

Uwe Siemon-Netto

(25 October 1936 – 29 August 2025)

The worlds of international journalism and Lutheran theology have lost one of their most esteemed voices. Dr. Uwe Siemon-Netto died in Laguna Woods, California on Friday, August 29th, 2025. He was 88.

Born October 25, 1936, in Leipzig, Gau Saxony, Germany, Uwe Siemon-Netto was the only child of Karl-Heinz Siemon (“Vati”) (1897–1959) and Ruth Netto (“Mutti”) (1914–1991). Karl-Heinz was badly scarred and blinded during World War I, but even so, he later became a well-respected Leipzig prosecutor. Ruth possessed a beautiful mezzo-soprano voice and was a professional singer and performer.

When Uwe was just 10 years old his parents divorced. Despite shared custody, the only real constant in his upbringing was his beloved grandmother Clara Netto (“Omi”) (1888–1976). A staunch and devoted Lutheran Christian, she raised Uwe in the Lutheran faith, teaching him the liturgical prayers and hymns, all whilst watching the near destruction of their beautiful city during World War II—that is, when she wasn’t scolding portly Gestapo soldiers!

Although his childhood playground, the Steinplatz, was spared from the bombings, his playtime soon extended to the rubble and shells of bombed out buildings. Even at that young age of 7 years he was an inquisitive child, asking his father and grandmother questions as he observed the carnage around him. Who? What? Where? When? Why? It was inevitable that he would become a journalist. It was in his bones. It was his calling.

He began his journalism career in 1956 as a trainee at *Westfalenpost*, a large regional newspaper in southern Westphalia. Two years later, he joined the Associated Press in Frankfurt, first as a copy editor, then as an editor and roving reporter. Thus began his reporting of major historical events of the second half of the 20th Century, starting with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. In 1962, he was about to marry an Englishwoman, Gillian Ackers, whom he had met through mutual friends. The wedding plans were interrupted by his sudden and mandated (by his editor-in-chief) departure from London to New York City to cover the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ultimately, post crisis, they tied the knot on December 1, 1962, but in their new hometown, New York City, and their long and colorful marriage began, lasting until her death on March 2, 2022.

From 1962–1969 he was a correspondent for West Germany’s Springer Foreign News Service in London, Paris, New York, Vietnam, the Middle East, and Hong Kong, and from 1969–1973 Siemon-Netto was North American correspondent for the magazine, *Der Stern*, writing about North, Central, and South America, East Asia, France, and again Vietnam. He covered the United Nations, the American Civil Rights Movement, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, the Arab Israeli Six Day War, China’s cultural revolution, and notably the Vietnam War as an embedded reporter for 5 years. Uwe was “on the beat” for the 1968 Tet Offensive, including the Huế massacre, and for the 1975 fall of Saigon. From 1973–1986 Siemon-Netto served as Managing Editor for *Hamburger Morgenpost*, taught journalism at Hamburg’s Hamburger Journalistenschule (now the Henri-Nannen-Schule), and worked as a freelance correspondent for German, Swiss, French, and American publications.



Uwe Siemon-Netto in May 2022

In mid-career, at age 50, the Christian faith that had girded him all those years ago as a child in war-torn Leipzig was rekindled and he began his theological studies. He had questions and he was going to find answers! He began by earning an M.A. from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (“LSTC”). In the summer of 1987, his studies at LSTC had him serving Vietnam veterans as a chaplain intern at the VA Medical Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota. His master’s thesis, applying Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology of suffering to Vietnam vets, was published by The Pilgrim Press as *The Acquittal of God: A Theology for Vietnam Veterans*. Instead of becoming a pastor (as he often said, his wife Gillian wisely talked him out of that), he continued his studies at Boston University where he received a Ph.D. in theology and sociology of religion under Dr. Peter Berger. His dissertation, refuting the cliché that Martin Luther was Hitler’s progenitor, was published by Concordia Publishing House under the title *The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth*. In 1996, he was a resident scholar at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, NJ, working on a project to bridge the gap between theology and the media. He also received an honorary D.Litt. from Concordia Seminary St. Louis in 2004.

All the while he remained a freelance correspondent. At the time of the Berlin Wall’s collapse in 1989 (and Germany’s eventual reunification) he served, concurrently with his academic work, as an editorial consultant and executive editor of *Bild*, launching its East German editions, helping plan newspapers for his beloved Leipzig and Dresden, and training East German journalists. From 1993–1994 he managed the redesign of the Berlin daily paper *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Scientific American* in New York, and *idea-Spektrum*, a Protestant magazine in Wetzlar, Germany, as well as co-founding *Confessio Augustana*, a Lutheran quarterly magazine in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria.

From 1997–2005 Siemon-Netto was a columnist and consultant for various publications, including a stint as United Press International’s religion editor in Washington D.C. From 2005–2009, he was a scholar in residence at Concordia Seminary St. Louis where he founded and served as director of “The Concordia Seminary Institute of Lay Vocation” (renamed in 2007 as “The Center for Lutheran Theology and Public Life”). The Center moved to California in 2009, was again renamed as “The League of Faithful Masks” (LFM). In 2015 LFM was absorbed into 1517 (1517.org), a non-profit that produces books, blogs, podcasts, and conferences, and whose mission statement is, “To Declare and Defend the Good News that you are forgiven and free on account of Christ alone.”

Siemon-Netto spent his remaining days as Senior Distinguished Fellow at 1517 where he continued writing and speaking on Luther’s Doctrine of Two Kingdoms, and on the Doctrine of Vocation. In the last ten years he began composing his memoirs, starting with an update and republication of the account of his Vietnam days titled, *Triumph of the Absurd: A Reporter’s Love for the Abandoned People of Vietnam*. In 2021, 1517 Publishing released Volume 1 of what was to be a four-volume autobiography, *Urchin at War: The Tale of a Leipzig Rascal and his Lutheran Granny under Bombs in Nazi Germany*. That was followed in 2024 by Volume 2, *Urchin on the Beat: The Tale of a Bad Adolescence and Its Joyful Conclusion*.

In 2022, shortly after his wife Gillian’s death in March of that year, the wonderfully unexpected occurred. He was attending a Palm Sunday service at a church very near his home (though not the church he normally frequented). As he left the service that morning, he heard German being spoken behind him. He turned to remark how nice it was to hear such proper spoken German, and he met Karin-Elisabeth von Renthe-Fink. A few days later they enjoyed a German meal together and bonded immediately over their similar German backgrounds and strong Lutheran faith. Uwe and Karin were married on April 15, 2023, and remained together until the day he died. Uwe gained an instant, loving family with four adult children (Donata Nilsen, and Christopher, Nicholas, and Catrina Paez), six grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. Karin was a true companion and helpmate. They were a gift to one another until he took his last breath.

A memorial is planned at Mission Lutheran Church in Laguna Niguel, California on Saturday, September 20 at 12:15 PM.