

## Separatism—a Part of Bessarabian Church History

Geschichte der Gemeinde Tarutino von 1814 bis 1934  
by Wilhelm Mutschall, Stuttgart, 1966  
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Information in square brackets [ ] is that provided by the translator. The translation below is Chapter 8, pages 50-57 of Wilhelm Mutschall's book: *History of the Tarutino Community from 1814 to 1934*.

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[Translation Begins]

### Separatism—a Part of Bessarabian Church History

In 1822, a religious movement arose in the Evangelical Lutheran congregations of Bessarabia, which for more than two decades disturbed not only the ecclesiastical authorities, but also the secular authorities, and only came to a halt when the emperor spoken his decisive word. It is separatism. We dare not pass over it, because its aspirations deeply scorched the existence of the church and inhibited and shaded the civic community life in its development. To understand this phenomenon, we have to go back a little.

It was about 1812, when Ignaz Lindl, Catholic pastor in Bavaria, a man of persuasive eloquence, initially in the spirit of enlightenment, but then, influenced by Joh. Goßner, in an evangelical way with strength and fire among his parishioners, proclaimed the word of God. Wonderful was the end result which his sermons had on many of those whose heads were a baptized multitude of his listeners. 8,000—10,000 people flocked together all Sunday long to hear Lindl's living testimony of salvation in Christ. But the fiery preacher, enchanting the masses, soon showed a strong inclination towards the religious fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) in his sermons; the doctrine of the 1000 year rule of the kingdom increasingly showing up in the teaching. And he found favor; for Bengel's writings and Jung-Stilling's "Aching for Home" (*Heimweh*) and "Triumphant History" (*Siegesgeschichte*) were especially well known among the evangelical listeners and had prepared the ground for this doctrine in their hearts. Beyond Samarkand [a city in south-eastern Uzbekistan], according to Stilling's interpretation, was to be the sheltering place for the believers; here, in the realm of the "Prince of Solyma," the blessed should await the coming of the Kingdom of Peace. Emigration to the east—that was also Lindl's slogan since he spoke in Stilling's sphere of influence.

The Day of Judgment was drawing ever closer. The ecclesiastical challenges in Württemberg, the political turmoil of the time, crop failures and famine, and last but not least the persecutions

to which Lindl was subjected, made it easier for him and many of his adherers to leave the homeland and respond to the call of Alexander I to settle in the south of his empire. When Lindl, who was detained in Augsburg, was freed through the intervention of Baron Berckheim, the son-in-law of the pietistic wife of Krüdener (*\*note: she died in 1824 in Karassu-Basar in Crimea, where she intended to create a colony*), a former actress, he rushed to Munich, where he became aware of the call of the emperor from the Russian envoy and demanded security and protection from the Bavarian government.

After a deeply emotional farewell to his community of Gundremingen, Lindl began the difficult journey to distant Russia and arrived in Petersburg on 15 November, 1819. Here he preached in the Maltesian Church before listeners from the highest aristocracy.

Meanwhile, flocks of people from Wuerttemberg and Bavaria had arrived in our south partly via Hungary, partly by detour via Petersburg. The Lutheran merchant Christian Friedr. Werner from Giengen in Württemberg led the whole movement during the exodus. In 1820, Lindl left Petersburg and traveled to Odessa, from where he was to serve his congregations as a provost of the Catholic Church of the South.

Shortly before his removal, Johannes Evangelista Goßner had arrived in Petersburg. Prepared for office under Sailer, influenced by Boss, he had walked in Lindl's footsteps and suffered the same fate. In 1804, he was a pastor in Dirlwang, Bavaria, and in 1811, he went to Munich, where he was dismissed from his office in 1817. By Goßner, Lindl had quietly married his housewife Elisabeth before he went to Odessa. Catholic provost and married!—that could not be concealed. Complaints were filed against him. When his life was even threatened, Lindl moved his residence to Sarata on 20 March, where 40 Protestant families from Württemberg, and just as many Catholics from Bavaria, had settled a year earlier.

Here, too, the witty (*geistgesalbte*) preacher had an astonishing appeal. From near and far, the people from the upper colonies came to the Sunday sermons of Lindl in such large numbers that he often found himself speaking in the open air from a boarded house. But Lindl's effectiveness in Sarata did not last long: at the end of 1823, without any investigation, he was dismissed and expelled from the country. It has never been quite revealed what the reasons of his dismissal from office were. It is only known that General Insow's adjutant Güldenschanz brought the announcement to Probst Lindl and picked him up with his wife and his son in a closed carriage, while he and his escort followed in another carriage. For Sarata, this day was a day of deepest sorrow. A consolation letter from Kischinew, from the departed pastor, could only soften the sadness, but not completely get rid of it.

The content of Lindl's sermons was repentance, faith, righteousness, and readiness for the impending return of the Lord and the 1,000 Year Kingdom. He carried out the ecclesiastical acts according to evangelical manner, only that at the sacrament he sometimes put on a white chasuble (*Meßgewand*) over the black gown. After Lindl's departure, it was not known which confessional church the parish of Sarata had been attached to. After receiving its first Lutheran pastor in 1824, in the person of Lesedow, a Baltic, from Tbilisi, each one had to decide which church he wanted to belong to. The confession: "I am a Christian!" was not sufficient. After a

long wave of talking and making excuses, all Sarata residents acknowledged themselves to belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. From then on, Sarata was the third parish.

The revival, which was proclaimed by Lindl, spread over almost all colonies. In meetings and hours of enlightenment, one sought to satisfy the need for spiritual nourishment. The “silent hours” (*stillen Stunden*) began in Sarata, where one was on one's knees or lay on one's face for hours and only from time to time was heard the call of the one in charge (*des Vorstehers*): “Press on! Press on!” This was followed by convulsions, beating on the chest and twisting of limbs. The Bible came into contempt, only in the silence of the heart one must deal with God. These religious fanatics explain the marital status almost as a sin: marriage disputes and divorces arose. Lindl's brief admonitions and warnings from Germany, however, brought people somewhat to their senses.

In the upper colonies, the movement took on even worse forms. The churches were, in the eyes of the awakened, heaps of stones, Baal churches, the Preacher-Baal priests, the worship service--trickery, straw and chaff. “Away from Babel!” was the slogan. Leipzig was the hearth of this fermentation; here, where the most ignorant people had gathered, the new doctrine found the most adherents. “A lot of people,” says the writer of the Tarutino parish chronicle, “had been awakened from their slumber, but, without knowledge of the scriptures and without guidance, they resembled those awakened at midnight from their physical sleep, who were in the dark, only bumping around themselves and others. A more serious Christian preacher, as Pastor Wagner was, could use this movement to lead many to the truth. But he could only counter them with mockery and swearing, and through his unchristian conduct he could only increase the slander and smears against the ecclesiastical position.”

It did not help much for Superintendent Böttinger, in order to keep the people with the church, to issue an ordinance to prevent the meetings, as the secular authorities allowed them; the separation was present and did not allow itself to be stopped.

Was this now the “new church” that Lindl wanted? By no means. The weeds continued to grow among the wheat; in addition to pious simplicity and honest striving for godliness and pure change, we see, especially among the superiors, a massive spiritual pride, which was expressed in damning ridicule and mockery against the Church and its members. Under the guise of freedom, moral offences of a hair raising nature were committed. So, to give just one example, a Separatist in L. was punished for stealing reeds by being whipped with a rod.

Around 1840, a man who had separated himself from his church and, in the course of separation, gathered around himself a new congregation, the “Nazarene Congregation.” This person was Joh. Jak. Wirz from Basel. This one was a real odd fellow. To be sure, he allowed the scriptures to be valued, but much more important to him were the “spiritual communications” from above. For all questions, this silk weaver and button maker from Basel got answers from there, sometimes from Christ, sometimes from Jehovah, sometimes from the evangelist John. When asked about the nature of the will, heavenly wisdom gave him the answer: “The nerve center (*Nervenäther*) is a spirit in which the spiritual properties of light, salt, water, mercury, and sulfur work together.” Question: “Jesus Jehovah, where was I when you founded the earth?” Answer: “A nothing, and yet you are...having already been seen in the mirror of godly wisdom.” A most

well-known “testimony” of the godly truth refers directly to Bessarabia. There had been widespread talk that a decree from the St. Petersburg Consistory had appeared against the new church. “Father Jacob” now asks, as an “ignorant one in the dust,” what he should make known to the brothers in Bessarabia regarding the decree. Answers: “That church that I set up as the cornerstone of the church shall remain the old church as a stone of offense until [the other one] collapses; but those who are faithful to me shall remain like Mount Zion...issued 12 October, 1841.” In response to this “testimony from above,” the separatist-minded enthusiastically broke away from the Church. A rich one from Borodino, Karl Ehni, who came from Marbach, became bishop, the other colonies received directors and elders. The battle flared up again, more violently than before. Inspector Kossowsky struck hard with both hands. Pastor Hübner complains that in the 13 congregations of his diocese, separatism is busy most of all in Borodino, where 85 children stayed away from school; the result being stupidity and roughness. Kossowsky threatens that he will put the unruly among the soldiers and send them to the Caucasus. They were to report to him every 7 days on the increase and decrease of sectarians, including how they operate their farms (*Wirtschaft*). Finally, since the separatists were refusing their share in the salaries of the pastors as well as the other church related burdens, the matter was submitted to Emperor Nicholas I, whose decision was to say: “I consider the people to be sick Lutherans and transfer them to the Evangelical Lutheran spirituality for healing; they are not relieved of their duties.” Now it was possible to lay down the weapons on both sides. We only hear of an attempt at healing by Pastor Lübner, which he made at numerous church assemblies (*Kirchenkonvent*), but which, despite his excellent words, did not have the slightest success. On the other hand, another assembly was not without effect, at which the ecclesiastical brothers proved to the separatists that the history about the decree from the Consistory was a plain lie. The all-knowing Savior could have, without a doubt, dictated that answer to Father Jacob in writing, since he must have been aware of the lie. This startled the people and many returned to the church. Around this time, there were about 100 souls separated in Tarutino. According to the inspector's instructions, the municipality had to designate for them a special burial place next to the Lutheran cemetery.

The connection with Wirz continued. The "New Church" experienced a lot of serenity and encouragement through his agents, the school teacher Heinr Jahn, who suddenly appeared here in person in 1844 and promoted his way in Borodino for some time. This visionary had written like this from Eßlingen: “There is a cross hovering over Russia, a great golden cross. A rose-red ribbon is waved over Russia and held over Bessarabia. The brothers and sisters look up and consider the miraculous ribbon. It is getting more and more beautiful; stars appear on the miraculous ribbon, peace radiating from itself.” Now Jahn was there physically; as a teacher, he wanted to settle down. But things turned out differently. The Synod subjected him to an embarrassing examination and urged his removal. In 1845, he was exiled by the authorities of the country and all communication with the foreign sects was forbidden.

According to Wirz, the 1,000 Year Kingdom was to begin in 1847. One expected Lindl (*\*note: Lindl had already died in Barmen in 1845.*) and “Father Jacob,” the two witnesses (Revelation 11), to be the guides of the sun-woman (*Sonnenweibes*), which was to pass through Bessarabia on the way to its place of shelter. In silence, the wagons for travel were summoned; some left their fields un-worked. Some families also left and crossed the Danube. A childless couple even advanced in their zeal as far as Jerusalem. But the year passed and neither the sun woman nor

the Antichrist appeared. This gave the new church such a shock that it cracked at the seams. A large part of the “New Church,” deceived by false prophecies and now disillusioned, returned to the Mother Church.

It is very noteworthy what Goßner has to say about the separation from the church. On 23 October, 1846, he wrote to an inquirer in Sarata: “It is a folly to separate from the outward Church and to want to make one oneself; it also again becomes as bad and human, where there is no annoyance, as one assumes, as is in the one which one is leaving. For we find all men, corrupted in the flesh, and must bear one another. Poor Lindl deceived himself so much in his prophecies...When he was still healthy, he affirmed that he would still experience the kingdom of God, and not 2 months later, he was moved to the kingdom of heaven...His followers should open their eyes.” Goßner's prudent judgment is still very much true today, as he is highly regarded in the Bessarabian communities by his “Treasure Chest” (*Schatzkästchen*) and is for many an authority. Goßner was joined to the Lutheran Church in Berlin in 1826 and became the pastor of Bethlehem Church, the Church, which today still exists as the “Goßner Mission Society.” He died in 1858.

Separatism has been going on for 100 years. The number of its followers has diminished from year to year. In Tarutino, only one old couple exists (*\*note: It is Gottlieb Wutzke and his wife Luise, born Tetzlaff. Both have already died.*). In Leipzig, a few years back, 7 whole and 10 half families, in all 24 souls; in Borodino, 3 married couples and 3 widowers and widows, all together 9 persons. Also in Alt-Elft, there is only a small number. Their relationship to the ecclesiastical is quite peaceful, their behavior not offensive. The children are baptized by the one in charge, attend school, are confirmed and married by the pastor. In a short time, Separatism will be considered history.

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