

# PAUL SCHNEIDER

## THE WITNESS OF BUCHENWALD

BY **RUDOLF WENTORF** · TRANSLATED BY **FRANKLIN SANDERS**



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P R E S S

**PAUL SCHNEIDER: THE WITNESS OF BUCHENWALD**

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**AUTHOR'S DEDICATION**

*This book is dedicated in friendship to the  
Evangelical Congregations at Hochelheim  
in Kreis Wetzlar, Dornholzhausen in Kreis  
Wetzlar, Dickenschied and Womrath  
in Hunsrueck, and to Mrs. Margarete  
Schneider, born Dieterich, by the author.*

**TRANSLATOR'S DEDICATION**

*To my friend and pastor, Daniel Rogan Morse,  
who has taught me to rejoice in Christ.*

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# TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

*by Franklin Sanders*

**A**lthough it is almost unknown to American and English speaking Christians, the name of Paul Schneider is precious to God. In these days of what seems to be the “coming of peace” around the world, his faithfulness unto death offers indispensable instruction to the Church of Jesus Christ.

If the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, then the ease of the Church threatens to be her destruction. Like the men of Issachar, Paul Schneider knew how to read the times. He recognized that Christians in every age must assert the independence of the Church against all who would control her. He saw the falsehood of those who cried “Peace, peace,” when there could be no peace with the enemies of Christ. Like the faithful servants in the parable of the talents, he refused to hide his belief, choosing rather to suffer affliction at the head of the people of God rather than enjoy a false peace at the cost of the purity of the Gospel.

Pastor Schneider’s life is instructive for us because he did not come to faith easily, but struggled to know God. He dabbled

with eastern religion and political salvation; he fought unbelief and training in God-denying liberalism. Yet by the power of the Holy Spirit he was brought to clean, strong faith in the saving power and all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Raised as a pastor's son, Paul Schneider was given to a morbid introspection before he came to faith. His diary from that time reflects his attempts to sanctify himself in the power of his own flesh, and show us again how pointless such pharisaism is. As he little by little stepped out of the toils of modernism and pharisaism and into the pure light of the Gospel, his earnestness remained, but the morbidity left him as he entered into the joy of his Lord. Although subject to occasional bouts of depression, once he was converted he recognized more and more that only the Spirit of God sanctifies and perfects us in holiness and service, and Schneider comes closer and closer to peace. He depends less and less on himself, and more and more on his Savior and Lord.

The time of Paul's education was a time of great upheaval in Germany. The Great Inflation of 1919-1923 destroyed the wealth and savings of the middle class, and with it, their hopes. Life insurance policies which were once sufficient to carry a widow to the end of her life were paid off in paper currency too meager to buy an egg. The story is told that during the height of the Inflation, an Englishman went into a Berlin bank to change a gold sovereign (about one-fourth of an ounce of gold) into German currency. The teller took one look at the coin, then reached behind him and took his coat off the hook. He called out to his colleagues, "Fellows, let's go home. This Englishman has just bought the bank." It is hardly possible to exaggerate the suffering of the German people at that time—the richest and most stable nation in Europe, tortured by paper money inflation.

Likewise, Germany was tortured by political upheavals. The end of World War I was the time of socialist revolution not only in Tsarist Russia, but also in Germany, where socialism had been born. In one state and in many cities there were rebellions and revolutions. As the twenties wore on, street fighting between left and right became more and more common.

If Paul's musings sound socialist, it is because socialism was the political theme of the times, and one with which Paul Schneider, as a Christian, had to deal. It should be instructive for Christians today that in the end Paul Schneider realized that salvation lay not in the false choices of right or left, but in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul Schneider refused to recognize the false claims of this world's ideologies, whether capitalist or socialist. Paul Schneider refused to accept political conversions, false saviors, and the social redeemers of right and left: he recognized the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only means of healing mankind, the only source of social justice.

Both church and state, the institutions which should have protected him, betrayed Paul Schneider. The state oppressed him for his faithfulness to the gospel; the church, both by cowardice and by cooperation, refused to aid him. The outcome did not rest on Paul Schneider alone, for judgment fell on the whole of Germany.

Ah, but in America the church is not persecuted by the state. Or is it? As incident piles on incident, do Christians not have a reason to dread their future in America? Is there a foretaste of things to come in the treatment of those Christians in the forefront of the fight against abortion? Are they oppressed by the state, and abandoned and condemned by the church? Does the American church speak with one voice in defense of Christ's people, and

in condemning evil in American society—or does the church temporize and vacillate, fearful of confrontation and the cost of following Christ, by her silence abandoning and condemning her children?

We can learn from Paul Schneider. He never gave up calling both church and state to repentance. By both his words and deeds, by his preaching and ministry, he continued to demand obedience to the gospel. It was not accidental that Schneider's final confrontation with the total state was precipitated by the enforcement of church discipline.

Paul Schneider was no advocate of an un-Christian Ghandian civil disobedience. In his life we see patient Christian suffering, bold Christian witness in rebuke to ungodly authorities, and stubborn Christian resistance to evil—regardless of its source. Resistance at the right time, rebuke to evil at all times, submission to suffering as God ordains.

We see here the life of one saint, beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and precious in His eyes, precious especially in his death. That grace poured out over him should stir us up to comfort, knowing that we, too, are precious in His sight and will be given all grace needful to become and remain His faithful witnesses.

The first part of this book, which outlines Paul Schneider's early life and struggle to reach a biblical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, may seem slow, but the reader should remember that "heroes of the faith" do not become heroes from breakfast to lunch. They are brought to steadfastness, trust, and utterly unshakable confidence in Jesus Christ step by step through patient training in sanctification over the years. Indeed, this very training—thorough and unrelenting—which God graciously gives His people enables them to stand for Him in faithful witness. Therefore we should



not despise the day of small beginnings, but rejoice that God will make us able to do all that He requires of us.

*Franklin Sanders, 1993*

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The three decades since I wrote this have not changed my outlook. The church's retreat under the threat of Covid, the attacks on Christian witness as hate speech, the unremitting war against Christian morality, and the attempt to transform Christianity into politics all intensify the need for faithful Christian witnesses and leaders. Now, as always, the Church must war "against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12b; KJV)

For the weapons of our warfare are *still* not carnal, but *still* mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. (See 2 Corinthians 10:4.) The end is *still* sure. The gates of Hell shall not prevail against Christ's Church.

*Franklin Sanders, 2022*

## IN MEMORY

Whenever something new arises somewhere in the world and steps into the sight of time, a certain Chronicler immediately becomes its companion. He only leaves the scene again when the book of history is closed over the event. No one can hinder this Chronicler in His work. There is no place where He does not appear or fails to register everything, the seen as well as the unseen. In every regard, this Chronicler is incorruptible. Before Him lie open both foreground and background. The proverb says, “The sun will bring everything to light.” The Psalmist informs us, “Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.” (Psalm 139:2) Therefore we bear witness: nothing is hidden from God.

There are places on our globe which now and then attach themselves to our attention on the basis of special events. Afterward, however, they step into the background again—until they appear once more on every tongue. Weimar, a city with an overflowing history, belongs among these places. In the past the Chronicler has often had both hands full there just to do His job right.

In 1919 the German National Assembly met in Weimar, elected the first president of the German Reich, and approved a new constitution. Then, in the following twenties and thirties of our century, both the city and its neighborhood were quite easily overlooked, with no trace of hectic unrest.

In July 1937 the citizens of the city were suddenly startled: something wasn't quite right in their area. No one would have guessed in their wildest dreams what was happening not far from Weimar.

The neighborhood of the Ettersberg, left of the Weimar-Sommerdaer highway, was closed to the local population. Trucks of various sorts, among them closed Schutzstaffel (SS) vehicles, bustled down the road. Our Chronicler, for whom no barbed wire is too tight, no voltage too high, and no wall too thick, was now moving about day and night, registering happenings so gruesome that they are imaginable only in apocalyptic times.

A road was built with blood and tears, and a camp was erected for men who had been forcibly ripped away from their families. Closely watched by the SS, whip blows cracked down on the working men, and again and again shots echoed through the woods. It wasn't by accident that the broad concrete stretch received the name "Blood Road." The men driven to work there died in droves by accident, exhaustion, ill treatment, and arbitrary killing. What did one human life count for to the *brown dictators*? Converting them to corpses earned another 200 Reichsmarks, according to *their* computation!

The calendar shows the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent, 1937. In the morning hours a train arrives at the Weimar station from the direction of Frankfurt on the River Main. One car is uncoupled and pushed onto a special track. Heavily armed

policemen immediately surround the car. They watch every single person who steps through the narrow door next to the track and immediately handcuff him. These persons, so strictly watched, must then climb into the waiting trucks, and in a fast trip under the underpass, they turn right up onto the highway, until the driver brakes jerkily and turns left onto “Blood Road.”

After some wide-swinging curves, he stops. The shackled ones get the command to step down. They stand under a veiled November sky. Bordering the road are firs and pines, which with their special meaning in the pre-Christmas season may have snatched the prisoners away from their present situation for splintered seconds. At home, the first candles of Advent will be lit tomorrow.

But suddenly they are recalled from this dream world. The police take off their handcuffs and hand the prisoners over to the SS. Their hands are free, yet in the next few minutes they discover that from now on their only “freedom” is to be delivered over to the savagery of the SS-men, according to their mood.

Suddenly one of those in the black uniforms trimmed with death’s head screams: “Karacho!” Not one of the new arrivals knows what that is supposed to mean. Before it is screamed out a second time, they understand it. The SS-men begin to beat them wildly with cudgels and rifle-butts. They begin to run, as if they were running for their lives. Today, the street right in front of the camp gate is still called “Karacho-way.”

Among the new arrivals there could be found the protestant pastor of Dickenschied and Womrath in Hunsrueck, Paul Schneider. Because of his faithfulness to the people of both church-villages, he is now beaten into the concentration camp. From the SS he receives the prisoner number 2491.

We want to observe the life of Pastor Paul Schneider who, as a servant of the divine Word, became the Witness of Buchenwald. In the Greek tongue the word “witness” is *martyrs*; our word “martyr” is derived from that. Christ Himself commanded his disciples to be His witnesses in the world. That includes—when the situation demands it—also to become a martyr.

We are not promoting any personality cult for our blood-witnesses. They point us, however, toward the complete earnestness of the imitation of Jesus. In their obedience and their firm resoluteness they are models for our faith. We should cause ourselves to remember them: “Think on your teachers, who have spoken to you the word of God; look at their goal and follow their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7) The witness points to Christ, the crucified and resurrected Lord.