

The Quest for Faithfulness

The Quest for Faithfulness

A Memoir

HELMUT HARTMANN

Translated and Edited by Kurt K. Hendel

Foreword by David Ansley Mote

RESOURCE *Publications* • Eugene, Oregon

THE QUEST FOR FAITHFULNESS

A Memoir

Copyright © 2019 Kurt K. Hendel. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Resource Publications

An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3

Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-5326-5808-2

HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-5326-5809-9

EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-5326-5810-5

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

MARCH 20, 2019

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

When scriptural passages are quoted from the NRSV this is noted in the text. When there is no such notation, the translation is of the scriptural text as it is quoted in the original manuscript.

“Als ich in weissem Krankenzimmer der Charité,” in: Bertolt Brecht, Werke. Grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, Band 15: Gedichte 5. © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben / Suhrkamp Verlag 1993. All rights with and controlled through Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin.

Excerpt from: Bertolt Brecht, Der gute Mensch von Sezuan, in: *ibid.*, Werke. Grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, Band 6: Stücke 6. © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben / Suhrkamp Verlag 1989. All rights with and controlled through Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin.

Sincere thanks to Christiane for forty-three years together

Contents

Foreword by David Ansley Mote | xi

Acknowledgments | xv

- 1932** A Man with a Sign | 1
- 1933** The Parsonage in Burgörner | 4
- 1934** Two Chopped-off Noses | 7
- 1935** The Teacher's Residence, Berlin | 9
- 1936** Nappian and Neucke | 13
- 1937** My Esteemed Uncle Karl | 15
- 1938** A Jewish Store Destroyed | 17
- 1939** Vacation in Trockenborn | 19
- 1940** Birthdays, Hamsters, and May Beetles | 21
- 1941** Expatriates in Our Village | 23
- 1942** We Visit Our Great-grandfather | 25
- 1943** Berlin Evacuation | 28
- 1944** For the Sake of Victory | 31
- 1945** Liberation | 33
- 1946** The 400th Anniversary of Martin Luther's Death | 36
- 1947** I Want to Be a Farmer | 41
- 1948** At the Stephaneum | 43
- 1949** Two German States | 46

CONTENTS

1950	A Night Hike	49
1951	Campus Ministry in Halle	51
1952	My Conversions	54
1953	June 17, 1953 in Halle	57
1954	Hamburg, Gateway to the World	62
1955	Vicar in Lindau	64
1956	Seminary in Brandenburg	66
1957	The Black Pump	69
1958	First Pastorate, Mücheln	74
1959	Bliss with Tent and Bicycle	77
1960	Summer along the Volga	79
1961	The Berlin Wall	82
1962	A Stormy February Night	84
1963	A Star Falls from Heaven's Vault	86
1964	Construction Soldiers	88
1965	Demanding a New Eastern Policy	90
1966	Who Are You?	93
1967	Pastor in Lutherstadt Eisleben	95
1968	End of the Prague Spring	98
1969	Drama after Klaus's Birth	100
1970	Adventures in Church Renovation	102
1971	Ecclesiastical Tourism	105
1972	A Christian in Socialism	107
1973	An Inter-congregational Reform Circle	109
1974	Local Ecumenism	111
1975	The Peasants' War	113
1976	The Beacon from Zeitz	116
1977	A Congregation of Actors	119
1978	To Halle as Superintendent	121

CONTENTS

1979	Halle is Better than Its Reputation	123
1980	A Delegation to Canada	126
1981	On the Way Together	129
1982	Swords into Plowshares	132
1983	Citizen Rights Groups in the Church	135
1984	Unexpected Consequences	137
1985	The Service of Visitation	139
1986	City Mission Pastor, Erfurt	142
1987	A City that Deals Justly	144
1988	Remain and Resist	146
1989	The Miracle	148
1990	A Hope Learns to Walk	151
1991	Day of Unity	154
1992	In Polish East Prussia	156
1993	Melting Heart	158
1994	To Jesus's Table	161
1995	A Christmas Story	163
1996	The Compassionate Romanian	167
1997	Crooked Tree—Erect Walk	169
1998	The Three Informers of King Herod	172
1999	An Encounter on Children's Day	174
2000	A Fifty-year Reunion	176
2001	Suddenly Gone	178
2002	A Good Conclusion	181

	Bibliography	185
--	--------------	-----

Foreword

I MET HELMUT HARTMANN at the Baptist Church in Moscow in the summer of 1960. I was with a group of a dozen young Americans in the Soviet Union as part of an exchange program arranged by our State Department and the Soviet Foreign Ministry. During that Sunday service an announcement was made in English welcoming foreign visitors and informing us of an opportunity to learn about the church in a meeting after the service. Our whole group attended along with dozens of others who had attended the service.

A pastor of the church who had studied in England spoke to us. Judging from how people were dressed in those days (when it was easy to spot whether people were from east or west of the Iron Curtain), all but one of the visitors in the room were from the West. Sitting next to me was a young man from somewhere behind the Iron Curtain. I would have assumed he was from the USSR except for the fact that the meeting was for foreign visitors to the church.

As soon as the meeting concluded I introduced myself and asked where he was from. I was surprised to hear that he was a Lutheran pastor from East Germany. Helmut and I spent the rest of that day together, and we began a correspondence that went on for forty years. After the first year it mostly consisted of annual letters. Every year during Advent Helmut wrote a thoughtful two-page letter that went to family and friends from all over, and he always added a hand-written personal note to me.

In 1975 I visited the Hartmanns in Eisleben. When I learned he would be part of a delegation from the Evangelical Church in East Germany to the United Church of Canada in 1980, I flew to Toronto and spent a day with him. We discussed whether it would make trouble for him if I were to visit him in Halle, and he assured me that it should be possible to get government permission to do so. That visit in the summer of 1980 turned out to be a wonderful week staying in the Hartmanns' home.

FOREWORD

In 2002 I sent my annual letter and did not receive one in return. When the 2003 letter did not come I wondered whether his Parkinsons was the reason (see Chapter 1997, “Crooked Tree—Erect Walk”) or whether something else had happened. I continued to write each year, and my letters did not come back as undeliverable.

In 2013 I experienced a very strong sense that if Helmut were still alive I needed to see him again. I remembered that his daughter Sabine had wanted to be a pediatrician. I entered her name and Kinderärztin (pediatrician) in an online search, and her name came up with no email address but with the address of her medical practice. I mailed a letter to her. Sabine remembered me and wrote back catching me up on her parents’ situation. Her father had been unable to write for several years.

My wife Nadia and I visited Helmut and Christiane in their home in Dessau in the summer of 2014. Parkinsons had taken quite a toll on him physically but he was still very sharp mentally. We were all grateful to be together once again. Helmut gave me a copy of *Unsere 70 Jahre* (*Our Seventy Years*, the original title of his memoir).

With my limited ability in German it took me many months to read it. It was clear to me that it should be available to a wider audience. I wrote to Sabine that I would like to see if I could find a way to get it published. At the end of November 2015, Helmut signed a hand-written note granting me permission to pursue publication in the USA. He died February 20, 2016.

Helmut wrote the memoir for his children and grandchildren. He had no need to include things they all knew very well. A question some readers might wonder about is how he and Christiane met. In 1958 Helmut’s sister married Christiane’s brother, with Helmut’s father presiding as pastor. Helmut and Christiane met at that wedding. Just a year later Helmut’s father presided at their wedding.

Some may also be puzzled to read in the chapter “1945 Liberation” that the American occupying force left the area where the Hartmanns lived and were replaced by the Soviet army. This came about because the victorious Western powers, France, Great Britain, and the United States, decided that Berlin should not be occupied only by the Soviets. In exchange for having a share in the occupation of Berlin, which had been liberated by the Soviets, the three Western powers turned over to the USSR part of the territory they had liberated.

Helmut Hartmann’s memoir is not only a personal, family story. Rather, Helmut consistently comments on the contexts, events, and personalities

FOREWORD

that impacted his life. The memoir is, therefore, a persistent engagement of Helmut's personal story with the historical events in the context in which he lived. That context was one of the most dramatic and challenging periods in German history and particularly in the history of individual Christians and of the Christian church in Germany. It was the time of the Nazi regime and of the German Democratic Republic. During both of those periods, all residents in the German territories and surely all Christians had to make crucial decisions about their identity, their values, and their way of life. Helmut Hartmann's memoir is the story of one man's quest to be faithful to his faith convictions and his sense of humanity when those convictions and that sense were challenged in radical ways.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Hendel for taking on the task of translation and for adding the many explanatory footnotes. Reading the memoir in English I realize what a big task it was and how much I missed when I read the original.

DAVID ANSLEY MOTE

Acknowledgments

I WISH TO EXPRESS my appreciation and thanks to Pastor Helmut Hartmann for his willingness to share his memoir with a wider public and to his family who have supported that willingness; to Pastor David Mote, who was in possession of a copy of the memoir and invited me to evaluate its potential for publication; to Wipf and Stock Publishers for their interest in the memoir, particularly to Matthew Wimer, Assistant Managing Editor, Daniel Lanning, Editorial Administrative Assistant, and George Callihan, typesetter, for their gracious assistance during the production of the translation; and to Ms. Nadia Ilyin for her expert copy editing.

KURT K. HENDEL

1932

A Man with a Sign

A MAN IS STANDING on the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin on a cold February day in the year 1932 with a sign on his belly: “I am looking for any kind of work.” He has pulled his hat deeply down on his face, as if he were ashamed. The newspaper sellers around him shout, “The six-million mark has been passed in Germany for the first time. 6,127,000 people are unemployed!” Advertisements on pillars call attention to Gerhard Hauptmann’s¹ drama, *Before Sunset*. The premiere is to occur at the German Theater on the occasion of Hauptmann’s seventieth birthday. Bertolt Brecht’s² *The Mother*, a dramatization of the novel by Maxim Gorky,³ is being presented at the Berlin Comedy House. Hans Fallada’s⁴ novel, *Little Man—What Now?* is being promoted in bookstores.

1. Gerhard Hauptmann (1862–1946) was a German writer who produced both dramas and comedies. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1912 and was considered one of Germany’s most important writers, also by the international community.

2. Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht (1898–1956), who used the name Bertolt Brecht professionally, was one of the most important and influential German playwrights and poets of the twentieth century. His literary works opposed fascism and promoted socialism.

3. Alexei Marimovich Peshkov (1868–1936), known primarily as Maxim Gorky, was a Russian writer and political activist. His writings were significantly impacted by his extensive travels throughout Russia and inspired five nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature. As a Bolshevik Marxist, he opposed the czar, but he then also criticized the political ambitions of Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924). As a result, he was exiled from Russia but returned in 1932 at the invitation of Joseph Stalin (1878–1953).

4. Rudolf Wilhelm Friedrich Dietzen (1893–1947) published his literary works under

THE QUEST FOR FAITHFULNESS

A little girl named Christiane is born in a hospital in Berlin-Karlshorst on this cold February 7. Her parents, Alfred and Elisabeth Kühn, order the names of their children according to the “golden alphabet.”⁵ Father Alfred is the first (A), then the firstborn Berthold (B); then follow Christiane (C) and Dankwart (D); and after mother Elisabeth (E) follow Friederike (F) and Gebhard (G).

When Christiane is born, her father, a secondary school teacher, is writing his book, *Matter in Atoms and Stars*.⁶ In amazement he speaks of the “smallest and greatest objects in which matter occurs . . .” and admires the mental labor of researchers before our time. “The pleasure that fills a lover of the arts when he listens to a symphony by Beethoven or views a master portrait of Rembrandt can also fill the person who considers the work of scientists.”

Twenty-four hours earlier, a son has been born to Wilhelm and Ruth Hartmann in the parsonage in Burgörner, in the territory of Mansfeld. He is their second child. Like his siblings, he receives a Germanic name, Helmut. His sisters are named Gudrun and Irmgard and his younger brother Günter. Their father considers himself to be a “religious socialist” with regard to the political and social challenges in his industrial-class congregation, in which he experiences the devastating consequences of extensive unemployment in near proximity. A few days after the birth of his son Helmut, he writes in the foreword of his book about *Heinrich Zschokke’s Hours of Devotion*:⁷ “The nations experience distress and perplexity once again. Human beings are anxious for comfort and help. The holy God, who speaks a powerful word in the midst of the shocking realities of the present world, rules over them!”

Who hears God speaking in shocking social and political realities? An election campaign for the new president of the German Reich rages on.

the pseudonym Hans Fallada. He struggled with the effects of a severe accident and serious illness and became addicted to medications. In spite of these challenges, Fallada was able to work as a journalist and become a productive writer, especially after 1928 when his drug addiction was controlled. He also married, and the marriage brought greater stability into his life. *Little Man—What Now?* was a literary success and was made into a movie in the United States.

5. The original reads “Güldne ABC.” Martin Luther called Psalm 119 “das güldene ABC” because the sections of the psalm are labeled according to the Hebrew alphabet. The “golden alphabet” thus means “in alphabetical order.”

6. Kühn, *Die Materie*.

7. Hartmann, *Zschokkes Stunden der Andacht*.

Hindenburg,⁸ Hitler,⁹ Duesterberg,¹⁰ and Thälmann¹¹ are considered to be the leading candidates. The aged Hindenburg prevails one more time. But for how long? What can he still achieve at age eighty-five? Hitler's followers are on standby.¹² Will 1932 be the last year of the Weimar Republic? How prepared are Christians, Idealists, Socialists, Democrats, Communists, art lovers, academics, and teachers for the threatening upheavals of their society?

The man with the sign "I am looking for any kind of work" pulls his hat down on his face, as if he were ashamed.

8. Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934) commanded the German armies during part of World War I and served as president of the Weimar Republic.

9. Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was the leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party, generally referred to as the Nazi Party, and was chancellor of Germany from 1933 until 1945.

10. Theodor Duesterberg (1875–1950) was an officer in the German army during World War I and subsequently became a leader of the Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten, a political party composed primarily of former soldiers. Because of its nationalistic and monarchical perspectives, the party opposed the Weimar Republic. Duesterberg was ardently anti-Semitic and persisted in his anti-Semitism even after he learned of his Jewish ancestry. He ran as a candidate for the presidency of Germany in the 1932 elections. The news of his ancestry resulted in little support, and he withdrew from the subsequent runoff election. Hartmann mistakenly refers to Duesterberg as Duisenberg.

11. Ernst Thälmann (1886–1944) was the leader of the Communist Party in Germany during the Weimar Republic. He was arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed by the Nazis.

12. Hartmann uses the phrase "Gewehr bei Fuss."

1933

The Parsonage in Burgörner

SINCE 1905 THE EVANGELICAL¹ parsonage has been situated where the water mill of the manor of Burgörner operated for many decades. An old wall made of large, black cinder blocks, which marked the border of our garden on the east, was for us children a mysterious witness from the past. The stories of Karoline von Dacherröden,² which our mother told us, occurred in the adjacent castle park. Karoline had become engaged to Wilhelm von Humboldt in this park. We children still saw the remains of

1. The German word Evangelisch is consistently translated as “Evangelical” throughout the text. The term is not intended to denote contemporary Evangelicalism, which is an important expression of Christianity, particularly in the Americas. Evangelisch or “Evangelical,” as it is used in this volume, refers to the Lutheran, Reformed, or Union Churches in Germany that consider themselves to be heirs of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The Union Churches resulted from a joining of Lutheran and Reformed communities in the so-called Prussian Union of 1817. The Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) is a federation of twenty German territorial churches representing these traditions. Theologians, programs, and organizations related to these churches are also referred to as Evangelisch.

2. Karoline von Dacherröden (1766–1829) was a member of an old Thuringian noble family who married Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). The couple had eight children, although they lived apart periodically. She traveled throughout Europe, was an ardent patron of the arts, and carried on a lively correspondence with contemporary politicians, scholars, and writers. As Hartmann notes, she lived in Burgörner for a time during her youth.

the “love nest.” Goethe,³ Schiller,⁴ Körner,⁵ the world traveler Alexander von Humboldt,⁶ and many other famous people strolled in this park. We grew up in such a distinguished neighborhood.

Our parents were shocked by Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 and from the very beginning recognized the tragic consequences for church and society. Nevertheless, they strove to create a pleasant, safe home in the house and garden for us four children, who were born in the parsonage between 1930 and 1935. However, they did not want to isolate us. We played with children from the neighborhood, whose fathers worked in industry or on the manor. There were no social class distinctions among us. We welcomed the son of a horse-stable worker in the same manner as the children of a director of a foundry, of the lord of the manor, or of a factory worker.

As we grew older, our sphere of activity expanded. We romped through the large castle park, built huts behind thick bushes or on trees, slowly conquered the lower village and later the upper village. However, the parsonage and its garden remained our home. Our mother spent much time with us, played and sang with us, made things with us, painted with us, and took walks with us. She also prayed with us at bedtime in the evening. When doing so, she did not hide needs and danger from us children. We learned from the evening prayers that there was civil war in Spain and many people died daily. We learned that our grandfather in Kahla suffered from a terrible form of diabetes and died from it. I could not comprehend why such a terrible illness was called diabetes.⁷ After all, sugar is something beautiful

3. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) was one of Germany’s most influential writers and poets. He also published scientific works and produced a large number of drawings. In addition to his literary work, he served as a civil servant and as managing director of the theater in Weimar.

4. Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) was a German dramatist, poet, playwright, philosopher, and historian who, together with Goethe, made Weimar the intellectual center of Germany and fostered what is generally referred to as Weimar Classicism.

5. Carl Theodor Körner (1791–1813) was born in Dresden but lived in Vienna for a time where he met Alexander von Humboldt, Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), and other literary figures. He became a writer himself and wrote dramas, operas, and poetry. He also served as a soldier in the Napoleonic Wars during which he lost his life.

6. Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) was a gifted intellectual and explorer who traveled extensively, particularly in the Americas. He was especially interested in studying the natural environment and noted the reality of climate change induced by human activity. His contributions to the scientific world were diverse and highly influential.

7. Zuckerkrankheit literally means “sugar illness.”