

9-1-1954

## In Memoriam. Professor F. E. Mayer, D.D.

William F. Arndt

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

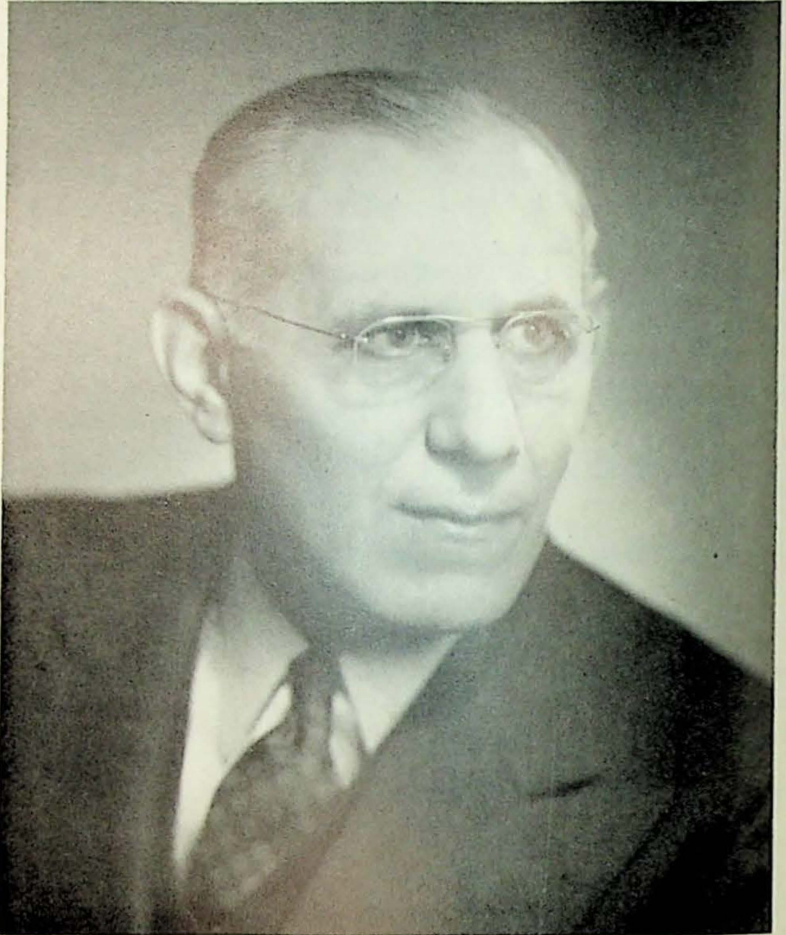
### Recommended Citation

Arndt, William F. (1954) "In Memoriam. Professor F. E. Mayer, D.D.," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 25, Article 48.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol25/iss1/48>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

Arndt: In Memoriam. Professor F. E. Mayer, D.D.



*Frederick E. Mayer, 1892—1954*

# Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXV

SEPTEMBER, 1954

No. 9

## In Memoriam

Professor F. E. Mayer, D. D., 1892—1954

THE managing editor of the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY has been taken to the home above where there is rest for God's children and editorial drudgery is unknown. Exigencies of space will not permit that we insert more than a few biographical data; for fuller accounts the readers are referred to the biweekly popular papers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the *Lutheraner* and the *Lutheran Witness*.

Frederick Emanuel Mayer, the son of the Rev. Emanuel Mayer, D. D., and his wife Marie, née Pfothenhauer, was born Nov. 5, 1892, at New Wells, Mo. His preparatory school was Concordia College, Milwaukee, Wis. He was graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., in 1915. After serving as pastor in Sherrard and Kewanee, Ill., he was a member, from 1926 to 1937, of the faculty of Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill., the school which later conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. In 1937 he became professor of systematic theology in Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., which position he held till his death on July 20 of this year. He is survived by his widow, Martha, née Luehrmann, and by three sons and two daughters, by his aged mother, and by many other relatives. His connection with the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY as assistant and afterwards as managing editor extended from 1940 to the day when he joined the saints in glory.

In surveying his life, one must not neglect to notice how his early environment could help to awaken in him interest in, and admiration and love for, the Lutheran Church and its teachings. His father was universally recognized as an eminent Lutheran theologian and churchman, and his uncle was the sainted Dr. F.

Pfotenhauer, from 1911 to 1935 the President of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, a man who will always be gratefully remembered as a noble and wise leader of a rapidly developing organization. Frankenmuth, Mich., where he grew up, had ever since its founding in 1845 been a center of healthy, joyous, confident Lutheranism and naturally was rich in fascinating historical associations — all of which could not fail to impress and influence a wide-awake, imaginative boy and aid, under God's guidance, in creating a lifelong warm loyalty to the Church of the Reformation.

The training which he received in the preparatory school and in the seminary was of the kind which alas! nowadays in many quarters is branded as hopelessly outmoded. It stressed the study of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew as tools which a theologian, if at all possible, should be acquainted with and able to handle. The charge, which not infrequently is launched, that such a system is bound to produce narrow specialists who are more interested in deliberative subjunctives, potential optatives, and peculiarities of the Hebrew *Hiibpa'el* than in the eternal verities and in real life is brilliantly refuted by the case of our deceased colleague, who was truly catholic in his outlook, deeply concerned about every problem confronting the nation and the Church, keeping the windows of his mind open in all directions for new and worthwhile information, and giving special attention to all theological, philosophical, and sociological movements of our time.

In fact, it was not exegesis with its natural emphasis on linguistic matters that became his chosen field, but systematic theology, and this again in its various branches of dogmatics proper, history of doctrine, the Confessional Writings of the Church, and comparative symbolics. For the position of teacher and investigator in this area he was remarkably gifted. He possessed a keen, analytical mind which could quickly separate the wheat from the chaff, discerning between truth and error and between essentials and nonessentials. His lively interest, mentioned a moment ago, in everything that took place on the religious stage made him study with genuine ardor the phenomena that engage the thinking of seriously minded theologians today, such as Barthianism, Neo-Orthodoxy, the Lundensian theology, and the Ecumenical Movement. As he immersed himself in the pertinent literature, his aim was not simply neg-

ative, that is, the desire to discover what was anti-Scriptural and absurd in the systems under consideration and to pillory it with becoming indignation, but to find the objective truth about them and to hail with joy those features in which they set forth divine, Biblical teaching.

His own theology, as was to be expected, was simply that of the Lutheran Church, well characterized by the terms *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*. It was in the true sense of the word Scriptural theology that he taught, untrammelled by a false traditionalism on the one hand and by rationalism and emotionalism on the other. But while he endeavored to be faithful to the Scriptures in all his teaching, his theology, as his writings abundantly show, consisted not in the mere exhaustive enumeration of all the doctrines which are found in the Bible. For him these doctrines had a vital center which illuminated them all and made them a grand unity—Christ, the divine Savior; and so he passionately strove to make his teaching and his preaching Christ-centered. It would be a pleasant and profitable occupation for anybody to go through his writings and mark the passages in which this special characteristic of his teaching becomes apparent.

For this reason, too, his theology was what the fathers said theology should be, a *habitus practicus*, a personal matter, something experienced and lived. Theology was his profession, it is true, but it was more than a profession; it was a means for him of finding true happiness for himself and others, of remaining in touch with his God and Savior. What he wrote about Law and Gospel, sin and grace, was good Lutheran dogmatics; but it was likewise the faith by which he lived.

In addition to other virtues, Dr. Mayer possessed a quality which unfortunately is somewhat rare, genuine industry coupled with a ready willingness to share his thoughts, convictions, and discoveries with others. Early in his career he began to ply the pen, and he did it in an able way. In the course of time many articles of his appeared in this journal; our readers will be glad to see a list of the main ones: Artikel X der Variata (1931); Entire Sanctification (1932); Ist die Variata synergistisch und majoristisch? (1935); Romanism, Calvinism, and Lutheranism on the Authority of Scripture (1937); The Means of Grace (1939); The Roman

Doctrine of the Lord's Supper (1939); *Modern Humanism* (1941); *Ritschl's Theology* (1944); *The Rise of Liberal Theology in Congregationalism* (1944); *Liberal Theology and the Reformed Church* (1944); *Dispensationalism Examined and Found Wanting* (1946); *Foreword* (1950); *De Ministerio Ecclesiastico, Augustana V* (1950); *The Dogma of Mary's Assumption, a Symptom of Antichristian Theology* (1950); *The Principium Cognoscendi of Roman Catholic Theology* (1951); *Human Will in Bondage and Freedom, a Study in Luther's Distinction of Law and Gospel* (1951); *The New Testament Concept of Fellowship* (1952); *The World Council of Churches, a Theological Appraisal— in Conjunction with Richard Z. Meyer* (1953); *The Formal and Material Principles of Lutheran Theology* (1953); *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel and the Terminology Visible and Invisible Church* (1954); *Theological Issues at Evanston* (1954).

While he was still in Springfield, an English up-to-date edition of a useful German work on symbolics by the sainted Prof. M. Guenther was greatly needed, and Prof. Mayer collaborated with Professors Th. Engelder, Th. Graebner, and the undersigned to produce such a work, which was given the title *Popular Symbolics* (Concordia Publishing House, 1934). When a new edition of this book was called for, the project was committed to the able hands of Prof. Mayer, and he produced an altogether new work, which appeared a few months ago under the title *The Religious Bodies of America* (Concordia Publishing House). It is his *magnum opus* and has been greeted far and wide as a magnificent contribution to our theological literature. He stated to the undersigned several weeks before his death that his aim had been to set forth impartially, objectively, on the basis of authoritative declarations and documents what the various religious bodies of our country teach on the chief topics of our Christian faith. Without making concessions to error the work is written in an evangelical spirit and bears testimony both to the vast learning of the author and to his love of the *una sancta*, a subject which always made his heart expand. It is very evident that in his approach to controversial matters he patterned more after Johann Gerhard, the prince of Lutheran dogmaticians, as Dr. Walther was fond

of calling him, than after Abraham Calov, the militant defender of orthodoxy, although he would have been the first one to admit that both types are needed. Various smaller publications (*Jehovah's Witnesses, American Churches and Sects, American Denominationalism*) show to what extent comparative symbolics had become for him a field of major interest.

What is worthy of special mention is that his splendid book on the religious bodies of America was largely written when he had become a part-invalid on account of a malady that began its attacks on him in 1949. At times the suffering caused him was so severe that all work had to cease. But the minute that the pain abated he again was active, writing, dictating, and sifting the abundant source material he had gathered. What a grand bequest to the Church he loved this book constitutes!

Another project, which, as far as his own assignment is concerned, was completed, is the retranslation of the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church provided with the required notes—an undertaking in which he was associated with other scholars. Other literary labors included editorship of the *Concordia Pulpit* in 1941 and 1942, several synodical essays, an article in *Christendom*, 1947 ('The *una sancta* in Luther's Theology), papers and lectures before conferences and other gatherings, membership on the editorial committee of the *Lutheraner* (1940—1952), and editorship of the European edition of the *Lutheraner* (1947—1948).

A prominent chapter in the life of the sainted professor has to do with his work as a churchman, that is, as leader in the affairs of our church body. Not only was he for years a member of Synod's Commission of Higher Education (1932—1938), but also chairman of the synodical Board for Parish Education (1940 to 1944), besides filling other committee assignments. His services in this area became particularly valuable when after World War II, in 1946, conferences were held by Lutheran theologians of Europe and representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, at Bad Boll, Germany. Three times (1946, 1947, 1948) he was one of the spokesmen of our church body in these discussions, which he himself ably described in the brochure *The Story of Bad Boll*, 1948. His genial, friendly personality was an important asset in these conferences. With pleasure the under-

signed recalls the role Dr. Mayer played at the Lutheran World Convention at Lund in 1947, where he and several other Missourians were present as observers. When, in the section which considered doctrinal matters, speeches delivered in English were not readily understood by some of the German delegates and these men expressed the wish that he translate such speeches, he consented and graciously and skilfully acted as interpreter. In his contacts abroad he loyally stated and defended the position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which both here and abroad altogether too often is misunderstood, caricatured, and maligned.

Those who knew Dr. Mayer will agree that as a teacher and lecturer he was interesting, lively, forceful. His former students as well as his colleagues will treasure the memory of the unflinching kindness with which he was willing to listen to requests for help and counsel. As a companion he was pleasant and entertaining, as husband and father tender and deeply affectionate. The patience and fortitude with which he bore his long and painful illness (cancer of the spine); the occasions when, after he had, as it were, been snatched from the doors of death, he would say to his friends, "Behold the power of Christian prayer!"; the beautiful witness of love of the Savior and ardent desire to serve his students which insisted on his being brought to the classroom in a wheel chair in order that he might expound divine truth; his very appearance preaching an eloquent sermon—all this could easily form the subject of an edifying chapter which would end with words of praise and thanksgiving to God for this precious gift granted our beloved Church.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Rev. 14:13.

WILLIAM F. ARNDT