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## FATHER HUGO LASALLE 1898-1990

On the 7th of July 1990, Father Hugo (Enomiya) Lasalle passed away at the age of 91 in West Germany. Well-known for his role in introducing Zen Buddhism to Germany and Europe and for his advocacy of integrating Zen practice with Christian contemplation, he left behind many important contributions, including the establishment of the World Peace Memorial Church in 1954, and the Sophia Settlement in Arakawa, Tokyo.

He was born into a Catholic family in the district of Westphalia, West Germany on the 11th of November, 1898. After leaving school (Gymnasium) in 1919, he became a novice in the Society of Jesus. There he trained for two years, after which, between 1921 and 1928, he studied philosophy in the Netherlands and England for three years and theology for the next four. He became a fully-ordained priest in August 1927 and two years later, at the age of 31, he volunteered to go to Japan as a missionary, where he taught German and Sociology at Sophia University for nine years. From 1931, living with students in the Arakawa district, he began to work with the poor who had lost their homes through natural and man-made disasters. He helped them by providing food and medicine and education for their children. Although he had to leave for other work, he never forgot the poor for the rest of his life.

In 1935, the Father General of the Society of Jesuits appointed him Superior of the Japan Mission. There he remained for the following fourteen years. At this time, however, the movement towards militarism had begun, which made the work of the Catholic Church in Japan difficult. Foreign missionaries were rounded up and sent to concentration camps in the countryside.

Between 1939 and 1969, he lived in Hiroshima. On the 6th of August, 1945, most of the city, including the Catholic Church in Noboricho, was destroyed by the atomic bomb and Father Lasalle was himself affected by radiation sickness. As soon as he became stronger,

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he started to help those who had been similarly afflicted. Seeing so much suffering, he became determined that such a terrible disaster should never be allowed to happen again. Thereupon he decided to build the World Peace Memorial Church where he hoped people of all religious faiths would pray for peace. To realize this dream, he formed a fund-raising committee, headed by Prince Takamatsu, brother of the Emperor Showa. He raised money in such places as America, Germany, and Spain by giving lectures about his experiences. The church was consecrated on the 6th of August, 1954. For his work on behalf of peace he was named an honorary citizen of Hiroshima in April of 1968.

All this time, from about 1940, he had been practicing zazen under Harada Sōgaku Rōshi of Hosshin Temple in Obama, Fukui Prefecture, who had been recommended to him by Etō Tarō, a professor at Hiroshima University. Ever since his arrival in Japan, he had been greatly attracted to Japanese culture, particularly Zen Buddhism. The reason for his practice was his perception of deep spirituality within Zen, which enabled him to experience a greater understanding of his own Christian life and, through this, he was able to bring Zen into Christian practice.

Later in his life, he told me that when he started his Zen practice, he found it extremely hard because of the pain in his legs and the very cold winters of Fukui (sometimes dropping to  $-10^{\circ}$  below). Once he was able to overcome those obstacles, however, he had great difficulty in passing the first gateway of Zen practice, Jōshū's Mu. That koan kept him occupied for nearly 40 years. Later, when he met Yamada Kōun Rōshi, he was able to overcome this stalemate and, over the next ten years, he was able to complete his training with his master, leading to his own certification as a teacher.

He was also writing books during this time, but there was not much response to his ideas concerning Zen and Catholicism, as this was before the 2nd Vatican Council. However, rising above these difficulties, he opened a Zen Dōjō called 'Shinmeikutsu' (Cave of Divine Darkness) in the suburbs of Hiroshima in December in 1960, where he taught zazen. In 1969, he established a Catholic Zen Dojo in Koiwa, West Tama in Tokyo. He also taught zazen in Germany, (where in) 1977 he opened a Catholic Zen Dojo at Diefurt, and other parts of Europe. This work took him to Europe up to thirty times a year. Students of all kinds came to him. They included the queens of Spain

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and Greece.

Throughout his life, Father Lasalle promoted religious dialogue inside and outside Japan, constantly explaining the necessity of peace in a form of pilgrimage throughout the world. On account of his efforts to promote peace, he was considered for the Nobel Peace Prize.

He wrote 30 books. To mention only a few:

*Zen—the Way to Enlightenment* (Riso-sha)

*Zen and Mystical Thought* (Shunju-sha)

Both written in Japanese.

*Zen-Buddhismus* (Bachen) in German

*Zen Meditation for Christians* (Open Court) in English

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