

Dr. Arthur Homann

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The history of the Christian Church, which is the course of the gospel in human history, is sometimes analysed and presented as the history of doctrines and movements. Yet since the Church is, properly speaking, people who believe the gospel of Christ, an illuminating insight into the course of the gospel is often gained by a more penetrating look at the life and work of individual Christians. The following is the story of one individual, Dr. Arthur Hormann. His story is an important one inasmuch as it touches on both the history of our Wisconsin Synod and the history of Lutheranism in Hawaii.

Arthur Hormann was born on November 12, 1869, in St. Louis. His parents came to America from the kingdom of Hanover before it became a province of Prussia in 1866. His mother came over as a child to be adopted by a childless aunt. His father finished his college education when he decided to emigrate to the U.S.A. He worked as a clerk and at the same time went to a medical school in St. Louis, where he received his M.D. and began practicing medicine in St. Louis and two places in Illinois. In 1882 he moved with his family, then seven, finally ten children, to Watertown, Wisconsin. He was a very popular doctor there until

his death in 1918.

In Watertown, Arthur attended a public school, and then Northwestern College, from which he graduated in 1890. From there he went, with most of his class, to the Lutheran Theological Seminary of the Wisconsin Synod, at that time in Milwaukee. There he was a student of Adolph Hoeneke. Although he graduated from the seminary in 1893, he did not enter the ministry with the rest of his class. His father had decided that he should go to Germany for postgraduate work. He stayed in Germany for nine years, from 1893 to 1902. During those years he became a master of German. He matriculated at the University of Berlin, specializing in history with the accent on Reformation history. He took courses and attended seminars in medieval and modern history. Among his teachers was Adolph Harnack. His main teacher was Max Lenz, for whom he wrote his thesis on a Spanish hero of the Reformation. He received his Ph.D. in 1902.

Dr. Hormann began his professional career when he was called back to Watertown to teach history and Latin at Northwestern College. There he remained for fourteen years. During this time he was also secretary

of the faculty.

In the summer of 1906 he returned to Berlin and married Maria Meyer, who had just graduated from a teachers college. Their marriage was blessed with three children, Bernhard, Helmut, and Irmgard.

Dr. Hormann was an exceptionally popular teacher, both with his students and among his colleagues on the faculty. One appreciative class gave him a painting by Kaulbach; "Luther at Worms." As the college's "history man" he was asked to write a history of the college for the 50th anniversary in 1915, which he titled "Soli Deo Gloria." He wrote it in German and it was translated into English by Hans Moussa. In the German edition Hormann merely mentions himself as a member of the faculty. But in the English edition, Moussa says of him: "Northwestern was exceedingly fortunate in securing his consent to accept a position at the college. It will readily be seen that it is not an idle boast if we say that students at Northwestern receive historical instruction of a standard as high as that of the proudest school; the students fully realize the unusual opportunity they have and the

infectious enthusiasm which pervades the doctor's classroom has resulted in much earnest historical work." Dr. Hormann's work-load at Northwestern was as follows: Secretary of the Faculty; History with the four college and the four prep classes, and American History with the Commercial Dept; Latin with Freshmen = 31 periods per week. In addition to this he wrote book reviews for the Journal of Theology of the University of Chicago.

Although Dr. Hormann began teaching in 1902, he was not ordained until 1906, at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Richwood, Wis. He often preached at mission festivals. One of his most unforgettable "preaching invitations" was to be the orator of the day at the NWC 50th anniversary, at which the whole synod was gathered.

In 1916 came a call which was the turning point in Hormann's career. For it was in April of that year that he received the call to be the pastor of the Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinde zu Honolulu.

The Lutheran Church of Honolulu was not founded by the missionary efforts of any European or American church body, but by laymen. Lutheranism first came

to the Hawaiian Islands when in the decade 1880 - 1890 some 1,500 Germans from rural areas in Germany came to work in Hawaii's sugar plantations. They had come as employees of the firm of H. Hackfeld. The majority of these workers settled at the sugar plantation at Lihue, Kauai. Paul Isenberg, associated with Hackfeld, had begun this plantation ca. 1860. With the coming of the immigrant workers, Paul Isenberg's brother Carl recruited a young German theological student, Friedrich Richter, who was in Honolulu, to organize a Lutheran congregation at Lihue. The birthday of the oldest Lutheran church in Hawaii is November 10, 1883, the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth. Richter served the Lihue congregation until 1887 when he returned to Germany. He was succeeded by Paul Isenberg's youngest brother, the Rev. Hans Isenberg, who served in Lihue until his death in 1918.

The Lutheran Church of Honolulu was started by Pastor Isenberg, who made occasional trips to Honolulu to conduct services at the Y. M. C. A. Following the service on Oct. 29, 1899, he suggested a permanent congregation. This was possible because

Paul Isenberg and J. F. Hackfeld each offered \$25,000.00 for the Honolulu German Lutherans to organize and seek a charter. The birthday of this congregation is Sept. 9, 1900. The first pastor, selected by the board of trustees from among applicants in Germany, was Rev. Willibald Felmy. He served from 1901-1912. From 1912-1914 the church was served by Rev. Emil Engelhardt. Engelhardt resigned just as World War I was beginning in Europe, and consequently looking to Germany for future pastors was out of the question. Therefore, when a successor to Engelhardt was being sought by the board, a member named Hartwig Harders, a brewmaster brewing Primo Beer, suggested his brother in law, an American born ordained Lutheran minister. The choice was ideal because on the one hand Hormann was an American and on the other because he spoke German like a German.

From 1914-1916, when Hormann came, the church was served by Pastor Isenberg on a once a month basis and in 1915 a certain Pastor Schafhirt, passing through from Australia back to Germany, took over the vacancy.

Hormann's new position offered hope for the improvement of his wife's health. Living in Hawaii is more healthful than living in Wisconsin, and soon Maria's asthma was gone. She lived in good health until 1976. Besides the hope for improvement of his wife's health, the Honolulu parish almost tripled the salary he made at Northwestern. Also there was the promise of a leave every five years. What he did not know was that he would lead the church through the gravest crisis of its history, ~~and~~ through two world wars, and the German to English transition.

The congregation bought a two story house at the foot of Punchbowl Crater in the Makiki section of Honolulu for Pastor Hormann. They also bought him a car, a 1916 Dodge. He had to learn how to drive at the age of 46. Hormann was the first of the church's pastors to use a car.

World War I aroused a tremendous amount of anti-German feeling in America, and the territory of Hawaii was no exception. German instruction was eliminated from high schools and the University of Hawaii, and not resumed until 1927, when Maria Hormann began

teaching German at the U. H. Various disturbing incidents took place during the war years. A humming sound in the organ was suspected as a wireless to Germany; it was inspected by a Federal official and found to be the organ motor! Once there was a bomb threat, and Pastor Hormann searched the church but found nothing. Then during the service there was a car that had a noisy blow out as it passed the church. Pastor Hormann and his wife alone were frightened - no one else knew. When one of Honolulu's most prominent ministers urged him to stop preaching in German, he said, "As long as my people pray in German, I'm going to preach to them in German." This was a time when numerous members were lost to other churches.

Pastor Hormann knew that the transition to English was inevitable, but he thought it best to proceed gradually, neither forcing the issue or resisting the change. When the war ended he began an English service once a month. Sunday School and confirmation classes became English very quickly. By the time World War II came, German was no longer in use on a regular basis. Hormann's last

German sermon was in 1952.

Beginning in 1918 Hormann went every six weeks to Lihue, Kawai. His wife, Maria, always felt that these trips helped to keep him enthusiastic, youthful, and well, since they gave him five full days in the stimulating environment of Mrs. Isenberg's home, and among the Kawai parishioners. His son, Bernhard, remembers how when he preached in Lihue an added note of warmth crept into his delivery. It is in this churchyard that both he and his wife are buried. Dr. Hormann died in 1957. He had served as pastor of the Lutheran church of Honolulu from 1916 - 1946 and as pastor emeritus till his death. During the period of his "pastor emeritus" status the members of the congregation affectionately called him "Vatti" and his wife "Mutti." He was helpful, humble, and beloved by the three pastors who served the church while he was still alive.

There can be no doubt that for 30 years the Lutheran Church of Honolulu had a pastor who kept his people in the love of God through the faithful preaching of Christ crucified and risen for our redemption.

The question arises, however, was Dr. Arthur Hormann a representative of Synodical Conference Lutheranism in Hawaii? Did he maintain throughout his ministry in the Islands, 7,000 miles from Germany and 5,000 miles from Wisconsin, the type of Lutheranism for which the Wisconsin Synod stands?

The answer is, apparently not. When this writer began investigating Dr. Hormann's life, he felt that the Wisconsin Synod was at fault for not supporting a mission in Hawaii. The fact of the matter is that the Lutheran Church of Honolulu did not "need" any synodical support, but was funded almost entirely by the Hackfeld and Isenberg families. And it was Pastor Hormann who taught his people, used to a state church in Germany, to contribute of their means to support the church.

After World War I the Church Council rejected any proposition that the congregation join a Mainland Lutheran Synod, and the proposal was never reconsidered. However, in 1940 two Missouri Synod men visited Honolulu and talked to the members and the pastor of the church. There was little desire to unite.

In 1928 Dr. Hormann had supported the motion to allow women's suffrage and council membership. He tolerated lodge members. Also he practiced fellowship with Reformed and Roman Catholic churchmen. All these things the Missourians objected to, and that in a rather authoritarian, tactless manner. Finally, in 1946, the church under the leadership of Dr. Hormann's successor, Rev. Edward Hamme joined the U. L. C. A. Apparently "Vatti" had no objections to this action. It is reasonable to assume that he would not fit too comfortably into the WELS of today, but would regard our position as legalistic.

Whatever may be said about the shift to the "right" in WELS since 1917, it is evident that the same issues of fellowship, women's place in the church, lodgery etc. beckon us to take a more relaxed position. In Dr. Hormann's case it was a sincere love of the gospel and desire to spread it that caused him to become lax in certain areas. If WELS and her sister churches are to fulfil their mission in this generation, then we must uphold every scriptural position, no matter how unpopular with the world around us,

and yet never lose sight of the fact that our main, predominant emphasis is to be the full and free salvation in Christ for all people. The history of Lutheranism in the last 40 years teaches us clearly that if we relax our attitude toward scripture, the gospel will finally be lost. Could Dr. Hermann be a portent for the Wisconsin Synod? I pray not