

# CHURCH CONFLICTS

The Cross, Apocalyptic, and  
Political Resistance



ERNST KÄSEMANN

*Foreword by James H. Cone*

*Edited by*  
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# Editor's Introduction

RY O. SIGGELKOW

What you hold in your hands is a translation of the first volume of Ernst Käsemann's *Kirchliche Konflikte*, a collection of essays, lectures, Bible studies, meditations, and sermons spanning the late 60s to the early 80s, compiled and published in 1982.<sup>1</sup> The projected second volume of *Kirchliche Konflikte* has already been translated and included in the book *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene*.<sup>2</sup> The meticulous labor of Käsemann's friend and colleague Roy A. Harrisville is behind the translations of both volumes. As the editor of this translation, I include here an introduction to the life and theology of Käsemann, which I hope will provide the reader with something of a guide to the material that one will encounter in this volume. Käsemann often reflected on how his experiences shaped his theology, sometimes even writing in vivid detail about his childhood years, the specific sequence of events that led to his arrest and imprisonment by the Gestapo, the turmoil of World War II and the postwar period in West Germany, his engagement with the ecumenical movement, his shifts in perspective, and his often quite intense conflicts and disagreements with teachers and colleagues, for which he was well-known. Here I foreground some significant, and more proximate, historical context for understanding Käsemann's theological development evident in the material found in this

1. Ernst Käsemann, *Kirchliche Konflikte*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

2. Ernst Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene: Unpublished Lectures and Sermons*, ed. Rudolf Landau and Wolfgang Kraus, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

volume. In particular, I highlight the abiding significance of the 1967–68 West German student movement, the life and death of his daughter Elisabeth, and Käsemann's encounter with the freedom struggles of the Third World through his participation in the global ecumenical movement. This context is critical to grasping the changing shape and movement of Käsemann's thought, which both extend the insights drawn from the German dialectical theology movement into the postwar period and substantially depart from certain dimensions of dialectical theology that failed to sufficiently challenge the ideological status quo. What begins to emerge from the material of this volume is what might be called an *apocalyptic theology of liberation*.<sup>3</sup>

### The Early Years and Theological Studies

Ernst Käsemann's life spanned nearly the entire twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Born in 1906, Käsemann grew up in the working-class city of Essen in northwest Germany, an industrial center of German coal mining.<sup>5</sup> When Käsemann was only nine years old, his father, who had been enlisted into World War I, was killed in battle on the Eastern Front. Left alone to raise two young children, Käsemann's mother was forced, in his words, to "tough it out" in the aftermath of postwar Germany. At the age of nineteen, Käsemann enrolled as a student at the University of Bonn. At Bonn, he found himself captivated by the lectures of Erik Peterson, a professor of church history, who would later, famously, convert to Roman Catholicism. Peterson's lectures on the church as the worldwide body of Christ drove Käsemann to call into question the liberal Protestant tradition as well as the evangelical pietism he had been exposed to in his youth. Out of fear that he, too, was already well on his way to Rome, Käsemann left Bonn to study under Rudolf Bultmann in Marburg, where he would, in his words, swallow the pill of Bultmann's historical criticism as an "antidote."<sup>6</sup> While studying at Marburg, Käsemann learned more about the dialectical theology movement, working his way through the writings of Kierkegaard, Barth, and Heidegger. In his fifth semester he left for Tübingen for further study under Adolf Schlatter.

3. See also Ry O. Siggelkow, "Ernst Käsemann and the Specter of Apocalyptic," *Theology Today* 75, no. 1 (April 2018): 37–50.

4. For an extended narration of Käsemann's life on which this account heavily relies, see Roy A. Harrisville, "The Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann (1906–1998)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (2007): 294–319.

5. The city still features a number of monuments in memory of Käsemann as well as in memory of his daughter Elisabeth, who is discussed below. For example, in Essen there is a square the size of half a city block called Ernst-Käsemann-Platz.

6. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xv.

## The Pastoral Years and the Resistance against Nazism

After completing his initial theological studies, Käsemann took up a position as a teaching vicar in Zieverich, about a hundred kilometers south of his hometown of Essen. While there he completed his first theological examinations at nearby Koblenz, and by 1931, under the direction of Bultmann, he submitted his doctoral dissertation on “the theme of the worldwide body of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Then, after briefly serving as vicar of the synod of Barmen, Käsemann was called to serve as pastor of a congregation in Gelsenkirchen-Rotthausen, where he would remain for the next several years.<sup>8</sup> In the midst of firsthand experiences of a mounting civil war in Germany, and having little time for involvement in politics while writing his dissertation and completing his exams, the young Käsemann describes himself as one who “eagerly longed for order.” He recounts his experience of that time: “In family and school we continually heard that the Treaty of Versailles shamefully humiliated us Germans. Finally, the war left behind six million unemployed in our country. So my friends and I agreed that only a strong government could help us.”<sup>9</sup> Along with many others, Käsemann would cast his vote for Adolf Hitler and join the right-wing Hitlerite movement of German Protestantism, the *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians). Before long, however, Käsemann grew mistrustful of the regime after Hitler intervened on behalf of a criminal storm trooper in Silesia. But Käsemann admits that he still naïvely thought that Germany could wait until the next election, four years later, to vote Hitler out of office.

Käsemann changed his mind when, in the summer of 1933, his congregation witnessed a dramatic increase in membership of the *Deutsche Christen* (from four to forty-five members).<sup>10</sup> When the Reichsbishop sought to recruit the evangelical youth group into the Hitler Youth in September 1933, Käsemann decided to join the Pastor’s Emergency Union (*Pfarrernotbund*), founded by Pastor Martin Niemöller, publicly declaring that the Reichsbishop had become a “traitor to the evangelical church.”<sup>11</sup> In response to his public stance against

7. Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi: Eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933).

8. Richard Walter, “Ernst Käsemanns Wirken als Gemeindepfarrer im Kirchenkampf in Westfalen 1933–1946,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 12 (1999): 201–4.

9. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xvii.

10. Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 295. See also Hammann’s discussion of Bultmann’s exchange with Käsemann. Konrad Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, trans. Philip E. Devenish (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2013), 278–83.

11. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xviii. See also Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann*, 282–83; Walter, “Käsemanns Wirken als Gemeindepfarrer,” 204–5.

the Reichsbishop, the district leader in Gelsenkirchen denounced Käsemann as a traitor to Germany and recommended him for assignment to a concentration camp. In the fall of 1934, Käsemann heard news that the Confessing Church had been contemplating an official separation from the German Christians, at which point he, along with two colleagues and twelve members of the Confessing Church, “resolved immediately to go on the offensive.”<sup>12</sup> On the Day of Repentance and Prayer on November 15, 1934, Käsemann, along with his colleagues and friends from the Confessing Church, publicly dismissed before the altar the forty-five members of the Deutsche Christen from membership in his congregation and presented forty-five members of the Confessing Church to replace them.

In response to the planned action, a group of Nazis from Gelsenkirchen had prepared a plan of their own. As the service was about to commence, a group of Nazis formed in front of the church, determined to stop the service from happening by having the pastors “flogged” out of the church. A group of women in the congregation—“the backbone of the congregation,” in Käsemann’s words—formed the key opposition against the Nazi group. While the Nazis did not threaten the group of women violently, they promised to “participate aggressively” if the situation demanded it. By this point, many curious onlookers from all ages and walks of life began to gather in front of the church to see what was going on. In Käsemann’s words, the front of the church had been transformed into a “battle arena.” In response to what appeared to be an impending riot, a man named Graf Stosch, a Nazi advocate for church affairs in the district of Westphalia-North, appeared with fifty policemen and ordered everyone to clear the area “in the name of the state.” Stosch had earlier informed Käsemann and others preparing for the service that he had received a commission from Berlin to arrest the pastors and prevent the service from taking place. In response to his query as to whether they would still continue the service, the Confessing Church pastors answered, “Yes.” Stosch said that he would ensure that the pastors would be protected, and he informed Berlin that he would secure law and order. Although he was not sure what had motivated Stosch to allow the service to continue, Käsemann found this action very moving, going so far as to say, “The climax of our struggle is bound up with him.”<sup>13</sup>

The service proceeded as planned. Stosch even joined the congregation in worship. On that day, Käsemann delivered a sermon on Jeremiah 7:1–15 (“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your

12. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xviii.

13. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xix.

doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. . . . Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?”). Then Käsemann, along with the other pastors and leaders, introduced and presented before the congregation the forty-five members of the Confessing Church who were to function as substitutes for the forty-five discharged German Christians. Käsemann read the name of each outgoing member and each incoming member. “We could see the older people weeping there,” he recalled.<sup>14</sup> Such a public excommunication was an unprecedented action among German Protestant churches at the time.

Käsemann’s actions on that day isolated the congregation from the rest of the synod in Westphalia, but not from the working-class community of Gelsenkirchen. Much of the labor force of Gelsenkirchen consisted of immigrant workers originally from Masuria, Poland, many of whom were miners and communists who would later be given sanctuary in Käsemann’s congregation in the midst of the struggle against Nazism. The congregation at Gelsenkirchen quickly became a fellowship of proletarians. Together with the Masurian communists and the members of the Confessing Church, the congregation became determined partisans against the Deutsche Christen, resisting any talk of “reconciliation” or compromise with the national church. In 1935, Käsemann preached on Joshua 7:13b (“You will be unable to stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you”) and spoke of the German church’s penchant for self-preservation and its refusal to move “out of the encampments of this world into No-Man’s-Land.”<sup>15</sup> In response to the sermon, Käsemann received another warning, and the German authorities eventually levied a charge against him.<sup>16</sup>

### Incarceration by the Gestapo and Involuntary Military Service

When seven hundred evangelical pastors were imprisoned by the Nazis in 1937—including Martin Niemöller, who was forced into a concentration camp—Käsemann again preached a provocative sermon at a service of intercession, this time on the text of Isaiah 26:13 (“O LORD our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone”). In the sermon, Käsemann spoke out against the many voices pressuring the Protestant church to throw out the Old Testament, the apostle Paul, and the Bible as a whole in the name of the supremacy of Germany and an Aryan

14. Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 296.

15. Quoted in Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 296.

16. Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 296.

Jesus.<sup>17</sup> He was immediately reported for treachery. “On the following day,” Käsemann writes, “the Gestapo came and got me.”<sup>18</sup> Käsemann spent the next month in a Gestapo prison completing a commentary on Hebrews, subsequently published as *The Wandering People of God (Das Wandernde Gottesvolk)*, which he would later describe as a commentary on the struggle of the Confessing Church (12). To this day, if one is willing to climb the rickety steps up to the very top of the Gelsenkirchen church tower, one can see engraved on the bell the passage from Isaiah 26:13, a text with which Käsemann was buried upon his death.<sup>19</sup>

In 1940, Käsemann was drafted into the German military (*Wehrmacht*). He was sent first to Charleroi, a mining region in Belgium, where he contracted a serious infection that required the extraction of his fingernails. He was then sent to Paris, where he served in the telephone exchange. While his congregation was able to reclaim him as their pastor in 1941, only two years later, in 1943, he was drafted into the *Wehrmacht* again and sent to work in Greece in a light artillery unit. Viewed by his commanders as not particularly fit for armed combat, Käsemann was sent to work in the mailroom. In 1944 Käsemann's unit was forced to retreat from Greece to Yugoslavia (what is now Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia) because of the Soviet occupation of Bulgaria and Romania. During his travels, Käsemann was shot in the hand by a rebel outfit and spent several months recovering in a military hospital in Sarajevo.<sup>20</sup>

## The Field of Misery: The Death of Dietrich Käsemann and Life in a US Concentration Camp

After his recovery, Käsemann received news from his wife, Margrit, that their eldest son, Dietrich, had died of diphtheria. In March 1945 Käsemann was granted a temporary release from the military to return to his family. On his way back to Germany from Yugoslavia, much of which he traveled by foot, and within only twelve kilometers from his home, he was captured by the Americans and became a prisoner of war at Bad Kreuznach.<sup>21</sup> The prison at

17. Käsemann, “Predigt im Bittgottesdienst am 15.8.1937 in Gelsenkirchen-Rotthausen,” in *Dienst in Freiheit: Ernst Käsemann zum 100. Geburtstag*, ed. Jens Adam, Hans-Joachim Eckstein, and Hermann Lichtenberger (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008), 87.

18. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xix.

19. In the summer of 2015, I had the opportunity to visit the church in Gelsenkirchen-Rotthausen to see the bell in the tower. Special thanks to Pastor Rolf Neuhaus for opening up the church to give me a personal tour.

20. Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 296.

21. It was in a personal conversation with Eva (Käsemann) Teufel that I learned he had made this journey mostly by foot.

Bad Kreuznach was one of twenty US-led camps in which an estimated four hundred thousand German citizens were held indefinitely in what amounted to an open-air concentration camp, lacking severely in food, water, medicine, and space.<sup>22</sup> As a prisoner of war, Käsemann was assigned the job of throwing prisoners who had died of starvation or disease “over the wire.”<sup>23</sup> As Harrisville describes it, “Sick with malaria, huddled in an underground cave dug with a pocket-knife, a spoon and a can, Käsemann was finally released, returned to his congregation.”<sup>24</sup>

Upon his return home, with little time to recover from the war and to mourn the death of his son, Käsemann learned he had been appointed as professor of New Testament at the University of Münster in Westphalia. In that same year, Käsemann delivered a paper at the Evangelische Akademie in Gelsenkirchen in which he maintained that the tyranny of Nazi Germany did not happen overnight but was the culmination of modern Western history itself.<sup>25</sup> At a time when Nazism was understood by liberal observers as the opposite of humanism, Käsemann maintained that it was, in fact, its bitter fruit. It is here that Käsemann begins to turn to apocalyptic imagery to describe theologically the contemporary reality of evil:

Life is a clash between cosmic powers, as one might, perhaps, formulate it today. The Bible says more simply and perhaps also more adequately: a confrontation between God and Satan. The spheres of power overlap in the struggle, they shift and divide anew in each new generation. The earth is the battlefield, the human being the true object of the fight, in which, however, the whole of the earth is also swept. And, in any case, the cross of Christ is

22. Among all the US camps along the Rhine River, Bad Kreuznach had the highest mortality rate. Officially, the prisoners were deemed “Disarmed Enemy Forces,” which was a convenient way for the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, to avoid granting the legal rights due to prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention. See the article by Richard Wiggers, “The United States and the Refusal to Feed German Civilians after World War II,” in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Steven Béla Várdy, T. Hunt Tooley, and Agnes Huszar Vardy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 281.

23. A large monument has been erected—a massive wooden cross wrapped in barbed wire—in memory of those who died at the concentration camp. The location, now an empty field bordered by vineyards, has come to be known as the “Field of Misery” (*Feld des Jammers*). The camp was one of an estimated twenty US POW camps along the Rhine. See Christiane Wienand, *Returning Memories: Former Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015).

24. Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 298. Because the prisoners had no shelter, they slept in holes dug in the ground. Wienand, *Returning Memories*, 183.

25. Ernst Käsemann, “Die evangelische Kirche im deutschen Zusammenbruch: Vortrag vor evangelischen Akademikern Gelsenkirchens am 4.12.1945,” in *Theologie und Wirklichkeit: Diskussionen der Bultmann-Schule*, ed. Martin Bauspieß, Christof Landmesser, and Friedrike Portenhauser (Neukirchen-Vluy: Neukirchener Verlag, 2011).

the place at which the division of the spirits and powers constantly comes into view.<sup>26</sup>

Käsemann never made it to Münster. Someone had intervened and denounced his appointment on account of his association with the Masurian communists in his former congregation in Gelsenkirchen. Instead, Käsemann went to teach at the University of Mainz, then to Göttingen, and finally to Tübingen, where he would spend the last thirty-seven years of his teaching career as professor of New Testament.

### Professor of New Testament Studies

In the years after the war, Käsemann taught thousands of students and published widely. Many of his essays were compiled and published in the two-volume *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*,<sup>27</sup> later translated into English as *Essays on New Testament Themes* and *New Testament Questions of Today*.<sup>28</sup> In these essays, written in the 1950s and early 1960s, Käsemann established himself as a prominent voice in the field of New Testament studies and was perceived by many to be the most significant representative of the Bultmann school of New Testament interpretation. And yet, Käsemann entered into fierce conflict and debate with his former teacher on virtually every topic in the field—from Bultmann's interpretation of Johannine theology,<sup>29</sup> Pauline theology, and the theology of the Synoptic Gospels to Bultmann's hermeneutical program of demythologizing and his categorical rejection of historical Jesus research. Even when his criticisms of Bultmann were most severely enunciated (and, as I will highlight in more detail below, their differences were profound and highly significant to Käsemann's later theological development), Käsemann always acknowledged his great debt to his teacher. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Käsemann published *Der Ruf der Freiheit*, translated into English as *Jesus Means Freedom*,<sup>30</sup> and another collection of a series of lectures on Paul, most of which were initially delivered before US

26. Käsemann, "Kirche im deutschen Zusammenbruch," 232. My translation.

27. Ernst Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).

28. Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1968); Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM, 1969).

29. Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

30. Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, trans. Frank Clarke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

audiences.<sup>31</sup> In 1973, Käsemann published *An die Römer*, and after several revised editions in German, it was finally translated into English in 1980. To this day, Käsemann's *Commentary on Romans* is regarded as an important contribution to New Testament studies.<sup>32</sup>

With the exception of *Der Ruf der Freiheit*, most of Käsemann's published work is often technical, focused on historical and exegetical issues in New Testament research. While he never hid his theological motivations, Käsemann's distinctiveness as a constructive theologian in his own right has often been underappreciated. In common with his teacher Bultmann, he always viewed himself as at once a theologian and a historian in the field of New Testament. The theological import of his work, however, has become much clearer, at least to the English-speaking world, since the publication in 2010 of *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene*—a translation of a wide variety of Käsemann's theological reflections on biblical themes, reflections previously unpublished or available only in German.<sup>33</sup> Now with the appearance of *Church Conflicts*, the breadth and depth of Käsemann's theological engagement with social and political issues has become clearer still. What is perhaps most striking about these two volumes is Käsemann's trenchant criticism of the German evangelical church's complicity in white supremacy, capitalism, and militarism, as well as his attention to the theological significance of the freedom struggles of the Third World.<sup>34</sup> Käsemann had always regarded himself as a political nonconformist, but after 1967–68 his work

31. Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

32. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

33. *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene* is an English translation of the posthumously published *In der Nachfolge des gekreuzigten Nazareners: Aufsätze und Vorträge aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Rudolf Landau and Wolfgang Kraus (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). Käsemann had actually intended to publish many of the essays in that volume in what would have been a second volume of *Kirchliche Konflikte* (Church Conflicts).

34. I use the term *freedom struggles* to refer to the anticolonial movements that emerged in the 1950s—especially in Latin America, Africa, and Asia—that sought to articulate a self-consciously internationalist political project. See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007). As Prashad puts it in the opening lines of *The Darker Nations*, “The Third World was not a place. It was a project.” However, Prashad overlooks the theological work that, in fact, formed a critical dimension of the Third World project. From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, at the center of this were the gatherings of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), which took place on a regular basis and produced some of the most under-read and undervalued theological literature of the twentieth century. The gatherings of the World Conference of Churches also became an important site for Third World theologians to contest the legitimacy of the imperial and colonial framework of European theology. For a historical introduction to EATWOT, see Virginia Fabella, *Beyond Bonding: A Third World Women's Theological Journey* (Manila: Ecumenical Association of Third World Studies and the Institute of Women's Studies, 1993).

displays a definite political radicalization—we might even say a *conscientization*, to use Paulo Freire's term—about the concrete ways in which the demonic powers enslave the earth.<sup>35</sup> This is important to highlight, in part, because the “apocalyptic theology” currently in vogue in much academic theology and biblical scholarship, which owes much to Käsemann, has often missed the concrete political dimension of Käsemann's theology.<sup>36</sup>

### The Postwar Years in Germany

The year 1945 has been described as “the most profound of the caesurae marking the history of modern Germany.”<sup>37</sup> The year marked the defeat of National Socialism in Germany, along with the devastation of German cities and the loss of territory, and precipitated a national moral crisis as the depth and breadth of the crimes of Nazism came into clearer focus among the general public. Only a few years later, two new German states had been established, each with its own set of constructed moral and political narratives and traditions. As the two German states sought to rebuild and reconstruct not only cities but new senses of national identity that would decisively break from the horrors of the preceding years, it was as if the clock of German history had been reset. For these reasons, these years have been described as

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and M. P. Joseph, *Theologies of the Non-Person: The Formative Years of EATWOT* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

35. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Thirtieth Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 67.

36. Even where the political dimension of Käsemann's work on apocalyptic is acknowledged, it is often abstracted from the concrete revolutionary struggles that he supported, effectively reducing his understanding of apocalyptic to a formal point about the sociopolitical or “cosmic” dimensions of a Pauline description of sin and salvation against Bultmannian existentialism. For a representative example, see Martinus C. de Boer, “Paul's Mythologizing Program in Romans 5–8,” in *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5–8*, ed. Beverly Gaventa (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 1–20. While it is no doubt true that the New Testament scholarship that relies on Käsemann is usually more concerned with the particularities of his biblical exegesis and interpretation than with the particularities of his politics, the effect is that the concrete political commitments of Käsemann's work become obscured or lost altogether. This is no less true in the field of theology. For an influential and representative example, see Philip G. Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018). Ziegler relies heavily on Käsemann in his constructive articulation of a soteriology that prioritizes what he calls an “apocalyptic account” of the lordship of Christ and the sovereignty of God. Yet his use of Käsemann remains mostly formal. Again, the claim is not so much that Ziegler is wrong to discover in Käsemann's interpretation of apocalyptic resources for a revision of Christian doctrine, it is that in the process Käsemann's politics become merely ancillary.

37. Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 84.

a *Stunde Null*, a Zero Hour, in the history of modern Germany.<sup>38</sup> And yet, recent scholarship has problematized this narrative, emphasizing the extent to which no matter how much German leadership desired to break with the past and begin anew, continuities remained, and the crimes of the past could not so easily be forgotten.<sup>39</sup>

In the late 1940s and into the 1950s West Germany experienced a period of tremendous economic growth, due in no small part to foreign aid from the United States. Demands for justice for the perpetrators of the crimes of National Socialism were often stultified as a result of Cold War geopolitical interests that perceived West Germany to be a central ally in the fight against the communism of the Eastern Bloc. Public outcry in the 1950s tended to be shaped more by a concern to grant leniency to the perpetrators of National Socialist violence than by a commitment to justice and reparations for the victims of violence. Indeed, the persistence of authoritarian and racist social and political attitudes in West Germany after the war along with explicit right-wing nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiment were symptomatic of the ways in which the politics of the past continued to determine the present.<sup>40</sup>

### The West German Student Movement of 1967–68 and the Anticolonial Struggles of the Third World

In several essays included in this volume, Käsemann reflects on the impact that the 1967–68 student movement in West Germany had on his own theological development. In order to grasp the significance of Käsemann's development and the distinctive shape that his theology takes in these essays, it is important to provide some historical context.

The German student movement of 1967–68 emerged, in part, as a response to the perceived failure of a generation of West Germans to adequately come to terms with Nazi crimes. Moreover, the student movement claimed that the fascism of National Socialism, far from receding out of public life, persisted in the form of global capitalist exploitation, support for colonial and neocolonial regimes in the Third World, and the German alliance with US imperial interests worldwide.<sup>41</sup> The student movement of West Germany, while responding to local issues in Germany, was also part of a larger global

38. Peter Alter, "Nationalism and German Politics after 1945," in *The State of Germany: The National Idea in the Making, Unmaking, and Remaking of a Modern Nation-State*, ed. John Breuilly (London: Longman, 1992), 154.

39. Brown, *West Germany*, 85–86.

40. Brown, *West Germany*, 91–92.

41. Brown, *West Germany*, 98.

resistance movement that occurred throughout the 1960s, which included uprisings in Berkeley, Paris, Prague, Mexico City, Dhaka, Tokyo, and many other cities across the globe. The networks of these movements were at times quite closely connected. The student movement in West Germany, in particular, was significantly shaped by a dramatic increase in the number of Third World students from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East who organized and mobilized West German students and deepened and broadened the student movement's political critique and demands to include critical issues raised by anticolonial liberationist struggles of the Third World.<sup>42</sup>

While the extent to which Käsemann himself had direct connection with Third World students is unclear, one can nonetheless discern an important resonance between Käsemann's evolving political perspective evident in this volume and the voices emerging from the West German student movement, particularly those shaped by Third World anticolonial struggles and the Black Power movement in the US. His engagement with the German student movement and his encounter with global liberationist struggles, moreover, provides the historical context for Käsemann's warm reception of James Cone in Germany, their friendship, and his deep appreciation of Cone's Black theology of liberation.<sup>43</sup>

In the opening essay of this volume, for example, which is intended to function as an introduction to the central theological outlook of the book, Käsemann refers to the impact of the German student movement on his theological development. Käsemann observes that the German student movement began as an inquiry into the role of the older generation in the crimes of the Third Reich but quickly turned into a wild "brush fire" of open revolt and rebellion against "all institutions and more or less everything older" (29). The polarization that had been latent, yet in certain respects limited, in German society now expanded and became all-encompassing, to the extent that "hate ate its way as far as into families" (30). Käsemann witnessed many of his colleagues in the academy and in the church respond by succumbing to a reactionary politics in which state repression and the "club of the police" (131) were repeatedly defended over openness to compromise and "presence of mind" (*Geistesgegenwart*) (chap. 10). For his own part, Käsemann interpreted

42. See especially Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

43. The appreciation was mutual. See the foreword to this volume, as well as Cone's references to Käsemann in many of his published works. For an important reading of Cone's theology within the context of anticolonial struggles and Third World theology, see Matthew M. Harris and Tyler B. Davis, "In the Hope That They Can Make Their Own Future": James H. Cone and the Third World," *Journal of Africana Religions* 7, no. 2 (2019): 189–212.

the student movement, despite its flaws, as a time of reckoning with the “bitter truth” of German history—namely, that the reconstruction of postwar Germany had culminated in a “dance around the golden calf” (30).

Käsemann describes this time of reckoning in the late 1960s as a conversion, a critical turning point in his theological career that furnished his work with “an unmistakable and most concrete goal” (30). Käsemann’s theology had long emphasized that the Christian life is never a private affair, that the Spirit leads one into the world and into everyday life, and that the central theme of preaching must take as its basis the freedom *from* principalities and powers, which is to be demonstrated in the work of resistance against idols among the disciples who follow their Lord, the Crucified One, into the “no-man’s-land” of the earth (77, 155, 202). But what became “unmistakable” and “concrete” in Käsemann’s theological work in the wake of the student movement was the particular idol that must be resisted in the contemporary world—namely, the global reality of white supremacy, which, Käsemann maintains, demonically possesses and systematically exploits the Third World, defending itself with science, technology, weapons, and the exploitation of the earth’s resources. “It is not enough,” Käsemann writes, “to demythologize texts with Bultmann.”<sup>44</sup> Recalling his earlier critiques of Bultmann’s theology, Käsemann asserts that while demythologizing is critical to the theological task, before demythologizing the demonic powers of the New Testament one must be willing to demythologize human beings, and especially the powers of the modern world. It is not only religious superstition, Käsemann maintains, but the modern Western ideology of “self-mastery” that needs to be demythologized. Such demythologizing only occurs “in the power of the gospel.”<sup>45</sup>

### The Death of Elisabeth Käsemann

In the late 1970s Käsemann would experience yet another trial when he received news that his youngest daughter, Elisabeth, had been detained, tortured for weeks, and executed by the US-backed junta in an Argentine detention center whose walls were “coated in polystyrene and decorated with swastikas.”<sup>46</sup> In 1968, at the height of the West German student movement, Elisabeth had left Germany to serve in Bolivia on a five-month internship. After her internship was over, Elisabeth took a six-week tour of South America. Witnessing the misery of the slums of Bolivia and Buenos Aires, Elisabeth decided to

44. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xii.

45. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, xii.

46. Harrisville, “Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann,” 298.

extend her stay in Argentina to join the fight alongside local union organizers against economic neocolonialism and the military dictatorship. As the political situation in Argentina worsened and became increasingly dangerous, the family encouraged Elisabeth to leave the country and return to Germany. In response, Elisabeth explained that she could not leave the struggle because so many of her friends had already gone missing or been killed.<sup>47</sup> She wrote to her parents about her decision to stay in Argentina, explaining that she had begun to identify with the fate of the Argentine people.<sup>48</sup>

The last time Ernst and Margrit Käsemann saw their daughter was when they visited her in Argentina in April 1976. In August of that same year, she wrote to her parents saying, “The conditions are very bad. . . . Thousands of people are missing of whom no one knows anything. . . . There are concentration camps everywhere, a human life is worth very little, and you get used to the fact that everywhere people disappear and you hear nothing more of them.”<sup>49</sup> In the spring of 1977, Elisabeth went missing. Her friend Diana Austen, a student at Union Theological Seminary whom she had met in Argentina, was also detained and interrogated in the same building. Diana never saw Elisabeth, but she reports hearing her scream in the next room.<sup>50</sup>

Käsemann worked tirelessly to learn the details of what had happened to his daughter, to retrieve her body from Argentina, and to ensure that the military and the executioners did not have the last word. The autopsy report concluded that Elisabeth had been shot in the back by an automatic weapon, and three times in the neck and heart; her body showed signs of having been tortured. Käsemann responded to the news saying, “This is the way executions are done.”<sup>51</sup> He invited his friend and colleague Jürgen Moltmann to deliver the eulogy at Elisabeth’s memorial service.<sup>52</sup> Moltmann wrote, “Your Elisabeth dedicated her love and her hope to the liberation of a humiliated people, in order that space would be made for the poor and their affliction would find an end! On this road to the freedom of others, she has fallen

47. See Diana Austen, “Fear and Remembrance: Back to Argentina,” *Christianity and Crisis*, August 19, 1991, 246–48.

48. When I asked Eva (Käsemann) Teufel about her younger sister Elisabeth’s decision to stay in Argentina despite the dangerous conditions, she said, “Elisabeth was her father’s daughter.”

49. Elisabeth Käsemann, a letter to her parents, August 1976, as quoted in *Koalition gegen Strafflosigkeit*, “Ein Leben in Solidarität mit Lateinamerika,” available from Deutsche National Bibliothek, May 2007, <https://d-nb.info/991004361/34> (translation mine).

50. Austen, “Fear and Remembrance,” 247.

51. Arthur Dobrin, “Disappearing in Argentina,” *Christianity and Crisis*, November 26, 1979, 301.

52. Moltmann later recalled that Käsemann had demanded, “The sermon: not more than 10 sentences!” Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 149.

victim to the oppressors of the people. She has entered the community of the countless, nameless victims of acts of violence."<sup>53</sup>

Käsemann was deeply affected by Elisabeth's murder.<sup>54</sup> He wanted justice for his daughter, but he did not seek revenge, nor did he want her remembered as a martyr.<sup>55</sup> Instead he expressed hope that her death might "open people's eyes so that the reality of [Argentina], so beautiful and yet harboring an inferno, can be seen."<sup>56</sup> Käsemann was not afraid to speak out against the political situation in Argentina. He wrote, "As grotesque as it appears to the observer, those presently in power in Argentina lay claim to . . . the primacy of a cultural nation, and downright blasphemously, to a pronounced liberal tradition. . . . With the aid of the army and the police great wealth protects itself against the protest of the proletariat."<sup>57</sup>

After the death of Elisabeth, Käsemann's theology takes on a new tone.<sup>58</sup> When Käsemann speaks of the cross, the life and death of Elisabeth are not far from view. When he speaks of resistance, liberation, freedom, and the call of discipleship, the life and death of Elisabeth are present in his mind. This is not to say that Käsemann idolizes his daughter. But the struggle for which she died in Argentina forms a crucial part of the context in which to read the essays written in the years after 1977. Profoundly shaped by the relationships she made while organizing in Argentina, Elisabeth had discerned the connection between the struggle of the Argentine people against a military dictatorship and the internationalist socialist commitments of Third World

53. Quoted in Koalition gegen Straflosigkeit, "Ein Leben in Solidarität" (translation mine).

54. As, of course, was her mother, Margrit, who kept a calendar marking every week that passed since the day of Elisabeth's murder. According to personal conversations with Eva (Käsemann) Teufel, her mother and father never fully recovered.

55. Ernst Käsemann, quoted in Elaine Magalis, "Murder in Argentina," *Christian Century*, November 9, 1977, 1033. In July 2011, a Buenos Aires court convicted retired General Hector Gamen and Colonel Hugo Pascarelli for committing crimes against humanity at the El Vesubio prison, where Elisabeth was tortured (along with at least 2,500 other "subversives" between 1976 and 1978). Tony Paterson, "Argentina Jails 'Dirty War' Officers Accused over Killing of German Girl," *Independent*, July 16, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/argentina-jails-dirty-war-officers-accused-over-killing-of-german-girl-2314585.html>.

A verdict was never made against the man convicted for the murder of Elisabeth Käsemann, because the defendant, Jorge Videla, died before the end of the trial in May 2013. For more details on Elisabeth Käsemann's case, see "The Käsemann Case," Elisabeth Käsemann Foundation, <http://www.elisabeth-kaesemann-stiftung.com/kaesemann-case.html>.

56. Magalis, "Murder in Argentina," 1033.

57. Ernst Käsemann, "Tod im argentinischen Dschungel," *Evangelische Kommentare* 8, no. 10 (August 1977): 469–71, quoted in Harrisville, "Life and Work of Ernst Käsemann," 299.

58. Dorothee Sölle, a former student and friend of Käsemann, dedicated many of the essays in *The Strength of the Weak* to the memory of Elisabeth. Dorothee Sölle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 7.

anticolonial movements.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it is precisely this insight that her father was so drawn to in his essays from the late 1970s until his death in the late 90s, an insight that, in significant ways, broke away from the standard Cold War political conflicts of postwar Germany—between the West and the East, the so-called First and Second Worlds—and pushed him toward a socialism informed by and attentive to voices emerging out of the Third World project. What Käsemann heard in these voices was nothing other than the Crucified Nazarene.<sup>60</sup>

### The Ecumenical Movement

Three years after Elisabeth's death, in 1980, Käsemann was invited to speak at the World Council of Churches Conference for Mission and Evangelization in Melbourne. Käsemann had previously participated in the global ecumenical movement, having attended and delivered papers at the World Council of Churches "Faith and Order" conference in Montreal in 1963 and in Nairobi at the Fifth Ecumenical General Assembly in 1975. But his experience in Melbourne left a lasting impression, deepening his awareness of the changing landscape of global Christianity, anticolonial Third World resistance to racial capitalism,<sup>61</sup> and the importance of reimagining the work of theological reflection in light of contemporary political realities. The ecumenical movement, particularly the theologies of liberation articulated by Latin American theologians, caused him to rethink the "marks" of the visible church in the world and the "heart of the gospel." No longer could he view the marks of the visible church in the terms of the Augsburg Confession—which identifies the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments as the criteria of the true church. Instead, Käsemann speaks of the "presence of the poor" as the critical third dimension of the visible church, which takes form as a resistance movement of the exalted Christ serving the freedom and liberation of the oppressed (225). "For us, the kingdom of God is not primarily a theory but a praxis"; it is that praxis whereby the first commandment—"no longer uttered from the clouds at Sinai"—is given concretion in the "crucified, risen, Son of the heavenly Father, and at the same time the new Adam"

59. See Koalition gegen Strafflosigkeit, "Ein Leben in Solidarität."

60. One can see a deepening of these themes after 1980, especially a more explicit affirmation of liberation theology in the essays included in *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene*.

61. The term *racial capitalism* comes from Cedric Robinson. It refers to the idea that "racialism . . . permeate[d] the social structures emergent from capitalism." See Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3.

(200). Käsemann here describes the church as a resistance movement of the exalted Christ, the “fellowship of the free,” given by the power of the Spirit to live in bodily service and in solidarity with an earth that groans for redemption under the weight of demonic possession. “We have understood nothing about [Christ],” Käsemann writes, “when we seek him at the wrong place and proclaim him under false mottoes” (201). As the Crucified, he is to be found only among those who “[sit] in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons,” as the psalmist writes (201). It is among those “who hunger and thirst after righteousness” that the Spirit of God is present and active, making dry bones live, and de-demonizing the earth of tyrants (203).

### Deepening and Extending the Fronts of Resistance

In 1934, de-demonizing the earth as resistance to tyranny took concrete form in the struggle against National Socialism. Käsemann’s experience in the struggle of the Confessing Church, informed by the dialectical theology of Barth and Bultmann, had profoundly shaped his theological perspective. But after 1967–68, Käsemann was pressed in genuinely new directions on account of what he had come to learn from his students in the West German student movement, the witness of his daughter in the freedom struggle in Argentina, and his encounters with Third World liberation theology in the ecumenical movement. “We once said at Barmen,” Käsemann writes, “that no area of life is omitted by the gospel. Conversely, . . . [it] can no longer be ignored . . . [that] Christianity is no longer determined by the White Man. Today, the majority, according to its number and its passion for departure, is in the world of the people of color” (224). The anti-fascist character of Käsemann’s theology was deepened and extended toward new fronts of resistance.

Käsemann saw his friends and colleagues in the Confessing Church wrongfully believing that the war had ended, too quickly settling into the comfort of bourgeois existence, failing to open their eyes to the scope of the tyrant’s possession over the earth. The fascism of National Socialism was merely symptomatic of a modern tyranny of demonic proportions, manifesting itself in a class war in which the white propertied possessors exploited people of color in the majority of the world through colonialism and neocolonialism and converted God’s good earth into a living inferno for most of its creatures. “What is harmlessly camouflaged as a free market economy and promises to benefit all,” Käsemann writes, “is in reality the continuation of imperialism and colonialism by a capitalist system. It lives from the Third World’s yielding its raw materials and accepting our finished products, to which, particularly

heinously, all sorts of weapons belong. The result is that the slums, the reverse side of our affluence, continue to grow, and for three-fourths of humanity our earth becomes a hell in which hunger, murder, and prostitution rule, each person wrestling with the other for survival” (225).

### Apocalyptic Theology and the Praxis of Discerning the Spirits

The recovery of Christian apocalyptic theology had long been a touchstone of Käsemann's contribution to New Testament research. Against the demythologizing of his acclaimed teacher Rudolf Bultmann, Käsemann insisted that “apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology,” determined as it was from the beginning by the imminent expectation of the parousia, the return of Christ.<sup>62</sup> For Käsemann, the apocalyptic mythology of the New Testament retained an ongoing theological significance, especially in its perception of the cosmic dimension and scope of the power of sin and the power of grace. Apocalyptic theology offered the critical insight that the Risen One remains for us the Crucified, and the earth remains for us a battlefield in which, still awaiting the new creation, ongoing struggle and resistance are necessary.

After the experiences in which Käsemann was opened up to the reality of anticolonial struggles against white supremacy coming especially from the Third World, apocalyptic came to express the truth of Golgotha and its contemporary meaning—namely, that God is present with and among “the crucified peoples of the earth,” in the memorable words of Ignacio Ellacuría,<sup>63</sup> an offense to the satiated, to the propertied, and especially to the bourgeois church that clamors for law and order in the face of revolution. “To reduce it to a common denominator,” Käsemann writes, reflecting on the impact of the student movement on his theological development, “I unlearned the spiritualization of the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount” (225). In the face of anticolonial freedom struggles, the German church had sided with the oppressors and the propertied class, refusing to remember the critical lessons learned in the struggle against Nazism. Because the Risen One, the Spirit of the Crucified on earth, apocalyptically conceived, is the Spirit that drives out demons and heals the possessed, the Risen One is also the Spirit of resistance and freedom from bodily enslavement, signaling an

62. Ernst Käsemann, “The Beginnings of Christian Theology,” in *New Testament Questions of Today*, 102. See also his response to critics and further elaboration of the earlier essay, “On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic,” in *New Testament Questions of Today*, 108–37.

63. See Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology (1978)” in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 195–224.

open heaven, the gospel of liberation for the children of God seeking healing, truth, and freedom.

The Spirit of the Crucified demands the work of concrete political judgment, discerning the spirits, which is the task of both theology and discipleship. Indeed, the task of theology, for Käsemann, is nothing else but “instruction in the praxis of discipleship” as it seeks to “[aid] toward discerning the spirits, and from out of love it weighs to what extent historical realities are and remain possibilities for moving into the present, or where and how they made dust of arable land, which needs plowing again in order to give bread to the world today” (224). Discernment always occurs, for Käsemann, in the praxis of discipleship: “There can be no mere prattle about it; we must live it” (226). Because it is oriented by and toward life in the world—that is to say, *praxis*—theology is a contextual task that must refuse the temptation of abstraction. To fail to concretely discern the spirits on the battlefield of the earth, to fail to act, or to seek after neutrality and balance in the face of anti-colonial struggle against the exploitation of the earth by the White Man, not only marks the failure of discipleship of the Crucified, it is a decision to side with the antichrist, with the propertied tyrants of the earth. “Resistance to the Nazis in our youth is an illustration of this. It would be senseless if we wanted to hide the fact that today the burden of this decision has become heavier, its dimension wider, its necessity clearer. For it continues. . . . All creation cries and in yearning waits for the glorious freedom of the children of God” (226).

### From an Apocalyptic Theology of Hope toward a Concrete Apocalyptic Theology of Liberation

In *God of the Oppressed*, James Cone commented on what he called the “white ‘hope’ theologians”—e.g., Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Metz—who had taken their “cue” from Käsemann’s work on apocalyptic but ignored the struggles of the peoples of the Third World. Cone expressed his bafflement that Hope and the Future of Man, a 1971 conference in New York City, included no presenters from Africa, Asia, Latin America, or Black America. “How can Christian theology truly speak of the hope of Jesus Christ,” Cone inquired, “unless that hope begins and ends with the liberation of the poor in the social existence in which theology takes shape? In America this means that there can be no talk about hope in the Christian sense unless it is talk about the freedom of black, red, and brown people.”<sup>64</sup> Cone argued that the

64. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 117.

refusal of “white ‘hope’ theologians” to take seriously the voices of hope in the struggle of oppressed peoples renders their theology “abstract talk, geared to the ideological justification of the status quo.”<sup>65</sup> While one could argue that certain aspects of Käsemann’s theology might also be subjected to a similar critique, in risking the work of concrete discernment and political judgment, Käsemann, we might say, moves away from the “abstract talk” that Cone diagnosed as ideologically dangerous. Indeed, it is precisely in risking concrete discernment of the spirits, the work of *naming* the contemporary tyrant concretely as the “White Man” in possession of the earth’s resources and *naming* the concrete presence of Christ among the crucified peoples that Käsemann’s apocalyptic theology departs from a “white” theology of hope and moves in the direction of an apocalyptic theology of liberation. With Cone, Käsemann insists that theology must entail such concrete discernment of Christ’s presence not only in words but in praxis.

It is precisely here that Käsemann’s theology marks a significant departure not only from the so-called “white ‘hope’ theologians” but also from the German dialectical theology that shaped the Confessing Church, specifically the theology of his teacher Bultmann and the apocalyptic theology of the early Karl Barth. It is a difference that Cone himself recognized when he drew on Käsemann over and against Barth’s theology of the Word and Bultmann’s skepticism about historical Jesus research, and one that he acknowledges again in the Foreword to this volume.<sup>66</sup> With Käsemann, Cone worried that Bultmann’s kerygmatic theology displaced the concrete history of Jesus Christ as the Crucified One, and in so doing removed God from God’s concrete identification with oppressed peoples. “Taking seriously the New Testament Jesus,” Cone writes against Bultmann: “Black theology believes that the historical kernel is the manifestation of Jesus as the Oppressed One whose earthly existence is bound up with the oppressed of the land.”<sup>67</sup> Here, Cone rightly discerns the motivating concern of Käsemann’s critique of his teacher Bultmann. Käsemann is not interested in reopening “the quest for the historical Jesus” but in articulating the sense in which Jesus is unreservedly given over to the damned of the earth. He is thereby motivated to revise the doctrine of the righteousness of God and the justification of the ungodly christologically—according to God’s preferential option for the poor and oppressed.<sup>68</sup> The result is that the

65. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 117.

66. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 118.

67. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 119.

68. John Barclay grasps this point in Käsemann well. John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 146.

fulcrum of Christology becomes a *theologia crucis* concretely discerned in the Crucified Nazarene's movement into the inferno of the earth. And so, Käsemann is able to insist that God's righteousness is always partisan, which means good news for the poor and judgment for the wealthy and satiated.<sup>69</sup>

For Käsemann, to maintain the material relation between the earthly historical Jesus and the risen *kerygmatic* Christ, the disciple must discern the activity of the Spirit in the everyday apocalyptic realities of the earth, affirming and proving in discipleship that the eschatological kingdom of God reaches out to those who bear the weight of the world on their shoulders. It is for these reasons that Käsemann insists that the cross of Jesus is not an "edifying picture" but the sign of one who "dies a death on the gallows because he did not erect principles, law, and order but unmasked the inhumanity of our earth by accepting its damned and oppressed."<sup>70</sup>

In important ways, Käsemann would remain a dialectical theologian within the tradition of Barth and Bultmann. Indeed, God's otherness from the world, for Käsemann, is located christologically as it is in Barth and Bultmann. The critical difference is that for Käsemann, as well as for his friend James Cone, in the discernment of the spirits, Christology takes on a concrete specification—indeed we might even say a location—because Christ is the one who is actively present with and among those who resist oppression.<sup>71</sup> God's apocalyptic otherness in relation to the world is articulated as God's solidarity with the oppressed in the Crucified Nazarene who is present precisely in historical struggles for liberation, which express the freedom of the children of God from the demonic structures that possess the earth.

69. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, 18.

70. Käsemann, *On Being a Disciple*, 250. See also James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 26.

71. On the importance of "concreteness" and even "sociological concreteness" with reference to the theology of James Cone, see especially Paul L. Lehmann, "Black Theology and 'Christian' Theology," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966–1979*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 145–46. Christopher Morse does not find Lehmann's discussion of "concreteness" to be sufficient. He explains, "For whether in the case of metaphysical or sociological modes of thought, the issue of *concreteness* poses particular problems with respect to what are most often designated as 'apocalyptic' claims" ("Apocalyptic Concreteness: James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*," *Theology Today* 70, no. 2 [Summer 2013]: 203). In the same essay, Morse takes up J. Louis Martyn's concept of "apocalyptic rectification" in Paul as a way of articulating not just "sociological" concreteness but what he calls the "apocalyptic concreteness" in Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* ("Apocalyptic Concreteness": 207).

# Translator's Preface

ROY A. HARRISVILLE

If there is a single theme threading through these essays and sermons, it is that the discipleship of the Nazarene involves corporeality. That is, the disciple, like the Master, is enjoined to come to earth, where the dispossessed and disadvantaged suffer from tyranny and exploitation. With this move, like Israel's exodus from the fleshpots of Egypt, or Abraham's abandonment of his father's house and his friends, the disciple waves goodbye to self for the sake of the other. Such a concentration delivers from the narcissism of the pietist, everlastingly feeling his or her own pulse, and from the captivity of the orthodox to unaltered, fixed tradition. The move may, perhaps, be slow, taken step by step, in the face of the tyranny of the powers that hold the majority of those who live on the earth enslaved, or in the face of the indifference of an affluent middle class, throwing alms to the poor to satisfy its guilt. And the rations to be taken along on this trip will be "iron," as Käsemann puts it, reduced to a minimum, with only enough to keep body and soul together.

If this move, this "descent," is required of the individual disciple, it is no less a requirement for a religious community, for the church. Concern for the dispossessed, for those in the third and fourth worlds, should move the church to abandon what is confessionalist, fundamentalist, whatever separates one body of Christians from the other and restricts fellowship at the "table of the Lord." Käsemann's interest in the ecumenical movement was nothing if not a hailing of a period in which churches and denominations were at the point of transcending their differences for the sake of a world in need.

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Whatever the objection, the move, the “exodus,” after the pattern of Israel and Abraham, was bound to have political consequences. But Käsemann was dissatisfied with the liberation movements of the secular society of his time. The genuineness of the move on behalf of the earth and of those for whom it was a hell could only be guaranteed by the discipleship of Jesus. Before the liberal reader registers surprise at this exclusivist claim, it should be noted that it serves the conviction that the life for the other was total, unconditional, without exception, in the suffering and death of the Crucified, and so it must be for the disciple. For this reason also, Christology had to be the criterion by which whatever the church said or did was measured; it had to be the key to the interpretation of the biblical witness to the Crucified. This explains what for the conservative represents a radical criticism of the New Testament, relegation of a portion of the Jesus-tradition to the legendary, and impatience with the debate over the empty tomb. If the reader misses this concentration on Christology as criterion and key, the criticism will appear merely as an eagerness to destroy or dismantle.

Beneath it all lay Käsemann's commitment to eschatology, in contradiction of his teacher Rudolf Bultmann, for whom anthropology, existence, self-understanding, the individual, lay at the center of the New Testament message. For, through that embracing of corporeality, God was at work to win back the whole world he had made. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of the end time, had begun with the Crucified, and it was to be brought to its completion through those who were his. Corporeality, then, was the end of the ways of God.

The context in which Käsemann lived and worked has altered radically. Germany is no longer divided, and the ecumenical movement has lost much of its attraction. Whatever of the arcane may attach to that context now, and be of interest only to the historical researcher, theologically it still maintains its relevance, since without it Käsemann's passion for his theme would be an abstraction, left in the air.

The old classicists had a term for it: *Traductor traditor* (The translator is a traitor). Käsemann's style, in the words of one of his younger colleagues, is “dense.” Aside from the syntax, that heaping up of dependent clauses, or that German habit of delaying the verb, and at times allowing it to do double or triple duty, the innumerable adverbs made reduction necessary. But however dire the betrayal, the intent was to be as faithful as possible to what my friend had to say. He deserves it; in fact, he deserves much more.

# Author's Preface (1982)

ERNST KÄSEMANN

**T**he essays in this collection of lectures and meditations have been individually published in many different places over the course of fifteen years, and some have already been translated into other languages. The first essay indicates the theme of the volume and is intended as an introduction. Conversation partners, opponents, and constantly changing situations forced me to reconsider my own way out of ever-shifting perspectives, leading me to abandon earlier positions and to steer another course. The old Adam remained nonconformist. I am not sure if the miracle of the new Adam expressed itself in me in the fact that I was permitted, compelled, or enabled to remain in German provincial churches of conservative or reactionary stripe. In any case, a good theologian does not swim with the secular or ecclesiastical current, which is why, despite many temptations, I was never able to become Roman Catholic or Orthodox. At least on earth, Protestants are always indispensable.

It seemed useful to me to look far back into the past. In this way, the development becomes more obvious, which I did not anticipate, but now fully affirm. The exegetical reflections show that I have tried to listen, as a disciple should do, according to Isaiah 50:4.<sup>1</sup> I have become increasingly conscious of

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1. "The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught" (Isa. 50:4).

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This preface was written by Käsemann during Easter 1982 to accompany the German edition, *Kirchliche Konflikte*, volume 1.

the fact that the Bible is a subversive book, at least in relation to the norms prevailing among us today. The Bible judges the church so severely that the criticism of those who do not simply and wholly submit themselves to it only seldom has any force. Authority is legitimized by service alone; tradition is legitimized by that rationality which, in every case, Paul has most intimately connected with love. No hierarchy and no bureaucracy may limit the freedom of those who still seek to radically follow the Nazarene. An old man would like to encourage young rebels, at their own peril, to risk with the One whom not even the church replaced, and who allowed his disciples to leap over ecclesiastical boundaries and barriers.

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## Aspects of the Church (1982)

Since my youth I have experienced church fellowship, have been most strongly determined by it, and for my part have sought to be informed by it in all phases of my life. For me, as for Zinzendorf, there is no Christianity without it. Conflicts are by no means excluded in such fellowship and its individual forms. Genuine and deep human bonds always lead to conflicts, even must prove themselves directly in them. They have been heaped up on my journey. The causes, arenas, opponents, problems, and results have changed. For this reason I have constantly ended up in different positions, was never dependent on a party for any length of time, had disputes with former friends, while onetime adversaries became partners. To live in church fellowship remains an adventure for me. At times, one does not become merely an outsider but a partisan between or behind all kinds of fronts. Sometimes offense has been taken at this assertion. Usually one forgets, if one ever knew at all, that church fellowship has never existed without loners. Criticism and opposition are indispensable to it, and in a certain respect not only the preacher in the pulpit, the theologian at the lectern, but every Christian must be a counterpart to the other members of a community if one is not to founder unfruitfully in it. Amos and Paul were undoubtedly almost unbearable companions for the churches of their time. Many have been excommunicated who wanted to serve, had an important task to fulfill, and later were sometimes actually canonized. Abraham had to leave his father's house and his friendships. Exodus is not just a part of every normal growth, but it pertains to discipleship as well. For we can hardly arrive at the kingdom of heaven on well-trodden paths and in columns. One's own thinking and independent steps are not made superfluous

by faith. No one can dispense with midwives, as Socrates wanted to be for his students. Conversely, grace does not continually make babysitters available to us. Very often, teachers, like-minded persons, adherents prove to be a particular danger, whereas troublemakers, nonconformists, even heretics prove to be guides, even if only by putting uncomfortable questions to us, indicating alternatives, or bringing us out of familiar routine. The cloud of witnesses envisaged by Hebrews 11 is, in any case, not only made up of the representatives of particular confessions, schools, and groups, though most who watch over order wish it so, and in their field believe it necessary to shape everything according to their own image and the breadth or narrowness of their horizon. Our God differentiates according to 1 Corinthians 12:13ff. and sets tensions without which there is no solidarity. The only one who is carried is the one who is also able to carry.

Perhaps young people will benefit more if an old man narrates his life in and with the church as a story of conflicts, rather than harmonizing what on earth is never harmonious. It is not even settled that one should regard heaven primarily as a sphere of harmony. In any case, I would like to leave behind a testament, as it were, for friends and opponents, as to how I learned to see the church over the years and under what circumstances that changed in each case. Perhaps others will gain courage, patience, and comfort from it.

## The Body of Christ

Faith cannot do without thinking. Otherwise it becomes sterile. When I took up my theological study in Bonn in 1925, out of curiosity I got into Erik Peterson's<sup>1</sup> lecture on the Epistle to the Romans, and I was so fascinated by it that his explanations, even to the point of their wording, stuck in my mind and for decades furnished me with the problems of my own academic work. Even the theme of my dissertation on the church as the body of Christ was conceived under his influence. Though I have often been urged to do so, I have not allowed the work (published in 1933) to be reissued, and I can no longer understand why my Marburg teachers, Bultmann and von Soden,<sup>2</sup> gave it high praise. I have never allowed my students the lack of restraint with which I sought to speculatively reconstruct not only the prehistory and the religious-historical sphere of the motif but also its relevance for the theology

1. Erik Peterson (1890–1950), professor of New Testament at the universities of Göttingen and Bonn in the 1920s, converted to Roman Catholicism in the 1930s.

2. Hans Freiherr von Soden (1881–1945), professor of church history at Breslau, finally of church history and New Testament at Marburg.

of Paul and his pupils. Since then I have learned that research decidedly rests on the capacity for limiting its horizon, and the boldest sketches must be open to radical self-criticism. Nonetheless, the investigation, undertaken in a hurry and monstrously rank in growth, betrays the fact that Peterson's understanding of the Pauline letters from the Hellenistic environment and the epochs following it, which I described as "early Catholicism," so captivated me as can only happen in a first semester.

Disillusion over what otherwise would soon have taken the route of romanticism, toward Rome, occurred in Marburg through the "dialectical theology" dominant there, as well as the sedulous readings of Luther that, under the aegis of the so-called Luther renaissance, were then almost obligatory. Already prepared for it by pietism, I became consciously and irrevocably "Protestant," while Schlier<sup>3</sup> at the same time, at the same place, and associated with me through Bultmann's seminars, wandered in the opposite direction. Later, one of my friends called it "contrast harmony." For me the primacy of Christology prior to and above ecclesiology could from now on no longer be infringed on in the least. The relation is irreversible. Only where Christ is, is there church. Factually it is acknowledged that church fellowship is normally shaped by Christ and oriented to him. But this should not be allowed to be explained apodictically and dogmatically. There are always churches of the antichrist that intend to expropriate the glory of the Nazarene, and that even in their worship services. And everywhere there are those churches that render their Lord unbelievable, see in him only the model of a religious affiliation, and no longer allow their criterion to be the Crucified One who unmasks all idolatry and problematizes the Christian worldview. But precisely this is involved in the concept of the body of Christ that marks the earthly sphere of the Exalted One's lordship, realized in his members. The church is mirror and tool, the "organon" of his glory. But it is legitimately such only in the shadow of his cross; and it is, even there, only a most deficient breaking in of the new creation.

Seen from this insight, only later gained and formulated precisely, my dissertation nevertheless encountered two important determinations. Without immediately calculating the extent of the decision that seemed obvious to me, I had most intimately connected Christology and anthropology when I first inquired what "body" meant before and in Paul. In doing so I assumed that the function of the body of Christ was analogous to that of the human body. The doctrine of the *Corpus mysticum* [mystical body] in the later history of

3. Heinrich Schlier (1900–1978), professor of New Testament at Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, Wuppertal, and Bonn; opponent of Nazi tyranny; convert to Roman Catholicism.

dogma might perhaps be valid. Instinctively, I did not want to proceed from it. Even less did I begin with the vulgar understanding of body as “corpus” or “person,” toward which ancient documents could totally lead one astray. If on the basis of the idea of the mystical body the relation to the earthly reality of concrete persons as members of this body was to be interpreted only vaguely as a “poetic” type of expression, then in the second case it could not be clearly stated how many earthly corpses or persons should unite themselves in one corpus or person of the heavenly Christ. So it also seemed to me to be problematic, in dependence on the famous fable of Menenius Agrippa,<sup>4</sup> to define the body of Christ constitutively as “organism.” Then, in 1 Corinthians 12:12ff., only one metaphor would have been used which could be configured allegorically. Yet the text, immediately in the first verse, exactly as in Romans 12:4, insisted on reality and identity, not comparison and possibility. Accordingly, only where the mutual relation of the members is concerned does the apostle take to comparison and thus to the usual idea of organism.

One last thing must still be considered: in Paul, “body of Christ” denotes not only the church but, as in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, the cruciform body of Jesus shared eucharistically. But again, from that point a relation is set up with the church and the union of its many members at the meal. Here I found the key to overcoming my problems, which offered me neither an exclusively christological nor an exclusively anthropological formulation of the question. For the apostle, “body” had to be more than something ready to hand or a type of existence in its individuality. At least in the text of the Lord’s Supper it was the possibility and modality of communication. This gave sense to all the other passages. As body, the human person belongs to the earth with its gifts, necessities, needs, and sufferings. One can be joined with all creatures or be separate from whatever displeases or is hostile. One always has masters in everyday life and therefore is subject to the constraint of powers and forces, either becoming a servant of Christ or, as “flesh,” a rebel against God or, in one’s sexuality, even one with the whore. In his body, the exalted Christ is present on earth, through his members and the church as a whole, sharing himself with the world, just as he did previously as the Nazarene, as he claims on the other hand as *kyrios* the obedience of his own as well as of the world promised him by the Father. What connects Christology, anthropology, and sacramental teaching within this context is the understanding of corporeality as sharing and participating, viewed cosmically: the belonging to a world, be it of blessing or curse, of God or of demons. According to Paul, even the

4. Menenius Agrippa (d. 493 BC), a consul of the Roman Republic in 503 BC.

resurrection, which does not denote living beyond the grave in the modern sense, concerns bodies insofar as it sets them in the world in which God is no longer contested, is the only One who is there for what was created by God, and is “all in all,” finally victor and liberator.

This interpretation assumes Bultmann’s fundamental insight, to which I always held, that in general the concepts of the Pauline anthropology do not, in the Greek sense, denote a component but the entire person with one’s various orientations, capabilities, and experiences. I have not understood why Bultmann, who singled out my dissertation without my deserving it, never directly opposed my analysis. He could not miss where we differed. He remained captive to the idealistic tradition when he found the concept of “body” as expressive of one’s relation to oneself and maintained the possibility of distancing oneself from oneself. “Self-understanding” was decisive for him, and he was inclined to see in the body that earthbound existence that needed to be transcended in faith as well as in knowledge. By contrast, for me everything depends on the fact that existence in the body is and remains bound to another, that it may never be viewed in isolation and as independent, mature individuality, so that the possibility of self-transcendence also falls away. In a certain way, my interpretation was “materialistic.” I did not want to miss the significance of “corporeality,” but also for that reason the body’s connection to the earth and thus to a “world” variously determined by creation, sin, redemption, and likewise to its various masters and conditions. From that point the notion of human autonomy was unthinkable. Conversely, the cosmic orientation of every individual is always a given, though differing in the particular spheres of power. One never really lives alone, not even in one’s ideas. One lives eternally with, for, against, under, or as an authority, over some other, and with those closest, with enemies, lords, brothers, animals, plants, demons, good “angels,” God, or Satan. So one always lives, and again in eternity, belonging to a world and its particular master. In sum, existence is participating and sharing, be it in blessing or curse, in obedience or rebellion, in pleasure or sorrow—manifold, but always “gifted,” manifold, but always in the service of good or evil.

From that point, it was easy to see that when he comes to speak of the relation of various Christians to each other, Paul can connect the body of Christ—which he first of all describes as a worldwide earthly sphere of the lordship of Christ, thus representing it realistically, not metaphorically—with the organism idea of popular philosophy. One always lives in service under good or evil masters. When one is under the lordship of Christ, one arrives at solidarity with all, at fellowship in the church, as corresponds to an organism. This type of observation thus gives concreteness to the first of those spheres

of lordship. Where Christ reigns his disciples live, as he himself on earth, in service to all, to whatever bears the image of the human.

With this we encounter again the other aspect of my dissertation, already indicated, which I later more sharply emphasized but have never given up: The body of Christ may not be confused with a religious association or an ideological community, as is possible only where, as chiefly occurred at the beginning of the century, one proceeds from the local community or the churchly institution. Also, the later alternative to institution, in Germany viewed as *Volkskirche* and event—and thus as missionary movement—is too schematic and phenomenological, not defined clearly enough from the outset by Christology, and it therefore does not precisely describe the ecumenical perspective. The body of Christ is the world under the sign of grace, in the lordship of the Nazarene as the *Pantocrator* designated by God. It is the new creation, which at the end of time points back to the old creation, wrests it from the power of the demons, and in the earthly present represents the inbreaking of the kingdom of the resurrection from the dead. Later, this will be dealt with in greater detail. Here it may suffice to point out that such an assessment was current in a time when our earth began to shrink and the ecumenical movement became gradually visible to us also in Germany. In two respects, then, I distanced myself from the liberal, idealistic inheritance of my school tradition, which in the end, at any rate, was current in Germany: I replaced the idea of the individual with that of the member within a sphere of lordship, which rendered categories of “autonomy” or “maturity” as well as “self-understanding” meaningless and actually incompatible with reality. The members of the body of Christ are never independent, never mature, and cannot realize themselves and need not attempt to do so—because they are identified by their Lord and have become distinctive. In the same way, I could not be content with what is again a most profoundly idealistic ethic—that of the I-Thou relationship. The world is Christ’s arena, thus the church also, right up to the seemingly limited mundane existence of its members. The door to the ecumenical reality was opened for me.

### The Priesthood of All Believers

In the struggle of the Confessing Church<sup>5</sup> our arguably most painful experience was the breakdown of almost all existing church leadership, which in any case allowed me always to be critical toward it. At the same time, we experienced the breakdown and more: the betrayal by those so-called officeholders

5. The Confessing Church, a Protestant confessional body in Nazi Germany, founded in opposition to government-sponsored efforts to Nazify the German Protestant churches.