



**JOHANN
CHRISTOPH
BLUMHARDT**

A BIOGRAPHY BY
FRIEDRICH
ZÜNDEL

THE BLUMHARDT SOURCE SERIES

BLUMHARDT

JOHANN CHRISTOPH BLUMHARDT



Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880)

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The Blumhardt Source Series

Christian T. Collins Winn and Charles E. Moore, editors

Johann Christoph Blumhardt

A Biography

FRIEDRICH ZÜNDEL

EDITED BY

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 PLOUGH PUBLISHING HOUSE

Published by Plough Publishing House
Walden, New York
Robertsbridge, England
Elsmore, Australia
www.plough.com

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Translated from Friedrich Zündel, *Johann Christoph Blumhardt: Ein Lebensbild*, 4th edition (Zürich: S. Höhr, 1883).

ISBN: 978-0-87486-241-6

23 22 21 20 19 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data pending.

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Series Foreword

THE BLUMHARDT SOURCE SERIES seeks to make available for the first time in English the extensive oeuvre of Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880) and his son Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842–1919), two influential religious figures of the latter half of the nineteenth century who are not well known outside their native Germany. Their influence can be detected in a number of important developments in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Protestantism: the recovery of the eschatological dimension of Christianity and the kingdom of God; the recovery of an emphasis on holistic notions of spirituality and salvation; the rise of faith healing and later, Pentecostalism; the convergence of socialism and the Christian faith; and the development of personalist models of pastoral counseling.

Their collected works make available their vast body of work to scholars, pastors, and laypeople alike with the aim of giving the Blumhardts a full hearing in the English language for the first time. Given the extent of their influence during the theological and religious ferment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we believe that these sources will be of great interest to scholars of that period across various disciplines. It is also true, however, that there is much spiritual and theological value in the witness of the Blumhardts. We hope that by making their witness more widely known in the English-speaking world the church at large will benefit.

The project outline is flexible, allowing for volumes that aim either in a scholarly direction or towards the thoughtful lay reader. The emphasis will be to reproduce, with only slight modifications, the various German editions of the Blumhardts' works that have appeared since the late nineteenth century. A modest scholarly apparatus will provide

contextual and theologically helpful comments and commentary through introductions, footnotes, and appendices.

During their long ministries, the elder and younger Blumhardt found themselves called to serve as pastors, counselors, biblical interpreters, theologians, and even politicians. No matter the vocational context, however, both understood themselves as witnesses to the kingdom of God that was both already present in the world, and also breaking into the current structures of the world. Together they represent one of the most powerful instances of the convergence of spirituality and social witness in the history of the Christian church. As series editors, it is our conviction that their witness continues to be relevant for the church and society today. We hope that the current series will give the Blumhardts a broader hearing in the English-speaking world.

Christian T. Collins Winn and Charles E. Moore

Foreword

FRIEDRICH ZÜNDEL (1827–1891) WAS from Schaffhausen, Switzerland, and wanted to become an engineer or architect. But in 1845 his attention was drawn to a newspaper article critical of events in Möttlingen, a small village on the edge of the Black Forest. After reading about the prayer-healings and the awakening that had touched the village there, he wanted to see for himself, first hand, what was actually happening. So he undertook a hefty hike to Möttlingen and became personally acquainted with the village congregation and with its pastor, Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880). What impressed him? First, he found no fanatic excesses or “public shrieking of repentance,” as had been rumored, but, instead, “upright fruits of repentance.” Furthermore, he was struck by Blumhardt’s hopes regarding the imminent events in the kingdom of God: the biblical promises regarding the return of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

So struck, Zündel gave up his engineering studies and enrolled as a student of theology in Erlangen and Berlin. By 1859 he became the pastor in Sevelen in the Rhine Valley (Canton St. Gallen, Switzerland), followed by a short time in Oberglatt (Canton Zurich). In 1874 he was pastor of the “minority congregation” in Winterthur, Switzerland, which had seceded from the State Church. Bypassing doctrinal differences, Zündel concentrated on developing a working relationship with the pastors of the State Church, in keeping with Blumhardt’s own “inter-confessional” approach. It was said of Zündel, “In State Church circles he spoke Free Church; in Free Church circles he spoke State Church.”¹

1. Georg Merz, “Forward,” in Friedrich Zündel, *Aus der Apostelzeit*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Kaiser, 1923), vi. This saying was based on information gathered from Zündel’s widow, Emilie Zündel-Pestalozzi.

All the while, Zündel maintained close contact with the Blumhardt family, who in 1852 moved to Bad Boll to spearhead a center for pastoral counseling. He became a close friend of Blumhardt's son Christoph, who succeeded his father as leader of Bad Boll, after his father's death in 1880. At Johann Christoph Blumhardt's funeral, Zündel reminded his listeners that God's promises were still valid, even after Blumhardt's death!

It was natural then for Zündel to become Johann Christoph Blumhardt's first biographer. The first edition of this book appeared in the very year of 1880. He thus found little time for extensive research. Blumhardt's youth, school years, vicariate, and the Basle period thus remained largely in the dark. Even by the fifth edition in 1887 (the last from Zündel's own hand) Zündel limited himself to relatively few of Blumhardt's letters and spoken sermons. He simply relied on his own personal knowledge of Blumhardt and the accounts related by the Blumhardt family and guests at Bad Boll.

But what personal knowledge! Zündel's biography gives a moving portrayal of the events surrounding Gottlieb Dittus and the spiritual renewal of the people of Möttlingen that followed. He was the first person not only to recount the stories of the awakening and the healings that followed, but to show their inner connection to each other. He also successfully conveyed how it was that prayer leads to healing; how prayer is not a feverish state of mind, drummed-up artificially, but a calm and grateful receiving of the "blooms in the field of everyday life." That his account is not exaggerated is proved by what became known only after Zündel's death: a far more extensive collection of Blumhardt's correspondence (together with other handwritten sources, such as diary entries, comprising nearly 4,000 documents).

These extraordinary accounts of struggle, awakening, faith-healing and hope, the "testimony of that which God desires to become in this world"—all this was written down by Zündel at that time when such an account was an offense to many and a source of refuge for others. For this reason, Blumhardt's son, Christoph, offered Zündel his deepest thanks: "He dared to relieve me of what we experienced, to write it in a book and sling it in the face of the entire world to spite the people: you have it right here!"²

One man, in particular, proved fertile soil for the book's message: the influential Religious Socialist Hermann Kutter. In a letter to Lydia Rohner on March 1, 1892, he wrote, "So it is good that you are making Zündel your

2. Meditation for June 11, 1891, the day of Zündel's burial. In Christoph Blumhardt, *Ansprachen, Predigten, Reden, Briefe 1865-1917*, vol. 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1978), 14.

spiritual possession. This will create kingdom ground under your feet and lays the base for our life of fellowship.—From the concepts in it, as they are expressed in Zündel’s book, I have constructed my present life, which stands and falls with them more and more.”³

Although Zündel wrote two other books, both of which found an appreciative readership, *Jesus* (1884) and *In the Apostles’ Times* (1886), his most significant work remains this biography. With this book Zündel shaped Blumhardt’s portrait for generations. “May it take the blessing God placed on Blumhardt,” he writes in his preface, and “cause something of that air to waft to the reader, the air of an approaching lovely time of grace that might be sensed in the presence of the blessed, and may it fill him with assurance of the certainty of all those great and beautiful matters that this life portrait recounts.”

Zündel’s work stands in the tradition of those “lives” that not only instruct but, above all else, also aim to “edify.” His aim is to help the reader be led to a life oriented to the kingdom of God. The critical questions that appear in the text serve chiefly as only a negative foil to the glorious figure of Blumhardt. Zündel’s account, in short, is a Protestant hagiography.

The immediacy of Zündel’s experience is invaluable. When one lays Zündel’s biography aside—inspired, perhaps, or with a critical frown—one cannot help, in any case, be impressed. It also becomes clear that there was something which Zündel did not aim to do and was not able to do: to conduct a conversation with Blumhardt, a real conversation that poses questions, listens and is prepared to learn and to contradict, a conversation conducted with awareness of the limitations of one’s own thinking, but also of the limits of the other. Zündel’s biography, this unique work whose portrayal cannot be duplicated, has found its own limits in its very nearness to Blumhardt.

Dieter Ising
Stuttgart, June 2009

3. *Hermann Kutter in seinen Briefen*, ed. by Max Geiger and Andreas Lindt (Munich: Kaiser, 1983), 122.

Acknowledgments

THE EDITORS WISH TO thank Tait Hoglund and Brian Bauernfeind for their help in the initial stages of preparing the manuscript, Miriam Mathis for her tireless work in copyediting, Dieter Ising for his help in clarifying several obscure references, and the Church Communities International Archives and Records Center in New York for providing photographs and original translated material.

PART ONE

Years of Growth and Preparation

First Section

INTRODUCTION — CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

1

The Native Soil

IT IS CUSTOMARY, WHEN starting a person's biography, to describe his parents, grandparents, etc., and the immediate family in which he grew up. In the case of a man like Blumhardt it is all the more important to depict his spiritual and intellectual forebears, background, and surroundings, for he influenced many contemporaries in their religious life and in fact left a rich spiritual legacy to the Protestant church.

Early in the nineteenth century the upper classes in Germany had been inundated by Voltaire's unbelief and the faith of the lower classes was undermined by the French Revolution. But here and there, particularly in Württemberg and above all in Stuttgart, there were quiet circles with a fresh, youthful faith in the Gospel. Christianity in Württemberg owes its well-known health and vigor mainly to a number of outstanding men. While gratefully embracing the movement of awakening in the Protestant church known as Pietism, these men earnestly resisted the excessive emotionalism that soon became the bane of Pietism in many other places. Among these men we especially mention J. A. Bengel and his pupil Oetinger.¹ Pietism

1. Editors' Note: Johannes Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), a prolific and influential Lutheran New Testament scholar, was a pioneer in the field of textual criticism of the New Testament. His exegesis in the *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (1742) influenced figures like John Wesley and continued to be used into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Bengel's greatest student was Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782). Oetinger's theosophical theories gave inspiration to the celebrated German Idealist Hegel. Bengel, Oetinger, and Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), founder of the Moravian Brethren, together constitute the three central figures in the formation of Württemberg Pietism.

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before long paid little heed to the call “Back to the Bible!” which its founding father Spener² had raised, and instead gave itself to the cultivation of emotions as the sole way to salvation. Bengel, on the other hand, took the call seriously and threw himself into the study of the Bible with enormous diligence and great inner freedom. In many quarters the cult of feeling led to a suspicious and disparaging attitude toward the official church and to a tendency to regard informal sociability as the main expression of Christian fellowship. It was different with Bengel. He combined his own joy in such sociable gatherings with a deep reverence for the Church and found a way of bringing these two forms of Christian life into mutual harmony. It is largely due to his clear, Christ-centered perception that such gatherings are flourishing in Württemberg even today—doubtless also because of their continuing contact with the established church, whereas elsewhere they have for the most part disappeared when that contact was missing.

What Bengel did for a deeper understanding of the New Testament is well known. The same holds true, at least in scholarly circles, for his courage and diligence in using the oldest available manuscripts in his endeavor to correct mistakes in Luther’s Bible translation. He needed all his innate conscientiousness to stand up for the apostolic Bible against the ingrained prejudices of his own fellow believers, attached as they were to the familiar Luther translation.

Another endeavor of Bengel’s, again showing his free-ranging spirit, exerted an even greater influence upon Christian people. By a diligent study of Revelation he sought to learn more about the course that the history of God’s kingdom and the Church of Christ could be expected to take. While his revision of Luther’s translation tended to give cold shivers to believers, this second undertaking earned him the ridicule of the world. To be sure, the way he found the history of Christendom reflected in Revelation is untenable, and so is his attempt to calculate the time of the Lord’s return. This actually led him to predict the latter for the year 1836, though he left open the possibility of an error. With respectful silence we note his words: “Neither in time nor in eternity will I need to regret my apocalyptic labors.”

On the other hand, precisely that side of his work was a courageous deed, with rich blessings in its train. The whole Bible, one might say, testifies that human history has an ultimate goal, and to proclaim that this goal deserves and needs serious and scholarly study was a worthy reply to wild

2. Editors’ Note: Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705), author of the *Pia Desideria* (1675), is widely considered the “father of Pietism.”

enthusiasts whose lips were full of “revelation” and “The Lord is coming.” But what was of importance for the church itself was Bengel’s authoritative pointing to the great and sure goal of the kingdom of God. For it almost seemed as if God’s kingdom had been reduced to an arrangement enabling humanity to live a godly life and die a blessed death. The course of world events was perceived as something totally unrelated to the kingdom. It was seen as a process that Jesus Christ, though still acknowledged as the Son of God, would never meddle with—or if at all, merely to bring it to an abrupt conclusion. Bengel’s was a mighty summons, which re-echoed strongly throughout his homeland, Württemberg, and gave a robust character to the piety of the circles mentioned above. It awakened in them a grateful, expectant readiness for God’s kingdom. Even among the devout it makes a difference whether one thinks: The world will go on, but we pass away, or: The world passes away, but we stand for evermore (cf. 1 John 2:17). Awareness that the Lord will come has made people gird their loins and have their lamps burning.

This great, free, and bold style of Christian thinking was further developed by Bengel’s pupil Oetinger. While Bengel was a churchman through and through, Oetinger’s characteristic was the urge to think, study, and know; his thirst for clarity and truth could never be stilled. Philosophy, theology, medicine, chemistry: which of these was his favorite field? The first and second most likely. In order to reach down to absolute rock bottom in these subjects, however, he kept bringing in new and original material from all sides. He found inward refreshment in Ignatius of Loyola and schooled himself in the subtleties of learned rabbis; yet with the same delight he delved into the works of the unbelieving philosopher Shaftesbury, whose spirit-filled writings he translated in order to publicize one of his own great ideas: the importance of common sense. He called it the “plain man’s wisdom” and recommended it as a rich store of helpful guidance for the perception of truth in general and for the understanding of Holy Scripture in particular. He also considered it a bulwark of true piety, since it helps to preserve the truthfulness and originality of genuine piety from being perverted by human bigotry into something artificial or trivial.

The second concept that Oetinger implanted firmly and deeply into present-day Christian thinking is that of reality as a living unity of matter and spirit. That concept on the one hand sees matter—the visible—as permeated by spirit; on the other hand, it rescues from oblivion and brings to light the actual existence of an invisible world of spirit. By that concept of the one-

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ness of body and spirit Oetinger helped to halt the translating of scriptural ideas into modern ways of thinking, at the expense of their original content and to have them understood as they are meant in the Bible.

In that way, the circles from which our Blumhardt stemmed had received a rich spiritual inheritance from their forebears, and this left its stamp on their whole tone of life. For the most part they were humble artisans, ranging from well-to-do to poor (Blumhardt's father being among the latter), but they also included schoolmasters, pastors, merchants, and even higher-up government officials, all seeking inward refreshment and deepening in that brotherly circle. Here, the hopes and goals of the kingdom of God were discussed on a high inner plane. Their thoughts and expectations concerning the kingdom found living expression when they participated in the founding of the Basel Mission Society. More than one might think, it was hopes for the victory of the kingdom, such as Bengel's vision of the future had kindled in them, that awakened in these men—who had never caught so much as a glimpse of the ocean—the longing to take the Gospel to their heathen brothers across the seas. We shall get more closely acquainted with the Basel Mission later on, when we accompany “candidate” Blumhardt into the Mission Institute at Basel.

Two forms of church life that were linked with the above circles ought to be briefly mentioned here: the Moravian Church and the Korntal community. Bengel, severe and sober-minded, sternly opposed the brotherly society that Zinzendorf had founded, while Oetinger at least cold-shouldered it. They took exception to the Bible's being used merely for edification, instead of being earnestly studied as a whole—a tendency they seemed to detect particularly in Count Zinzendorf. As time went on, though, the contrasts evened themselves out, and the network of orderly fellowships, which the Moravian Church had spread over the Protestant areas proved to be a decided help to scattered groups of the faithful. The itinerant Moravian preachers in particular rendered a valuable service by blazing new trails, as well as by acting as good Samaritans and leading strays and stragglers back to the main body.

But there was and still is one Moravian institution that was generally acclaimed—their book of daily texts, called *Losungsbüchlein*. Annually, the Moravian Church selects two Bible texts for every day of the year—one text picked by lot from the Old Testament, the other a matching passage selected from the New Testament. Each text has added to it a stanza from a hymn. The widespread distribution and extraordinary popularity of this little book, designed for daily family devotion, can be ascribed to the rich

variety of the material. As the year rolls by, the reader is guided to this or that book of the Bible. Thousands upon thousands all over the globe read and take to heart the same text on the same day; so it is easy to understand how widely circulated and how beloved the little book is. We are greatly indebted to the Moravian Church for that gift. Some, along with me, also gratefully acknowledge the fact that in the selection of the hymn stanzas the feeling of mainstream church members has lately been taken more into consideration.

The Korntal community is a splendid testimony to the dedication and the creative urge of the above-mentioned circles as well as to the wise liberalism of the king of Württemberg. When the Württemberg church hymnal, introduced in 1791 and watered down by rationalistic influences, was joined in 1809 by a prayerbook (collection of church prayers) breathing the same spirit, the faithful lost their sole remaining chance of giving vocal expression to their faith. In the circles we have spoken about, this led to an irresistible urge to leave the country. This urge was nourished not only by a longing to live out their Christian ideas in an autonomous fellowship, but also by the expectation of a great turning point in the history of God's kingdom. As the prevailing notions of political economy made such plans highly distasteful to the government, the mayor of Leonberg, Gottlieb Wilhelm Hoffmann, submitted to the authorities a brilliant suggestion. He proposed to let the would-be emigrants move from their various places of residence to a sanctuary assigned to them within their own fatherland; there they would be allowed to give concrete form, at their own discretion, to their religious and moral convictions. Some decades earlier, the young poet Schiller, while attending the *Karlsschule* (Charles's School) on the grounds of the ducal palace called Solitude, in his drama *Die Räuber* (The Robbers) had dreamed of a community freed of the barriers of tradition. He had no idea that on the estate named Korntal basking in the sunshine at his very feet the germ of truth in his ideas would one day become reality in a holy yet sensible way. For it so happened that the Württemberg government readily acceded to Hoffmann's proposal, and it was possible to acquire the Korntal estate, then belonging to Count Gorlitz, for the purpose. Hoffmann, together with Michael Hahn (a remarkable peasant and head of the religious society called *Michelianer* (Michaelites), who even today are numbered in tens of thousands, drafted the ecclesiastic and civic order of the new congregation, taking as their model the Moravian settlement at Königsfeld. Hoffmann became its first overseer.

Birth and Childhood

GODLINESS, IT SEEMS, WAS an outstanding trait of the stock from which Blumhardt came. Ostertag¹ for example tells of a Blumhardt who was coachman to the ducal court of Württemberg. He tells of the time when this man's son Matthäus got married. After the wedding dinner the father of the bridegroom, together with master shoemaker Volker, the bride's father, knelt down in a cornfield and prayed that the young couple and their future children and grandchildren might all find salvation and that "not a hoof might be left behind" (Exodus 10:26). One of the descendants thus interceded for—the son² of this shoemaker Matthäus Blumhardt—was Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt, first inspector of the Basel Missionary Society. Our Blumhardt is not strictly one of these descendants; his line goes back to a brother of the above-mentioned Matthäus, Johann Christoph Blumhardt, *famulus* (or attendant) at the Blaubeuren monastery; so he is a grandson of the inspector's uncle. But that coachman ancestor will surely have included also that other line in his prayer. Blumhardt's father, Johann Georg Blumhardt, started out as a baker and flour merchant and later was a wood measurer in Stuttgart. His mother, Johanna Luise, was the daughter of

1. Ostertag, *Entstehungsgeschichte der evangelischen Missiongesellschaft in Basel* (Basel: Verlag des Missionshaus, 1865), 63.

2. Translator's Note: Zündel actually says "grandson," but that appears to be a mistake, for in two other places (pp. 10 and 39) Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt, the mission inspector, is described as the *son* of the shoemaker Matthäus Blumhardt. That agrees with the statements that "our" Blumhardt is the "grandson of the inspector's uncle" (p. 9) and that the inspector is a cousin of "our" Blumhardt's father (p. 39).

Christoph Deckinger, a master tailor. So it is among humble trades-people that we find ourselves—a class that has often been a main focus of spiritual life in Germany.

Ostertag's book tells yet another incident—again taken from that other line of the Blumhardt family—of the fine Christian spirit at work in those circles. At the age of twenty-one, Christian Gottlieb Blumhardt (the later mission inspector) had been asked to preach a Good Friday sermon in the neighborhood of Stuttgart. He was about to decline the request, because his father Matthäus, mentioned above, lay close to death. But the father ordered him to preach, saying he would surely live through his son's sermon. Returning home after this solemn Good Friday sermon, preached at the behest of the dying father and "greatly blessed," according to a sister's account, the young preacher finds family and friends gathered around the dying father, who lay festively dressed in a clean gown. It was the father's express wish that he might take leave of his dear ones at a meal of remembrance, after the Savior's example. An earnest prayer spoken by the dying man was followed by a simple, festive meal. After it he blessed each of his children with laying on of hands. Among other things, he said to Christian Gottlieb, "The Savior will so bless you and so equip you with the power of his spirit that you will be a blessed instrument of his grace among the heathen." Thus even in death this man's heart went out to the heathen, and his heart's desire to see his beloved son Gottlieb consecrated to their salvation turned out to be prophetic foresight. A few hours later he passed away peacefully.

Our Blumhardt was born on July 16, 1805. "That was a difficult time in Germany," as he told later (*Täglich Brod* 1879, July 16).³ "I experienced that right at my birth, on July 16, 1805. On that day foreign troops marched into Stuttgart, and my mother with me, her baby, was in extreme danger, for there was no limit to the violence and brutality of the soldiers, who also entered her house. My mother had to hide and pray for the baby to keep still, lest he be heard by the soldiers. Our father was away; he had gone to the town hall, to seek help against the violence of the military. But the baby did keep quiet and help came." An hour after his birth, Blumhardt tells, his mother was once more standing at the cooking stove.

3. Editors' note: *Täglich Brod aus Bad Boll, bestehend in einem Bibelwort mit kurzur erbaulicher Betrachtung auf alle Tage des Jahres, nach stenographischen Aufzeichnungen*, edited by Theophil Blumhardt, vols 1–4 (Bad Boll and Heilbronn, 1878–1881). [*Daily Bread from Bad Boll*] Cited throughout as *Täglich Brod*, year, and day.

Johann Christoph was his parents' second child, but as his older brother died at the age of eleven, he was from then on the oldest of six children. As early as his fourth year he began to attend school. "History is silent about how the three-year-old boy got to school," a reliable source tells us, "but we have documentary evidence that he did." If the "how" is taken literally, "history" has *not* really remained silent about it. Blumhardt himself tells us that his father used to carry him to school in his arms, and at times he returned home in a similar way, that is, in the arms of the good schoolmaster, who looked after him with tender care. According to Ostertag, that teacher (named Gundert) was a lively, spirit-filled, believing member of those Christian circles that Blumhardt's father also belonged to. He was the grandfather of Dr. Gundert, the missionary who succeeded Dr. Barth as director of the *Calwer Verlagsverein* (Calw Publishing Association). This early schooling had a marked influence on Blumhardt's character. It was, so to speak, natural for him to be a man of culture, not so much in the sense of intellectual refinement, but in the sense that school learning and discipline had become part of his very nature.

Having one day carried home the boy, still quite tiny, one of Christoph's⁴ later teachers said to the father, "Here is your son; he is not meant to be a tradesman. You must let him study; the boy has special gifts and could be destined for greatness." The father replied, "But how can I do that? Where am I to find the means to let my son study?" "The means will be found," said the teacher. "I am firmly convinced that something great may become of this boy. He must study, and God will surely find the means. Just have faith!"

From that time on Christoph attended the *Gymnasium* (high school preparing for university)—before long, free of charge.

From an early age the boy found joy in the Bible; it also comforted and quickened him amid manifold tribulations caused by poverty and other difficulties. In the evenings, when the children were in bed, Christoph would stand on his bed in his nightshirt and tell his younger brothers and sisters with lively enthusiasm the stories he had found in the Bible. By the time he was eleven, he had read the whole Bible through twice. Thus the spirit pervading the Bible shaped and nourished the boy's spirit into the very depths of his subconscious. His thinking became instinctively biblical; from now on, he took the biblical view of things for granted; any other way of think-

4. Editors' Note: Before the authorial career of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842–1919), the famous son of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, Johann Christoph Blumhardt published under the name Christoph Blumhardt.

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ing seemed alien. In particular, the loving nearness of a personal God, as one who truly manifests his presence to the soul, was to him a deeply felt need and also a sure fact. In view of this, he found it painful, strange, and saddening that not only he, but also the venerable, devout men around him, seemed to lack the nearness to God that he saw in the Bible. Even at that time it puzzled him that the gifts of grace of the apostolic age had so receded into the background.

The distress and tribulation that clouded Christoph's early years was due in part to the general need of the times—the war and the famine of 1815 and 1816—and in part to the specific needs of his family. At one time every member of the family—father, mother, and six children—came down one after the other with typhoid fever. Every morning a concerned uncle ventured into the contaminated house as far as the foot of the stairs and inquired of the mother in a loud shout how her family was getting on. Those were hard times, and Christoph, while studying diligently, also had to pitch in with the manifold chores around the house.

As we have but little information on Christoph's childhood, I would like to cite here an experience of those years that remained important to him.

When I was nine, our professor at the Stuttgart *Gymnasium* once asked me to supervise a small group of my classmates for an hour. It was remarkable, by the way, that it occurred to me to say to the other boys, all of the same age as I, "Children, not so loud!" Then the boys really let me have it for calling them "children." I found that strange, for I thought, "What else are they if not children, and how should I address them?" But even children don't want to be children nowadays. To come to the point, however: While I kept walking to and fro among the boys, I overheard one of them, who was leafing through a Bible reader, ask another, "Listen, can you tell me which story moved you to tears the most?" The other answered promptly, "Yes, the story of Jesus' suffering! Whenever I read that, it makes me cry." The first boy became thoughtful, and I too, felt struck in my heart, because I had never yet felt it so deeply. What that boy said moved me to tears. That happened sixty years ago now, but I have still not forgotten that sensitive boy, and every time I read out the story of Jesus' suffering, he helps me to see it in all its seriousness.

Even here a trait of Christoph's character—as felicitous as it is beautiful—comes to the fore that explains in large measure the influence he exerted on people and his ready access to their hearts. It is the reverence he felt for the other person, his warm, appreciative way of placing the other above him-

self, and his thankful acceptance of the good in the other. This may have become less noticeable toward the end of his life. In those last years he stood largely alone and stubbornly held aloft the banner of his hopes. Yet the reader may still perceive this appreciative reverence for others shining forth from this account of his life.

At an early age his love of singing and his musical talent awakened. Unable to wait for the time when the school curriculum would introduce him to the noble art of singing, he would edge his way close to the precentor (directing singer) in church, and by closely watching the music in front of that man as well as the notes that issued forth, he learned to read music. Before long, he had to take his share in the choral singing of the *Stiftskirche* (collegiate church) in Stuttgart. Once, when bread was being distributed in that church, these young bearers of the future had to officiate as singers, and one of them had to be the speaker. Christoph was chosen to be the speaker, and the singers missed him greatly!

Because of his father's great poverty, from a very early age the boy had to help support the family. Many times he carried home heavy chunks of wood from the wood market, and he was especially keen to split the firewood for his mother's household needs. In later life his small but sturdy hands bore witness that he had done more than just push a pen in his younger years.

Blumhardt tells how seriously his father took the education of his children:

He was deeply concerned to lead his children to Christ. He gathered us children regularly for prayer and Bible reading, had us sing spiritual songs together, and encouraged us in all kinds of ways. I shall never forget the moment one evening when he spoke to us of the possible persecutions that might be in store for those confessing to the name of Jesus. I felt a thrill run through my whole body when at the end he exclaimed with lively gestures, "Children, rather let your heads be cut off than deny Jesus!" Such an education, supported by equal care on the part of a tenderly loving mother and a sympathetic uncle, awakened the good within me at an early age, and I consider it my particular good fortune to have still many a lively childhood memory of special workings of God's grace in my heart.

On their mutual visits, Blumhardt often heard the older men speak of impending great developments in God's kingdom, such as his father had spoken of—of the approaching "end time," and the solemn impression that made on him remained with him throughout his life.

Unfortunately we have no detailed information about his confirmation at the age of thirteen, an important period in his life. From the extremely high value he set on that time and especially on the festive occasion concluding it, we may infer that it was a time of rich blessing for him. Still, to tally with Blumhardt's character and the course of his inner development, it must have been an experience of a steady, simple, and organic nature.

In Württemberg, for a boy who wants to devote himself to the ministry of the Protestant state church, confirmation is followed at once by the so-called *Landexamen*, a state-wide examination in which pretty well all boys of that age group who desire to study theology—between sixty and a hundred or more in number—compete for the thirty (forty at that time) scholarships annually available at the four “lower” seminaries or “monasteries”: Schönthal, Blaubeuren, Urach, and Maulbronn. These are former monasteries, which during the Reformation were dissolved and transformed into schools preparing prospective ministers for the study of theology at Tübingen University. The entire further theological training of the thirty lucky winners is taken care of by the State of Württemberg. After four years they advance from the lower to the upper seminary, called the *Stift*, at Tübingen, a celebrated breeding-ground for writers. In Blumhardt's time the seminary student had to pass three more successive examinations (one a year), the last one being the decisive one. It was on only his second try, at the age of fourteen, that Blumhardt succeeded in gaining one of the thirty scholarships. In various ways his poverty had stood in the way of an immediate success. The “monastery” whose gates now opened to him was Schönthal. It is situated in a pleasant valley on the Jaxt River. The ground on which it stands belonged at one time to the lords of Berlichingen; in the nearby castle of that name the students could marvel at the iron hand of the celebrated Götz von Berlichingen.⁵ It was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when through the Napoleonic mediatization (i.e. annexation to one of the larger German states of lands formerly *immediately* subject to the Holy Roman Empire) it became part of Württemberg, that the Schönthal monastery was dissolved and transformed into a Protestant seminary.

In the Protestant church of Württemberg a freshly installed minister usually gives his new congregation a short description of his life and development. To this pleasant custom we owe a brief account of Blumhardt's life until then, as he told it to his Möttlingen parishioners. Beginning here, its several parts will serve us as introductions as we consider the successive

5. Hero (and title) of a drama by Goethe.

stages of his life. For instance, Blumhardt tells the following about his time at Schönthal:

I had faithful teachers at Schönthal.⁶ The short time that the late Prelate von Abel was principal of the seminary was a particular blessing to me. That venerable old man took a special interest in me, and some of his long and truly fatherly talks with me impressed me deeply.

Among my fellow students I found several of like mind, whose company was of great value to me. Above all, I cannot leave unmentioned Wilhelm Hoffmann, son of the founder and director of Korntal, now assistant at Winnenden. (Later he was Gottlieb Blumhardt's successor as inspector of the Basel Mission and died in 1873 as court preacher in Berlin.) With him I formed a most intimate friendship during my very first days at Schönthal. For nine years I shared with him all my youthful concerns, and God let this association become a source of inestimable benefit for my heart and my studies.

Blumhardt's tribute to his friend just after the latter's death in 1873 in the periodical *Der Christenbote* (Christian Messenger)⁷ was hailed by Hoffmann's son and biographer as the best and most faithful extant account of Hoffmann's time in Schönthal. There Blumhardt depicts that unique and fruitful friendship as follows:

I have always considered it a particularly gracious leading of the Lord that on my entry into the Schönthal "monastery" in October 1820, when we were fourteen years old, my very first new acquaintance was the late Wilhelm Hoffmann. Already on the way to Schönthal, especially at the last coach stop, we two boys, as yet unknown to each other,

6. The biography of Hoffmann written by his son tells us more about these teachers, as follows. Abel, later "prelate" (i.e., superintendent general in the Württemberg Protestant church), had been Friedrich Schiller's—the playwright—teacher at *Karlsschule* (Charles's School) and was the first to call his attention to Shakespeare. He was subsequently professor at Tübingen University, where he taught psychology to Schelling and Hegel. Abel's fellow teachers at Schönthal were Hauber, an outstanding mathematician, as well as expert in Latin and Oriental Languages; Fischer, known for his skillful translation into Latin of Voss's *Luise* and Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea*; Hermann, later prelate at Ludwigsburg; Wunderlich, later superintendent, esteemed as a clever mathematician and as a watchful overseer. Together, these teachers represented a rich store of knowledge and experience with which to prepare their pupils during the four-year course at Schönthal for entry into university. Finally, mention should be made of Kern, a beloved teacher, who as rector of Dürrmenz later on had Blumhardt as his curate. His "simply exquisite" sermons were published by Wilhelm Hoffmann jointly with L. Völter.

7. Editors' note: "Erinnerungen an Wilhelm Hoffmann, Generalsuperintendenten in Berlin, aus seiner Jugendzeit," *Der Christenbote* 39 (1873), 305–8. ["Reminiscences Concerning Wilhelm Hoffmann, General Superintendent in Berlin, From His Youth"].

caught sight of and eyed one another from our respective chaises. The one in which he rode with his father, which was drawn by the two ponies, so well-known later on, mostly followed closely behind the one in which I was traveling with the late minister of state, Herr von Schmidlin, and his son, who had the kindness to thus facilitate my journey. On arrival in Schöenthal, we scurried about looking for rooms and places for ourselves and, with an eye to the future, tried to find what seemed best. A remark made then by Wilhelm's father challenged and impressed me. Seeing how avidly we looked around, he said to him and to me, as if I, too, were his son, "Whoever wants to live like a Christian must not take the best for himself, but leave it for the others." That one word gave me a keynote that kept resonating within me throughout my life. On many occasions I also found it reverberating in my dear Wilhelm.

We immediately became close friends, who could also share with one another the finer and higher things of life. Our friendship was not an ordinary one, for it had a mutually elevating influence on us both, especially since Wilhelm's father, with his vast experience and an eye to the practical even in spiritual matters, served as a link between us, also later during the holidays. For nine years we could be seen together daily, arm in arm. As Wilhelm was much taller than I, who was among the shortest in the class, we would stroll along, his arm around my neck and my arm around his waist. Generally bareheaded (as was then the custom among students), we were constantly talking and at times arguing, but always about matters that in some way nourished our spirit. To be sure, with my friend the preferred subject of conversation—attractive and stimulating though it was to both of us and also pursued by both—tended to be an intellectual one, while in my case it was more likely to be a concern of the heart, and he was well aware of that. Yet whatever it was, it was there in both of us and filled us both inwardly.

It is a rare thing for two friends and fellow students to give to each other as much as we did, and yet I have to say that he was almost wholly the giver and I the avid recipient. His brilliant mind, searching for the truth, lighted on everything noble and drew me along with him, yet never so that our individual personalities merged or got lost in each other. Each in his own way, we retained our independence and individuality. Yet we were so firmly bound together inwardly that we never let each other go, and if now and then, especially during the middle period of our time in Tübingen, the divergent courses of our lives led us apart for a while, we always came back together as eagerly as ever and completely understood each other. My friend was gifted in every direction, especially in linguistics. Together we practiced reading the Greek and Roman classics, especially the poets. Because of building work in the seminary we had eleven weeks of vacation in 1821; that

was our first autumn vacation. I spent that time mostly in Korntal, and the two of us worked at a written translation of Horace's letters and satires. But of course, all I could do was look up to him and admire his speed and skill at grasping what Horace had to say and rendering it with such insight. By myself I would at that time have been quite incapable of understanding Horace the way he did.

While still at Schönthal, we also began to learn and practice English and French together, and before long my friend and I plunged into the literature of those languages. During our free time we would often go out, sit in a meadow or wood, and read and study these writings, again with him doing everything and me being at the receiving end. Now and then he would also give vent to his youthful imagination in poetry, and what he shared with me showed me sufficiently how high he could soar and how little I was able to follow him. At other times we would pick up this or that thoughtful and uplifting little booklet, and some of what we read there left a deep impression on us. He loved literature altogether, and whatever was outstanding in any of its branches would not remain unknown to him. With his excellent memory he could instantly remember the names of all the books in a list and could also quickly and very distinctly recall passages that were original or witty or apt to lead one deeper. He sought to obtain this or that book that would enlighten him on subjects he did *not* have at his disposal, and it often seemed to me as if from the mere title of a book its content would flash into his mind.

As he was most ready to share his thoughts with me, I benefited greatly from all this, for through him my mind, too, was ever drawn to what was real, spirit-filled, and original, but it also pleased him when here and there I showed a liking for simple things as well, as long as they seemed right otherwise. Even though I could not really keep up with him in all that, something of it did remain with me, and for that I feel grateful to him to this day. This is how it was already at Schönthal, where, instruction being somewhat inadequate in those days, the students had to pick up most by studying on their own. And it was even more so in Tübingen, where we occupied ourselves with philosophy and theology.

What a vivid picture that gives of those halcyon days of the two friends' school years! How it shows us their joyous urge to achieve, their delight in growing, their youthful forays into the land of knowledge! It is also worth noting that Blumhardt was more than a year older than his friend and mentor. While the courses of their lives diverged, they continued to have one thing in common: a wide horizon, coupled with an inner urge to have what had come to them from God in quiet become reality and a common posses-

sion of all humankind. As regards the divergence of the ways they followed, a humorous brotherly word to Hoffmann is remembered, which has been ascribed either to Dr. Barth or, perhaps more correctly, to Blumhardt. When Hoffmann moved from Tübingen to take up his new post as court preacher in Berlin, one of the two, it is said, saw him off with this farewell warning: “Watch out that you don’t lose your second ‘f!’” To explain: *Hoffmann* means “man of hope” (*Hoffnung*), while *Hofmann* signifies a courtier (court = *Hof*).

A fellow student of those days describes Blumhardt as a steady character, who studied diligently, though without distinguishing himself, morally pure and always very modest. He tells that “when encountering coarseness or attacks on his reverence for God, Blumhardt would indeed react, yet without being moralistic. When his patience was exhausted, he would say, ‘Now listen, that’s enough of that; it’s going the wrong way.’”

It was during his time at Schönthal, in 1822, that he lost his father. He had spent the fall vacation the year before in his parental home. On the day when he left to go to Korntal with his friend Hoffmann, his sick father, driven by his great love for his son, accompanied the two, notwithstanding his chest ailment. But it went beyond his strength. At a certain place, which Blumhardt was always to remember, his father took leave of him in tears, sensing correctly that he would not see him again on this earth. Neither at his father’s death nor at his burial was Blumhardt able to be with him. The father’s passing made it even more imperative for him to support his mother and his brothers and sisters. He took this obligation very seriously. For example, to carry it out he made use of an existing arrangement at Schönthal that entitled each seminary student to a daily allowance of a pint of wine, with the understanding that he actually received the wine only on special occasions and that in general he was simply credited each month with “wine money,” that is, the monetary value of that allowance (fluctuating with the current price of wine). Blumhardt managed to save a considerable part of his wine money for his mother’s household expenses.

