A Personal Note

My “Theology of Hope” has two roots: Christoph Blumhardt and Ernst Bloch. I was not in Bad Boll; nor was I in Württemberg. But I was first influenced by Christoph Blumhardt before I read Ernst Bloch through my involvement with others in a “Blumhardt circle.” This happened in 1958 in Wuppertal, when, together with my soon-to-be-friend Rudolf Bohren, I was called to the Kirchliche Hochschule there. At the nearby Pädagogische Hochschule I met Johannes Harder. Rudolf Bohren, who was from Switzerland, was touched early on by Blumhardt’s spirit of hope through Thurneysen and Ragaz. Johannes Harder, who came from the Mennonites at the Wolga, connected Blumhardt’s spirit of hope with the

* Editor’s Note: The Blumhardts, father (Johann) and son (Christoph) were nineteenth-century German pietists who exercised a profound influence on Protestant church life and theology with their emphasis on the Kingdom of God. Though authors at times refer to them both under the singular name “Blumhardt,” there was a difference between them. The father established himself as a preacher who prayed for the healing of a woman tormented by evil spirits. Her deliverance led to a lengthy revival in the town of Möttlingen and, later, to the establishment of a healing home at nearby Bad Boll. The son became known for his “turn to the world” of socialist politics in his effort to expand the healing work of Christ to a much broader context. The following text is a translation of an address entitled, “Reich-Gottes-Hoffnung und Hoffnungszeichen in der Welt. Die Aktualität von Blumhardts Theologie,” delivered at the Blumhardt-Pilgrimage on the occasion of the 28th “Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag,” held on June 19, 1999 at the Evangelical Academy of Bad Boll. The translation was by done by Michael Nausner, Christian Collins Winn, and Peter Heltzel. Sources were footnoted wherever possible.

Mennonite vocation of radical discipleship in foreign countries. Johannes Rau was the fourth member in our Blumhardt circle. Bohren loved Blumhardt’s counseling, which he exercised with us, calling it “dining counseling.” In 1978, Harder edited from the somewhat chaotic Nachlass the “new texts” from Christoph Blumhardt’s Devotions, Sermons, Speeches and Letters (1865-1917): truly devotional books for one’s own soul and a rich source for unusual theological thoughts on hope.

By that time I myself had moved from Karl Barth to Christoph Blumhardt in order to rediscover, together with him and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the lost horizons of Christian faith: genuine worldliness, true humanness, simple naturalness, and the “wide space” of the Spirit in the dawn of the Kingdom of God.

Today I do not want to give a historical piece on Blumhardt, but simply to say what is important for me about Blumhardt and to describe how we can envision a future for our world by remembering his message of hope.

**“Behold, the House of God” in Bad Boll**

The elder Blumhardt, Johann Christoph, had bought Bad Boll because his parsonage in Möttlingen was no longer big enough for the many who came to him seeking help and healing. When “he moved from Möttlingen to Boll and changed from minister to principal and owner of a bath house, the Kingdom of God moved with him from the church into the world,” as Leonhard Ragaz has interpreted this journey. As the younger Blumhardt, Christoph, has reported, however, this journey did not happen without inner and outer struggles:

In Möttlingen as well as in Bad Boll the struggle continued, but there were also new promises. At that time it was not yet possible to liberate oneself from the religious institutions and forms of the time, even if my father was inwardly liberated. Later, in Bad Boll, the second struggle occurred, the divorce from the traditional church forms, which even then was a source of much divine life. That caused an enormous storm, and even today many people in Bad Boll are not reconciled to it. But Jesus, who showed himself as victor in Möttlingen, helped to get through even this storm.

Blumhardt’s healing “bath house” was large: sixty to seventy persons could sit along two long tables in the dining room. Whoever came for

---