

In Memoriam

Ludvig Munthe

Thor Strandencæus

One of the grand old men in Nordic missiology, Professor Dr Ludvig Munthe, died peacefully on July 13th 2002. For several years he had problems with his health, but continued his scholarly research until the end. Recently, the second of his fine pieces has been published posthumously, an article on the Norwegian pioneer missionary to Madagascar, Reinert Larsen Aas, who was a favourite role model for Professor Munthe.

Ludvig Munthe was born on April 22, 1920 at Hjelmeland in the Diocese of Stavanger. He was the son of police constable Olav Munthe and Ingeborg Munthe (née Teigland). When he was only six months old, Ludvig's father died, and he grew up together with his mother as an only child. At the age of twelve he moved to Sauda and later completed gymnasium at Voss.

After *examen artium* he was accepted for theological training in 1941 at the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, where he studied during the Second World War. After graduation in 1946 he was ordained in Kristiansand Cathedral by Bishop Maroni. In the same year he married Olaug (née Austarheim). The two soon left for language studies in France and thereafter for language studies and mission service in Madagascar. Here Ludvig Munthe worked in the districts of Malaimbandy and Tsiribihina. During his second period in Madagascar he taught at the Lutheran theological college at Ivory in Fianarantsoa, a ministry he had until retirement from active mission service in 1977. For a while he also led the youth ministry of the Malagasy Lutheran Church. During his long missionary service he was engaged in the study of theology and of the French and Malagasy languages. He completed both licentiate and doctoral degrees in theology at the University of Sorbonne in Paris. His doctoral dissertation (1964) dealt with the first Malagasy Bible translations, and was published as *La Bible à Madagascar: les deux premières traductions du Nouveau Testament malgache* (Oslo, 1969).

From 1966-1977 he returned to his *alma mater*, The School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, where he taught missiology (1966-1977). From 1977-1988 he was professor of missiology and science of religion at the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology in Oslo. During this time he was also editor of *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* until he retired for health reasons. In the Nordic Institute of Missionary and Ecumenical Research (NIME) he was particularly known for his many years of wholehearted devotion and work for systematising Nordic missionary and Malagasy church and mission archives.

In connection with his 70th year birthday Professor Munthe was honoured by a Festschrift, *Misjonsengasjement og forskertrang: Professor dr. Ludvig Munthe 70 år*, published as a special issue of *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* (Vol. 44, No 1-2, 1990, pp. 1-124). This also included a bibliography of his extensive scientific production, both books and articles (pp. 111-123). This bibliography is supplemented by the many articles he wrote and published after his retirement, as he continued with extensive archive studies in many countries till the very last months of his life. He was always looking for new sources for the understanding of Malagasy history.

Because of his familiarity with the French and Malagasy languages he had both adequate and efficient tools for conveying theology and history of mission, Malagasy culture, history and religion to a readership of French and Malagasy speaking scholars. He was one of the very first Norwegian theologians who predominantly addressed these subjects in French and Malagasy, thereby enabling both a European and African readership to benefit from the results of his research on topics relevant to Madagascar in languages familiar to them. As a scholar he was never afraid to engage in difficult and strenuous tasks. On the contrary, in his search for dependable sources for church and mission studies he engaged in extensive travel and visited numerous archives and museums in Africa and Europe. Rather than discourage him, the obstacles he met spurred his interest and zeal.

In his publications he wrote about the Norwegian missionary to Madagascar, Lars Dahle. He publicised previously unknown Malagash religious texts and gave important contributions to the understanding of Malagasy history, language, culture and religion. Like his friend and missionary colleague Professor Dr Otto Christian Dahl, he was eager to prove and demonstrate

the close links between Malagasy and Indonesian cultures. For his scientific and cultural achievements and contributions he was elected a member of the Malagasy Academy of Science and received the highest Malagasy decorations for expatriates (*Chevalier de l'Ordre National, Promu Officier de l'Ordre National & Grand Officier de l'Ordre National*). In Norway he also received His Majesty's Golden Award for distinguished scholarly work of great national and international significance, rather a rare achievement nowadays.

As missionary, research colleague and friend, Professor Munthe made many friendships and was a faithful friend himself. He combined a down-to-earth attitude with the mind of a detective, always searching for new answers to his many questions. A man of principle, he never became a fanatic. He showed himself to be an understanding person who listened with an open mind to people who held opinions and worldviews different from his own. Professor Munthe was a peace loving man who himself did not like to be in the limelight. But for mission and theology, for Madagascar and the propagation of knowledge, he was a burning torch, always motivating new people to become engaged. And what he learnt himself, he was eager to share with others, be it Norwegian or Malagasy fairytales, children's rhymes or historical facts.

His upbringing in the Norwegian countryside made him an eager adventurer. He loved fishing and hunting, cared much for his family, students and colleagues and had a special gift for encouraging others. Throughout his life he never forgot that he was an ordained pastor and an evangelist. Thus, as a proclaimer of the Gospel he willingly shared it with whoever was ready to lend him an ear. Ludvig Munthe died in his countryside cabin at Hagalid, Hjelmeland. He had been out fishing in Jøsenfjorden and shared a home cooked meal with his wife. Ludvig Munthe was buried in the churchyard of Hjelmeland, next to his parents. Surviving him are his wife, Olaug, four children, eleven grandchildren and one great grandchild.

His colleagues and students of mission studies, as well as those who study Malagasy mission history, religion, language and culture, mourn his death but are the more thankful to him for leaving a living legacy of published works, which will support us in our continuing research. May he rest in peace and rise to eternal life on the day of the Lord's coming.