

Pastor Vochenzer in the *Interim* 1550

Pastor Jodocus Vochenzer was the first Lutheran pastor known to us by name in Geradstetten. He was presumably installed as priest of the old church here in 1530. It is certain that he avowed his faith to the Reformation, which the Duke brought to Wuerttemberg four years later.

We would not know much about Pastor Vochenzer had he not been taken into custody by the Spanish garrison in Schorndorf in 1550. It was the time of the *Interim*, an emergency law that Emperor Charles V enacted to settle religious issues after the fateful outcome of the *Schmakalden* War. [The Schmalkalden League attempted but failed to blunt Charles V, allied with Spain and the Netherlands, in returning southern Germany to Roman Catholic persuasion. The *Interim* was a conciliatory formula restoring Roman Catholic ritual in general, making some small concession to Lutheran theology, and allowing priests already married to keep their wives, pending further notice.] Because of Charles merely trifling concessions to the Lutheran estates of the realm, they fought vehemently against him. The Emperor's troops occupied the Wuerttemberg towns. During the *Interim*, Duke Ulrich was forced to dismiss all of his pastors. However, he sent them back into the communities as "*catechisten*," to secure at least the basic necessities of Christian instruction.

In January of 1550, Duke Ulrich's Overseer in Schorndorf called the *catechisten* to his office to inform them of the instructions from their sovereign Ulrich. As Vochenzer attempted to return to Geradstetten, he was taken by the Spanish soldiers at the town gate and led before their leader, a commander. With the help of an interpreter, Vochenzer was asked if he was reading the mass, pursuant to the *Interim*. If he was not doing this, the commander roared out, he would be arrested and burned at the stake in the Schorndorf market place.

Pastor Vochenzer vividly detailed the process in a report to the Duke. Let us read his own words:

Eternal Highborn Prince, Noble Lord, your Princely Grace! Just as I am at your humbly, willing, and obedient servant. Noble Prince and Lord!

...And as I came before the gate of the town, several Spaniards followed in my footsteps, ...grabbed me, and signed at me, ordering me to go with another one to the commander, whom I should obey, and when I came by Michael Hanssen's house, they lead me to the next house. The commander himself came and asked me, through his interpreter, if I was obeying the Interim, reading the mass. Whereupon I answered through the interpreter what your Princely Grace had set down for me and the other Catechisten, not to oppose the Interim.

At this point the commander spoke clearly and shouted at Vochenzer:

Because I was opposing him, and would not follow him, I should not look to others for protection, because he will take me into custody, lead me back to Schorndorf, and have me burned at the stake in the market place. So, your Honored Princely Grace, it is my humble plea that you graciously help me, and give me instruction as to how and what I should hold to.

*Your Princely Grace, I am your humble servant
Jodocus Vochenzer
Catechist zu Geratstette*

We can imagine how stricken Vochenzer was with the commander's announcement. He gave the above letter to the Duke's overseer in Schorndorf, who transmitted it, along with a description of the circumstances from his viewpoint. Vochenzer spoke personally to the church tribunal in Stuttgart, in whose proceedings we find the following memorandum:

Your Princely Grace, we wish humbly to inform you that today the Catechist of Geradstetten, Jodocus Vochenzer, who appeared before me here and allowed himself to be interrogated about his report against the commander at Schorndorf, who took him into custody in connection with the observance of the Interim, according to his enclosed description. Whereupon we advised him that he should express himself in Geradstetten, stay out of danger, and, this he liked, to stay out of custody. So we have deliberated, your Princely Grace, and wish to bring this humbly to your attention.

To your Princely Grace by your humble obedient ordained Council for the Performance of Church Service.

The answer of the Duke was short and sweet, but less than helpful:

This Jodocus should not put himself in danger of being burned at the stake until further expanded notice is received.

Pastor Vochenzer died about a year later, without outliving the Spanish occupation. Approximately 1000 soldiers and 400 support people with 200 horses under commanders Diego de Arse and Juan de Casto cleared out of Schorndorf on 19 October 1551 after more than 30 years of occupation.

The overseer Marx Schmidlapp mentioned above composed a poem, which once hung in the meeting room of the Schordorf Town Hall:

At last the time was over,
On a Monday, take notice that,
The nineteenth of October it was,
In fifteen hundred and fifty one,
They went away, God the Father,
and the Son, and the Holy Ghost,
Be praised from warm hearts here,
That we live to see this hour.