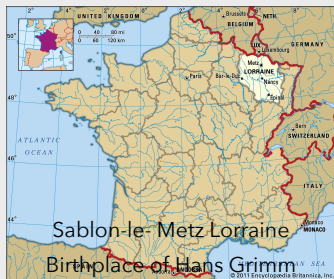


CHURCH HISTORY

“Now these things took place as examples for us...”

Lesson 17

Hans G. Grimm



Hans Godwin Grimm was born in 1899 at Sablon-lez-Metz, Lorraine. He was the son of Gustaf Grimm, one of the three last elders of the churches of Christ in Strasbourg, Alsatia. He is a descendant of one of the oldest Christian families in Central Europe, between the Moselle and the Alps. He was baptized at the age of 17 on March the 18th, 1916. He suffered in Nazi concentration camps along with other Christians and survived, even though they destroyed all his research on New Testament Christianity in Europe. He was able to recreate some of his research and wrote a pamphlet called “The Story of Churches of Christ in Central Europe.” It can be found at the following website for free. (<https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/the-story-of-the-churches-of-christ-in-central-europe/>)

New Testament Churches in 17th & 18th Century Europe and England, and Movements that Influence Early Restoration Leaders.

I have long believed the Lord’s church has had faithful followers since the first century. There have always been religious movements outside of Catholicism and Denominationalism. There are, however, few that recognize separate, smaller movements closely resembling the larger movements yet actually distinct from them. Historical records about them are scarce but they can be found. A few have sought to find such evidence. Although every historian writes with his own bias (whether admitted or not) there is strong evidence there were New Testament churches in Europe for many centuries. We noted some early examples in lesson 11. As we move past the Reformation we want to look at evidence of the existence of New Testament churches in the 17th and 18th centuries and of movements that would later lead to the 19th century Restoration movement.

17th and 18th Century Churches in Central Europe

One writer who offers evidence of New Testament Christians on the European continent is Hans Godwin Grimm. He was first met by American brethren after WW II.

Hans Godwin Grimm whose is identified in the sidebar on the left) offers evidence of thousands of New Testament Christians in central Europe in 16th and 17th century. Godwin writes:

“But even in these dark ages, the churches of Christ did not only hold their ground in their strongholds in Alsace-Lorraine, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, but from 1518 to 1538 they succeeded in multiplying their congregations in the Palatinate, Austria, Moravia, and in the center of Germany. In 1524 there were approximately 12,000 baptized Christians in Alsace-Lorraine, over 5,000 in the Palatinate, more than 2,500 in Frisia, almost 2,000 in Salzburg. Under the influence of some of their gospel preachers, a new religious movement sprang up almost spontaneously: The Anabaptist revival, soon numbering more than 500,000 men and women.”

Anabaptist Movement



Churches of Christ in the 16th and 17th centuries are apparently often grouped with the Anabaptists. Grimm's identity of the locations of Christians in this time puts them throughout this region. Lorraine is in France on the German border; Frisia is in the Netherlands; Palatinate is in Germany; Switzerland; Salzburg, Austria.

Godwin says the Anabaptist movement actually developed out of faithful churches but introduced several key false doctrines, chief among them were: all men (Christians and non-Christians) are endowed with a certain measure of God's spirit, which they called the "inner light," and that this light was a sufficient guide for all who followed it in sincerity; that the Scriptures could easily be replaced by the personal messages of the Holy Ghost to sinful men; a belief in premillennialism. The Anabaptist church was persecuted by the authorities mercilessly.

But faithful brethren were persecuted along with the Anabaptists as outside forces saw them as one and the same. Grimm says the numbers of Christians were decreased dramatically, not only by persecution but by drifting into false doctrines. Grimm writes:

“The German [authorities] recognized that all who rejected infant sprinkling had to be considered as dangerous foes of all spiritual and secular government and therefore had to be condemned to the stake.”

“The result of this decree was the almost total extermination of the churches of Christ in Alsace-Lorraine, Switzerland, the Palatinate, and Central Germany. [Along] with about 100,000 Anabaptists, more than 42,000 followers of Christ were given their choice between revocation [or] mounting the pyre. By far the greater number chose the latter. Under the witnesses for the gospel truth were four of my ancestors: Augustine and Adolf Grimm in 1525, Godwin Engel in 1535, and the young Gregor Cron in 1536.”

16th and 17th Century Churches in England

Another Christian, Keith Sisman of England, has done extensive research on the history of the New Testament church in the British Isles. He has written written about it in his book: Traces of the Kingdom.

Sisman presents evidence of New Testament Christianity in the late Middle Ages. He also presents evidence of brethren in 16th and 17th centuries. He agrees with Godwin that the disappearance of many of these is the result of false doctrine. Under the pressure of the calvinistic Anglican State Church, many turned to Calvinism. The Anabaptist movement is so influenced and practices the aforementioned false teachings, but seeks to maintain its independence. Sisman says the Anabaptist movement, the Baptist church movement, and the Quakers, all began among faithful brethren during these times. In another 150 years, there will be men who will again seek to follow Bible doctrines, rejecting false teachings, coming out of those churches, and become leaders in the 19th century Restoration Movement.

Quakers



William Penn

This movement begins in the mid 1600's. The name possibly came from a statement by their founder, John Fox, who urged his brethren to "tremble at the name of the Lord" or from fits experienced by worshippers supposedly when moved by the Spirit. Persecuted in Europe, many left England for Barbados in 1655 and then on to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where they were also known as the Friends. In the beginning they were persecuted by Pilgrims there.

In 1681, King Charles II granted William Penn, a Quaker, a charter for the area to become Pennsylvania. Penn guaranteed freedom of religion throughout the colony. Their influence in the northeast was significant and gained respectability among the people. They are a conservative group that especially influences a return to a life of purity, but also one of seeking inner enlightenment from direct personal instruction from the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Preachers Preceding the Restoration Movement

Some of the preachers who teach New Testament Christianity in the 16th and 17th centuries include the following men.

-Thomas Lamb was born in the early 1600's. Most historians identify him as an early Baptist preacher. He is probably so identified because of the later drift into Baptist doctrine by many churches of Christ he started. Yet, the evidence of his teaching says he not only taught basic new Testament doctrines of free will (opposing the introduction of Calvinism) and advocated local church autonomy overseen by elders, but also baptism for remission of sins.

-Thomas' son, Isaac, also preached the gospel. He became a chaplain on the British man-o-war Constant Warwick. He baptized fellow sailors and his audience often included Admiral Blake and, on one occasion, included Admiral Penn, father of William Penn, the Quaker who started the colony of Pennsylvania. When the monarchy was restored in 1660 along with the power of the state supported Anglican church, young Isaac was stripped of his commission and denied religious liberty. Yet he continued to preach until his death in 1691.

-Henry Denne - Denne was baptized by Thomas Lamb in 1643. A Cambridge graduate and ordained Anglican minister, he came to reject Calvinism and infant baptism. He left the Anglican church and became a travelling preacher, establishing many churches. Denne's preaching was reported to authorities, resulting in his arrest and imprisonment, though later released. We know the doctrines that were taught in the churches with which Denne associated. They included: rejection of Calvinism and belief in free will; calling their congregations Churches of Christ; weekly observance of the Lord's Supper; plurality of elders and deacons in each church; baptizing by immersion for the remission of sins; no separate priesthood (clergy), and a triune Godhead. When some of these brethren would use the term baptist, they simply meant someone who baptized believers by immersion. This adds to the confusion of historians who end up identifying them with the Anabaptist and Baptist churches.

These men and others like them, I would readily identify as gospel preachers, faithful to the Word of God. In time, most of the churches they established drifted into Calvinism, Anabaptists, and even Presbyterians.

Evidence of Early Churches of Christ in England

Sisman reprints a letter from this period written by one who was a part of these churches. The churches were being accused of practicing believer's baptism, along with teaching free will and falling from grace. One who tried to answer the letter also charged these brethren with teaching the Bible as the final authority, rejection of the creeds of men which contradict the

The Haldane Brothers



Robert Haldane

Robert and James Haldane were from a well-to-do and connected family in Scottish society going back about 800 years. Many distinguished Scots were among their ancestors. Robert's wife was a cousin of Sir Walter Scott. Both were deeply religious. Robert became a dedicated evangelist, traveling to India before returning to spend his life in Scotland. James worked more behind the scenes providing ample financial support including building a large church building in Glasgow. Alexander Campbell's first attempt to travel to America ended in a shipwreck of the coast near Glasgow. He often listened to Robert Haldane preach while attending the University of Glasgow. Though only in Glasgow for 9 months, Campbell was greatly influenced by these men. He would give them credit for playing a major role in his spiritual journey.

Bible, and rejection of "predestination, reprobation, final perseverance, and other truths."

The letter itself speaks of the rejection of infant baptism, the old covenant being abolished, and following Paul's example who was "baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins." The letter is dated May 10, 1622, London.

I should point out no Reformation churches used instrumental music in worship. For this reason, it was not an issue.

It would appear that by the mid 18th century, most churches of Christ had disappeared from England and Scotland. A new call for a return to the primitive church of the Bible would arise under the influences of people who would come out of these apostate movements. It is a cycle oft repeated in church history.

Movements That Influenced Restoration Preachers.

In the second half of the 17th century we begin to see movements arise, particularly in Scotland that are beginning to question practices of the established churches, especially the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the official state church.

One of the earliest is begun by John Glas, who left the Church of Scotland, pleading to restore primitive New Testament Christianity. He influenced another early pioneer of this movement in Scotland, his son-in-law Robert Sandeman. Through their efforts congregations started in Scotland, England and America, who practiced congregational autonomy, plurality of elders, and weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. However, they taught salvation by faith alone and other presbyterian doctrines. The movement died out in the 1800's.

At the end of the 17th century, the Haldane brothers of Edinburgh, Scotland formed a church of 310 members that was determined to restore New Testament Christianity. They first practiced infant baptism but later taught believer's baptism by immersion. This movement was to directly influence Alexander Campbell when he attended the University of Glasgow in 1808-09. Others are also coming on the scene by the end of the 1700's. We will examine them in our next lesson.

There is a great lesson to be learned from this story. Failure to be fully committed to the principle of the finality of Bible authority will lead churches astray in only a couple of generations. But, hopefully, there will always be those who study the Bible for themselves, who will become dissatisfied with unscriptural practices, and will have the courage of conviction to return to primitive New Testament Christianity. Biblical authority will always be the foundation of the New Testament church. We must always be committed to following what it says, no matter the consequences. Otherwise, our grandchildren will begin to leave the faith, influenced by the ideas and innovations of others who do not follow this principle.