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Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ In Central Europe

Written by Dr. Hans Grimm

Translated by Dr. H. L. Schug

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Biographical Sketch of The Author

Hans Godwin Grimm, Kanalgasse 28, Biel (Switzerland), was born at Sablon-lez-Metz, Lorraine, son of the late Gustaf Grim. He was married July 9, 1948, to Ilse Hildegard Kohler of Leipzig, Germany.

He was baptized as a scion of one of the oldest Christian families in Central Europe at the age of 17 in the Hanau pond in Alsatia. He attended college in Strassburg, and started preaching while inscribed in the universities of Koningsberg, Hamburg and Riga. Lic. Comparative Religion Science and doing research work for a history of the churches of Christ in Central Europe.

In 1933 he was placed in a Nazi concentration camp in Germany for illegal preaching in Anhalt, Germany. His first library and manuscript were confiscated in 1934, and his second library and manuscript were bombed out in 1944 in Leipzig. In 1946-48 he served as professor in the Teachers' College in Leipzig. In October 1948, he was arrested by the Communists for illegal preaching, serving a four-year term in the Red prisons of Leipzig, Waldheim and Graefentonna. He escaped to Berlin in December 1952, and from 1953 to 1955 was a lecturer of the Evangelical Academy in Kassel.

At his first contact with the brethren from the United States (Roy Palmer and Otis Gatewood), Herr Grimm was recognized as a member of the churches of Christ. He served congregations at Kaiserslautern and Mannheim, Germany, and since May 1963, at Biel, Switzerland, under the supervision of the elders of Trinity Heights Church of Christ in Dallas.

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The Church of Christ has always been in History

The Church of Christ: There has always been a real church of Christ in this world since Pentecost, and this means: a church believing in faith, repentance, confession and immersion for the remission of sins—a church which worshipped at least on the first day of the week, with hymns, prayers, the Lord's Supper, Bible study and contributions for the saints—a church which worked under the oversight of bishops, deacons, and evangelists—a church—not some isolated seekers, but an organized church, which trusted in the Lord's promise that "the powers of death will never prevail against it."

Any study of the nature of the successors of our Lord and of their true walk in the light (in the understanding of the New Testament) is always at the same time a question concerning the nature of the church, (the church of Christ itself). The fact that this question is again coming into the forefront of today's thinking merely shows that all the institutions for salvation which call themselves Christian churches and all the institutions of world philosophy have been shaken by social and ideological revolutions which bring into question their survival or have even fundamentally changed them. The church of the Lord has been spared, it is true, by these revolutions because it has known how to keep itself free from institutional and sectarian defilements, but it is also exposed to the constant attacks from both organized great churches and smaller sects. It shall be the purpose of this modest brochure to answer these attacks.

Let it be emphasized that this brochure is not the "official dogma" of churches of Christ but represents purely and only the personal and individual interpretation of the writer who in the seventeenth year of his life was added in baptism to the Lord's church by God's grace. The churches of Christ have no official system of doctrine, for the Bible alone is their standard of faith and practice. Therefore, they have neither central offices nor seminaries for preachers; neither an official catechism nor official songbooks; neither their official journal nor their own authorized literature. And so, this brochure is approved by members of churches of Christ only insofar as it conforms with the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

This brochure is to discuss the concepts of the terms "church" and "sect," so let us come to a clear understanding of the term "church." Here we must realize that interestingly, the word Kirche (organized church) never appears in the original German translation of the New Testament by Martin Luther. The German reformer regularly translates the Greek word ekklesia (the sense of which is the people's assembly which the herald called together) by the German word Gemeinde (church, congregation). "The word Kirche (organized church) is to us

especially un-German, and does not give the sense nor thought which one must take from the term," Luther writes in his treatise *On Councils and Churches* of the year 1539. At this point we are glad to stay with him and accept his thought, and we proceed accordingly.

Jesus Christ speaks of the church in only two passages (Matt. 16:18 and 18:16-18). The passage in the sixteenth chapter is the more familiar one, this passage upon which the Roman pope bases his claims to be head of the church and Peter's successor. Why could not this interpretation be true? Peter is to be the rock, rock not in the sense that he, like Christ, is the foundation of the church or its cornerstone (Matt. 21:42) but on the contrary that he is to be the herald at whose call the church is assembled for the first time.

Peter, the man of the rock, signifies the historic establishment of the church, and in fact through his Pentecostal sermon this commission which had been enjoined upon him by Christ was carried out. Through Peter's words the Lord added to his church on that day about three thousand souls who had repented and been baptized into the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:14-41). But we can clearly see from John 20:21-23 that Peter was not given any special privilege above the other apostles for they all had the same power to bind or loose sins. According to Galatians 2:9 Paul and Barnabas received the commission in Jerusalem to preach to the Gentiles, not from Peter alone, but also from James and John, who along with Peter were considered as "pillars."

The second passage in which Christ himself speaks of the church is Matthew 18:16-18, where certain guidelines are established for certain matters of church life. These guiding principles alone disprove the assertions of liberal theologians that Jesus never had had the intention of founding his own group of believers in contrast with the Jewish state. For this reason, they say, the Lord never spoke of a church but only the approaching kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God. Contrary to this, as Ernest Kalb quite correctly explains, it is to be noted that Jesus did in fact form the nucleus of the church when he gathered around himself the Twelve as a closer-knit group of intimate followers. The disciples were chosen by him and were in constant association with him; they were to continue his work, to carry the good news to the world; they were to continue his work through prophecy, the teaching, and the exposition of the Scriptures (Matt. 23:34).

Everything they did was to be a service of love at all times. They were not to be superior officers of the church; they were not even to allow themselves to be called master or doctor (Luke 22:25, 26); Matt. 23:8, 9). These men are the beginnings of the formation of a church of Christ, as they stand out clearly already in the life and work of Christ. To be sure, the Lord gave no statutory rules concerning the kind of the constitution of the church, concerning the exterior regulations of discipline of church life except the one in Matthew 18:16-18, the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:17-20), and baptism (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16). He knew that

the Comforter who was to come, the Holy Spirit, would lead them into all truths in all these details.

A closer study of all the Bible passages concerned with the church of Christ as distinguished from the kingdom of God or heaven will show us that no such distinction is to be found in the New Testament. Also, in the thought of Jesus there is no distinction between the exterior (the church) and the inner (kingdom of God). To be sure, the kingdom of God is the highest possession, the treasure in the field, the pearl of greatest price, something that man must inwardly appropriate unto himself, and the church is the union of all those called together, of those who have transformed themselves entirely under the power of the Word, of those devoting themselves to Christ as God's Son and acknowledging him as the only authority, and who have been baptized in his name for the forgiveness of their sins—as such the kingdom of God is something which has become outwardly visible.

The church, nevertheless, is the church of Christ only insofar as the church is in Christ and Christ is in the church (Matthew 18: 20; 28:20), and the kingdom of God stands outwardly in appearance through the fruits of faith and love. The "fellow-citizens with the saints, and the household of God" (Eph. 2:29), when considered in their close relationship as a congregation, are precisely the church of Christ and the manifestation of the kingdom of God in the midst of this present world.

Julius Koestlin puts it emphatically: Only those can be called true members of his church, who are really united as his disciples and are assembled in his name in accordance with Matthew 18 and also share in the kingdom in this very thing. And, on the other hand, we must not think that anyone who has received the seed of the Word and has part in the kingdom could remain a stranger of the fellowship of the church.

One cannot dispute the convincing power of the Scriptures in these words of this eminent Luther scholar in his commendable work, *Religion and the Kingdom of God*. To be sure, those who have believed and been baptized are now "delivered out of the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom" of the beloved Son of God—now they are "raised up with him and made to sit with him in the heavenly places" (Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:6), and they assuredly are now participating even during this life in the spiritual possessions of the kingdom of God: "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). But for the development of the kingdom in its fullness and for its revelation of all mankind this kingdom will not come until the future age of the world. When the apostles speak of the clearly outlined fellowship of obedient believers in Christ, then they are not speaking of the kingdom of God, but of the church.

This church of Christ is not merely challenged to be holy, but it is already called "holy" and its members are called the "saints," since they have offered themselves up to God, and therefore have sanctified themselves in the real significance of the word. Thus Paul speaks of the churches as "the sanctified in Christ" or "those called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 1:7 and other passages); and in 1 Peter 2:9 the designation of the people of the Old Covenant as a "holy people" is carried over to Christians while the individual members of the church are called by God, "separated" by God out of the kingdom of the world, hence, sanctified. He who belongs to this church stands in the most intimate fellowship of life with God and his Anointed; he has been "washed, sanctified, and justified through the name of the Lord Jesus and through the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11) and has "put on Christ" in baptism (Gal. 3:27). In spite of all the faults and mistakes that cling to them, in spite of the possibility of sin and of falling, they are the saints; that is, the men sanctified by God. "The Lord knoweth his own" (1 Tim. 2:19), and recognizes only his own as his saints. Those who have "fallen from grace" no longer belong to the church of Christ at all. Even Kalb, the Luther symbolist, quite rightly emphasizes this.

According to the conception of the New Testament, individual Christians do not come together to form the church, but those individual believers are chosen by God and God adds them to the church which already exists. Therefore, the church is there first as a church. It has been formed from above by Christ, and God adds to this church whomsoever he will.

Where Christ is, where his word is proclaimed by the preaching of the mouth or by the works of faith, there is the church of Christ, it matters not whether regular assemblies are held or not. For the "mother of the faithful", as the New Testament is called in Galatians 4:26, already exists before her children, the body of Christ, that is to say his church (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:15, 16; 5:23-30; Col. 1:18-24), exists there first, not the individual members, and a member that is separated from the body dies.

In this church of Christ there were and there are offices or callings. It is significant, however, that these callings are always designated as diakonia, that is, a rendering of service, since under the New Testament conception the office rests on a special gift, a charisma, that has been given to the individual by God and is to be placed at the disposition of the church.

The three designations that appear most frequently for such offices and for their holders are episkopoi, presbyteroi (bishop-overseer, elder) and diakonoi (servants). The terms bishops and elders appear interchangeably and are therefore identical. A number of these respected members of the church then stood and now stand at the head of each of the

churches, which are completely independent of each other, and have the responsibility together to advise and counsel the affairs of the assembly and to care for them. Also the deacons, whose duty above all else is to be the "servants of need," have to concern themselves with the physical care of the needy members, are subject to the same qualifications (save the ability to teach) and have to meet the same requirements. Only those men are called for the office in question who in the judgment of the church have the gifts necessary for the office.

All regulations about the church and divine worship are so constituted that they may be clearly read as indicated in the Word of God in the writings of the New Covenant. In the light of this evangelical freedom the weeds of clericalism can never thrive.

Yet the "mystery of iniquity was already working" (2 Thess. 2:7) as Paul wrote, and so it can be no surprise to learn that even the generation that followed the apostles saw approaching a growing centralization of the offices in the church at the hands of a single bishop, the establishment of associations of churches, councils of the elders and deacons in the various provinces of the Roman Empire, and finally the usurpation of the direction of the universal church by the imperial bishops of Rome and Constantinople.

The nucleus of churches of Christ defended themselves desperately against this development, which, as could be expected, led under Emperor Constantine to the creation of a mighty world church that worked hand in hand with the state and little by little pushed aside the old forms of organization, and by absorption of Hellenistic-philosophic elements and Oriental-magic elements completely robbed the doctrine of its original sense.

The small sects of the times of the apostles mentioned in the epistles of the Corinthians, to the Galatians, and to Titus (Jewish Christians who were sinking back into Pharisaical legalism, or Gnostics who were striving after an impure knowledge of Higher worlds) all these had already long before this divided themselves by hundreds into religious groups that feuded among themselves, and now found themselves among the others companions on the broad road that leads to destruction.

Now the erection of a state church created new problems and with these new groups of sects who did not especially rise up in opposition to such a state church but on the contrary only wished to make their distinctive Christological or organizational views the prevailing view of the kingdom.

Out of the discussions with these splinter groups and heresies there was formed the false structure of dogmatic teachings of the sects of the West and the East against whom the state church and with the means of the state carried out their campaigns of opposition and persecution which extended also to the small independent churches of Christ, who

acknowledged only the New Testament as the basis of their faith and worship and who could but with great difficulty defend themselves against being absorbed by the sects of all shades of teachings.

The Sect: The evil of sectarianism, as if mocking at all the prophecies of the apologists and symbolists of the turn of the century, is still increasing rather than decreasing in this twentieth century. In Germany, for example, the number of known sects increased from 83 in the year 1898 to 272 in 1957 (and how many sects-of-five-men, or better said sects-of-five-women there are of whom at most only the very nearest neighbors know).

In Holland the number of sects grew from 160 to 348; in the United States from 162 to 247; in South Africa even from 32 in 1909 to 783 in 1956; and in Brazil the development went even more rapidly from 9 in 1907 to 821 in 1957. And all these numbers are based on very incomplete statistics.

The source of all sectarianism, even though the sects may be divergent as Unitarianism and Mormonism, Pentecostalism and Free Religion, Catholicism and Calvinism, is the lack of knowledge of the message of the New Testament, and the consequent complete misunderstanding of Christ as the only revealer of divine being in this final and therefore most decisive chapter of the history of mankind.

The Course of The Church Through the Centuries

350 to 800 AD

When the persecution of the powers of state and of the organized church of that time violently rooted out not only the Arianists of the Eastern Kingdom but also the Donatists and Novatianists of the Western Kingdom, then perished also many churches who had held fast to the teaching of the mountain land of Galilee and to the ordinances of the times of the apostles; they perished before the fanaticism and officiousness of the persecutors. These persecutors classed the genuine and sincere Christians who were striving to remain with the Old Paths right along with the heretics who were after money. In Syria, for instance, genuine disciples were burned to death along with dualistic Marcionites or Manicheans—in Armenia and Northeast Asia Minor that bordered on Armenia.

They rooted out their churches under the pretext that their churches had succumbed to the sun-worship of the Avars. The persecutors hunted them out on the Galatian plateau at the same time as the Antinomianist of Messalim and stoned them to death or burned them alive along with these heretics. Yet no power could stop the course of the church of the living God. By families and by groups Christians who were concealing themselves from the executioners settled the inaccessible oases of Northwest Arabia, concealed themselves in the almost waterless wadis of the Sinaitic Peninsula, fled into the chaotic cities of the Nile delta that were heated by the Arian and Meletian controversies, they emerged in the hinterland of Cyrenaika, on the island of Djerba near the Tunisian coast, and in the High and Lower Atlas mountains.

About the middle of the fourth century we find the traces of the New Testament mission in the northern part of the Pyrenees Peninsula. A very influential merchant Priscillianus followed the advice which Jesus gave the rich young man for he sold his possessions, distributed the proceeds among the poor, and preached the good news of our deliverance from death and from the power of the devil with such success that the Catholic diocese of Avila called upon him to serve it as bishop. Two bishops of the state church became his zealous followers. In the year 380 he was banished along with his faithful followers. The supreme authority of the state seized him, he was brought in chains to Trier and there, after terrible torturings whose aim it was to extract from him the confession that he was a magician and Manichean, he and five of his followers were beheaded. Traces of churches founded and influenced by him are still to be found after centuries in northern Portugal, in western France, in Galicia, and Traz-oz-Montez.

Out of the Celtic district of Galacia and Gaul messengers of the New Testament gospel must have entered the British Isles for the first time, for even as early as the year 422 the Catholic bishop Germanus, who had been sent there on inspection, wrote that numerous Christians in Britain had rejected Augustine's doctrine of the original sin, practiced the immersion of adults only, did not follow the Roman ritual in their divine service, and did not recognize the hierarchy of Rome, especially the spiritual jurisdiction of the Pope. It was not asserted that these British Christians were Manicheans. That would not have been believed even in Rome; the blame was placed rather on the schismatic churches of Arianism. The conquest of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons and the later so-called Christianization of the tribes by Roman bishops and by abbots educated in Rome led to the rapid disappearance of these churches.

In the bold missionary spirit of the Irish-Scottish church, in their endeavor to keep the doctrine of Jesus pure from the foreign range of thinking, in their opposition to the arrogant authority of the Roman episcopate and in their ever-newly undertaken attempts to check the worldliness of the church, there is certainly to be observed a legacy of those churches which gave Germany a Kilian, a Clement, and a Vergilius. In the workroom of that Kilian who was murdered at the command of the duke of the Franks, in the so-called "Cloister" at Wurzburg, there is still preserved a parchment out of the middle of the eighth century, a Greek copy of the Letter to the Romans (Book of Romans).

On chapter three there stands the Irish marginal note: "Creitem hi cridiu in folgni firiam" (Faith, hid in the heart, makes man just), a clear testimony of a genuine New Testament Christianity in contrast to the institutionalism of the papal church. About the year 700 there began in Ireland itself the gradual assimilation of the national church, which was free from Rome, into the type of the western great church.

At about the year 800 the Scottish kings broke the strength of the clans, and with the old constitution of blood relationship brushed aside the last remains of the Scottish-Irish missionary churches; but even as late as 1390 A.D. a New Testament church in Celtic Hill Cliff in Wales built a room for worship with a great basin for immersion of adults in baptism upon confession of faith.

We get our first knowledge of the continuation of New Testament churches in Syria from Mananalis where the pious widow Kallinike raised her public protest in the year 375 on the one hand against the terror of the majority of the state church and on the other hand against the Arian heresy of the minority by appealing to the teaching and deeds of the apostle Paul in those provinces. Along with her two sons Paulus and Johannes, she was banished from the region as a follower of Manichaeism on the cheapest pretext, since the adherents of the blending of the Gnostic, Parsee and Buddhist religion of Mani also took a stand against forced "conversions", against the use of the sword, and against the use of oaths, against

Mammonism in church and state, and who declared that the Law of the Old Testament was made without power through Christ. To be branded as followers of Manichaeism was dangerous, since this religion was held to be especially hostile to state and culture and its followers were exposed to the funeral pile.

In spite of this, some 250 years later there was extended out from Mananalis a wave of building of churches after the New Testament order in Asia Minor. A Marcionite sectarian, Constantine, was converted by the study of the four gospels and of Paul's epistles and joined with the small church of true Christians in the Catacombs. Around the middle of the seventh century persecution drove him and his fellow believers to Kibossa in northern Armenia where he was cordially received by the church of Christ which was located there and existed in somewhat freer circumstances.

From now on he wandered and preached and led the life of a true follower of Christ, keeping in touch with all the churches of the dispersion either personally or by letter. In doing this he made use of code names for persons or places in order to make the work of informers difficult. Thus, for example he speaks of himself as "Silvanus", of Kibossa as "Macedonia". But he did not escape from his fate for, seized by the soldiers of the Byzantine Governor Simeon, he was condemned to death and stoned to death as "adulterer" caught in the very act of leading astray the church, Christ's pure bride, with the "Marcionite false lover".

However, his steadfast death so impressed the governor that he involuntarily drew parallels with the death by stoning of the martyr Stephen and began to study intensively the teachings of the New Testament, that is to say of the church, and then a few years later, under the code name of "Titus", became one of the most successful messengers of the gospel in Galatia and Cappadocia. In the year 694 he was likewise ferreted out and led to the funeral pile. But his work and his predecessor's work did not perish. The epoch of the iconoclast emperors granted to the churches of Asia Minor a little time for recovery before the great storm of persecution which was to be hurled upon them after the martyr's death of Simon-Titus.

In this "golden time" of comparative peace there was great growth of those who turned away from the confused teachings of those who were following the great denominations and were added by God to his church. The people and the authorities called the followers of the Lamb "Paulicians" because these followers knew how to answer their opponents in all their discussions with well-aimed arguments of the great apostle to the Gentiles, while they called themselves exclusively "Christians" and among each other as "brothers" and "sisters". A Byzantine monk of this time reports concerning a religious debate with them:

Only the New testament was accepted among them as rule for faith and church practice; they rejected the worship of the Mother of God and of the saints, even of the great martyrs George and Sergius; they do not consecrate a special worship to the Archangels or to Elias, have no church feasts at all; each Sunday they assemble in places of prayer which are not worthy to be named thus, since they have neither altar nor wall for pictures of the saints, nor a place for keeping the holy vessels; they use neither incense nor chrism oil. They despise and scorn the baptism of the church and say that infants have no faith.

They recognize neither the jurisdiction of the Patriarch at Constantinople nor of the Patriarch of Antioch and Jerusalem and have no respect for the schismatic church of the Armenians. They are proud of the fact that their churches are small and poor and that their evangelists live only from what sheltering believers give them voluntarily. They do not accept the false accusation that the heretic Paulus is said to have founded their sect, and say that they are not Paulicians, but Christians, and chosen of God.

The Course of The Church Through the Centuries

800 to 1071 AD

About the beginning of the ninth century the fire of persecution became enkindled which rose from year to year. In 813 the Christians in Cappadocia were also exterminated through mass executions, those in Armenia fearfully decimated. When at the attempt to seize a group of fleeing believers in the passes of the Taurus Mountains two imperial commissioners were pushed into the precipice in the panic and perished, entire churches fled as one to the region of Mohammedan feudal lords in Aserbeidschan and Kurdistan so that, at their being sheltered by the Emir of Argaum, the city Tephrika had to be built close to the Byzantine boundary. The walls and battlements of this city, which the Byzantine persecutors of heretics themselves called "Christianopolis" (City of the Christians), became the protective castle of all the persecuted, no matter what their religion was. For besides the Christians, there were fleeing to this stronghold on the border also adherents of false doctrines: Manicheans, Jacobites, Nestorians, Messalians, Bardaisanites; for the persecution by the emperors and bishops of Anatolia raged fearfully against all who did not submit to the state church, for they were considered as allies of Islam which was knocking at the doors of the empire. According to estimates of Armenian and Byzantine chroniclers, up to the year 843 some 100,000 heretics in Asia Minor and Northern Syria were executed or perished in flight.

The close coexistence of Christians and confused believers of all shades in the emirate of Malatia led necessarily also to apostasy, division, and weakening of the transmitted faith of the apostles. Antinomistic movements—that is, movements which declared that with the taking away of the Mosaic law the end of all law had come and therefore no true Christian could sin any longer—such movements won adherents among even the elders of the churches; thus the surviving Galatian church had to withdraw from their last surviving elder Baanes for these reasons. However, the opinions clashed together the hardest concerning the use of weapons. Up to that time it had been self-evident that one must not become violent toward evil men, even for self-protection, after their understanding of Matthew 5:38, 39. But now, after the news of the horrible extermination of entire families from the suckling infant to the old man in the adjoining imperial provinces, there arose voices, even in the ranks of the members of the churches, who proposed that "liberating marches" be undertaken into the Byzantine empire in order to rescue these unfortunate ones with the sword. With the agreement of the Mohammedan authorities they set up a "Christian army", whose commander was one of the most beloved elders, Karbeas. The church of those who did not believe in using violence had to state to the sword-bearing brethren that by this action they had placed themselves outside of the people of God, for "the Holy Spirit who (you

know) only takes from him and shares with us what Christ in his testament has revealed to us, will never demand of us that we ever fight with others with any but spiritual weapons; and Christ forbids us to battle, not only for the kingdoms of this world, but also for the kingdom of God."

As always, when the decisions of the New Testament seem to contradict human understanding, it is only the minority that represents this consistent point of view of not resisting evil. The great majority greeted with cheers the marching out of sword-bearing Christians, greeted with shouts of joy the report of the saving of a number of Galatian and Phrygian churches from complete annihilation, rejoiced when Karbeas' son-in-law had reached the old Ephesus on the Aegean Sea with his Kurdish cavalry, and this same majority was saddened to death when the message came that when the victorious army was marching back home with several hundred fugitives in the passes of the Taurus Mountains in the year 871, it fell into an ambush and was annihilated up to the last man.

Those who had seized the sword—even if for the best and noblest purpose in the world—had perished by the sword. The church in the district of Malatia did penance, and many of the sword-devotees reconciled themselves again with God. But that did not please Kurdish the Emir at all, for he had wished to use these Christians as an important stone on his political chessboard. And now began the chicaneries on the part of the Moslems. The tax, which all non-Mohammedan subjects had to pay, was tripled for the churches of the Lord, herds were seized as security, lands and homes were expropriated, forest pastures were taken away from them.

The persecution was announced. Soon the first martyrs fell under the swords of the Seldschukken. Like a message from heaven the emigrants heard at this moment the report that the emperor had authorized the return of all Christians to Asia Minor provided they would solemnly renounce any use of violence, and a few months later more than 80,000 Christians returned to Phrygia, Galatia, and Lycaonia.

Only the especially cautious ones stayed behind in some hiding places in the mountains of northern Armenia and in the district of Thondrak, where even to this day they have maintained themselves as a small group of 28 families. Their feeling had not betrayed them: seventy years after their return from the Islamic sphere of power, the Byzantine emperor had all the heretical churches of his Asiatic part of the empire deported to Thrace and settled there near Philippolis close by the military border just across from the Bulgarians, who were still heathen.

They were to serve in a certain way as a buffer between the warlike barbarian peoples of the Balkans and the imperial city on the Bosphorus. However, they were sternly forbidden to solicit for their "heretical faith". In spite of this the life and simple worship of these settlers made the deepest impression upon the inhabitants of their new home. Even before the turn of the millennium (first thousand years after Christ) the priest Jeremias of the eastern church had himself baptized; under the code name of Theophilus (Friend of God) he displayed a zealous activity among his countrymen and even among the mystic circles of the monks in the hermitages of the Athos Mountains. Under the name "Bogomiles" he entered into the church history of the great sects.

Old Slavic belief in the gods and Finnish-Ugrian Schamanism of the Bulgarian lordly rank merge in many parts of the eastern Balkans with Gnostic-Manichean conceptions which non-Christian groups of heretics had brought with them, groups that had been deported at the same time as the Christians. In numerous discussions the brethren and sisters tried to protect themselves against the reproach that they had had anything at all to do with these dualistic groups of ascetics; it was all without avail. The hundreds of earnest disciples of Christ who because of their proclamation of the doctrine of the Lord (just as it had been preached by him on the mountains of Galilee) had had to mount the funeral piles both in Constantinople, the residence of the emperor, and also in Tirnowo, the residence of the Bulgarian Grand Khan, were burned to death as "adherents of the faith in two gods".

The Course of The Church Through the Centuries

1071 to 1143 AD

In spite of this, the message of freedom in Christ kept extending farther and farther. In the year 1071 there arose in Ukraine a first church of the gospel of Christ; the severe persecutions of the decades between 1150 and 1180 in Bulgaria and Servia drove the untiring messengers of the savior farther to the north and west. In 1115 they emerged in Albania, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, and Dalmatia; a few years later the first churches of Christ were established in northeast Italy. They were to record the seemingly greatest success in Bosnia, where at the turn of the 13th century, according to the population professed "Bogomilism" and the Catholic Bishop Daniel of Poili had himself baptized in Bosna in 1198, and the strong churches of the eastern and western state churches stood empty.

Here at the boundary of the Byzantine and Roman circles of culture also a new designation of the old evangelical church now appeared, at first used only by the people, then—although very unwillingly—by the officialdom of the Inquisition: Katharoi, i.e., "the Pure". The term crossed over through the Italian gazzari to become in German the loan-word Ketzer (i.e., Heretic). But the Roman Catholic counter-propaganda liked much better to designate the churches of God with the name of Pataria, i.e., "Riffraff". All imaginable false doctrines and abominable deeds were ascribed to them and even though the Mendicant Orders contended emphatically that they were guilty of "unspeakable crimes" in their secret assemblies, yet they were but committing the "crimes" of not acknowledging the clergy and the sacraments given out by them under magical formulas, showing their preference for the New Testament over the Old Testament, and rejecting all confessions of faith formulated by the religious councils, and making their plea for the Word of God alone. In the Roman catholic church history and also in the Protestant reference works, in many cases without inspection, these brethren were haunted by the false and stealthy accusations of the Catholic mission preachers. Not until the year 1927 did the Dictionary of Catholic Theology feel constrained to confess:

The accusations against the Catharists of the 11th century are precisely the same as those that were raised against the Christians throughout the Roman empire in the second century: immorality, ritual murder (worship of a grotesque idol).

Several crusades were waged against unfortunate Bosnia by the booty-greedy Croatian, Hungarian, and Venetian magnates, but these miscarried because of the brave resistance of knights and great landowners of the nation who did not belong to the churches of Christ. This region by the papal legate the Twertko Ban of 1373 was named "the cave of bandits into which all the heretics of the eastern land take refuge". Not until the cooperation of the Turkish and Catholic armies was effected in the year 1446 did Bosnia succumb. But 40,000 left their homeland that had fallen into the hands of the unbelievers and of the superstitious, and emigrated into the inaccessible mountains of Herzegovina, where the last surviving small congregations of Christ were not annihilated until the year 1942 by bands of Nazi Vstacha.

The last report of the old congregations around Thessalonika got to Central Europe in the year 1550 when messengers of the Christians residing there came to Moravia in order to be convinced of the rumors that had found their way to the church that believers in the truth of the New Testament were permitted to live there in peace. Shortly after that the church in Thessalonika fell victims to a slaughter which the Mohammedan volunteers who were returning from the wars in Turkey waged against the "unbelievers" of Old Thessalonika. Only in the plateau of Witosch near Sofia were there still living in 1939 some families of the "Bogomil" faith, beloved by the poor and the unfortunate because of their unselfish willingness to help, but spied upon and persecuted by the government and the church because of their uncompromising profession of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.

The itinerant preachers who worked in Venetia (later Venice) from about 1150 came mostly from Macedonia (Salonica), Albania (Koritza), and Dalmatia (Dragavitza), but even 70 years later in Brescia and Viterbo there were congregations of several hundred; in Milan, Ferrera and Florence, churches of several thousand members. Even the Catholic Dictionary of Addis and Arnold was forced to acknowledge:

These teachers manifested a great simplicity of behavior, of dress, and way of living. They directed their attacks against the worldliness of the clergy, and there was also too much truth in their censure; thus their hearers were also willing to believe everything else that they said, and to despise what they despised.

The Reformed church historian states:

It is impossible to be more exclusively filled with religious interest than the Catharists were...The Catharists have seen goodness in all its shining fullness. One cannot speak of the

good God more sublimely and more persuasively than they have done. ...These people received the "kiss of God" ...as death was already named by them ...with greatest rejoicing while striding towards the time beyond, time full of blessed intoxication of death.

In spite of monstrous cruelties, or really through the monstrous cruelties with which church and state tried to oppose the further diffusion of the truth of salvation, the message of redemption by grace was quickly spread across the Alps. There they found the surviving churches, which were once brought to life by the activity of the disciples of Priscillian and the Irish-Scottish messengers, but had been almost exterminated by severe persecutions.

In the year 1052 Emperor Henry the Third had executed in Goslar "Manichean heretics" whose crime consisted in that they had preached before monks that everything which belonged to the world of the Babylonian beast must be avoided, and that only that was genuine fasting which Christ demanded of us. In 1118 Gregory Grimm was tortured in Ensisheim in Alsace as a "Patarene" and put to death, because he had been baptized by his grandfather, who on his part had been baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit by a traveling merchant from Venetia of the church, which according to his words was the only church of the saints.

The Course of The Church Through The Centuries

1143 To 1400 AD

In the year 1143 an elder and more than one hundred orthodox Christians were seized on the lower Rhein. These confessed under torture that their congregations were in existence everywhere but in concealment; their greatest center of members at that time was Greece, by which term doubtlessly the Byzantine Empire was meant. Out of the stronghold of the heretics at Montwimer near Chalons-sur-Marne, which already 150 years previously had sheltered the evangelist Gundulf as he came from Lombardy—Gundulf, who at that time journeyed through the Walloon and Picardy district of north France and Belgium as a preacher of apostolic poverty and opponent of christening of children, and had called into life important churches both in Luettick and in Arras—out of Montwimer came the establishment of the brotherhood in Rheims in about 1200. Here the New Testament believers were called "Publicani"—probably not to brand them as receivers of custom but as a mistaken word-form of their Macedonian designation of "Paulikanoi", which the French crusaders had brought back with them.

In Provence and in sunny southern France it was the disciple of the sharp-thinking Breton thinker Abelaard, who was so discerning and therefore so suspicious of heresy—it was his disciple Pierre de Bruys who caused the herald's call of Christ to resound far and wide until he died at the stake in 1137. Likewise his friends Henry, a former Cistercian monk from Lausanne, and the elder Pontius of Perigord were killed by the united state and church forces. When the witnesses were silenced itinerant brothers from the Balkans came to their rescue, so that far and wide in France the term "Bulgare" became the equivalent of "heretic" and the mutilation of the word bougre is still used there as one of the basest terms of abuse (cf. "bugger"—sodomite). By the year 1162 Flanders was covered with such a close net of small New Testament churches that the believers even ventured to request the rulers of this region, the counts of Flanders, the dukes of Artois, and the archbishop of Cambrai, to permit them to preach publicly.

The bold proclamation of the happy message of the New Covenant had as a result not only the rapid formation of churches but also a great tangle of false teachings now appeared—not as the result of the propagation of the knowledge of the Bible by the itinerant preachers, as the Catholic historians wrote in their polemic works, but as a result of the colossal ignorance about the real facts of salvation—ignorance in which an unscrupulous clique of priests had kept the souls that had been entrusted to them. The persecution that now set in with full

force naturally put into one pot those of opposing and differing views—half-crazy Manichean ascetics who saw the crowning of their life in fasting to death, and dissolute freethinkers who enjoyed at full draughts the joys of life (or at least what they considered as joys), hysterical and psychopathic souls, who pretended to be the reincarnation of Christ or Mary and who considered their confused hallucinations as the word of God speaking for them, and also strictly Bible-following surviving orthodox thinkers holding to the New Testament, were designated with the collective name "Albigenses" (named after one of the centers of religious ferment in south France, Albi) and were made the goal of all measures of extermination.

It was to no avail that princes and nobles of these regions at first strictly declined to persecute the true followers of the Lord, yet they saw in these simple, sensible, industrious people who always fulfilled their obligations who were respected everywhere on account of their unquestioning love of the truth, who were pioneers in many trades, as for example in the arts of stonemasonry and weaving, yet they saw in them a special treasure in their land which would be valuable to keep. Especially it was the young Vicomte Roger Ramon Trencavel from the Visigothic peerage and the energetic Capitoul, Head Mayor of Toulouse, Pierre Mauran, who interested themselves in favor of those threatened by the Inquisition.

In spite of their energetic remonstrances the storm broke loose in the year 1208, when a papal legate in a public sermon had severely insulted the mighty Earl of Toulouse, a free thinker and by no means a religious man, and because of his insult had been slain by a vassal of the earl. A crusade began under the king of France who long had greedily eyed the possessions of the rich, industrious Languedoc tradesmen; his forces marched into the district of the "heretics" and stormed one city after the other in fearful slaughter among Catholics, fanatics, and Christians. In his long-lasting and furious campaigns of revenge during thirty years and more he made of the land a wilderness almost uninhabited by man. The French historians estimate the number of those who perished through the direct effects of war in Languedoc from 1208 through 1244 at around 1,500,000; to this must be added also the number of those perishing from epidemics and famines following the campaigns and those who fell victims of the tribunals of the Inquisition.

The council of the Catholic bishops of 1229 at Toulouse issued regulations for the persecution of the heretics. Of these the following are the most important: every secular or ecclesiastical official who spares a heretic shall be stripped of his land, office, or possessions; every house in which a heretic is found shall be torn down; heretics and those suspected of heresy shall not be allowed the services of a physician, even the severest illness; those implicated in this same crime even if criminals shall be accepted as witnesses against heretics; confessions may be forced through torture; even the suspicion of heresy justifies imprisonment; the penalties for heresy shade off from the loss of rights of citizenship and

church to the seizure of property and imprisonment up to execution, and this execution varied from simple decapitation for drowning to slow strangulation by the garotte and finally to a quick death through powder-explosions or on the funeral pile.

Two-thirds of the confiscated property of the heretics fell to the ruling board of the Inquisition, while one-third was assigned to the informers. But in order that the state church (which still called itself Christian) should not have the appearance of thirsting after blood, the secular rulers were obligated to lend their arm to the ecclesiastical authorities by performing the service of executioner for them. The French historian, Charles Molinier, rightly writes in his report about the "Catharist" heretics of the 13th century based on Catholic sources: "By no means can one give credence to the voices of the judges, who all too often were also the executioners."

Remnants of the old evangelical churches of Southern France were preserved in the foundation of "The Poor of Lyons," a foundation established by the wealthy merchant Pierre Valdes of Lyons. They were named after its founder the "Waldenses" (cf. Valdes with Wald) and they united in the unique manner New Testament Christianity with the ideals of Catholic monks. Their missionary zeal soon led them to regions outside of France, where they still found intact small congregations of Christ: in the Bernese Highlands, in the Jura Mountains and Vosges Mountains, as well as in the sections of the Lower Rhine and Friesland, yes, even in Brandenburg and Bohemia. That the memory of the old churches of Waldensian type was still very much alive is shown by the report of the flaming death of Mrs. Lucardis in Trier in the year 1229, who thanked God for the funeral pile that she could suffer there where many years before a faithful confessor of the glory of Christ had given his life for his Savior.

The Course of The Church Through The Centuries

1400 To 1800 AD

In 1400 an annihilating blow struck the congregation which was perhaps the oldest church in Germany, Strasbourg, in which according to tradition of the Alsatian Old Evangelicals there were said to have been New Testament Christians even from the time of Julian the Apostate. In a raid based on Denunciation 32, "Winkler" ("Cornerers")—as common folk here called the orthodox believers on account of their secret meetings in ole corners (Winkeln) and vaults—were arrested, submitted to torture and in their torture terribly mutilated. The persecutors extorted from these victims the confession that their sole authority was not the church but the New Testament, which should be studied in the language of the country.

They rejected all adoration of Mary and of the saints and all veneration of pictures or crucifixes; they disavowed the authority of the consecrations by priests and bishops along with the clergy's claim to the keys of salvation and heaven. Of feast days they kept only Good Friday, Easter, Whitsunday and the first day of the week. They called the baptism of children useless, since there could not yet be any belief in these little ones. Only the intercession of the commander of the knights of Saint John, who was favorable to them and of the city clerk Johann von Blunstein saved the imprisoned ones from the funeral pile. They were banned from the city "for eternal years" and disappeared in the loneliness of the valleys of the Vosges and Jura Mountains.

During the years of struggle and strife within the state church wherein rival popes vied for power and influence and the state church continued its persecutions against such men as Wycliffe and Huss and their many followers—during these years of shedding of blood and of terror the churches of New Testament Christians also suffered unspeakably. The little old congregation at Regensburg was ferreted out, its elder Grueneisen with three other members were executed after many tortures as allies of the Hussites. The churches of Dresden, of Lausitz and of Uckermark fared similarly. On the Rhine the Saxon nobleman Henry of Schlieben was burned at the stake as an alleged Hussite spy; even in North France small groups of primitive Christians were rooted out; the accusations against them ran: "Hunt the Prague game out," referring to the murdering of Catholic clergymen, such as occurred in Prague in the days of July 1415.

For years and years the "bloodhounds of the Lord," as the Dominican monks engaged in the service of the Inquisition proudly called themselves, endeavored to seek out the secret

threads of association with which undoubtedly the scattered little congregations united with each other in some manner or other. The brains of the Inquisitors believed they represented some rival church under a heretic-pope in some secret central cathedral, so when the primitive itinerant Bishop Frederick Reiser was treacherously arrested in Strasbourg, this picture seemed to be confirmed. Reiser, born in Swabia, scion of a family that had for centuries given martyrs to the gospel, had tirelessly endeavored to effect and to blend together the Waldenses and the New Testament churches. He visited and preached for these many scattered groups of Central Europe, but close to his heart were the countless small assemblies which had been formed in the guild rooms of the weavers and the lodges of the stonemasons in the imperial cities of South Germany. With them he broke bread, among them he baptized and preached. In Donauworth, Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Strausbourg he had the centers of his missionary work. When the Hussite storms broke loose he journeyed at once to Bohemia, determined to create there, where everything stood in ferment, an asylum for the persecuted comrades of the faith.

The great army of the Hussites at Tabor was a swarming ant-heap of bohemians of all shades of belief who agreed fully in only two points: The church of the Babylonian beast, the popish church, and her priests must be rooted out, just as the priests of Baal were rooted out by Elijah; and the chalice of the Lord must be taken away from the clergy and be given to all baptized believers. The Roman church had created this great chasm between the clergy and the laity, and herein were many of the great struggles between them and the Hussites. Thus there gleamed on the chalice in the hands of the preachers who came galloping in before the armies of the Hussites the glow of a new time as to the equality of mankind before their heavenly Father.

For in Tabor the layman stood holding the same privileges and rights as the preacher, the knight stood beside the burgher and the peasant—having become one as a sign of the dawning time of redemption that knew no order of rank but only the paradise-like good fortune of brotherhood and equality. Here the rigorous ruler Procope proclaimed that that only should be accepted in Bohemia which was expressly demanded in the Holy Scriptures. And so purgatory, veneration of the saints, transformation of the elements of the Lord's Supper, worship of relics, definite time of fasting, and all church festivals, oaths, capital punishment, and ecclesiastical rank all were rejected and preaching should be done only in the language of the country and lay members also have full authority to preach.

Friedrich Reiser came to Tabor about 1431 and visited all the scattered Christians in Bohemia and Moravia and got in contact with the Waldenses of the adjacent Austrian districts. The Taborites, who were inclined toward the New Testament, esteemed the daring evangelist very highly for to them he was the connection with the long chain of congregations

believing the teachings of the apostles, a "bishop of God's grace in the midst of the Roman church corrupted by the gifts of Constantine."

He was one of the fellow elders of the Taborite congregation in Landscron, and was in position to attend the church council in the entourage of secular delegates sent at the request of the frightened emperor in 1433. He was able to attend this council in its discussion concerning a reform of church and state. A plan of reformation conceived by him at this time, which was printed and circulated, contained definitions as they were to be found current 93 years later in the peasant parliament at Heilbrenn. When the skillful diplomacy of the Roman Catholic Curia succeeded in breaking up the front of the Hussites who at first maintained unity, and the majority of the Bohemian-Moravian delegates declared themselves satisfied with the granting of the chalice for laity, just then civil war broke out in the Czech districts.

Reiser had warned in vain against trying to protect churches of Christ with the sword. The Taborites, incensed at the betrayal of the common cause, began the two-front war against those who had capitulated in their own camp and against the crusaders on the borders. They were annihilated near Lipan in 1434 as a military force by the combined forces of their opponents, and about the middle of the century they vanished as a religious party also. Now Reiser tried to bring his mission to a close by creating a place of refuge for the gospel in this Bohemia that was still reeking from the blood of civil war, for, as he thought, the compromise of the majority of the Hussites made at least a space in Central Europe that did not stand directly under the jurisdiction of the popes, a region in which a certain mutual tolerance necessarily would have to arise through the coexistence of two different forms of worship and faith.

Fugitives from Picardy had already found shelter near Tabor, also Waldenses from Upper and Lower Austria. Reiser now wished to set about bringing the message to the hard oppressed brothers and sisters of the Upper Rhine and in Brandenburg so that no hindrances might stand against their entrance into Bohemia. But he was recognized in Strasbourg by the guards of the Inquisition and burned at the stake along with one of the deaconesses of the church, Anna Barbara von Weiler. Even in death he professed: "God is love. Only he who abides in love abides in God."

As he had foreseen, the work of the Lord in Bohemia and Moravia was to develop in a most gratifying way during the next hundred years. The former military captain of the Taborites, Peter von Cheltsehitz, long before the outbreak of the civil war, through conversations with Reiser had come to the conviction that Christ had also given us a law in answer to a question of a lawyer in Matthew 22:35-40 with these words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as

thyself." In his letter to the Galatians Paul repeated the same law (6:2): "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." In his spiritually significant book, *The Net of Faith*, Reiser had developed out of this "law of Christ" the entire position of a New Testament church, coming in detail to the same conclusions of the primitive believers in Syria, Armenia, Kurdistan, Spain, Bulgaria, Albania, Bosnia, Italy, and France.

Reiser broke off his connections with his former comrades at arms and retired to his estate near Senftenberg. After the final destruction of Tabor by the humbled, restrained Hussites the remains of those stern scripturalistic Taborites and Picards came to this refuge near Senftenberg in 1452 where under Reiser's influence and the spiritual guidance of Gregory, a nephew of the Hussite bishop of Prague, they were developed into a separate congregation. The persecutions that shortly set in strengthened them in their separation from the Hussite church and in their efforts to form a purely New Testament church. In 1467 in the Forest of Lhotka near Reichnau, there was held a decisive discussion of some sixty seekers after God of all New Testament tendencies among whom were former Taborites, people from the district of Peter von Cheltschitz, former Waldenses, and Christians of the ancient faith. In ardent prayers they besought God's blessings upon the new brotherhood that was being formed, and they chose three from their midst to be elders, commissioned to conform this developing church to the apostolic pattern. The three chosen were separated for the duty conferred upon them by the laying on of hands: a former Catholic priest and two Waldenses elders. The assembly resolved to stand by the Savior's way of non-violence, therefore through constant appeal to the New Testament they rejected service in war, the death sentence, and the office of secular judgeship, and the giving of an oath in court. In regard to the possession of earthly goods they decreed that the apostolic principle should prevail that those possessing goods should so live as though they possessed nothing and that they should be conscious of the fact that they were only stewards of possessions that had been entrusted to them through God's grace. The work of the elders lay first of all in the spiritual condition of the congregation and in church discipline. The Lutheran researcher, von Zetschwitz, later had to acknowledge, even against his will:

The impartial historian will be obliged to acknowledge that since the times of the apostolic churches no community of churches has in gradually approaching manner performed similar results in actually pure and noble life as the Bohemian brethren.

In Grugenheim, (Pit-Men)—thus the Catholic and Hussite clergy called in derision of the Christian brethren in Bohemia and Moravia who assembled in the caves of Sudeten and Rissengebirge—those believers soon realized a mighty increase in numbers. In 1940 their churches in these lands numbered more than 300 with more than 100,000 members. It was

no wonder that among these so recently added to them there were many who had not rightly understood God's way of salvation. The learned, widely traveled Master Lukas of Prague, who after the dying out of the first generation came more and more into the foreground, drew to himself a great throng of nobles whose sons he had instructed in the university and thus brought them into the so-called "United Brotherhood" which suited them better than the Hussite church, which to be sure celebrated the Lord's Supper under two forms (the bread and the wine separately) and celebrated the mass in the Czech language, but otherwise retained all the Roman customs, rites and ranks of the clergy. When Lukas in 1494 summoned to Rychnow a "synod" which tried to do away with the renunciation of the oath and the equality of all in church life, the old Christian minority of the United Brethren Churches resisted this deviation from the principles of the New Testament.

Under the leadership of the smith, Amos from Wodnian, they withdrew from the communion of the brethren and as a "little flock" still kept in contact only with the remains of the old evangelical churches in Steiermark, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Southern Italy. But the majority, the *Unitas Fratrum* (United of the Brethren) became the third largest church of Bohemia and Moravia precisely in the decisive years of the Reformation; the principle that Christians should not defend themselves by arms was abandoned by them, their clergy lived in comfortable parsonages, churches and chapels arose in more than 100 places; as early as 1505 a uniform songbook was produced, then a uniform liturgical set of regulations for the new church; then there followed a beginners' catechism—still from the hand of Lukas of Prague. They kept drawing nearer and nearer to the doctrines and practices, not of the Lutheran churches which were now rising, but to the church of Rome.

In a letter sent to Luther, Lukas defended the sacraments, especially the "holy Number Seven," and the celibacy of the priests. In 1575 this movement even finally set up its own confession of faith, the *Confessio Bohemia*, in which the baptism of adults, which had been continually practiced up to 1535, was dropped entirely. On the basis of this Confession of Faith there followed in the same year their reunion with the Hussite church; however, the few loyal believers were derided as "fanatics" and "legalists." In 1621 disaster befell the Bohemian-Moravian association of United Brethren: "Thousands of those who had become lukewarm fell victims to the Catholic counter-revolution, others were compelled to leave their beloved homes and, deprived of all their possessions, most of them returned to the great Roman church organization under the pressure of the state and of its church.

In Zurich in 1521 two followers of Zwingli, Felix Manz and Konrad Grebel, announced the following theses:

It is necessary to separate oneself from the evil way and found a pure church and communion of the genuine children of God, who have the spirit, and are ruled and led by him.

The church of the Lord, they said, must now, after it has run wild, be gathered completely anew according to the pattern of the New Testament. The true Christian life, continued they, begins with baptism, but only that one who believes can be baptized. Infants cannot believe, therefore cannot be baptized.

A bookdealer in Zurich, Andreas auf der Stuelze, called their attention to the remains of churches of secret believers in the Bernese Highlands from whose lineage he had sprung. Those religious leaders made contact with these worshipers—even though hesitatingly since there was a suspicion that some of them were friends of the mutinous fanatical preacher Thomas Muenzer—but as they became convinced that the sober people who relied only on the Word of God and accepted the Word as the only standard for the truth, and that they did not have the slightest thing to do with the mystic premillennialism of the prophet from Zwingli, they joyfully opened their hearts to the influence. On January 25, 1525, Manz baptized in Lake Zurich Georg Majakob-Blaurock, former monk of Grisons. Two years later, almost to the day, at the recommendation of Zwingli and at the instruction of the Great Council, Manz was drowned in the Limmat River.

The small number of believers scattered. In the upper Black Forest Mountains area, in the mountain regions on both sides of the Rhine between Constance and Basel, in the imperial cities of Regensburg, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Memmingen, Linden, and Strasbourg, in Tyrol, Stiermark, Salzburg, in Austria, Moravia and Slovakia they found comrades of nearer and more distant ways of thinking religiously, with whom they could pray but with whom also they had to come to agreement, for the Anabaptists, as their adversaries called them, but as a whole hardly to be considered as a direct continuation of the pre-reformation churches of Christ; more than that, these united too many mutually contradicting elements in their ranks. The 500,000 and more baptized believers (Anabaptists) in Central Europe did have in common with the churches of Christ the rejection of infant baptism, the union of church and the state, the rejection of the oath and the refusal to serve as judge; their rejection of the worship of images, and the organization of their churches; nevertheless they differed sharply in some other matters. Their opinion, for example, that all men, Christians and non-Christians, were endowed with a certain quantity of the Holy Spirit, which they usually named the "inner Light," and that this inner Light was a real voice of God which could lead to salvation of all who listened to it—this idea led them to fanatical "revelations" and to dangerous "visions,"

and finally this resulted in their belief that the Holy Scriptures still needed the complement through personal messages of the Spirit of God to sinful men. Their feverish expectation of the thousand years kingdom of Christ on earth standing immediately before them, their fiery wish to help realize this empire by restoration of the falsely so-called apostolic communism, brought them into close union with the Dutch Baptists who in 1533 and 1535 in Muenster undertook to put an end to the evil one through the power of weapons, and to bring to reality the New Zion under almost complete rejection of all New Testament teachings, but under all the stronger approach of the Old Testament ideas.

With this state of things it is not surprising that the imperial parliament took the sharpest measures against all the sects which spoke against infant sprinkling and for baptism only upon faith. They were declared "dangerous enemies of all spiritual and secular rule," and were condemned to death all together. The result of this decree was the complete eradication not only of the Anabaptists who assented to the use of the sword and were fanatically premillennialists, but also of the sternly scriptural churches of God in Central Europe.

Among the approximately 100,000 executed as Anabaptists and opponents of church-statism of all shades, who were executed, tortured to death, or died from hunger in prisons in the Netherlands, Friesland, Westphalia, in the Mountainland, in Thuringen, in Rheingau, the Palatinate, in Alsace, Mainfranken, Upper Bavaria, Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia, Carmiola, Hauenstein, Tyrol, and Switzerland—just to mention some of the most important centers of persecutions of Christians—in these lands there were some 42,000 primitive evangelicals. The "Little Flock" in Bohemia was just about completely annihilated, and the same fate befell the defenseless Christians in the Palatinate and in Alsace. Only in Hesse and in the Free Imperial City of Strasbourg no funeral piles blazed: here the first Hessian reformer, the former Franciscan Lambert of Avignon—who in his mother's side descended from Catharist circles—and in Strasbourg the great Mountain-and-Water Pilgrim Marbeck of Tyrol, who had joined the primitive evangelicals, these two had exercised such restraining influence that procedures against baptists and New Testament Christians were "only" imprisonment (in given cases imprisonment for life), confiscation of property and banishment.

It is not superfluous to point out that by no means was it in the Roman church alone which poured out in streams heretic blood. The new reformation churches of Lutheran and Zwinglian and Calvinistic stamp vied with the Roman church in rooting out the disturbers of graveyard quiet. The churches, under the protection of the basic principle *Cuius regio, eius religio* (The sovereign decides about the religion), had begun to expand in the "Holy Empire of German Nations." Even Melanchthon, who was praised as the gentle Lutheran man of God,

gave out for his sovereign ruler theological decisions which were intended to justify the execution of defenseless of advocates of baptism.

Little by little the churches of Christ in Europe ceased to exist. Whatever remnants of them had been left by the bloody era of persecution from 1525 to 1575 perished in the disorders of the Thirty Years War. Many of the churches joined themselves to the halfway tolerated peaceful groups of baptizing Mennonites and Familiarists, others joined the remaining followers of Schwenkenfeld in Lower Silesia. In the year 1688 there were some 1,000 faithful believers scattered in the remote hamlets of the Vosges Mountains, and of the Tunsrueck, in the estates along the Rhone River, on some islands of the Frisian coast, in the swamps and marshes of East Prussia, in the sawmills of Bearn and Foix in the foothills of the Pyrenees, in the Witosch Plateau of Bulgaria, on the Zab valley in Kurdistan, and in Northern Armenia. More than 5,000 settled among the deported Russian schismatics in the Cossak region along the Kuban and Terek and in the steppes of Siberia.

What the dark centuries of the blood-covered torture racks and the reeking funeral piles had not been able to bring about an end, namely, the complete destruction of the churches of the Lord, that was brought about by the centuries of tolerance, with the domination of enlightened absolutism beginning with the rules of emperor Joseph and King Frederick. Emerging out of the night of catacomb-like existence, many of the members could not see their way clearly any longer in the sun of the light of freedom of belief. They did not prevent their children from intermarrying with Mennonites, Amish, or baptists, since these after all practiced baptism of adults upon profession of faith. They sympathized with other groups of previously persecuted believers who likewise professed to represent Bible groups and truths, such as the Inspiration-Groups and New Baptists, radical Pietists and Quakers. The spirit of Evangelical Alliance, that spirit that conceded to everyone membership in "the church of his choice" and granted the same rights to the legalistic-Mosaic Seventy Day Adventists as it did to almost antinomistic Pregizerianers, to the unbending Calvinists who quaked in their thoughts of the "inner sin" along with the Arminian Methodists who defended mankind's freedom of will, to the Lutherans who consented to the sacrament of sprinkling children along with the Baptists who affirmed that only believers should be baptized—this shifting spirit undermined the surviving churches.

The descendants of martyrs became lukewarm and many fell away. When the First World War broke out there were only three small churches of 20 families or less which professed the apostolic order of their lives and baptism for the remission of sins.

The Course of The Church Through the Centuries

1800 To 1955 AD

Seed In Good Soil

The seed of the blood of the martyred churches had not been sowed in vain; God's Word did not return again void. In all the Occident the survivors of the centuries of persecutions, without knowing it gave the decisive impulse to mighty movements of awakening. In England the remnants of the Leollard Christian churches, the Seekers, exerted a decisive influence upon the Puritans and Quakers; in Holland fugitive English Puritans found their way through the influence of Mennonite and Old Evangelic groups to the Congregational and Baptist movements. In Central Europe much of the essence of the old churches trickled into the fundamental teaching and constitutional systems of the Moravian Herrnhuters. Nevertheless, only in a few churches and numerically very small churches, was shown more evidently the survival of the New Testament pre-reformation wealth of thought: among the Sandimanians of Scotland for example; or the Kollegianten in Holland; or the Dunkards of Northwestern Germany, who later were to establish flourishing churches on the other side of the Atlantic.

But in that very epoch when seemingly among these few struggling groups left in Europe and Asia the flame of apostolic faith was about to be put out, there arose on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, wholly independent of the churches of Europe and without the Europeans knowing about it, the great "Restoration Movement" calling for a return to the apostolic faith and practice. Their efforts were not directed to a continuation or even remaking of old customs and traditions but a finding of the purity of the New Testament church and a restoration of that. Coming to their own decisions quite independently of each other, the Methodist O'Kelly, the Baptist Abner Jones, the Presbyterian Barton Stone, and the two free church theologians, the Campbells father and son, just immigrated from Ireland, who were to put aside all humanly devised creeds, dogmas and catechisms, and to build the church of the New Covenant on the Cornerstone, which is Christ. Their message found far and wide a responsive echo in the hearts of thousands. God added to the churches not only countless individuals, but also hundreds of young preachers, yes, entire congregations abandoned the prisons of their separate churches and joined themselves to the movement of New Testament Christianity. In a few years there were hundreds of these churches on the American continent.

May I speak of myself as a connecting link of the Central European churches of Christ and the brethren and sisters of the English-speaking restoration movement? Hitler's henchmen in World War II tried to terminate the destruction of the Lord's little flock. In 1933 all bishops and deacons of the churches of Christ on German soil were imprisoned in Konzentrationslager. In 1939 the adult members in East Prussia followed their shepherds into the prisons and hard-labor convoys, where they perished in 1944, and in 1942 the 11 Alsatian families were deported to Poland. There they were massacred by the advancing Red tankists in January, 1945. All died with the same heroism for their Lord as their ancestors did.

I was born in 1899 at Sablon-les-Metz as a scion of one of the oldest Christian families between the Mosele and the Alps. My dear father was one of the last three bishops of the church of Christ in Strassburg, and I was immersed by my uncle in the icy waters of the Hanauer Weiher March 18, 1916. Trained in Strassburg, Konigsberg, and Hamburg Universities, I obtained a license in comparative history of religions. Imprisoned in 1933 by the Nazis for preaching the gospel in the face of a blasphemous government, I had to suffer almost two years in the concentration camps of Hammerstein and Lichtenburg hunger, thirst, and the uninterrupted thrashing of arms, shinbones, and head like all other political, religious or non-Aryan prisoners. Released, deaf in one ear and with crushed kidneys, I continued preaching like my ancestors in woods, hills, and swamps or in hiding places in the large cities. I had to sell my special library and furniture to manage to live. When World War II began I was commissioned as an interpreter with the army.

Back in Leipzig on Christmas, 1945, I learned of my dear father's death, from some survivors, the extermination of our churches in East Europe. I immediately took up the task of rebuilding the destroyed brotherhood, and I had to work hard as a proofreader, reporter, and lecturer to earn a living not only for me, but also for the old and sick brethren and sisters in Communist-ruled, famine-stricken and ravaged East Germany. I could say with the apostle: "These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (Acts 20:34).

Just at the beginning of a remarkable revival of young people in Leipzig, and three months after my wedding, I was arrested October 9, 1948, by the Communists and for four years imprisoned in the ill-famed jails of Leipzig, Waldheim and Graefentonna. The pretended reason: conspiracy against the Red government in religious circles.

Released in the fall of 1952, I joined my dear wife in Western Germany. In March 1955, the protestant State Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck invited me to take over the office of president of the Evangelical Academy for Social Ethics in Kassel. I declined; I could not subscribe to the promise not to attack the teaching of the Confession of Augsburg.

But in the same month I met for the first time in my life a member of the restored churches of Christ of America. What he had to tell me was not other than the faith of my ancestors which I had taught and practiced all my life. My grandfather had had contacts with Scottish (Haldane) Baptists and Sandemanians, yea, even with Christadelphians in Birmingham, but the American Restoration Movement had been totally unknown to us. And now the fact that the Lord had built up his church beyond the Atlantic, just in time, when his last followers in Europe dwindled, hit me like a thunderclap.

The torch did not die out. God had kindled it again and put it on a lamp-stand and it gives light for everybody in the house. This was the fulfillment of Christ's promise: I am going to build my church, and the powers of death will never prevail against it.

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