

# The Legacy of Adventist Martyrs in Europe

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DANIEL HEINZ

Daniel Heinz, Ph.D., is director of the Historical Archives of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe located at Friedensau Adventist University, Germany. He did his ministerial studies at Bogenhofen Seminary and further studies at the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University in Vienna. His Ph.D. is in modern church history and Adventist studies from Andrews University. Some of his publications include *Church, State, and Religious Dissent: A History of Seventh-day Adventists in Austria, 1890–1975* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993) and *So komm noch diese Stunde. Luthers Reformation aus Sicht der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten* (Lüneburg, 2016).

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*Note: This article presents an account of the influence and witness of some remarkable martyred and persecuted European Adventists during the political and religious epochs of the Ottoman Empire, Soviet Communism, and German Fascism. In the future, this article will be updated to include other martyrs in Europe (for example, Adventist martyrs in Serbia and Romania) and missionaries from Europe who died as martyrs in mission fields outside of Europe.*

## Overview of the Issue

Christian martyrs are believers in Christ who lost their lives prematurely in situations of witness as a result of human hostility and violence. Since the day Stephen was stoned for the cause of Christ, Christian martyrs have sealed their faith with blood for nearly two thousand years.<sup>1</sup> They remained true to God even when it cost them dearly. In their life and death, Christ's words were fulfilled: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 26:24–25, ESV).

The 20th century entered the annals of history as *the* century of martyrs. In that century, more Christians were killed for their faith than in any previous century. In Turkey, Christian Armenians and Assyrians endured terrible persecution. Between 1894 and 1923, around 1.5 million people of these ethnic groups perished in a national genocide that Elie Wiesel has called "a holocaust before the Holocaust." The war against Christianity, waged by modern dictators of both Communist and Fascist persuasions, resulted in indescribable sufferings. It led to a death toll that has not been calculated to this day.

The period of persecution under the Soviet regime stretched, roughly speaking, from 1917 to 1965, with the years of terror during Stalin's rule (1929–1941) being the darkest ones. The Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn estimates that in the years 1937 to 1939 alone, around 1.7 million people were shot by Soviet militia. Stalin's number of victims has been roughly estimated at fifteen million. Even though the majority of these victims perished on "political" grounds, the Christians who died tragically or deliberately due to their

religious convictions number several million. The Stalinist “purges” are indeed without precedent in world history.<sup>2</sup> Even though National Socialism’s reign of terror was much shorter than the Stalinist one, the systematic and perfected annihilation of Jews and Jewish Christians during that time reached atrocious proportions. And even the more recent past—if we, for instance, consider only the persecution of Christians during the Chinese Cultural Revolution—is soaked with the blood of millions of martyrs.

It is true that Christians today can speak freely about their faith in Western societies. Yet human rights experts have demonstrated that even today, Christianity remains the most persecuted religion worldwide.<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that in recent years, around 100,000 Christians were killed annually at a global level.<sup>4</sup> In many Islamic states in the Near East, Asia, and Africa, violence against Christians is particularly strong. The life of the Christian Church is dependent on the faith expressions of these courageous witnesses. The early church father Tertullian (2nd–3rd century) stated, “*Semen est sanguis Christianorum*” (The blood of Christians is seed”).<sup>5</sup> A church that does not know or forgets its martyrs cuts itself off from its own history and loses its value and purpose.

Seventh-day Adventists also count many martyrs among their ranks, especially in Europe. They were killed as “Christian heretics” in the Ottoman Empire. They died under torture in the dungeons of the Soviet secret police or in Siberian labor camps, completely isolated from the outside world. Some were killed by Nazi henchmen due to nonviolence, conscientious objection to military service, or refusal to work on Sabbath. Some lost their lives as missionaries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Their persecutors were not only militant nonbelievers or hostile atheists but also fanatics from non-Christian religions. Some Adventists even fell victim to ecclesiastic or Christian violence, especially in Orthodox countries such as tsarist Russia, Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Besides this, the story of many Adventist martyrs is still unknown.<sup>6</sup>

## Adventist Martyrs: Uncomfortable Witnesses?

No monograph has been written in the field of Adventist martyrology so far. The topic is obviously not yet part of the spiritual or theological mindset of the Church even though Adventists have developed a biblical end-time scenario that includes the persecution of faithful believers by anti-Christian powers. The heritage of the martyrs as “models of faith” (not as “saints” or “mediators” as in Roman Catholic tradition!) is alive in the historical consciousness of other Protestant denominations (e.g., the Mennonites).<sup>7</sup> One of the reasons that many Adventist martyrs are not known is due to insufficient sources of information. The readiness to suffer in the sense of “self-denial” and “carrying the cross” is still required of all those who wish to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, honestly, and consistently (2 Timothy 3:12).

Uncompromising martyrs who lived out their faith to the last consequence always have been a challenge to the church. In fact, they reflect the true crisis that exists within the church, a church that prefers to ensure its survival in some given situation by entering into complicity or compromise with the ruling power, thus going directly against the divine commandment and human conscience.<sup>8</sup> The painful contrast between aspiration and

reality in the life of a church is manifested by the powerful and clear witness of its martyrs. And, thus, the memory of martyrs may indeed raise uncomfortable questions: If their nonconformist choices were right, did all the other true believers go astray? Are there ultimately only two positions to be taken, for or against? Or how should the biblical commandment “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29, ESV) be understood in practice? How important are biblical doctrines to me in times of trouble and temptation? Do I have a solid, Bible-based personal conviction, a living and independent trust in God, or are all my religious convictions more or less shaped by the sociocultural environment in which I live? Do I shy away from inevitable conflicts to live comfortably or, at least, to survive under pressure, or do I have the courage to resist and suffer even at the risk of my life? Do I ultimately tend to forget the witness and legacy of Christian martyrs to avoid inner struggle?

Despite the diversity of their sufferings, Adventist martyrs have one thing in common: They represent a radical challenge to our Christian life, reminding us of the apocalyptic warning to Laodicea: “So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16, ESV). At the same time, they encourage us to follow the Master by carrying the cross willingly and patiently, for—to put it in the words of Heinrich J. Löbsack—it is “a burden that is light in view of the signs of the approaching Advent,” a burden that “uplifts us in the light of eternity.”<sup>9</sup> Löbsack, who was murdered in a labor camp and who had furthered the Adventist missionary cause in Russia and the Soviet Union with untold sacrifices, concludes: “I know no disappointment, for I ‘have tasted the powers of the world to come’ (Hebrews 6:5).”<sup>10</sup> This strong eschatological assurance—“to stand finally with all the perfected saints on Mount Zion!”—gave Adventist martyrs the strength to remain faithful to God despite despair, doubts, fears, and sufferings as they faced the greatest, final trial of their life.

## The Adventist Story: Persecution, Hardship, and Death

This article can mention only a few examples of Adventist martyrs from various epochs. Their stories exemplify the stories of many others who suffered a similar fate. Some remain forgotten, are unknown, or are lost to memory until today. This ambiguous situation is characteristic of many Adventist martyrs who suffered and died in anonymity and loneliness, completely cut off from the outside world in prisons, in concentration camps, or in labor camps. The perpetrators methodically covered the traces of the victims as if they never had existed. I was continually reminded of this fact during the weary research into files of the Soviet secret police, which were intentionally scattered all over the country to make any investigations as difficult as possible. In many cases, documents were redacted to hide the truth behind them. For nearly 30 years, the author has endeavored to collect biographical information about Adventist martyrs in Russian and Ukrainian archives with rather limited success. The “operative documents” (spy and police reports), for example, are still closed to the public to this day. Once all relatives of a repressed or executed person have passed away, archivists and police refuse categorically to cooperate with investigators or historians, and no files are released.

When the Turkish authorities realized the purpose of my investigations in Istanbul in 1995, they became furious and blocked access to all archives. To the present day, the Turkish government officially denies the Armenian genocide. Historians often face closed doors. What remains is the certainty that those who were persecuted and killed are not forgotten by God. Their names neither drown in the water nor burn up in the flames (Isa 43:1–2). The fragmentary historical records that do exist—whether transcripts of court proceedings or a personal farewell note—may demonstrate, sometimes in a deeply moving way, the strong faith of the victims. This faith was not free from doubt or fear, but it held on to the end. Often, this work of uncovering history will simply remain a tentative but intricate search for traces, with few historical results, a challenge for every researcher, but, spiritually, most rewarding.

First, we will look at Adventist victims of Greek and Armenian background in the Ottoman Empire who lost their lives in the course of the Young Turks revolution. They were not only political victims, for they died as confessing and practicing Christians in a hostile and intolerant Islamic environment. Although the Ottoman Empire was, historically, geographically, and culturally, never part of Europe—even though it had subjugated in the course of history large territories of southeastern Europe—the little flock of Greek and Armenian Seventh-day Adventists within its borders always considered itself to be more European than Oriental in its cultural outlook and orientation. Next, we will consider the group of martyrs during the time of German National Socialism and Soviet Stalinism—both totalitarian regimes that were profoundly atheist and hostile to Christianity. As for European Adventist martyrs who died as missionaries in non-European mission fields—mostly due to sickness and exhaustion, but also through violence—their story, unfortunately, lies beyond the limited scope of this presentation. Nevertheless, we should not forget any single Adventist martyr in our historical work. They are heroes of faith, even if they did not consider themselves as such. If we forget their names, even unintentionally, we allow them, metaphorically, to suffer “death” a second time—in our memory—and their witness for us is forever lost.

## “God Has Satisfied My Spiritual Hunger”: Diran Tcherakian

The annihilation of the Armenian Adventist congregations is one of the saddest chapters in Adventist mission history.<sup>11</sup> In 1914, there were about 350 Adventist church members, most of them ethnic Armenians, scattered all over Turkey. Of those, more than 250 lost their lives in the years to come, among them about 50 children or youth. Very few seem to have converted to Islam to save their lives. One of the first martyrs was the untiring Dzdour G. Baharian, who has become known as the Adventist “father” and “apostle” of the Armenians. Kurdish soldiers murdered him in 1914 close to Sivas while he was on a missionary journey. Baharian was ordered to renounce Christ and accept Islam on the spot. When he resisted and folded his hands for prayer, he was shot in cold blood. The murderers then sold his clothes and belongings in the marketplace. Other Adventist preachers followed Baharian into death in the following months and years, some with their families: E. Ayvazian, B. Touzajian, M. Ashikian, H. Apovian, H. Shadarevian, O. Pirenian, and finally Diran Tcherakian. Those who were

not killed immediately perished during the so-called “death marches,” which were organized by the Turkish army. The prisoners, sometimes whole families with their children, were led through rough mountain and desert areas for hundreds of miles without regular food and water until they perished in the blazing heat.

Diran Tcherakian was a famous Armenian poet and college teacher who decided in 1921 to travel through Anatolia as an itinerant preacher to comfort the threatened, frightened, and isolated Adventist church members on his way. He was among those who later perished in one of these numerous death marches. We are relatively well informed about the martyrdom of Tcherakian because he was already famous during his lifetime, so the entire Armenian people mourned his death. Tcherakian also managed to leave behind written notes during the march that found their way back to the Adventist members in Constantinople, where the mission office was located. In addition, there were also some eyewitnesses who reported his death in oral and written form later on. Even the *Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia*, published in Yerevan from 1974 to 1986, honored Tcherakian with an entry that acknowledged his literary accomplishments for the Armenian nation.<sup>12</sup>

Tcherakian, the restless and searching poet, had become a fervent Adventist believer in 1915 and, according to his own testimony, saw in the return of Christ the fulfillment of his deep spiritual longing. After the death of Baharian, the 40-year-old took over the pastoral care of the small Armenian flock that had survived the genocide. This Tcherakian did until 1921, when he was arrested in Konya and convicted because he refused to renounce his faith in court. He had preached about his favorite topic, the soon-coming “kingdom of God.” The Turkish authorities, however, accused him of “rebellion.” Two sturdy brothers from the local Adventist group were convicted with him and shot dead within a few days after the trial. Tcherakian’s ordeal began on April 14, 1921. For several months, he was forced to walk in chains, beaten and tortured by mounted militiamen, traversing the barren mountainous area of Anatolia. Gradually all his belongings were taken from him. With a small Bible in his hands, he preached to his fellow prisoners while walking.

After having traveled about a thousand kilometers (about 620 miles), the convict colony reached the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir on the banks of the river Tigris in June. They now faced the deadly Syrian desert beyond the river. Along the way, women and children from Armenian villages, taking pity on the prisoners, had given them food or washed them and their clothes. Any prisoner who could not walk farther was now left behind to die. Tcherakian was struck by fever, and finally, his feet could not carry him any longer. His fellow prisoners, who had listened to his short sermons on the march, being themselves in deepest misery and totally exhausted, did not want to leave the preacher behind and decided to carry him on their backs until strength forsook them too. Yet, they did not give up and convinced some officers, in exchange for Tcherakian’s coat, to lift him onto a horse and tie him to the saddle. A few hours later, Tcherakian passed away. In one of his final words, he exhorted his companions to keep together and not to allow their faith and love to cease.<sup>13</sup>

**“All the Kingdoms of This World Shall Pass Away”: Karl G. Harress**

Since Adventists distanced themselves from state and politics on the one hand and kept to the divine commandment and their conscience on the other, they often found themselves in conflict with the authorities. They did not openly show political opposition but valued loyalty to God above loyalty to the government according to the principle “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). However, this stance was not an iron rule but left to the individual church member’s understanding and interpretation. At times, it caused those members who took the rule very seriously not only sufferings but also loneliness and isolation because they could not rely on the spiritual support of their local congregation or denominational leadership. Frequently, church leaders or even close fellow believers accused them of religious hubris, ostentation, or fanaticism. Thus, they eventually became “strangers” in the ranks of their own congregation, which saw political or social adjustments as a means of survival and, therefore, distanced itself from members who would not bend or compromise.

The Adventist minister Karl G. Harress grew up in the province of Thuringia and was working as a pastor in Oldenburg at the time of his arrest. His wife, Frieda, described him as “a level-headed man, who already in 1939 perceived the catastrophe that was about to befall the German nation.” In December 1941, he held public lectures on the occasion of the annual week of prayer. Unnoticed by Harress, three undercover Gestapo agents were sitting in the audience pretending interest in the message he presented. At the end of one lecture, they suddenly arrested him. After intense police interrogation, Harress honestly admitted his opposition to the Nazi regime, which he based on the message of the prophet Daniel that no earthly kingdom will last (Dan 2).<sup>14</sup>

He was taken into “custody” and finally judged by the People’s Court (*Volksgesichtshof*). In February 1942, the 55-year old pastor was transferred to the Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp, where he was left to the whims of the guards. Already severely weakened, he was put to the task of cleaning sidewalks with a toothbrush. Many times, he collapsed, unconscious. Soon thereafter, he was transferred to the concentration camp of Gross-Rosen in Lower Silesia, which claimed many victims due to the grueling forced labor in the granite quarry. Harress managed to send some short letters to his wife from the camp. One letter reveals that he refused to use the greeting “*Heil Hitler*.” The courageous preacher died on July 6, 1942, as a result of the severe conditions. It is uncertain whether the official cause of death—poor blood circulation—corresponded to reality. Harress was one of the few German Adventist martyrs in the Third Reich.

## Conscientious Objectors

Many Adventist conscientious objectors were persecuted for their faith, some of whom are known to us by name: Fritz Bergner, Hans Brüning, Otto König, Franz Partes, Herbert Schwalbe, Franz Dlugosch, Willi Kollmann, and Erich Mertinat. Erich Mertinat, a young dentist from Treuburg, East Prussia, refused to kill but was permitted to serve as a medic. Fritz Bergner, born in 1903 in Berlin, who was a simple locksmith, saw his conscription to the *Wehrmacht* (German armed forces) as “the most difficult trial” in his life (“I was in constant conflict with my

religious convictions”).<sup>15</sup> At first, he complied with the orders, but could not go against his conscience for long. In 1942, in the battle turmoil on the Eastern front, he affirmed: “I would rather be shot than raise a weapon against the enemy.” Bergner was deemed “unworthy to bear arms” and handed over to the Gestapo. A few months later, he died in the Dachau concentration camp. We do not know the real cause of his death.

When Hans Brüning of Rostock was enlisted in 1943, he attempted to flee to Switzerland. Before he could cross the border, he was arrested and convicted for desertion. Soon after, Brüning was executed in the city of Posen by the Gestapo.

Franz Partes from Vienna and Otto König from Eastern Prussia were already advanced in age when they were drafted into the *Volkssturm* (German national militia) in the very last phase of the war. The latter stated: “I can serve only one *Führer* [Leader], and I do not want to be unfaithful to Him at the end of my life.”<sup>16</sup> Both were convicted and died under unknown circumstances.

Even though he was physically disabled—visually impaired—Herbert Schwalbe from Dresden was conscripted to the armed forces and died as a conscientious objector and deserter. Franz Dlugosch, an Adventist merchant and staunch pacifist from Lossen in Silesia, suffered a similar fate when he was shot in 1940 in Łódź/Litzmannstadt for refusing to bear arms. In 1937, he had already been imprisoned for “fleeing the flag.” Willi Kollmann, born 1914 in Neustrelitz, had been a colporteur and a student at the Adventist Seminary in Neandertal. After having finished a specialized training with the German Luftwaffe, Kollmann worked as a cargo pilot, mainly in the Ukraine. He brought food and medical supplies to frontline soldiers on his plane, a Heinkel He 111. Kollmann even received a military medal of honor (“honor roll clasp” or *Frontflug-Spange*) for his courageous service. In March 1944, however, he was ordered to change planes and work as a bomber pilot. Being a staunch Christian, Kollmann refused repeatedly. He was then ordered before a military tribunal but before the court was able to decide on a final verdict, Kollmann was suddenly shot on April 27, 1944, at Jarosław in eastern Poland.<sup>17</sup>

When the German army had to withdraw in Bobruisk (Mogilev) at the White Russian front line in June 1944, Erich Mertinat was left behind with a large group of heavily wounded German soldiers. As a devout Christian, he had volunteered to take care of them since they were unfit for transport. When the Soviet army took over, these wounded soldiers were most probably executed together with Mertinat. Nothing was heard of them, and Mertinat’s fate has been a mystery ever since.<sup>18</sup>

Some Adventists lost their lives because they had protected Jews by helping them to hide or flee the country. For example, Zoltán Kubinyi, an Adventist military officer of a Jewish work battalion from Hungary, freed about 140 Jewish prisoners, but he himself was taken prisoner and later found dead in a Siberian labor camp!<sup>19</sup>

Finally, there were the brave conscientious objectors among the German “Reform Adventists,” of whom seven died just between 1941 and 1943 in the prison of Brandenburg-Görden.<sup>20</sup> Of all churches and denominations—with the exception of the Jehovah’s Witnesses—Adventists and Reform Adventists account for

the highest number of conscientious objectors (around 18, though the number of unreported cases is higher), a historical fact that was previously unnoticed in research literature.<sup>21</sup>

## “I Have Tasted the Powers of the World to Come”: Heinrich J. Löbsack

Adventists were hit particularly hard in the Soviet Union. During the time of the persecutions under Stalin (1924–1941), entire congregations were wiped out. About 70 percent of all preachers and church leaders were killed. Nearly 3,000 to 4,000 church members, about one fourth of the Soviet Adventist membership at that time, lost their lives due to persecution, hunger, and detention in labor camps. It is impossible to calculate the precise number of Adventist martyrs in the Soviet Union. A few relatively well-documented cases are now known after many years of research and investigation.<sup>22</sup>

The White Russian preacher Alexander M. Gryc (Gritz) represents one of these cases. Gryc testified of his faith openly in his East-Siberian captivity in 1944 until he was tied to a tree in the extreme cold and water was poured over him until he froze stiff. The Russian-German leaders Jacob K. Reimer and Jakob W. Kraus, who had studied in Friedensau before World War I, were shot in labor camps in the late 1930s for refusing to work on Sabbath and for conducting baptisms in secret. A particularly agonizing fate was that of the president of the entire church work in the Soviet Union, Heinrich J. Löbsack.<sup>23</sup> On the night before March 21, 1934, a black car stopped outside his home in Durowa Street 22, Moscow. Undercover secret service agents stepped out and knocked loudly at the door of apartment 19 of the wooden house, built in traditional Russian fashion. The Volga-German Adventist preacher from the village of Frank had spent years of sacrificial work as colporteur, pastor, and superintendent in the largest country on earth. He had now grown old but was still undeterred in his service for the church. He quietly opened the door. “Genrich Ivanovitsch Lebsak!” one of the men shouted, “You are under arrest!” Before Löbsack was put into handcuffs, he called out to his fellow workers in the mission house: “Brethren, keep on working and do not become discouraged because the work of God is like a river and cannot be stopped.” These were the last words of the doomed preacher to his congregation. They represent a legacy to this day.

No other person accomplished as much for the Adventist cause in Russia as he did. From 1890 onward, Löbsack had been an itinerant preacher and a church leader on the front lines. In 1927, if we just look at one year of his life, he traveled 46,000 kilometers (about 28,500 miles) by train, ship, car, and on horseback to visit Adventist congregations scattered all over the country. Adversity, persecution, and imprisonment run like a red thread through his life. He often found himself “chased like a hunted deer.” His missionary spirit came from a deep eschatological assurance, which he expressed in 1906 in one of his many poems in the following words: “Du machtest mich zum Himmelsbürger, Befreit von Angst; Drum will ich, Herr, für Dich auch sterben, Wenn Du’s verlangst.”<sup>24</sup> At that time Löbsack, of course, did not know that he would have to suffer precisely this fate one day.

The highlights of his career as a church leader were the recognition of the Adventist Church through a declaration of tolerance issued by Tsar Nicholas II in 1906, the reorganization of the Church as a "Federation of Unions" (*All-Räte-Bundesunion*) at the beginning of the new era of the Soviet Union, the doubling of membership from 1920 to 1927 under his presidency (from 1920 on), and the founding of a publishing house. At the same time, Löbsack realized that the Soviet state was increasingly tightening its iron grip on the church through new restrictions and repressions. At two Adventist conferences held in Moscow in 1924 and 1928, he attempted to find a compromise with the state and the party, especially with regard to the question of military service.

In 1924, he issued a formal declaration stating that each member "had to solve the question of military service according to its own conscience." In 1928, however, under severe pressure from the authorities, Löbsack proclaimed that, henceforth, members must fully accept "military service in all its forms." Church members who failed to adhere to this guideline were to be considered as "false teachers" and dismissed. Consequently, various dissident Adventist underground movements arose in the country that refused to accept the church's compromise with the state. After 1929 (and the new laws restricting religion), the situation in Moscow became gradually unbearable for Löbsack. Secret police officials now summoned him almost daily for negotiations and interrogations that lasted for hours, with Löbsack always barely escaping arrest. Once again, he tried to appease his suppressors. This time, in June 1933, he published a circular in which he encouraged Adventist *Kolchos* (collective farm) farmers to work on the Sabbath during harvest time, a highly controversial move by the faithful church leader. Löbsack did not want the smoldering wick of the suppressed church to go out entirely, and, therefore, for one last time tried desperately to accommodate, hoping to finally win the favor of the authorities.

Yet his efforts were doomed from the start. Later, in prison, he confessed to his wife in tears how much he regretted these compromises. It had become clear to him: "The tyrants want one thing only: the complete annihilation of the Church and our death." After his arrest, Löbsack was interrogated every night for three weeks in the infamous Lubyanka and Butyrka prisons in Moscow until he caved in. The court records give only a vague description of the harassment and punishments he suffered in the torture chambers of the secret police agency.

<sup>25</sup> The goal was to break the body and mind of the prisoner. After Löbsack collapsed, he was taken to the prison hospital to recover so that the trial could continue. It is obvious from the court records available between 1994 and 1995 at the secret intelligence service<sup>26</sup> archives in Moscow that both the charges against and the confessions by Löbsack were falsified. Every defendant was brought to the point where he or she admitted their "mistakes" and, after a Kafkaesque process, ritually pledged to "improve." Löbsack's "confession" of counterrevolutionary activities as defined in Article 58 of the Russian Soviet Penal Code (RSFSR) was brought about through torture, as seen from the later rehabilitation record.

When visited by his wife, he uttered only one wish: "I want to die." Löbsack was sentenced to three years of solitary confinement in a labor camp close to Yaroslavl, northeast of Moscow. Almost nothing is known about his detention conditions. Some of the individual cells in the camp were very small and cold, with a low ceiling, and

could be submerged in water. At the end of his sentence, Löbsack was offered freedom if he recanted his faith. He refused. It is possible that he died in the camp in 1938. An eyewitness claims to have seen a guard beating Löbsack to death with the butt of his rifle. It was later reported that he was executed by a firing squad during the Great Purge. Until today, the exact place, time, and circumstances of his death remain unknown. The family received no official death notification, and his grave has not been located.

## “Consider the Outcome of Their Way of Life, and Follow Their Faith” (Hebrews 13:7, ESV)

The power of Adventist martyrs lies in the fact that they illustrate in a dramatic way what it means to glorify God and be true to his commandments in a world ruled by dark forces. In spite of obstacles and doubts, they remained faithful unto death. The light in their sufferings was the hope in Jesus, the soon-returning King. They saw themselves as subjects of his reign, which is everlasting. And for that, it was worth it both to live and to die.

Never before, when we look at the world as a whole, have there been so many Christian martyrs. In this respect, our lives in Germany and in Western Europe are like an island of blessing. . . . Yes, friends, we still dance in our Christian house parties, while the body of Christ bleeds from a thousand wounds in other countries. We still market the Christian faith under the cheap slogan “Christianity is cool.” But what will we do, when one day Christianity is not “cool” anymore, but a dangerous liability? Who will be sustained by these superficialities when not sitting in church but in prison? When there is no more happy dancing but terrible torture?<sup>27</sup>

The witness of the martyrs reminds the Church that it was first and foremost Jesus who went to the cross for us. Those who live “under the cross” and are persecuted for His sake, He embraces in His infinite love and mercy and declares that theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10). They are unparalleled examples of faith and discipleship.

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## NOTES

1. This article was translated from German by Jón Hjörleifur Stefánsson.
2. With regard to the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union, I refer to the groundbreaking study of my late friend and colleague Hans-Christian Diedrich, which appeared shortly before his untimely death in 2008: *“Wohin sollen wir gehen . . .” Der Weg der Christen durch die sowjetische Religionsverfolgung* (Erlangen: Martin-Luther Verlag, 2007). With great appreciation and thankfulness, I look back at our fruitful cooperation in establishing various lists of Christian martyrs for the Soviet period, which were partially published in his book.

3. Thomas Schirmacher, *Christenverfolgung heute. Die vergessenen Märtyrer* (Holzgerlingen: Hänssler, 2008), 6–65.
4. See Christof Sauer, "Kann man Märtyrer zählen und wenn ja, wie? Gegensätzliche Ansätze," in *Jahrbuch Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen 2018*, ed. Thomas Schirmacher, Max Klingberg, and Martin Warnecke (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2018), 39.
5. Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50, 14, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>.
6. The present article is based on various studies done by the author over a period of many years. I refer to two pieces that contain most of the information presented in this article: "Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz: Das Vermächtnis adventistischer Märtyrer," *Adventecho*, October 2006, 25–28; "Christusbekenner unter Halbmond, Sowjetstern und Hakenkreuz: Adventistische Märtyrerschicksale im 20. Jahrhundert," *Adventecho*, November 2006, 23–26.
7. Cf. Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, "Die Wiederentdeckung der Märtyrer im 20. Jahrhundert," in *Gewalt gegen Christen*, ed. Georg Plasger and Heinz-Günther Stobbe (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2014), 265–280.
8. See Daniel Heinz, "Dem Gebot und Gewissen verpflichtet: Freikirchliche Märtyrer," in *Ihr Ende schaut an . . .*: *Evangelische Märtyrer des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Harald Schultze and Andreas Kurschat, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008), 85–89.
9. See Daniel Heinz, "Heinrich J. Löbsack: Pioneer, President, and Poet of the Adventist Church in Russia, 1870–1938," *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR)* 21, no. 1 (1998): 11–16.
10. *Ibid.*, 13.
11. See Daniel Heinz, "Adventisten im Osmanischen Reich—Ein Fallbeispiel für islamische Intoleranz," in *For You Have Strengthened Me: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (St. Peter/Hart: Seminar Bogenhofen, 2007), 453–478.
12. The State Museum of Yerevan dedicates one exhibition room to the life and work of Diran Tcherakian as an outstanding Armenian writer and philosopher. However, no information is given on his later life as an Adventist lay pastor and missionary.
13. Some vital information on Tcherakian is from the late Professor Nourhan Ouzounian, an Armenian Adventist scholar and linguist. He invited the author to his home in Montreal in 2001, where they attempted to reconstruct the biography of Tcherakian on the basis of the primary sources in his collection.
14. See Heinz, "Dem Gebot und Gewissen verpflichtet," 307–308. Cf. also Johannes Hartlapp, "Karl Georg Harreß—Ein adventistischer Märtyrer," *Dialog* (Theologische Hochschule Friedensau) (July–September 2014): 8. For the difficult situation of the Adventist Church during the Nazi regime, I refer to Johannes Hartlapp's monumental study, *Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2008).
15. On Fritz Bergner and Hans Brüning, see Heinz, "Dem Gebot und Gewissen verpflichtet," 232–233, 244.

16. Heinz, "Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz," 27.
17. See Daniel Heinz, "Adventist Opposition to War in Europe: Cases of Nonconformity and Conscientious Objection," in *Adventists and Military Service: Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives*, ed. Frank Hasel, Barna Magyarosi, and Stefan Höschele (Madrid: Sateliz 2019), 147.
18. Walter Mertinat (brother of Erich), interview by Daniel Heinz, Freiburg/Br., 8. 11. 2002.
19. See Daniel Heinz, ed., *Freikirchen und Juden im "Dritten Reich." Instrumentalisierte Heilsgeschichte, antisemitische Vorurteile und verdrängte Schuld* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2011), 298, 302, 304.
20. The author refers to the short biographical entries that he dedicated to them in Heinz, "Dem Gebot und Gewissen verpflichtet." Cf. also Ines Müller, ed., *Du sammelst meine Tränen. Glaubenszeugen im Nationalsozialismus* (Naumburg/Saale: Edelstein Verlag, 2014).
21. See Heinz, "Dem Gebot und Gewissen verpflichtet," 94.
22. The author conducted more than 15 field trips between 1994 and 2015 to states and cities of the former Soviet Union searching for biographical information on Adventist martyrs among local congregations and in various public archives. Most of the material he found is not yet ready for publication but still gives an idea of the vast extent of state suppression and annihilation during the Communist years.
23. On Löbsack, see Heinz, "Dem Gebot und Gewissen verpflichtet," 602–603.
24. Translation: "You made me a citizen of heaven / And freed me from all fear / And, therefore, Lord, I would also die for You / If you would so require."
25. The secret police agency, Stalin's instrument of terror, was named NKVD, which stands for People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. From 1954 until 1991, it was called the KGB (translated in English as "Committee for State Security"). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the secret intelligence service took a new name: FSB (Federal Security Service).
26. See the previous note.
27. Theo Lehmann, "Das Land ist still," *Idea Spektrum*, May 26, 2004, 3.

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