

Chapter 20: Who Are Evangelical Christians?

“Then they said to him, ‘We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.’”¹

By the grace of God, dear readers, this is the final chapter of this book. After briefly assessing all that has been written earlier, this chapter will examine the historical development of evangelical Christianity, the true Church of Christ, from the earliest times to the present day.

Unlike the religious institutions adhering to beliefs, organizations, and rites analyzed in this book – with the ultimate conclusion that they have no right to call themselves the “holy and apostolic Church” – the Church of Christ founded in the first century has operated in unbroken continuity and continues to do so to this day. The Lord Jesus Christ declared that the Church He established would endure to the end of time and prevail even over the most severe of trials. Of course, as noted earlier in the book, the concept of the Church of Christ as described in the Bible is vastly different from later manifestations claiming to be this.

It is well known that Ecumenical Orthodoxy, along with Roman Catholicism, preaches the inclusion within the Church of all people who have received the “holy sacrament of baptism”, even if most such people spend their lives with utter apathy toward God and the Bible. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Christ’s Church will consist of a relatively small minority of the human population² - those who are given spiritual rebirth by the Holy Spirit of God and strive to live their lives in every way to the glory of God the Father.³

One significant aspect of the Church of Christ is the persecution and hatred on the part of the world ruled by Satan towards the Church, following in the footsteps of its Savior. A profound mystery also explored earlier in this book is the utter blindness exhibited amongst the members of traditional Christian churches. They view themselves as pleasing to God (in spite of adhering to a large number of antibiblical teachings) and consider evangelical fellowships of believers to be apostates.

The beginning of this chapter quotes from the Acts of the Apostles. It reveals that the sect of Jesus Nazareth is “*spoken against everywhere*”. Such words are spoken even today as well as during the time of the Apostles.

Yet, the truth is the same now as it was back then. Any institution that preaches salvation through religious rites (salvation through works), proclaims numerous religious innovations after the time of the apostles to be original Christianity, crowns Jesus’s mother Mary in the place of the former goddess Ishtar, and considers her to be the queen of Heaven (all based on the apocryphal gospels and the foolish saints) has no right to call itself Christ’s Church.

¹ Acts 28:21-2.

² See Matthew 7:13-4.

³ See Matthew 7:21.

The truth revealed in this book will surprise many readers. Traditional Christianity in the East and West – the religious institutions of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism – never has nor ever will have anything in common with the Church of God established in the first century by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The only point of contact between traditional so-called “Christianity” with the true Church of Christ occurred during times of persecution. Traditional “Christianity” played the role of the persecutor. The true Church of Christ was persecuted, having been hunted down and suppressed under the most brutal methods.

A previous chapter titled “The Church that Persecutes” examined the topic of actions and threats against evangelical Christians (in Serbia). This chapter will analyze the development of major New Testament churches in other geographies. The purpose is to form a perspective on the progression of New Testament history. Such a review of historical events must depend on vague and even suppressed sources of written history of the Christian Church – movements which were persecuted and anathematized by the institutional church that falsely presented itself as the heirs of the authority of the Lord’s apostles.

Small and large groups of Christians suffered tribulations and persecutions. They confessed the faith believed in the apostolic Church of the first century. They believed that salvation was through grace through faith in the Savior and spiritual rebirth imputed by God through the Holy Spirit. They relied on one mediator between God and people – the Lord Jesus Christ.

They also rejected religious novelties and innovations, including the mediation of Mary and saints, holy sacraments, special priesthoods in the churches, and the use of incense and candles.

Let us start with the beginning of the Christian era, in the second half of the second century, when the effects of the gradual departure from the faith of Christ’s apostles and their direct successors began to occur.

History of the Legitimate Christian Church (Until the 16th Century)

Evangelical Christians, who are mainly considered to be Protestants,⁴ assert their beliefs and church traditions to derive from the times of the apostles. Orthodox theologians mock their assertion. Naturally, the Orthodox consider their church to be the direct successor of apostolic Christianity and very easily point to their connection to the church of the fourth century during the time of the Emperor Constantine. Naturally, the Orthodox argue that their tradition came earlier directly from apostolic ordination.

However, as we demonstrated in the chapter on sacred sacraments (particularly the sacred sacrament of the priesthood), apostolic ordination (succession) even in apostolic times was no guarantee for the infallible transmission of sound biblical doctrine to future generations. A large gap exists between the apostolic teachings of the New Testament Church and the doctrines of the

⁴ We have intentionally used the term “evangelical Christian” for the reason that “Protestant” is imprecise – indeed, many evangelical Christians outside of the traditional churches of East and West existed well before the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century.

official church in the fourth century and beyond. Even the Orthodox admit to this claim by evangelical Christians of the utter insignificance of “apostolic succession”. The Orthodox monks of Mount Athos, who condemn other Orthodox churches for ecumenism with non-Orthodox “heretics”, support this claim. Let them remind us about the details of Canon I cited from St. Basil the Great:

“When we discuss apostolic succession, it does not suffice merely to prove the unbroken chain of ordination extending all the way back to the apostles. The Church of Christ does not depend on the letter of the law nor the mechanical act of ordination. If clergymen who are ordained lack any true faith, then their ordination was invalid and do not have the right to be called priests nor lay claim to apostolic succession. Ordination on a person to become a priest by means of a proper bishop conveys on him the grace of the Holy Spirit. Can the Holy Spirit dwell where there is a lie? Where is the heresy?... What danger does the ritual itself of Apostolic Succession is conveyed by those from whom the Holy Spirit has departed?... For those who first fell away had received consecration from the fathers, and through the laying-on of their hands had the spiritual gift. But when they fell away, thereby becoming laymen, they had power neither to baptize, nor to lay-on-hands, and could not confer on others the grace of the Holy Spirit, from which they themselves had fallen away.”⁵

On the other hand, just as there exists an obvious historical connection between modern Orthodox Church with that of the fourth century AD, so there exists credible evidence to link modern evangelical Christianity with the faith of the era before Constantine, both in terms of organizational structure and agreement in doctrine.

Orthodox theologians manifest an attitude of arrogance toward Protestants. Generally, Orthodox theologians neither know nor care to know the facts surrounding the historical existence of Christ’s true church in all centuries following the New Testament period. Orthodox theologians out of their ignorance and resistance to examining church history outside of Rome based on their view that only they possess direct succession from the Apostles. Here is a typical example of objections offered by such Orthodox theologians:

“The common Protestant conception of Church history, that the Church fell into apostasy from the time of Constantine until the Reformation ... As to those who would posit that there was some group of true-believing Protestants living in caves somewhere for a thousand years, where is the evidence? The Waldensians that are claimed as forebearers by every sect from the Pentecostals to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, did not exist prior to the 12th Century. It is, to say the least, a bit of a stretch to believe that these true-believers suffered courageously under the fierce persecutions of the Romans, and yet would have headed for the hills as soon as Christianity became a legal religion. And yet even this seems possible when compared with the notion that such a group could have survived for

⁵ *The Kiss of Judas*, 276-7. Author’s emphasis. [Translator’s note: See also the First Canonical Rule of Basil the Great quoted by Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitski, “The Basis on which Economy May Be Used in the Reception of Converts” (1936) on <http://mission-center.com/ru/trudi/5427-the-basis-on-which-economy-may-be-used-in-the-reception-of-converts> .]

a thousand years without leaving a trace of historical evidence to substantiate that it had ever existed.”⁶

Being Orthodox, theologians such as Whiteford ignore the history of the true Church of Christ and its existence over the centuries as a marginalized and persecuted minority (just as Christ had prophesied). This chapter will elaborate on the successors of the Church of the Apostles and how their sufferings and fate resembled those of Christ.

Speaking about modern Baptists as evangelical Christians, believers who belong to the Body of Christ, Dr. Edward Watke Jr. presented the following conclusions in his article “Why Baptists Are Not Protestants?”

“Ordinarily, people were put into one of three religious groups. If you were not a Jew or a Roman Catholic, then automatically people think of you as a Protestant. Thus, Baptists are usually called ‘*Protestants*.’

The term ‘Protestant’ came into use as a result of the protest and appeal made by certain Lutherans and reformed church leaders before the Second Diet of Speieer, in 1529. The purpose of this Roman Catholic Council was to devise a means of checking the progress of Lutherans and others who were not cooperating with the Pope. The protest of these church leaders before this Council was a defensive measure designed to protect them from the decisions of this Council. The noted church historian, Philip Schaaf, makes the following statement: “*From this protest, and appeal, the Lutherans were called Protestants.*” (History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII, p. 692. The same fact is stated in the Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XII, p. 495.)

These Lutheran leaders who appeared before this Council were speaking for themselves and not for Baptists. **They hated and persecuted the Baptists as much as did the Catholics.** Of Baptists they wrote, “*All Anabaptists (Baptists) and rebaptized persons, male or female, of mature age, shall be judged and brought from natural life to death, by fire, or sword, or otherwise, as may befit the persons, without preceding trial or spiritual judges.*” Since the Baptists did not share in this protest, they cannot be properly called, “Protestants.”

Historically, Baptists are not Protestants. Protestants date from the sixteenth century. They are the Lutherans, the Reformed, and others who were once Roman Catholics and left the Roman Church as did Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. Many other groups have branched off of these over the years so there are many different Protestant churches today. **Baptists never were in the Roman Church. They did not begin their existence at the time of the Reformation, but hundreds of years prior to it.**

It has been claimed that there was only one religious group, the Roman Catholic Church, until the time of Martin Luther. History refutes this view. **In every age of Church history, there have been groups that have held to the same doctrines that**

⁶ John Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura in the Vanity of their Minds: an Orthodox Examination of the Protestant Teaching* retrieved from http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/sola_scriptura_john_whiteford.htm

Baptists hold today. There were the Montanists (150 A. D.) the Novations (240 A. D.) the Donatists (350 A. D.) the Paulicians (650 A. D.) the Albigenses (1,022 A. D.) and the Waldensians (1,170 A. D.).

This coincides with the testimony of Cardinal Hosius, a Roman Catholic prelate who was commissioned by Pope Paul IV to work for the suppression of non-Catholic groups. He said, “*Were it not that the Baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past 1,200 years, they would have swarmed in greater numbers than all the reformers.*” (Letters Apud Opera. pp. 112, 113). **Note that this Catholic scholar has spoken of the vicious persecution Baptists have endured, that he clearly distinguishes them from the Reformers, and that he dates them 1,200 years before the Protestant Reformation.** It is also evident that Baptists are not Protestants because they were fiercely persecuted by the Protestant Reformers and their followers. These things can easily be proven by historical records of many sorts.”⁷

In the following sections, we will briefly examine the characteristics of each movement mentioned “on the fringe of the ancient Church”. The clear similarities between these movements and today’s evangelical Christianity will be clear. Some of the most salient qualities include their austere and profound Christian morality, the belief in the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of His millennial rule, and the emphasis of teaching on the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals and the church as a whole.

Montanists

The Montanist movement arose in the middle of the second century AD (only 50 years after the death of the last apostle of Christ) in reaction to the beginnings of the Church’s apostate teachings and liturgical practices predicted by Christ or His apostles. Noted historian E.H. Broadbent describes the circumstances surrounding this movement:

“In view of the increasing worldliness in the Church, and the way in which among the leaders learning was taking the place of spiritual power, many believers were deeply impressed with the desire for a fuller experience of the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit, and were looking for spiritual revival and return to apostolic teaching and practice. In Phrygia, Montanus began to teach (156), he and those with him protesting against the prevailing laxity in the relations of the Church to the world... The Montanists hoped to raise up congregations that should return to primitive piety, live as those waiting for the Lord's return and, especially, give to the Holy Spirit His rightful place in the Church.”⁸

⁷ Dr. Edward Watke, *Biblical Truths for our Faith! Studies about Biblical, Baptist Distinctives*, (Revival in the Home Ministries: Augusta, GA, 1988) 3-4 retrieved from <http://www.watke.org/resources/Bible%20Distinctives%20of%20Our%20Faith.pdf> Author’s emphasis.

⁸ E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, (A Project Gutenberg Australia eBook Produced by Rose Mawhorter, July 2010) 12, retrieved from http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks10/1000351h.html#page_1.

“These differences soon led to the formation of separate churches in the East, but in the West the Montanists long remained as societies within the Catholic churches, and it was only after many years that they were excluded from, or left, them.”⁹

Their faith was consistent with that of other Christians – which means that the Montanists were not some heretical cult. However, the Montanists differed from other believers in the degree of belief and practice of their faith. Many believers realized that the faith of the majority was weak and brought about little fruit:

“Dissensions amongst Christians are always sad, and in a sense the discord between the Church and the Montanists was particularly sad. The Montanists in certain areas were no different than other Christians, but Montanists who died in the persecutions were among the most famous martyrs.¹⁰ Montanists behaved like other Christians. They lived by Christian standards with uncommon rigor regarding the keeping of fasts, giving charity to the community, and living without any compromise with the pagan world nor escaping persecution.”¹¹

“One man who moved from paganism to Christianity was Montanus from the town of Pepuze. Before he had been a pagan priest, **but later he became a strict Christian**. As a Gentile convert, he generally tended toward conservative views. He viewed the **discipline of the church as very liberal and lukewarm**. He pondered: the reason Christ had not required stricter discipline was because the church at that time was still young; however, now that the church is in its adulthood, and the Parousia (Second Coming) of Christ with the millennial reign would soon occur, the church needed to be **more serious and live in strict discipline**.”¹²

Such high spiritual quality and commitment to restore the high moral standards of first century Christianity by the Montanist movement attracted the famous presbyter of Carthage and teacher of the early Church, Tertullian. He became a member and ardent backer of the Montanists:

“The high moral standards and, above all, the rejection of compromise of the Montanists persuaded Tertullian in 207 to assume leadership of the sect in northern Africa, where they were often called not Montanists, but Tertullianists.”¹³

According to Eusebius Popovic, the Montanist movement lasted until the sixth century and possessed its own unique leadership independent of the official “Church”. Popovic alleges that the Montanists were the first to use the title “patriarch” as the supreme overseer of other bishops.¹⁴

⁹ Broadbent, 13.

¹⁰ In Carthage, Perpetua and Felicitas, the touching record of whose martyrdom has preserved their memory, were still, though Montanists, members of the Catholic church at the time of their martyrdom (207).” Broadbent, 13.

¹¹ John Foster, *Church History: the First Advance, Vol. 1: AD 29-500*, 60.

¹² Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol.1, 356-7. Author’s emphasis.

¹³ Foster, 60.

¹⁴ See Popovic, vol. 1, 358.

Novatians

Roughly a century after the founding of the Montanists (in the East), certain groups of believers in the West also noted the decline in the system of spiritual values taken for granted at the start of the Christian era.

“Departure from the original pattern given in the New Testament for the churches met very early with strenuous resistance, leading in some cases to the formation within the decadent churches of circles which kept themselves free from the evil and hoped to be a means of restoration to the whole. Some of them were cast out and met as separate congregations. Some, finding conformity to the prevailing conditions impossible, left and formed fresh companies. These would often reinforce those others which, from the beginning, had maintained primitive practice. There is frequent reference in later centuries to those churches that had adhered to Apostolic doctrine, and which claimed unbroken succession of testimony from the time of the Apostles.”¹⁵

These groups of believers were later called Novatians, although it is uncertain that they called themselves by that name. After the martyrdom of the Roman bishop Fabian in 250, the presbyter Cornelius took his place. However, the strictness of the Christians in Rome did not mesh with Cornelius’s temerity and toleration of unspiritual people in the church. He faced the opposition of other church leaders. Novatian became the leader of the opposing Christian group and assumed the role of “supreme bishop” of Rome based on the laying on of hands by some other Italian bishops.¹⁶

Novatian and his followers were excommunicated at the Council of Rome in 251. Yet the number of advocates for strict Christian morals further grew in number and fervor. Novatian later perished as a martyr for Christ. His movement lasted several centuries after his death:

“The Novatians had followers not only in Italy, but also outside of Italy, even in the East. The movement was quite powerful **and respected as a moral sect**. But the stubbornness and the fanaticism of the Novatians precluded all efforts of reconciliation with the Catholic Church. Even up to the sixth century, Novatians still existed, but they were extinct by the seventh century.”¹⁷

Donatists

The next group of Christians typified by their lack of compromise in matters of faith and morals and in opposition to the attitudes of the majority of the church that tolerated various forms of immorality among Christian leaders was the Donatists. This large group of Christian believers dwelled in North Africa. They were led by Donatus, chief bishop of Carthage. He protested the irregular and unspiritual ways for the appointment of the bishop Caecilianus, who replaced the deceased Menzurius. Namely, the Donatists protested that Caecilianus would be consecrated by

¹⁵ Broadbent, 16. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶ See Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 360-1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Author’s emphasis.

Felix, Bishop of Aptunga, whom some sources claimed had turned over Christian books to be burned by the Roman authorities during the persecution of the Roman emperor Diocletian.

For this reason, the Donatists first sent appeals to all the churches and then to the emperor Constantine to revoke the ordination of Caecilianus. However, the opposition also acted at the same time. Consequently, other churches supported Caecilianus at church councils in Rome in 313, Arelatus (Gaul) in 314, and Milan in 316. After rejecting the appeal of the Donatists that Christian bishops ought to be people of high morals and showing no compromise in their faith, the Donatists separated from the official church system and continued to carefully follow the teachings of Scripture and the Christian faith.¹⁸

After decades of no reconciliation, a great council in Carthage was convened in the fifth century. Over 560 bishops from the Donatists and the “official church” attended. The official church attempted to persuade the Donatists that the performance of sacred rites and acts did not depend on the moral character and integrity of the minister. All sacred acts emanate divine blessing. The main proponent of this theory was the famous Bishop Augustine of Hippo. To this day, this theory remains popular in Orthodox and other traditional churches:

“This fight lasted with unrelenting ferocity until the year 411. At the command of the Emperor Honorius and many pleas of the African synod and bishops, a great Council was convened in Carthage. 279 bishops from the Donatists and 286 Orthodox bishops attended. The Orthodox disputation was led by the famous Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (died 430), who attempted to convince the Donatists. Thus he believed that cruel and violent measures are not unfair to convince them of their stubbornness and pointed to the command in the Gospel (Luke 14:23): ‘Coe intrare’ (*‘Compel them to enter’*). He argued **that the importance of holy rites does not depend on the moral integrity of the agency of the presbyter or bishop, but rather on the blessing of God. The Church does not cease to be sacred even if its core is unclean**, for there is only one church, and the true saints will be in Heaven. Christ compared the church on earth to the net, which has both clean and unclean fish, and the field, where both wheat and tares grow.”¹⁹

This teaching of Augustine stood in direct opposition to the apostolic teachings in the New Testament. Of course, it is clear that Augustine misunderstood the otherwise clear meaning of the gospel narratives in which Christ points to the Church as a collection of individuals “*both clean and unclean.*”²⁰ It is true that the Lord taught that among some of the “ordinary” baptisms would be included people who were truly never born again. (Examples in the early Church included Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8), Hymaneus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20), Philetus (2 Timothy 2:16-8), and Diotrefes (3 John 9-10). Such situations on earth are unavoidable. However, concerning the bishops (presbyters) and deacons, the Apostles taught that such leaders need to be proven as faithful people, sound in faith, having a pure live, lacking even the trace of evil.²¹

¹⁸ See Popovic, vol. 1, 534.

¹⁹ Popovic, 534-5. Author’s emphasis.

²⁰ Augustine had in mind Matthew 13:24-30 and 13:47-50.

²¹ See 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-22; and Titus 1:5-9.

In spite of the defects in Augustine's arguments, one group of Donatists accepted his reasoning and returned to the fold of the official church. However, another group remained steadfast and united in their views of adhering to the apostolic teaching in this matter.

The Donatists as a religious movement endured in Egypt until the end of the seventh century, that is, until the arrival of the Muslims, whose influence contributed to its gradual extinction.

Paulicians

The next significant group of true followers of Christ is the Paulicians. Just as with the other groups mentioned so far in this chapter, we do not have much historical data about them, primarily due to the systematic obliteration of their records by both the official Roman and Byzantine Churches. Similar to Christians of the first centuries, Satan (using the instrument of the secular and pagan religious "Christian" powers) disseminated all sorts of lies about the true followers of Christ by declaring their teachings to be heretical and accusing their conduct as full of immorality. Such is the case with the official version of the historical beliefs and practices of the Paulicians. We see this from the pens of their main opponents, in this case Orthodox rulers and their religious scholars. Historian Eusebius Popovic records the writings of earlier Orthodox writers²² on the Paulicians:

"Just at the time when monothelism flourished in the Byzantine Empire, namely around 657 during the reign of Constantia II (641-688), there appeared on the eastern border of Asia Minor with Syria a new heresy: paulicianism, a new form of Gnosticism and Manicheanism, which is why writers of the ninth century named it 'the new Manicheanism'." ²³

From a different perspective, the historian Broadbent, relying heavily on his thorough historical research of the beliefs of this movement drawn from the few remaining authentic sources and documents preserved from destruction by the official church, reveals these facts:

"This Emperor [Constantine Pogonatus] issued a decree (684) against the congregations of believers and against Constantine in particular, sending one of his officers, named Simeon, to put it into effect. In order to give special significance to the execution of Constantine, Simeon supplied a number of his personal friends with stones and ordered them to stone the teacher whom they had so long revered and loved. Risking their own lives by their refusal, they dropped the stones, but there was a young man present named Justus, who had been brought up by Constantine as his adopted son and treated with especial kindness; he flung a stone at his benefactor and killed him, thus earning high praise and reward from the authorities, who compared him to David slaying Goliath. **Simeon was profoundly moved by all that he saw and heard at Kibossa, and, conversing with the Christians there, was convinced of the truth of their doctrines and the rightness of their practice.** Returning to Constantinople, he could find no peace of soul at the court, and after three years of inward conflict, abandoned everything,

²² These writers actually worked on behalf of the Byzantine empress Theodora, who at the time persecuted the Paulicians. This fact in and of itself demonstrates their lack of objectivity.

²³ Popovic, Vol. 1, 760-1.

escaped to Kibossa, and there, adopting the name of Titus, took up and continued the work of the man whom he had caused to be put to death. **It was not long before he, too, joined the great company of martyrs**, for, two years later, Justus, making use of his knowledge of the ways of the brethren, gave to the bishop—and he to the Emperor Justinian II—information which led to the capture of a large number of them. Expecting to terrorise the rest of the "heretics" into submission, the Emperor had these, including Simeon, all burnt together at one time. The fortitude of the sufferers, however, defeated his plan, fanning the faith and courage of many into a flame of devotion and testimony, so that more preachers and teachers were raised up and the congregations increased.”²⁴

“Constantine or Silvanus was the first sacrifice in the time of persecution under the Emperor Constantine Pogonatus in 685; he was burned by order of the Emperor. However, this made no difference. The imperial officer Simeon who led the execution became a Paulician himself and assumed the name Titus. He was executed in 690 during the reign of Justinian II Rinotmita.”²⁵

The great persecution of the Paulicians, who in reality enjoyed only short respites from the Byzantine rulers, occurred during the reign of Empress Theodora in the ninth century. Theodora ushered in the “freedom” of icon veneration in the Eastern Church. Consequently, she exerted strong effort to combat all “heretical” movements that denied the biblical foundation of this practice. Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic with great reluctance and only in mid-sentence admits that “they were treated miserably (by the Orthodox Byzantines)”²⁶. Broadbent has more detail about their martyrdom:

“Systematic slaughter, beheading, burning, drowning, began afresh under the Empress Theodora's orders, and continued for many years; but it failed to shake the steadfastness of the believers. It was claimed that between the years 842 and 867 the zeal of Theodora and her inquisitors resulted in **the massacre of 100,000 persons**. This time is described by Gregory Magistros, who, 200 years later, was in charge of the persecution of similar people in the same district. He writes: ‘Prior to us many generals and magistrates have given them over to the sword and, without pity, have **spared neither old men nor children, and quite rightly**. What is more, our patriarchs have branded their foreheads and burned into them the image of a fox ... **others again have put their eyes out**, saying, 'you are blind to spiritual things therefore you shall not look on sensible things.’”²⁷

Such disasters forced the Byzantine Paulicians to cross over first into Arab territory and then with the help of Emperor John Cimisa (969-976) of Armenia to spread out to Bulgaria and Serbia, as well as other parts of Europe, including Italy and France. In Bulgaria and Serbia, these worshipers in the 10th and 11th centuries became known as Bogomils. In France, they were

²⁴ Broadbent, 46-7. Author’s emphasis.

²⁵ Popovic, vol.1, 762.

²⁶ **“Behaving with the utmost hostility toward the Paulicians was the Empress Theodora** (842-856). She wanted to put a definitive end to opposition to icons, and she wanted to destroy the Paulicians. **According to them, they were abused so badly** that in despair they bore weapons and fled from Byzantium to Arabia.” Popovic, vol.1, 762. Author’s emphasis.

²⁷ Broadbent, 53. Author’s emphasis.

called Patarenes, and in France they were named Cathars. In Armenia, they became known as the Tondraceans (named after the city of Tondrake) in the early eleventh century. One Armenian Metropolitan named Jacob Harkski became one of their leaders and suffered martyrdom on behalf of the Paulicians. According to Eusebius Popovic, the Paulicians and Bogomils lasted in Bulgaria until the 17th century.²⁸

Bogomils

The religious movement of the Bogomils was a direct descendant of the Paulicians over the course of several centuries. In the new areas where they settled, the Bogomils met a similar lack of understanding by the unbelieving world (i.e. “traditional” Christians) as they did in the areas from which they were expelled. The Bogomils were victims of the most vicious types of rumors. Even if they lacked any truth to them, the people around them still wanted to believe the rumors.

An historical document tells about a famous doctor of that time named Basil, who was a Bogomil and lived at the end of the eleventh and start of the twelfth centuries. The document tells about his practice of medicine and virtuous Christian example that attracted many to the Christ whom he believed.

Even the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos invited him to speak, ostensibly because of his own interest to examine the essence of Basil’s faith. Basil spoke with the emperor and sincerely believed that the emperor wanted to hear about his faith in Christ. Basil attempted to persuade him to accept apostolic doctrine and faith in the Gospel. However, Emperor Alexios suddenly unveiled the curtain behind which sat a stenographer who recorded all the details of the conversation.

The emperor’s servants were summoned to chain up the deceived doctor and throw him into prison. He remained there for several years until 1119. He still refused to renounce his faith. Finally, he was publicly burned in the Hippodrome in Constantinople. Alexios threw many Bogomils into prison and had them executed.²⁹

Yet, it was the Bogomils, living meek and godly lives, who were accused of being “wolves in sheep’s clothing”- merely on the pretense that they dragged people off to perdition:

“The opinions expressed by outsiders about these Christian congregations, both in Asia Minor and in Bulgaria, vary greatly, **for while it was usual to speak of them and their doctrine as being indescribably wicked**, there were those who judged differently. The earliest writers appear to have written more as partisans than as historians. They accuse the “heretics” of practising vile and unnatural fleshly sins, repeat from hearsay what was current about them and include much from Mani and from what was written against him. The writer Euthymius (died after 1118), says: ‘They bid those who listen to their doctrines to keep the commandments of the Gospel, and to be meek and merciful and of brotherly love. Thus they entice men on by teaching all good things and useful doctrines, **but they poison by degrees and draw to perdition.**’ Cosmas, a Bulgarian Presbyter,

²⁸ Popovic, vol.2, 111.

²⁹ See Broadbent, 59-60.

writing at the end of the tenth century, describes Bogomils as "**worse and more horrible than demons**", denies their belief in the Old Testament or the Gospels, says they pay no honour to the Mother of God nor to the cross, they revile the ceremonies of the Church and all Church dignitaries, call orthodox priests "blind Pharisees", say that the Lord's Supper is not kept according to God's commandment, and that the bread is not the body of God, but ordinary bread."³⁰

However, a few writers of that time acknowledged that the teachings and behavior of the Bogomils was not corrupt except for their lack of submission to the official church authorities. Some of these writers who were more familiar with the teachings of the Bogomils (Paulicians – Tornaceans) even concluded that they followed the true original apostolic teachings.³¹

The Bogomils arrived in Bosnia from Serbia and Bulgaria. The persecutions of the Bogomils in Serbia under Stefan Nemanja the Great and in Bulgaria during the Emperor Boril were covered in the chapter on "The Church that Persecutes". This section will examine the fate of the Bogomils over several centuries on the territory of Bosnia.

In Bosnia the Bogomils experienced their greatest time of prosperity and growth, in part due to one of their greatest patrons and supporters, the Ban Kulin. When the Serbian Bogomils had fled from persecution in Nemanja's kingdom, in Bosnia there were few Orthodox churches, and the Eastern Orthodox Church in general was weak. Roman Catholicism had a much stronger influence. However, the arrival of the Bogomils pleased the Bosnians because of their religious beliefs, moral ethics, and use of the local dialect. The religious status of Bosnia (along with the sounding areas of Dalmatia and Croatia) had changed.

Roman Catholicism's use of the Latin language looked quite unattractive relative to the Bogomils in addition to their recent persecuted state. The majority of Bosnia accepted a new religion while enjoying God's great blessings and material prosperity.³²

After the defeat of Nemanja's son Vukan at Hum in 1198, the Hungarians planned to attack the country ruled by Ban Kulin. At a meeting held in 1203, the envoys of Pope Innocent III with the armed support of the King of Hungary pressured the Bogomil ruler to renounce heresy and reintroduce the Roman Catholic religious system. However, the promise given to the Pope by Ban Kulin had absolutely no impact on the Bosnian people. The majority continued to serve the Lord and in opposition to the teachings of so-called "traditional Christianity".

So the teaching of the Bogomils expanded even further. As a consequence, Pope Honorius III called upon the western nations to wage a crusade against the Bosnian state. The Westerners did not respond to his call as they doubted an invasion would satisfy their territorial ambitions. The Archbishop of Kalocsa, from Hungary, offered to lead a crusade with the condition that his archbishopric would rule the subjugated Bosnian territory.³³

³⁰ Broadbent, 60. Author's emphasis.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³² Even in modern times, the Serbian people know the folk saying: "From Ban Kulin come good things today."

³³ See Cedomir Marjanovic, *History of the Serbian Church*, 85-7.

After their military victory over the Bosnian leaders, the Roman Catholics conducted an aggressive inquisition against the Bogomil people. In addition to the Franciscan Order in Bosnia, the Dominicans also used the same methods of terror as those employed in Serbia and other Orthodox countries. The Bogomils were burned at the stake, murdered, and their property was expropriated. A period of Roman Catholic government in Bosnia was followed by the rule of King Dragutin (1282-1316) who was Orthodox. Aided by Bishop Basil, he continued the persecution.³⁴ Some time later, Rome sent a letter to the Ban asking him for help in eradicating the Bogomils. This letter reveals the types of accusations leveled at the Bogomil believers by the Roman Catholics, who accused them of being devil worshipers. Here is one example:

“Knowing that thou art a faithful son of the Church, we therefore charge thee to exterminate the heretics in thy dominions, and to render aid and assistance unto Fabian, our Inquisitor, forasmuch as a large multitude of heretics from many and divers parts collected, have flowed together into the Principality of Bosnia, trusting there to sow their obscene errors and to dwell there in safety. **These men, imbued with the cunning of the Old Fiend**, and armed with the venom of their falseness, corrupt the minds of Catholics by outward show of simplicity and lying assumption of the name of Christians; their speech crawleth like a crab, and they creep in with humility, but in secret they kill, and are **wolves in sheep's clothing**, covering their bestial fury as a means whereby they may deceive the simple sheep of Christ.”³⁵

This effort at persecution was undermined in part because of rivalry between the two Roman Catholic monastic orders: the Franciscans and Dominicans over many years (1327-1336). Afterward until the final occupation of Bosnia by the Turks in the fifteenth century, the persecution and suffering of the Bogomils resumed. After the reign of Tvrtko, during which the Bogomils enjoyed some sort of peace, repeated wars led by the Pope with the help of Hungary against Bosnia resumed. In 1408 the Hungarian King Sigismund managed to destroy the Bosnian army, beheaded 126 Bosnian nobles, and threw their bodies into the river Bosna near Doboij.

Finally realizing that they faced a greater enemy in the Roman Catholics, the Bogomil aristocrats concluded an alliance with the Muslim Turkish conquerors who had earlier subdued Serbia after the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. They gave the Turks no resistance to occupying Bosnia. In later centuries, the Bogomils disappeared from Bosnia. Most likely, this occurred through the process of future generations adopting Islam.

However, the many centuries of survival of the Bogomils despite great persecution at the hands of Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers shows the evidence of God's great blessings to those who accepted the original teachings of Christ and the apostles. Contact with other groups of persecuted believers from Europe included cooperation and providing them shelter. Such contact is yet more proof of the fraternal solidarity and Christian charity that has always distinguished Christ's true disciples.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Broadbent, 64. Author's emphasis.

The Bogomils in this part of Europe were a very important link in the chain of continuity of the existence of Christ's church. From the very beginning, the Church of Christ followed in the footsteps of its rejected and persecuted Savior. The historian Broadbent says this:

“These *‘Friends of God’* in Bosnia have left but little literature behind them, so that there remains much to be discovered of their doctrines and practices, which must have varied in different circles and at different periods. But it is evident that they made a vigorous protest against the prevailing evils in Christendom, and **endeavoured with the utmost energy to hold fast to the teachings and example of the primitive churches, as portrayed in the Scriptures.** Their relations with the older churches in Armenia and Asia Minor, with the Albigenses in France, Waldenses and others in Italy, and Hussites in Bohemia, show that there was a common ground of faith and practice which united them all. Their heroic stand for four centuries against overwhelming adversity, though unrecorded, must have yielded examples of faith and courage, of love unto death, second to none in the world's histories. **They formed a link, connecting the Primitive churches in the Taurus Mountains of Asia Minor with similar ones in the Alps of Italy and France.**”³⁶

There still exist a large number of Bogomil monuments dating from the period of their habitation and activity in these areas. Most of these are tombstones with the names of those buried beneath. There are no signs of the cross or other characteristics that would associate them with the traditional churches. It is estimated that there are roughly 150,000 such tombstones in Bosnia, particularly in the area of Sarajevo near the castle on the road to Rogatica.³⁷

Popovic claims that Bogomils were found in Russia, Romania, Italy, France, Germany, and England.³⁸

Albigenses

Parallel to the activity of the remaining Paulician churches in Bulgaria and the Bogomils in Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Russia, and other parts of Eastern Europe, the Church of Christ also worked in Western Europe. Special success in testifying to Christ through an unsurpassed example of righteous living resulted in the appearance of believers in southern France. Most of these believers lived in the area of Alba, hence the name “Albigenses” (from the city of Albi). Of course, the believers did not refer to themselves by this term, which was invented by their opponents. Yet, this term Albigenses is how historians refer to them.

The Albigenses fostered strong ties to other persecuted churches across Europe known under various names (including the Bogomils, then the Valdenses, the Poor Men of Lyons, etc.).

During the time of the Albigenses, southern France enjoyed the highest level of development in the state – just as Bosnia did during the times of the Bogomils under the reign of Kulin Ban.

³⁶ Broadbent, 65. Author's emphasis.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁸ Popovic, Vol. 2, 113.

Regardless, the rising of the evangelical Christian community in this part of Europe did not please the Roman Church. Pope Innocent III called upon Roman Catholic rulers in the region to wage a crusade against the Albigenses. As in the cases of the crusades against the Saracens (Arabs), the Pope guaranteed the forgiveness of sins of the crusaders for any (mis)deed committed in protecting the “orthodoxy” of Roman doctrine. Hundreds of thousands of Roman Catholics responded to his call also out of desire to shed innocent blood and to plunder the wealthy provinces. The historian Broadbent informs us that the most heinous crimes were committed under the auspices of senior officials of the Roman church:

“Under the presidency of high clerical dignitaries and led by Simon de Montfort, a military leader of great ability and a man of boundless ambition and ruthless cruelty, **the most beautiful and cultivated part of Europe at that time was ravaged, became for twenty years the scene of unspeakable wickedness and cruelty** and was reduced to desolation. When the town of Beziers was summoned to surrender, the Catholic inhabitants joined with the Dissenters in refusing, though warned that if the place were taken no soul should be left alive. The town was captured, **and of the tens of thousands who had taken refuge there none were spared**. After the capture of another place, La Minerve, about 140 believers were found, women in one house, men in another, engaged in prayer as they awaited their doom. De Montfort had a great pile of wood prepared, and told them to be converted to the Catholic faith or mount that pile. They answered that they owned no papal or priestly authority, only that of Christ and His Word. The fire was lighted and the confessors, without hesitation, entered the flames.”³⁹

Eusebius Popovic adds some more historical details, including the cruelty of the Dominican inquisitors who began their activity after the war that raged for 20 years:

“...the Pope declared them as heretics worse than the Saracens and summoned Christians to conduct a war of crusade against them. This gave rise to the so-called Albigense Crusade, which lasted from 1209 to 1229. It was a **very bloody war**. Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) found himself ecstatic to finally conclude the war and to implement the extermination of the remaining heretics through the spiritual tribunals and criminal courts under the so-called Inquisition. As stated earlier, these courts were particularly entrusted to the order of the Dominicans, **whose zealous and strict labor led to the eradication of the Albigense heresy.**”⁴⁰

Waldenses and the Poor Men of Lyon

This section mentions two other significant groups of Christian disciples that coexisted with the Albigenses. The first group, the Waldenses, lived for many centuries in the Alpine valleys of the Piedmont. Similar to the Albigenses, the Waldenses did not call themselves that name but rather received the label from their persecutors in the Roman Catholic Church. According to Henri Arnold, one of their leaders from the 17th century, the Waldenses descend from the most ancient of times when Christianity first appeared in Italy. They consist of the descendants and

³⁹ Broadbent, 88-9. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁰ Popovic, 120. Author’s emphasis.

successors of the apostolic teaching and tradition. Arnold mentions that the first Christian believers settled in the Alps in the North of Italy during the time of the first century persecution during and after the ministry of the apostle Paul. The sheltered rugged mountains preserved the New Testament teachings held by the Waldenses over the generations and repelled any trace of teaching from the Roman Catholic Church. No matter, centuries of history prior to the European Reformation easily confirm the existence of these believers in the Alps as attested by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. Indeed, this proves the fact that Christians existed apart from the Roman Catholic system and belonged to Christ's true Church independently.⁴¹

The Roman Catholic inquisitor Reinerius (died 1259) also affirms this truth in deeming them "ancient heretics", which for some reason he named "Leonists".⁴² He explains his rationale:

"Concerning the sects of ancient heretics, observe, that there have been more than seventy: all of which, except the sects of the Manichaeans and the Arians and the Runcarians and the Leonists which have infected Germany, have through the favour of God, been destroyed. Among all these sects, which either still exist or which have formerly existed, **there is not one more pernicious to the Church than that of the Leonists:** and this for three reasons. The first reason is; **because it has been of longer continuance,** for some say that it has lasted from the time of Sylvester, others, from the time of the Apostles. The second reason is: **because it is more general, for there is scarcely any land, in which this sect does not exist.** The third reason is; because, while all other sects, through the enormity of their blasphemies against God, strike horror into the hearers, **this of the Leonists has a great semblance of piety, inasmuch as they live justly before men,** and believe every point well respecting God together with all the articles contained in the creed: only they blaspheme the Roman Church and clergy, to which the multitude of the laity are ready enough to give credence."⁴³

"A Prior of St. Roch at Turin, Marco Aurelio Rorengo, was ordered in 1630 to write an account of the history and opinions of the Waldenses. He wrote that the Waldenses are so ancient as to afford no absolute certainty in regard to the precise time of their origin, but that, at all events, in the ninth and tenth centuries they were even then not a new sect. And he adds that in the ninth century so far from being a new sect, they were rather to be deemed a race of fomenters and encouragers of opinions which had preceded them."⁴⁴

In spite of the evidence, these followers of Jesus of Nazareth were still named after a man named Peter Waldo (died 1217). He was a merchant and banker who lived in Lyon during the 1160's and became interested in Christian doctrine. Sometime later, after reading the Scriptures, he was called by the Lord to preach the Gospel. He left part of his estate to his wife and gave the rest to the poor. So he became a poor man in view of Christ's words in Matthew 10:9-10 and preached

⁴¹ See Broadbent, 92.

⁴² Eusebius Popovic explains the term "Leonists" or "Lyonists" as referring to the movement founded by Peter Waldo of Lyons in the second half of the twelfth century. (Popovic, vol. 2, 118) However, as we will see later, Peter Waldo did not found the "Waldensians" even though their opponents used this name. The so-called "Waldenses" simply called themselves "brothers and sisters" over the centuries. They used no special name for their church fellowships.

⁴³ Broadbent, 91. Author's emphasis.

⁴⁴ Broadbent, 92.

without carrying a wallet nor spare clothes, but entrusted himself to God to take care of his basic needs. So Peter Waldo joined other similar believers who deprived themselves of material benefits and traveled to preach the Gospel. The Roman Church despised these “poor men of Lyons”, excommunicated them, and eventually expelled them from the city in 1184. According to the report of a later Inquisitor (David of Augsburg), sects like the “poor men of Lyons” were particularly dangerous because of their “external appearance of piety”. According to an old record, the disciples of Peter Waldo came from Lyons to Germany and began to preach in Frankfurt and Nuremburg. However, the Nuremburg City Council ordered these preachers to be arrested and burned. The preachers from Lyons fled to the Czech Republic.⁴⁵

Although the believers living in the Alpine valleys had been faithful witnesses of Jesus before their contact with “the poor men of Lyons”, the Waldenses received a special zeal for missions since. The Waldensian church became particularly active in preaching and spreading the gospel in many European countries.

John Wycliffe and the Lollards

The Lord’s perfect planning along with the prayers of God’s people for revival in other lands led to God’s raising an army of preachers of the gospel in England. In this case, the Lord used as His instrument the learned professor of Oxford University John Wycliffe (1324-1384). Wycliffe devoted his career as a resistor to papal supremacy, a distinguished patriot and fighter for the independence of his nation from Roman domination. During the situation when Pope Urban V demanded feudal tribute from King Edward II, Wycliffe opposed it. His brave conduct along with sound political and theological reasoning became noticed by the King, who recognized the value of having such a stalwart ally. From that moment, Wycliffe enjoyed protection by the King’s Court.

This protection was manifested in his hearing before a church tribunal. Specifically, because of Wycliffe’s opposition to the Pope’s demand for a tribute, he was summoned to appear before ecclesiastical dignitaries at St. Paul in London. The church building was full of curious spectators as Wycliffe arrived in the company of the Duke of Lancaster and the chief marshal. The whole process of interrogation failed from the start due to the bickering between the church prosecutor and the king’s emissary. Because of the tremendous verbal and physical ruckus that ensued, Wycliffe did not manage to speak a word. The hearing was postponed. However, that did not silence the university professor. Deeply reflecting on the motives for the desire of the Roman Catholic Church (its senior and junior clergy) to enrich itself, Wycliffe put into doubt the divine mission and authority of the Catholic Church:

“Since the financial ambitions of the Curiate stoked Wycliffe’s critical attitude toward the church, the bold patriot posed the question of why the Church made such a request. He could not find a good answer, but he convinced himself that the Church had already betrayed its original mission. **From the time of Constantine emerged a rapidly secularizing Church**, whose blame belonged to none other than the clergy... **Wycliffe felt compelled to declare war against Satan’s pretensions for power, the insatiable**

⁴⁵ See Broadbent, 91.

appetite for money, and the manifestation of clerical arrogance. That decision, based on radical changes from the medieval conception of the clergy, took him on the path of a church reformer and led him to seek a new church not led by these medieval motives. If he could not find it, Wycliffe would create it, and that was all that mattered.”⁴⁶

Over time, Wycliffe deepened his conviction that many traditions held by the institutional church were not based on Scripture, and that the main reason for deviation from the true faith stemmed from the highly immoral conduct of the official Roman Catholic Church – and above all, the Pope himself. Here is what Wycliffe said about the Roman Church and the Papacy as its crowning institution:

“As one of the first knights storming the bastion of the long-established institution of the Papacy, Wycliffe argued that the Pope and his despotic power in its worst sense fostered heretical Christianity. Wycliffe’s views on the Papacy became increasingly intransigent. From a moderate acknowledgement of papal primacy to an outright effort for total emancipation, he started a decisive battle against the institution. Wycliffe challenged its authority and necessity in offering salvation. **According to Wycliffe, the church could exist without the Pope for Christ was its true head...** The Pope should follow Christ in His moral virtues, but he ought not strive toward the absolute power of the Curia. The papal institution in the strictest sense is blasphemous because of its tendency toward power perverts the humility of Christ. **It was a shocking moment for Wycliffe when he realized the end of papacy was the expression of anti-Christianity...** Wycliffe could not ignore this gruesome discovery, although it contradicted everything he had learned and performed. He was forced to attribute the terrible description of the ‘Man of Sin’ as taught by Paul to the Pope, the very man before whom Christians address as ‘Holy Father’ and kneel in front of him!”⁴⁷

On another front, the lack of availability of the Scriptures in the national (English) language disturbed Wycliffe greatly. The fact that they were only translated into Latin contributed to the ignorance and lack of holiness among religious folk. Increasingly aware that the Catholic Church’s teaching deviated from that of Scripture, Wycliffe rejected all teaching of tradition that contradicted Scripture. Among the most prominent teachings were the doctrine of transubstantiation and the existence of monastic orders, the strongest pillar of the spiritual power of the papacy. Out of the necessity to translate the entire Bible into the national language, Wycliffe hired five associates to rapidly fulfill this God-honoring task.

At the same time, all over England simple people began to preach the Gospel of God and return to high moral standards of the New Testament. They lived in simplicity and modesty unlike the proud Roman clergy. Their opponents derisively called them “Lollards”, which meant “babblers” and considered them as sowers of spiritual tares. However, these people were sent to sow the word of Christ, the gospel of salvation.

Up until 1382, Wycliffe’s opponents could not suppress him because of his strong relationship with influential people at the King’s Court and the University of Oxford. However, in that year,

⁴⁶ Walter Nig, *Book of the Heretic*, (Belgrade 2004) 305. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 306. Author’s emphasis.

the Roman Catholic Church officially denounced his teachings, and some of his friends abandoned him. Wycliffe was fired from the University. He retreated to a small church in the town of Latervort. He died there in peace in 1384.

However, though Wycliffe escaped the vengeance of his enemies, his sympathizers and successors did not. Namely, during the peasants' revolt from 1377 to 1381, the Lollards were falsely accused of fomenting unrest. This unleashed the anger against the Lollards on the part of the nobility who united with the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The English Parliament granted to Henry IV an amended law allowing the ruler to publicly execute Lollards for preaching the gospel. The first to be burned under the new law was William Sawtre, parish priest in Norfolk.⁴⁸ After this execution, many other confessors of Christ's New Testament faith were burned. Men and women of various social strata and educational backgrounds ranging from craftsmen to nobles professed the same faith and provided shelter during the time of persecution. One noble was Sir John Oldcastle, the first man of noble descent to be burned for his faith.

In 1408, the Archbishop of Canterbury denounced the translation of the Bible done by Wycliffe and his associates. He banned further translation without special permission.⁴⁹ The Council of Constance (Switzerland) held from 1414 to 1418 condemned Wycliffe's theses and declared him as an irreconcilable heretic:

“The church circle felt the need to impose the death sentence on Wycliffe that they had not accomplished while he was alive. They ordered his bones to be exhumed and cast away from any church cemetery – it was too late to avenge this man that so complicated their lust for clerical power. They felt they could eradicate his memory. But this presumption was mistaken... Wycliffe's words and actions were so inflammatory that they extended far beyond England even to exert enormous influence on the Continent.”⁵⁰

Jan Hus and the Moravian Brotherhood

Due to the close relations between the University of Oxford and the University of Prague, many Czech students studied in England and then returned to their own country and transferred their knowledge and experience gained overseas. One such alumnus of Oxford who personally attended the lectures of John Wycliffe was Jerome of Prague. Like others, he translated Wycliffe's teachings on Christ's faith to the University of Prague and gained a crowd of followers. One of the most influential followers of Wycliffe ended up to be adjunct professor Jan Hus, rector of the Bethlehem Church in Prague. Hus was an excellent preacher and a very pious and virtuous man. As a Roman Catholic priest, he served as confessor to Queen Sofia, wife of the Czech King Vyachslav.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Broadbent, 123.

⁴⁹ See Foster, vol. 2, 154.

⁵⁰ Nig, 311.

⁵¹ See Popovic, vol. 2, 123.

As a preacher, Jan Hus categorically condemned any kind of immorality and transgression. He most of all condemned the sins based on the observations of the lives of his fellow priests, who were supposed to serve as examples to the uneducated masses. Walter Nig conveys the power of the words of Hus:

“He thundered sharply from the pulpit: ‘Our bishops and priests today, especially the canonical and lazy churchmen who cannot wait to end God’s ministry and exit the church, one to the inn, others here and there, do not speak in the manner worthy of a priest, as if they were just pretending... those men who should have been the first disciples of Christ, they end up being the greatest enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ No one could speak more harshly of the clergy than Hus, who constantly struggled with their power... Hus became very popular. People in large numbers flocked to his sermons because they believed he would tell them the truth and not just pander to the ruling class. The Czech’s enthusiastically called Hus ‘the fifth gospel.’”⁵²

Because of his bold preaching and impeccable life, Hus became popular among the masses but was despised by the clergy in Prague who complained to the bishop that the fiery priest must receive excommunication. Hus paid no attention to their condemnation, but his sermons became even more fiery. Commenting on the condemnation of John Wycliffe and his teachings, Hus preached that “the Pope, the successors of Peter, have become executioners and criminals by calling a true Christian a heretic and burning him.”⁵³

It is noteworthy that Hus’s fierce opposition against indulgences (absolutions for sins) that Pope John 23 offered everyone who had participated in the Crusades predated Martin Luther by one hundred years. His speeches so stirred up the masses that people publicly burned the papal bull and the indulgences of the Roman messengers which they ridiculed.

As a result, the Pope urged King Sigismund to severely punish Hus, who pulled out of public life for a short time and left Prague. Because he wanted to publicly air the true faith and biblical soundness of his teachings, Hus agreed to go before the ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church held in the Swiss city of Constance in 1414. King Sigismund was to have guaranteed Hus’s safety and safe conduct home. However, unfortunately, the church council that lasted for three and a half years violated Sigismund’s promise of safe conduct for his subject.⁵⁴

In spite of Hus’s attempt to settle the problems of the Church, the Council condemned the teachings of both Hus and Wycliffe and called for him to recant and renounce them. Walter Nig describes the antagonism brewing between the cardinals assembled to interrogate the fiery Czech preacher:

⁵² Nig, 313.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁵⁴ “A heavy shadow looms over the church gathering, through which very little presence of the Holy Spirit was seen. The Council was a social event where knight tournaments played **an equally important role as soldiers fraternizing with greedy prostitutes**, which took place during the Council in Constance. **This discouraging immorality** prevailed from the beginning and stifled any effort at serious church reform. The moral swamp choked even the slightest desire for improvement.” Nig, 315. Author’s emphasis.

“The conflict between the Council and Hus was severe. The contrast between the loose living of the members of the Council and the morality of Hus who stood for the truth was too great that disaster could not be avoided at this meeting... **The clash between the Council and Hus produced such terrible clarity, as if the sky darkened and the powers of the underworld came to power in an effort to overcome brutally Christian conscience.** All arguments in favor of Hus were roundly condemned by the Council, **which one cannot overlook that ‘the ruler of this world’ orchestrated in Constance.** His power directed the College of Cardinals to suddenly seize Hus and throw him into the dungeon of the Dominican monastery located next to the sewers. A few months later, they transferred Hus to the prison of the castle Gotliben. During the day, Hus wore fetters on his feet. During the night, they chained his hands to the wall. That is how they treated Hus even before they took up his case. **From the very first day, they treated Hus with a distinct hatred, which demonstrates that they had already made their decision.**”⁵⁵

After they finally listened to Hus and interrupted him numerous times, including his refusal to recant and renounce his “heresy”, the Council defrocked the Czech preacher of his clerical rank and handed him to the secular authorities for execution. They sentenced him to be burned for heresy in Prague and to hand his soul over to Satan. Jan Hus surrendered his soul to the Lord with songs of praise on his lips on July 6, 1415. One year later, the very same Council condemned his close associate Jerome of Prague.

As news of the Czech Hus’s martyrdom spread, a great protest against his burning at a gathering in Prague took place in September 1415. 452 barons and nobles from all over the Czech Republic and Moravia signed and sent a declaration to the Pope and his Cardinals that they would continue to obey only those teachings that are completely in accord with the Scriptures.

The followers of Hus continued the religious reform based on his proper understanding of the teaching of the Bible. The most significant group was the “Moravian Brethren”. During subsequent centuries, this group operated in Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland. It suffered persecution both at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church and the newly established Czech national church, which was recognized by Rome.⁵⁶

One of the most famous members of the Church of the Moravian Brethren was Jan Amos Komenski (born in 1592), who was a world leader in education.

Christ’s Church after the Sixteenth Century

The previous section of this chapter demonstrated that the true Church of Jesus Christ has existed in all centuries since its foundation. The Church has stood in spite of major suffering and

⁵⁵ Nig, 316-7. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁶ The newly established Czech national church retained many external and internal features of Roman Catholicism. The main difference was communion for believers (in contrast to Roman Catholicism) was offered in both forms, the bread and the wine. Only to this extent did the influence of Hus’s teaching effect any real change.

persecution at the hands of unbelieving people. We have observed and will continue to demonstrate that the true Church is always persecuted and never becomes a persecutor of others. Nonetheless, throughout the history of the true Church of Christ, there have existed government institutions in the East and West that call themselves “the Church” yet both in a doctrinal and moral sense have fallen away from original apostolic Christianity. These groups wield great influence on the godless masses that comprise the bulk of their membership by keeping them in centuries-old ignorance of spiritual darkness and illiteracy. Yet, the gospel fellowship of God’s elect endure and continue to shine the light of Christ on the earth.

The end of the Middle Ages in Europe coincided with the Mohammedan conquest of the Orthodox East (including the Ecumenical Patriarchate). The official Church of the West experienced great disappointment (especially its more educated members).

Many began to recognize the difference between their current situation with that of first century Christianity to the extent of the difference between “gold and chaff”.⁵⁷ Priests, bishops, and archbishops usually ascended to their positions with the help of money, and the Pope defended his seat with intrigue, murder, and poisoning rivals.⁵⁸ During the reign of a very godless and immoral Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo de Borgia),⁵⁹ against his conduct as head of the Church stood a Dominican friar named Savonarola, who unfortunately was burned at the stake. Here is some history:

“When Charles VIII, King of France, passed through Florence in 1494, Savonarola begged him to convoke an ecumenical council in Rome to defrock Pope Alexander VI. The French warrior considered it expedient to keep the Pope in power. Savonarola, full of spiritual and prophetic power, urged the citizens of Florence to proclaim Christ as King. He attacked the splendor and simony of the Roman Curia and defied papal suspension and excommunication. He sent the European rulers a petition calling for a council of reformation. In the end, he was abandoned by the Florentines. In the year of our Lord, May 23, 1498, he was burned in the city square. His demand for reform was medieval, expressed in the old way, experienced temporary triumph in the old way, and was extinguished in the old way.”⁶⁰

In addition to the public immorality especially among the high dignitaries of the Church who were supposed to have lived celibate lives, great spiritual ignorance and superstition dominated the people. Women accused of being witches were burned at every step. People together with the priests collected so-called holy relics allegedly belonging to deceased saints and thus possessing miraculous powers. Because of their arrogance and increasing profligacy, the Popes

⁵⁷ See Owen Chadwick, *History of the Reformation*, (Good News: Novi Sad, 1986) 15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Rodrigo Borgia who was named Alexander VI (1492-1503) ascended the papal throne with the help of bribing cardinals. Before he became Pope (while he was still a cardinal), he lived out of wedlock with a Roman lady Vanozza de' Cattanei and her daughter Rosa, with whom he sired five children. On the day of his appointment as Pope, he named his son who was of highly dubious morality to become Archbishop of Valencia. He lived in public incest with two of his sisters and his own daughter, Lucretia, with whom he fathered a child. Two years before his death, he held in the Vatican such a sexual orgy that had such a lack of shame that it entered the annals of world history. See Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon World Religion*, 97.

⁶⁰ Chadwick, 17.

invented new ways to access financial resources. One way was imposing new taxes on Roman Catholic Europe. The rulers of France, Germany, and other countries did not share the enthusiasm of Rome in “plundering” their own countries. Rising levels of unrest and desire for independence from Rome resulted. One of the most notable people during this period was Erasmus of Rotterdam. His works greatly weakened the authority of the Roman clergy in the eyes of ordinary people and especially intellectuals:

“As a satirist, he composed jokes, sometimes gently, other times harshly, with all professions or social classes in the country. His powerful ridicule haunted kings, merchants, soldiers, artisans, and scholars. **Of all the targets, his sharpest arrows were directed against the injustices perpetrated by the Church...** And the learned world grumbled about everything related to the clergy, on account of monk and pastor, about corruption and bribery, superstition and idolatrous worship of the people. Erasmus expressed it, and brilliantly, what others could barely utter: learned Europe laughed. Kings and bishops, scholars and merchants, all of whom were said to be educated, first cheered him with glee, and then with serious approval. By 1517, it had become a part of social reality. Not only in Italy, but also in France, England, Spain, and Germany, the new scholarship and criticism by Erasmus of the Church went hand in hand. **More than any other person, he managed to undermine the reputation of the Pope and priests, monks and friars and (above all) theologians.**”⁶¹

Furthermore, the setting in which the believers worked and were persecuted for the sake of Christ’s truth (be they Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathars, Patarenes, Albigenses, Waldenses, Lollards, Moravian Brethren – Hussites, or whatever name) was utter satanic darkness. Thanks to their faithfulness and sharing of the good news of salvation, out of this darkness the gift of Christ was revealed to thousands of people – who received eternal salvation. The Holy Spirit in the face of fierce satanic opposition with strength saved people through the good news of Christ and filled many local fellowships with believers who did not belong to any of the established religious movements. So, concurrently with the formation and activity of the Waldenses and other nameless Christian fellowships in Europe, there appeared other groups of believers who, thanks to their faithfulness to the Bible and submission to Christ, put into practice believer’s baptism for those who put their faith in the Lord and committed their lives to Him.

Namely, these believers stood in contrast to the ancient practice of the so-called Roman Church (as well as the Reformers Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin who continued the practice) of infant baptism. Following evangelical teaching, these fellowships viewed infant baptism as something unfounded in the Scriptures and in error. Because of their resistance toward infant baptism, they received the name “Anabaptists”.⁶² Anabaptist churches evoked much outrage from many around them who considered a second “baptism” as a great sin. This outrage came both from the Roman Catholics and the Reformers. The Anabaptists were lumped in together with one group of religious fanatics in the city of Minster; these fanatics were also labeled Anabaptists. Their notorious reputation of their conduct harmed the Anabaptists with very deceptive propaganda

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24-5. Author’s emphasis.

⁶² The label “Anabaptist” means particularly someone who requires “second baptism” after their “baptism” as an infant and views infant baptism as in error and without meaning. The very word “Anabaptist” consists of two parts: “Ana” meaning “again” and “baptizo” meaning “baptized”.

about them. However, the truth was that the Anabaptist fellowships consisted of born again people who were taught to display as much as possible a positive example of Christian life and behavior. Their faith and life centered around their early Christian simplicity as well as their very integrated Christian unity with the Holy Spirit. Anabaptist historian Alan Thomson lists the principles governing the lives of Anabaptists:

“From the very beginning, there were three basic principles, which one of their writers called ‘the Anabaptist vision’:

- (a) Christian life as a brotherhood
- (b) The vital importance of obedience to Christ
- (c) Separation from the world

It is clear that this confession faith contains very little theology. It also is moral. The Anabaptists in their Christian life emphasized that which is very unequivocal and practical. They based their Christian faith and life on Jesus’s command: ‘*Follow me.*’”⁶³

Anabaptist church fellowships spread throughout the territory of Europe and were found mostly in Switzerland, Germany, Holland, England, and Moravia. In Moravia they became known as the Huterite Brothers, named after one of the first and most devout elders, Jakob Huter, who suffered for his faith in 1536. They were known as dangerous and almost cancerous, which is far from the truth:

“Profoundly joyful, humble living, and moderation comprised their wealth. During times of peace between 1564 and 1619, the Moravian Huterites rose to prominence, for they produced high quality work for a low price in various places. There were wonderful doctors, watchmakers, scribes, coopers, and other craftsmen... Their wonderful doctor Cobl was called upon to care for King Rudolf II.”⁶⁴

From another side, the Anabaptist movement in Holland arose at the will of the Lord and was led by the former Roman Catholic priest Menno Simons. Namely, in his autobiography, Simons mentions that although he was named a priest at 24 years of age, he had not known Scripture or even took it up in his hand until his repentance. Once he started to read Scripture, he was afraid that he had been led into some false doctrine. Under the tutelage of other priests, Menno had read other books that were useless, but one year later, he recalled Holy Scripture and did not read anything else afterward. The historian Broadbent in his book cites some excerpts from Simons’s autobiography which describe the beginning of his study of the truth of Holy Scripture about the appearance of a false church system based on people’s traditions and not on God’s Word. His testimony begins with the first page of the New Testament:

“At last I decided to read the New Testament once through diligently. **I had not gone far with it before I became aware that we had been deceived....** Through the Lord's grace I advanced from day to day in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and some called me an Evangelical Preacher, although wrongly... Afterwards, though I had never in my life

⁶³ Thomson, vol. 3, 40.

⁶⁴ Chadwick, 141.

heard of brethren, it happened that a god-fearing, pious hero, Sicke Snyder by name, was beheaded in Leeuwarden, because he had renewed his baptism. That sounded extraordinary in my ears that another baptism should be spoken of. I examined the Scripture diligently and thought the matter over earnestly, **but I could find no news there of infant baptism.** When I recognized this I spoke of it with my pastor, and after much conversation, **brought him so far that he had to acknowledge that infant baptism had no foundation in the Scripture.**"⁶⁵

After realizing the knowledge of God's truth, not just in terms of baptism, but also in other areas, Simons fully devoted himself to the preaching of God's Word. After nearly two decades of continuous ministry to the Lord, Simons received a humble and repentant heart. He wrote about his true motives that compelled him to preach with urgency as well as the results of his missionary activity:

"He who ... has bought me ... and called me to His service, knows me and knows that I seek neither money nor goods, neither pleasure nor comfort on earth, but only my Lord's praise, my own salvation, and that of many. On which account I have had to suffer, with my delicate wife and little child, such excessive fear, pressure, sorrow, misery, and persecution, now these eighteen years, that I have to live in poverty and in constant fear and danger of our lives. Yes, when the preachers⁶⁶ lie on soft beds and pillows, we must generally creep secretly into hidden corners. When they openly enjoy themselves at weddings, etc., with pipes, drums, and flutes, we must look round every time a dog barks for fear those should be there who would seize us. Whereas they are greeted by everyone as Doctor or Master, **we must let ourselves be called Anabaptists, Corner-Preachers, Deceivers, and Heretics, and are greeted in the Devil's name.** Finally, instead of being rewarded, as they are, for their service, with high salaries and good days, **our reward and share from them is fire, sword, and death.**"⁶⁷

Suffering and death were experienced by other Anabaptists (simply Baptists) throughout Europe. They were persecuted both by Roman Catholics as well as Reformers and their heirs. Luther celebrated the death of Ulrich Zwingli's death in war because Luther viewed him as a heretic who held Zurich under his religious rule and condemned to death those who practiced believer's baptism. Throughout Europe, Roman Catholics and Protestants handed over to torture and execution the preachers of Anabaptism, for believers were baptized because of their preaching. Many of them were drowned in the river and suffocated, others were burned at the stake, and still others were beheaded. Here is a short excerpt of Christ's sufferings for believers during the Reformation:

"Zwingli defended the integrity of infant baptism, stating, 'We do not accept any complaints about infant baptism, for I know that they are not worth heeding.' With that, he sentenced to death the Anabaptist Felix Manz, who had the honor of becoming the first 'Protestant' martyr, for he was drowned in the river Linmat near Zurich by the hands

⁶⁵ Broadbent, 187. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁶ Author's note: Simons here refers to Roman Catholic priests.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 92. Author's emphasis.

of Protestant guards on January 5, 1527... Dr. Balthazar Hubmaier, who declared 'Truth is immortal', was burned at the stake in 1528, where his wife embraced him to the end. Several days later his wife was executed by drowning in the River Danube by being thrown from a bridge with a rock tied around her neck. **Many Anabaptists were tortured, murdered, and exiled throughout Europe, even to Carpathia.** According to Fritz (Nizozemska) from 1535 to 1546 **nearly 30,000 Anabaptists, Baptists, were murdered by both Protestants and Catholics.**

'With certainty one can say,' says historian Dr. Rufus Jones, '**that no other movement for the sake of freedom of religion in the history of the Church suffered such terrible martyrdom.**'

The persecutions of Baptists engulfed the continent of Europe and England... The Baptists were persecuted for their faith by government and church officials in Europe and America. Having been persecuted in Europe, they brought their faith to the other side of the Atlantic, where they still were unable to avoid persecution. In this they fulfill the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy: '*All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*' (2 Timothy 3:12)"⁶⁸

Still, in this period, the Anabaptists were not the only ones to undergo persecution under the ruling authorities. There is the very famous history of the French Calvinists – the Huguenots who were attacked on the night of St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572. On that night in Paris the Roman Catholics butchered more than 9,000 believers of all ages, even including children. However, this was not the only incident against non-Catholics in France. Similar persecutions which concealed murders also occurred, albeit with weaker intensity than St. Bartholomew's Day occurred before and after this massacre.

Generally speaking, all these religious groups under various names stood in the onslaught of Roman Catholicism or nominal Protestant churches. These traditional churches consisted of many people who came out of old traditionalism and were unregenerate people not led by the Holy Spirit. These people subjected members of these religious groups to the most varied types of torture and murder. For this reason, many families of evangelical believers sought to move from the environment which persecuted and exiled them to the end of the world – still they behaved with some sort of peace and spiritual calmness. The persecutions in Europe scattered groups of evangelical believers across the ocean to the North American continent as well as the territory of Tsarist Russia. As can be affirmed in later history, the persecution of Christ's Church in some areas brought about the dispersion of believers from their native lands to other regions. Their scattering resulted in the evangelization of many millions of people for whom the Lord shed His blood.

With regard to the meaningful immigration of a great number of evangelical Christians to the territory of North America in the sixteenth century, it brought great blessing to that region, just as the dispersion of local Christian fellowships from central Europe brought blessing to the territory of Russia, where the Orthodox Church had dominated for centuries. With regard to

⁶⁸ Dr. Josip Horak, *Baptists, History and Essence of Faith*, (Duhovna Stvarnost: Zagreb 1989) 12-3. Author's emphasis.

Western believers about whom we commented earlier, there is evidence that in Russia for centuries there had been a Bogomil fellowship (which came there also because of persecution in the Balkan peninsula). In the eighteenth century, evangelical Christians from Europe also came to the ends of the earth at the beckoning of the palace itself. Namely, Tsarina Catherine II in 1788 invited 288 Mennonite families (totaling 1500 people) to settle in Russia from Europe. They were given land and tools. They settled on the edge of Ekaterinoslav in the suburb of Hozritsa by the river of the same name. Others who also suffered persecution for their faith came from Europe to live with them. These included Baptists as well as Pietists from the fringe of the Lutheran Church. The settlers over the years accumulated land and grew in the material sense to form many villages – which could serve as examples of productivity:

“These were the beginnings of a colonization which increased greatly. In course of time the settlements spread over the south of Russia, into the Crimea, especially along the lower reaches of the Volga, to the Caucasus, and then away into Siberia and even to Turkestan and as far as the borders of China. Unabsorbed by the surrounding populations, the colonists kept their own language, religion and customs—compact bodies scattered like islands in the sea of Orthodox Slavs and other peoples of the vast Empire.”⁶⁹

The Russian monarch guaranteed religious liberty to other settlers from Europe. They were not Russian by nationality, but Dutch, Germans, and other cultures. However, these believers were strictly forbidden to share their faith with the Orthodox. The born again Europeans respected this restriction as they knew that their own religious freedom depended on it. Yet, they prayed that the Word of God would also reach the Russian people as they had no knowledge about the good news of Jesus Christ. The light of the gospel, which shines in dark places, could not be suppressed. In the ranks of some of the families of evangelical Christians were added families of Russian descent. Unhindered contact with believers as well as the presence of their prayers and familiar songs by which they praised the Lord could not fail to touch the families of their host nation. On another front, after the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society in England in 1804 (by the preacher Thomas Charles Bell), a similar society was founded in Russia in 1812 with the help of Tsar Alexander I. Since the Bible Society had a wide network in many areas, it was able to distribute in local areas copies of the Holy Scriptures in the language of the people who lived throughout the Tsarist kingdom. Hunger and thirst for the Word of God was enormous, and many people sincerely believed what they read:

“Reading the Scriptures was for these Russians an extraordinary revelation and power. **They saw that the religious system in which they had been brought up had held them in ignorance of God and of His salvation in Christ.** Repentance for their sins, which were many, was complete and unreserved. Their acceptance of Christ as their Savior and Lord was in fullness of faith and love. **Seeing the entire disagreement between the Russian Church and the teachings of Scripture, they left the former and attached themselves to the latter to the full extent of their knowledge.**”⁷⁰

Regardless, the conversion of Russia to pure New Testament Christianity which was revealed exclusively in the gospel of the Bible itself would not go without opposition. The most bitter

⁶⁹ Broadbent, 319.

⁷⁰ Broadbent, 326. Author’s emphasis.

opponent came in the form of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, which exerted all its power to suppress the further publication of the gospel. Although Baptists and other evangelical Christians obeyed the law forbidding them to share their teaching with Russians (which gave them their own right to religious freedom), the government never guaranteed its own people the freedom to other religious confessions except Orthodoxy. Repentant Russians did not hide their delight in the newly found truth of the gospel about salvation in Jesus Christ. They zealously preached and assembled as new groups of believers.

These groups of churches of Russian evangelical Christians were labeled by the Orthodox as “Stundists” – the word used by the Germans to refer to their church fellowships. This name had a negative context and clearly took on the meaning “traitors to their own faith”. But, during the time of Alexander I who himself heard of Holy Scripture from senior representatives of foreign evangelical churches, the distribution of the Bible among the Russian people was constant.

Even during the time of Alexander II, the gospel was shared among all classes of society, including the aristocracy. For example, Lord Radstock, who arrived from England in 1866, brought the gospel to the nobility of St. Petersburg. Many people repented and were set free from Satan’s lies through reading Holy Scripture. Then people became united who before lived miles away from each other, not just in terms of distance, but also in terms of social rank, culture, and education. Along with wealthy nobles sat simple peasants – linked by their mutual faith and Christian love. One person who accepted faith in Christ as a wealthy landowner was officer Vasilij Alexandrovich Pashkov. History attests to his zeal for the Lord and the spreading of the gospel:

“He gave the ballroom of his palace for meetings and himself preached the Gospel everywhere, in prisons and hospitals as well as in meeting-places and houses. He used his great wealth in distributing the Scriptures, publishing tracts and books, helping the poor and in every way furthering the kingdom of God. Pashkov was forbidden to hold meetings in his house (1880). As he continued to do so he was banished, by the influence of the Holy Synod, first from St. Petersburg and later from Russia, and much of his property confiscated.”⁷¹

However, persecution under which evangelical Christians had outlived in this period returned on the part of those who hounded them. Namely, after the murder of Tsar Alexander II in 1882, the government in Russia reversed the reform implemented by the deceased ruler. The Russian police assumed more authority, and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided to suppress all elements in society that did not conform to its ideal of “Holy Russia”. The Jews also fell victim to the Church because they considered the Jews to be a nation serving Satan.⁷² The Orthodox Church also grouped the evangelical churches into the same category of wrath as they were different from the official state religion:

“In Pobedonostsev, the head of the Holy Synod, they found a bitter and consistent adversary. Imprisonment, fines and exile were their lot, **while the priests incited the**

⁷¹ Broadbent, 320-1.

⁷² See the chapter “The Second Coming of Christ and Resurrection of the Dead” for more details about the persecution of the Jews in Tsarist Russia.

people to attack and maltreat them and to destroy their homes and their goods. Their meetings were forbidden, and when they were found coming together secretly for prayer and reading the Scriptures their gatherings were forcibly broken up and arrest and punishment followed. Increasing numbers, especially of the elders and leaders of the churches, were banished to Siberia or the Caucasus.”⁷³

However, under persecution, evangelical believers lived further and acted knowing that their Lord also suffered at the hands of His persecutors – all the way up to His death on the cross. Their persecution and dispersion also led to the conversion of many other people in distant parts who received the gospel and salvation for eternity through faith in the blood of Christ.

Evangelical believers today were scattered in Russia. They endured similar brute force from the Communists against them and other religious groups for seven decades in the previous century. Their fellowship resulted in the baptisms of thousands and the formation of evangelical denominations with various names yet in their confession holding to the same major tenets of biblical faith.

This section has outlined the spreading of evangelical Christianity (the same as the Church of Christ) in the contemporary world, as its zeal to obey the Lord’s command to preach the Gospel to all peoples. I wish to examine one of the lesser known holy examples in the history of ecumenical Orthodoxy. As we know, Orthodoxy as a whole never experienced “Reformation” but has retained much of its faith, rituals, and traditions from ancient times. The Western Church underwent Reformation in the sixteenth century under Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin in order to renew Christianity. Obviously, the Orthodox Church never prepared a spiritual climate such that a reformation could occur in the “Eastern Church”. But it does not mean that there never were any attempts to reform the Orthodox Church. The most famous person in the history of ecumenical Orthodoxy to attempt a reformation during a time of great darkness in the Church was Patriarch Cyril Lukaris.

The Unsuccessful Attempt to Reform Orthodox Christianity

Cyril Lukaris, known as one of the most prominent people in the Eastern Church of his time, studied in Venice and the University of Padua. He was fluent in Italian and Latin, and he developed into a polemicist and translator of Polish. During this time, he became acquainted not only with Western culture, but also with the fruits of the Protestant Reformation which took place in his time. He had very close contacts with Calvinists, he studied their faith, and he compared it with the teachings of Holy Scripture. He considered them to be most faithful to the Scriptures.

For this reason, after his appointment as Patriarch of Alexandria (1602) and then as Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (1621), he sent his top priests for schooling to Western Europe – to Oxford, Helmstedt, and Geneva. He hoped to lay the foundation for a reformation of the Eastern Church.

⁷³ Broadbent, 330. Author’s emphasis.

When he was in the pulpit as Patriarch of Alexandria, Lukaris conducted an examination of the various confessions of Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and the Reformed Calvinist Church. He conducted his analysis based on the study of Holy Scripture. He convinced himself that the teachings of the Reformers were more faithful to Christ's faith than the teachings of traditional Christianity.

After testifying to the truth of this revelation, Patriarch Cyril rejected any teaching or practice not substantiated by the teaching of the New Testament (veneration of and prayer to the saints, icon veneration, belief in transubstantiation, etc.).⁷⁴ He stated that he could no longer take seriously stories from manmade tradition (sacred tradition) as it lacked the value of Holy Scripture:

“He openly appealed to the saints during the liturgy. He gave to the Dutch ambassador in Geneva a copy of *The Confession of Faith* which language easily could have been written by Calvin. Elements in the Orthodox Church condemned Cyril's agreement with the Reformed. Cyril preached that the Church is obliged to submit to Holy Spirit. He also believed that the Church was capable of error; salvation of life without the merit of good works; justification by faith; two sacraments in the Gospel; and the Reformed teaching about the Eucharist.”⁷⁵

Although Protestant Europe rejoiced that the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church was pleased to confess the identical faith,⁷⁶ the Roman Catholics were enraged. The Jesuit network shrewdly embarked on a campaign to discredit the Patriarch of Constantinople before church bodies as well as the Turkish Sultan. After his publications and subsequent toppling from the Patriarchal throne, Cyril Lukaris was murdered by the Turks in 1638 and then drowned in the sea.⁷⁷

Although the Orthodox Church did not react seriously to the teaching of Patriarch Cyril during his life, nor his Calvinist *Confession of Faith*, the Church changed its tone after his death. Namely, councils held in Constantinople in 1638, 1642, 1672, and 1691 along with ones in Kiev in 1640, Jasi in 1642, and Jerusalem in 1672 bitterly condemned his teaching and pronounced invalid any reason for reforming the Orthodox faith. Some of the main opponents of Cyril included Petar Mogila, Patriarch of Kiev (1633-1647) and Dositej, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1672-1707). Each patriarch on his own composed his own confession of faith for the Orthodox Church and bitterly condemned the theses of the *Confession* advocated by the previous Ecumenical Patriarch. These two confessions of faith from Mogila and Dositej were received by these Orthodox councils. They affirmed their doctrinal correctness and adoption by the whole Orthodox Church.

The Spreading of Christ's True Church and Its Activity in the Beginning of the 21st Century

According to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ which was given two thousand years ago, the last days before His second coming would be characterized by two very important events. One

⁷⁴ See Broadbent, 316.

⁷⁵ Chadwick, 259.

⁷⁶ Cyril Lukaris published his own version of *The Confession of Faith* in Latin in 1629 and then in Greek in 1633.

⁷⁷ See Popovic, vol. 2, 274.

would be the great falling away from true Biblical teaching which will occur among the professing Christian Church. The second event would be the relatively few (considering the massive size of the earth's population) who would be Christ's followers and redeemed in identical fellowship which zealously preach the truth of faith in their Lord. Christ stated:

*"But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"*⁷⁸

*"And you will preach this gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth in testimony to all peoples, and then the end will come."*⁷⁹

At first glance, these commands of Christ appear contradictory. However, the first is addressed to the whole world who will not accept Christ's teachings. The second is addressed to the "*little flock*" (Luke 12:32) who will overcome all tribulations and fulfill the mission of evangelization of the world to which the Lord Christ sent them. (Matthew 28:19-20)

The spreading of evangelical Christianity in the surrounding areas of the world was described earlier in this chapter. The Holy Spirit in His sovereignty works on different continents in various times. The Church of Christ, which in this section we will call the Church of evangelical Christians, has spread the Word to the near continent of Europe and also to the Near and Far East and North Africa. Today the European continent on which we live has the highest proportion of evangelical born-again believers. The most widespread churches in Europe today are in Great Britain, Romania, Ukraine, and other lands of the former Soviet Union. In terms of numbers of churches of evangelical Christians, the most are in North America followed by South America and Africa. In terms of sheer numbers of people, the largest evangelical church is found in the Communist state of China, where by some estimates up to 60 million believers meet in house churches.⁸⁰

The process of evangelization has intensified over the last 100 years with the formation of various missionary societies. Their goal is to proclaim Christ's gospel to all the nations. The number of believers is still very few. However, as time will show, believers will come from every nation on earth.

The first of several examples of missionary societies of evangelical believers in the world is the well-known Gideon's International. This society was founded in 1899 and for over 100 years from its humble origins, its members have managed to finance the free distribution of over 1.3 million copies of the Bible (or New Testaments) in 180 countries around the world.

Also, the society Every Home for Christ has functioned for over 60 years (founded in 1946) in a great number of nations. Its activity involves going "from home to home" and has shared nearly 2 billion 200 million Christian tracts and brochures. It is assisted by over 100 local churches and home groups. Each day material is sent to local addresses, and the society receives responses of over 17,000 people who are interested in Bibles and other published, video, and audio material.

⁷⁸ Luke 18:8b.

⁷⁹ Matthew 24:14.

⁸⁰ This data comes from the book *The Heavenly Man* written by Chinese brother Yan and published by Paul Hattaway (Kingdom and Life: Zagreb 2005).

Belonging to Christ and His Church involves biblical orthodoxy as well as a devout life, which were discussed earlier in this book. Evangelical Christians of Serbia firmly ask the Lord for His Name to be praised so that many people can hear the Gospel and receive God's call to accept eternal salvation which comes through His Son Jesus Christ.