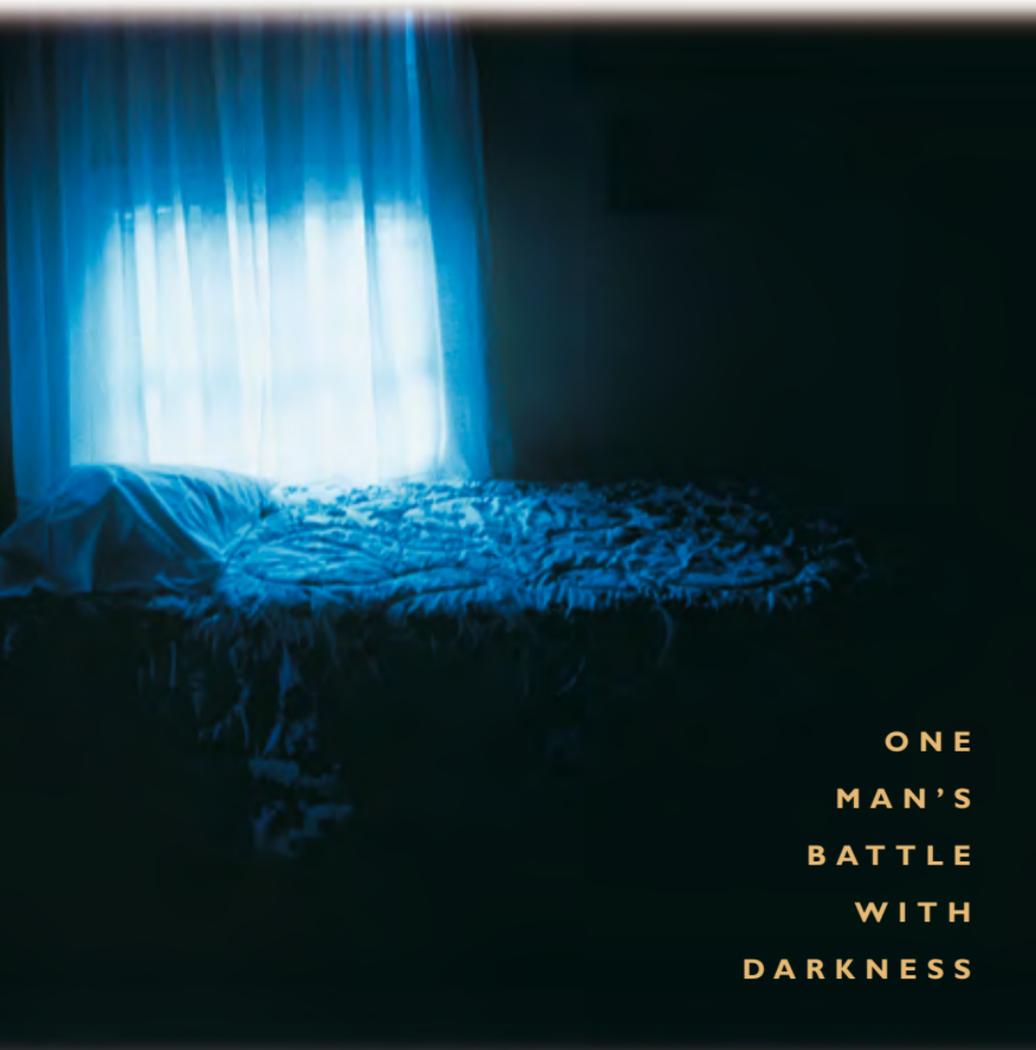


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ONE
MAN'S
BATTLE
WITH
DARKNESS

THE Awakening

FRIEDRICH ZÜNDEL

Friedrich Zündel

THE AWAKENING

O N E M A N ' S

B A T T L E W I T H

D A R K N E S S



P L O U G H P U B L I S H I N G H O U S E

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CONTENTS

vi

To the Reader

xiii

Introduction

I

I THE FIGHT

45

II THE AWAKENING

85

III MIRACLES

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According to oral tradition, the words on the plaque opposite mysteriously appeared, painted, on a shutter of Gottliebin Dittus's house in the village of Möttlingen during her fight against demonic powers, 1841–1843. The plaque itself, which was made later, still hangs on the house. The text reads:

*Mensch: bedenk die Ewigkeit,
und spotte nicht der Gnadenzeit,
denn das Gericht ist nicht mehr weit.*

Man: think on eternity,
and do not mock the time of grace,
for judgment is not far off.



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TO THE READER

Johann Christoph Arnold

We live in an increasingly fragmented world, and almost everywhere one looks, it seems that people are becoming more desperate in their search for personal wholeness and happiness. If the present spread of interest in astrology, pagan religion, New Age spirituality, and the occult is any indication, people are no longer satisfied with the answers of conventional Christianity, and growing numbers are looking beyond it to the realm of the supernatural.

Part of this trend is an increased fascination with evil. Mention demons or Satan, and you're still likely to evoke wincing in some circles. But times are changing. In a popular culture obsessed with the basest instincts of human nature, the sensationalization of violence, death, promiscuity, and lawlessness has become more profitable than ever before. Through films, videos, songs, books, and games, the occult has entered the mainstream and seems certain to stay.

To many, all this is merely a superficial trend – the entertainment industry's never-ending search for the next bestseller, the next box-office success, the next hot fad. But I am not so sure. To me, it seems clear that our fascination with darkness is taking a toll. The prevalence of crimes involving ritual satanism, deaths linked to occult beliefs (such as the recent group suicides of cult members in Switzerland and California), predatory gangs of

teens calling themselves “vampires,” and shooting rampages such as the ones in Littleton and Fort Worth, in which the killers cursed God as they mowed down their victims – these are just a few examples of the deepening influence of evil powers in our culture.

It is in the context of this darkness that I believe *The Awakening* contains such a significant message. More than just a gripping story, it offers a rare look at the way the most ordinary people can be sucked into a vortex of evil – and more importantly, at the way they can be rescued from its downward pull, no matter how strong it seems.

Though relatively unknown to American readers, the main figure in this book, Johann Christoph Blumhardt, is widely recognized in his native Germany. In a way, that is not surprising, for the terrifying phenomena and subsequent miracles he witnessed catapulted his village into the public eye and still draw streams of curious visitors to it, one hundred and fifty years later. (My parents were so struck by his life and writings that they named me after him, and I grew up hearing anecdotes about him.)

What makes Blumhardt really stand out, however, is not his involvement with demonic powers, but the simple faith that led him to confront them. To him, there was no question about it: good and evil truly did exist, and not only in the abstract. As he saw it, the well-known accounts of Jesus’ miracles were not only parables or stories, but factual instances of divine intervention in the lives of real men and women. If demons were driven out, the sick

healed, and the dead raised two thousand years ago, they could be driven out, healed, and raised in the present too.

Zündel's account is fascinating on a historical level, but it has vital implications for the world we live in today. And though the unassuming man at the heart of the story worried that it might be sensationalized, he would still want it to be discovered and grappled with. He would also surely hope that it might give courage to those who despair over the spiritual emptiness of our church-filled landscapes – and to those whose hearts are open to believe.

Rifton, New York

February 2000

INTRODUCTION

Born in Stuttgart, Germany, into a long line of Swabian craftsmen, Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880) read the entire Bible twice by the time he was twelve, and the rest of his life bore the imprint of its message. Though his early devotion never faltered, he began to wonder even in his youth why the power of the gospel seemed so limited in the present day. If the Bible was truly the living word of God, he wondered, why was God’s nearness so hard to perceive in the world around him? Where was the spirit that had animated the first believers in the apostolic era?

At Tübingen Blumhardt studied theology, philosophy, history, mathematics, and other subjects. After receiving his university degree, he spent six years teaching in Basel, Switzerland (where he met his future wife, Doris Köllner) and then returned to Germany, where he found a temporary position as curate in the town of Iptingen.

Iptingen was deemed the most difficult parish in the region. Divided by dissension, the congregation was also at odds with its youth and long out of touch with its aging, eccentric minister, whom Blumhardt had come to replace. Luckily Blumhardt’s ability to draw out the best in people and to inspire trust in them stood him in good stead, and he soon won the hearts of his parishioners.

In the summer of 1838 Blumhardt, now thirty-three, left Iptingen and took on the pastorate at the nearby village of

Möttlingen. Möttlingen and its affiliated parish, Haugstett, were among the poorest in the region. When Blumhardt arrived, a crippling spiritual lethargy lay over the whole congregation. Pastor Barth, Blumhardt's immediate predecessor and a brilliant preacher, complained bitterly to him that the parish seemed preached to death; people were fed up with the gospel, and if some still attended church, most of them slept in their seats. The entire town seemed to be held in a sleepy thrall.

Beginning in the fall of 1841, Blumhardt was drawn into a spiritual struggle that he referred to for the rest of his life as "the fight." At first he tried to keep a cautious distance from it, but it soon became obvious that he would not be able to stay uninvolved.

Gottliebin Dittus, a young woman from a pious Möttlingen family who had once been Pastor Barth's favorite pupil, was regarded in her village as a "God-fearing" member of the parish. At the same time she was known, ever since her childhood, to have suffered recurring nervous disorders and various other maladies, including inexplicable attacks not unlike epileptic seizures.

Repulsed by her peculiar behavior, Blumhardt kept his distance from her. He would come when summoned during her worst attacks, but he went reluctantly, feeling that her case was no task for him as a pastor. Village physician Dr. Späth, on the other hand, argued that Gottliebin's disorders were beyond the scope of his medical knowledge, if not symptomatic of supernatural forces at work. It was on this account that Blumhardt finally agreed to observe the woman.

Before long he was so deeply involved in Gottlieb's struggle that no one could hold him back. For one thing, he was ashamed at the thought of conceding power to the darkness affecting her. Moreover, he pitied her. Little did he know that he had embarked on an uncharted journey of the most bizarre kind and entered a battle so intense that it would demand all of his energies for the next two years.

Though the echoes of this battle reverberated for the rest of Blumhardt's life, he tended to play it down whenever he was asked about it in later years, insisting that it was not the struggle itself but its aftermath that was really significant. This aftermath was a remarkable movement that arose soon after the conclusion of Blumhardt's fight. An unprecedented "awakening" of repentance that swept his entire parish like a wave, it soon spread beyond Möttlingen to neighboring villages and towns throughout the Black Forest.

Following this revival, and almost as a side effect, one person after another began to find relief from physical and emotional afflictions. Numerous cases of healings were reported, as well as mysterious incidents that can only be described as miracles. For the most part these things happened quietly; that is, they were not celebrated or sensationalized but looked on as a natural outcome of the awakening. Certainly there were those who regarded Blumhardt as a miracle-worker, but he energetically dismissed the idea. As he put it, he could only pray, "Jesus, help!" – and anyone who believed in Jesus could do that. He insisted that credit belonged to no one but God.

Meanwhile Möttlingen was becoming a problem for both government and church officials. As early as January 1846 the regional government, worried that Blumhardt was undermining local professional practices, forbade him to include healing as part of his pastoral office and demanded that he refer his visitors to a doctor instead. Church authorities used the same argument. Advising Blumhardt that the role of religion was to provide comfort by emphasizing patience and the blessings brought by suffering, they forbade him to take overnight guests in his home. Later they tried to completely bar him from receiving out-of-town visitors in his house.

Modern minds tend to deny or ignore the very existence of satanic forces, let alone their hold on specific individuals. Blumhardt felt that this skepticism trivializes the reality of evil. He argued that every human being has demons of his or her own to fight, that all are affected in some way by the power of evil.

As soon as one tells a bible story with a phrase like “Then he cast out the demon...” people tune out; they dismiss it as religious nonsense. They do this because they cannot recognize any capacity for evil, any wretchedness in themselves.

If we are not aware of human wretchedness, we cannot appreciate the Savior’s role in the kingdom of God, which means the end for Satan...And it will come to that! If we

already have power to overcome evil, is that not enough reason to believe that God is beginning to take up his reign?

Blumhardt's insights have great relevance today, when interest (and involvement) in pagan religions, the occult, satanism, and New Age philosophy is at an unprecedented high. So does his recognition that in fighting for clarity in any of these areas, scientific or psychological literature is of little help – even if informative, it does not take evil seriously and is therefore unable to inspire action against it.

For Blumhardt, the only acceptable tools were the “pure weapons of prayer and the word of God.” The building up of the church in Möttlingen did not begin with preaching but, as he put it, with struggle, prayer, and finally, victory over “personalities of darkness.”

Contrary to popular belief, Blumhardt was, he claimed, only an accompanist to the fight in Möttlingen and not its driving force. After it was over, it seemed as if an invisible sluice had been opened: suddenly, people came to repentance quite on their own, and in their new faith they found that prayer could relieve their mental and physical sufferings. There came into being, as Blumhardt's son Christoph later put it, “a church aflame with the first love.”

Still, Blumhardt never sat back satisfied. To him, the fight, the awakening, and the miracles of healing that followed it were merely a tiny premonition of what is to come, like the first flash of lightning before a storm. Thus, despite all he experienced, he continued to grieve

all his life over the spiritual poverty of Christendom, and repeatedly lamented that “we no longer have the spirit of Pentecost.” Distressed that Christians had lost their expectancy, he even saw a relationship between this lack and the delay of Christ’s second coming. “How can the Lord wish to come to a people who no longer await his coming, a people for whom he has become a matter of indifference?” (It should be said that when Blumhardt spoke of God’s people, he meant *all* people, not just some small flock of redeemed Christians: “I believe that Jesus, the friend of man, will reveal a compassion so great that many will be saved.”)

Certainly it is true that Blumhardt saw the kingdom of God as a state from which all forces hostile to God must be banished in an aggressive battle fought against “the prince of this world.” But he was never a purveyor of fear or gloom, and he repeatedly argued that Christ’s coming will be less an act of devastation, than a “setting straight.” As for anxiety about the horrors of the so-called end times, he had only one response:

I cannot believe that the Savior will come as a great destroyer. He is coming to reveal salvation, not doom; to reveal joy and peace, not horror and destruction...The sign of mourning that hangs over humankind shall be removed at last.

I THE FIGHT

This is a preview. Get the entire book here.

On July 31, 1838, the people of Möttlingen, a small town in southern Germany, turned out to welcome their new pastor. A zealous thirty-three-year-old, Johann Christoph Blumhardt had spent years preparing for such a position, and was looking forward to serving his new flock as a minister, teacher, and counselor. Now, finally, he and his fiancée Doris Köllner could marry, settle down, and raise a family.

Blumhardt could never have anticipated the events he was about to be thrust into. Through them the power of God to which he clung came close to him with a vividness experienced by only a few throughout history. At the request of his ecclesiastical superiors, he recounted these events in a detailed report entitled *An Account of Gottlieb's Dittus' Illness*. In his own memory the events lived on as “the fight.”

Before long, completely against Blumhardt's wish, a distorted version of his report began to circulate publicly. This compelled Blumhardt, who had not even kept the original, to publish a carefully edited second version. He made one hundred copies and stated in the preface that he did not wish to see it circulated further.

Out of respect for that wish, the following account describes manifestations of supernatural forces only where necessary to demonstrate God's victories over them. However, general, mysterious hints would envelop his struggle

in an apocryphal twilight. Besides, Blumhardt regarded his experiences during the fight as so significant for the church and for the world that he would almost certainly agree to making their essential content public now. In a sense, we owe it to him to do so.

In the preface to his report Blumhardt wrote:

Until now I have never spoken with such boldness and candor to anybody about my experiences. Even my best friends look at me askance and act as though they feel threatened by even hearing about these things. Until now, most of it has remained a secret that I could have taken with me to the grave. It would have been easy to give an account that avoided offending any reader, but I could not do that. At almost every paragraph I asked myself if it was not rash to tell everything just as it was, but time and again an inner voice would say, "Out with it!"

So I dared it, in the name of Jesus, the victor. This is an honest report of what I can still remember, and I am firmly convinced that the Lord will hold his hand over me in this. My only intention is to tell everything to the honor of him who is the victor over all dark powers. I cannot take it amiss if somebody is mistrustful of these accounts, for these things are beyond our understanding. They are, however, based on observations and experiences over nearly two years, ones which can in every case be corroborated by eye-witnesses.

In speaking out unreservedly for the first time, I ask that the information given here be regarded as private, as when close friends share a secret. I also ask the reader

to be so good as to read the whole report several times before forming a judgment. Meanwhile, I put my trust in Him who has human hearts in his power. Whatever the verdict of those who read this account, I rest assured in the knowledge that I have spoken the unvarnished truth, and in the rock-like certainty that Jesus is the victor.

Möttlingen, a parish at the northern end of the Black Forest which numbered 874 souls when Blumhardt arrived, encompasses two villages. Möttlingen proper, with a population of 535, overlooks the Nagold River and has the architecture, costumes, and customs of the Swabian lowland. Haugstett, the parish branch, is more typical of the Black Forest region, and its inhabitants were known at the time for a spirit of independence so fierce that it often bordered on hostility toward their pastor.

Near the edge of the village of Möttlingen stands a ramshackle house, recognizable now just as it was then by a window shutter bearing this weather-worn inscription:

Man, think on eternity,
And do not mock the time of grace,
For judgment is not far off.

In the spring of 1840 a poor family by the name of Dittus, consisting of two brothers and three sisters, moved into the ground floor apartment of this house. The eldest, Andreas, later became a village councillor. Then came Johann Georg, half blind and known as Hans. After him came three girls: Katharina, Anna Maria, and Gottliebin. Their parents, both devout Christians, had died young.

Gottlieb, who was born on October 13, 1815, was spiritually precocious and a favorite pupil of Pastor Barth, Blumhardt's predecessor. Adept at composing verse, she later wrote many fine songs. Yet from childhood on she experienced uncanny things and contracted one strange illness after the next, which more than once forced her to give up a good job. Though no one was certain of the cause of these afflictions, they were presumed to spring from her involvement in the magic practices rampant in villages throughout the region. Barth used his connections to consult eminent physicians on her behalf, and she recovered fairly well from her last ailment, a kidney disease.

Gottlieb felt as attracted to Blumhardt as she felt repelled by him. At his first sermon she had to fight a desire to scratch his eyes out. On the other hand, Blumhardt could be sure of seeing her wherever she had a chance of hearing an uplifting word from him. For instance, she attended his service at the remote parish branch of Haugstett every week, even though one of her legs was shorter than the other, and it was difficult for her to walk long distances. Gottlieb had a marked, dejected sort of shyness, which, when broken, revealed a defensive reserve. She made a downright unpleasant impression on Blumhardt and on others as well.

No sooner had the Dittuses moved into their new apartment than Gottlieb reported seeing and hearing strange things in the house. Other family members noticed them too. On the first day, as Andreas said grace at table, Gottlieb fell unconscious to the floor at the

