

A Theologian Who Fanned the Flames of Revival: August Tholuck and the German Awakening Movement¹

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On April 9, 1822, a little over four years after his own conversion experience in the Berlin Awakening, August Tholuck wrote in his diary, “O burning in me is an unquenchable, blazing fire to be in Christ himself and to lead millions of souls with me into him.”² Tholuck’s spiritual zeal epitomized the German Awakening Movement, which rejected the rationalist theology dominating the German Protestant Church in the early nineteenth century. The Awakening Movement promoted a return to greater theological orthodoxy, but like the earlier Pietist movement (which exerted considerable influence on the Awakening Movement), it was decidedly opposed to an orthodoxy that was cold and lifeless. Instead, it urged church members to seek a conversion experience and to engage in Bible studies and other gatherings for Christian edification. It also promoted the establishment of Bible societies, mission societies, and many charitable institutions and organizations. Tholuck was involved in many of these activities.

It is unlikely that Tholuck personally led millions of souls to salvation. Nonetheless, as a theology student and adjunct professor at the University of Berlin in the early 1820s and as a theology professor at the University of Halle after 1826, he would have a profound influence over multitudes of people. Indeed, just a week after he expressed the desire to lead millions to Christ, he reported in his diary that he had already helped twenty-five people come to Christ.³ In reflecting back on his career in 1873, Tholuck stated that early in his Christian life, “I adopted for my own life the famous motto of Count Zinzendorf: ‘Ich hab nur eine Passion, und die ist Er, nur Er.’ (I have but one passion, and that is He, and He alone). To bring back souls to Christ, was from that time the daily, nay, the hourly *problem* as well as the *joy* of my life.”⁴ Three years earlier, while celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his teaching career, Tholuck reminisced that he could look back “on hundreds and thousands of young men’s hearts, which I have seen open up, and, like everything, it has only been, as Paul says, the fruit of an inner necessity: ‘for I do not boast that I preach the gospel; a necessity has been laid upon me, and woe to me, if I do not preach.’” Tholuck confessed at that time that he was obsessed with “breathing new life from God into the lives of dead, degenerate, and straying young people. And one can only do that, where the spiritual fire from God is present and brings forth the breath of God.” Tholuck expressed astonishment as well as thanks to God for “the spiritual fire from God’s heart, which has been granted to me, since the time when I received the baptism of fire.”⁵

From the time of his conversion through his long career, Tholuck tirelessly worked to promote revival. Through his writing, preaching, teaching, and personal interaction with students—including many Americans, such as the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, who came to study under him—he converted many and inspired those who were already converted to greater spiritual activity. He not only supported mission organizations, but he also encouraged many of his theology students—such as the young George Müller, who later became a famous Bristol preacher and orphanage founder—to go forth as missionaries or pastors to win lost souls for Christ.

Except for Andrew Kloes’s recent book, *The German Awakening: Protestant Renewal after the Enlightenment, 1815-1848*, historians in the Anglo-American world have paid little attention to the Awakening Movement or

to August Tholuck.⁶ Kloes provides a helpful overview of Tholuck's role in the Awakening, but it is quite brief and relies on just a few sources (and no archival sources).⁷ The only recent German-language work providing considerable discussion of Tholuck is Sung-Bong Kim, who focuses on only one of Tholuck's books, *Die Lehre von der Sünde und vom Versöhner* (*The Doctrine of Sin and of the Reconciler*), which was one of the most important books to spread the Awakening Movement.⁸

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF AUGUST THOLUCK

When Tholuck graduated from secondary school in Breslau in October 1816, he was so antagonistic toward Christianity that he gave a talk, in which he maintained that Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Confucianism were all superior to Jesus and Christianity. He was an ardent student of eastern languages, and at that time he intended to travel to the Orient to show how silly Christianity was compared to the wisdom of the East. He studied languages briefly at the University of Breslau, but in early 1817 he travelled to Berlin to meet Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, an expert in Oriental languages, who took him into his home as an assistant. Diez was a committed Christian, and though Tholuck did not convert to Christianity before Diez's death in April 1817, Diez's influence made Tholuck more open to Christianity.⁹ Another powerful influence on Tholuck at that time was his favorite professor at the University of Berlin, the church historian August Neander. Neander held weekly meetings for his students, and by May 1817 Tholuck wrote to a friend that he had often been to Neander's home.¹⁰

The man whom Tholuck credited with bringing him fully into the Christian faith was a friend of Neander, Baron Hans Ernst von Kottwitz, whom Tholuck met sometime in mid-1817. Kottwitz, who had been converted by the Moravian Brethren in the late eighteenth century, moved to Berlin in 1806 and began a ministry for unemployed workmen there. Though he was not instrumental in launching the Berlin Awakening, which began when some young aristocrats had powerful conversion experiences in late 1816, Kottwitz's Voluntary Employment Institution in central Berlin soon became a gathering point for young men whose lives had been transformed in the Awakening.

Tholuck, who dated his conversion to January 1818,¹¹ continually honored Kottwitz as his spiritual father. He once wrote, “My Savior, how many false paths I would have trod, had you not given me a Kottwitz! had you not shown me, that it is not a chimera, that one can actually sacrifice for and devote oneself to the brethren.”¹² After spending time with Kottwitz, he wrote in his diary in July 1823, “O you most holy Kottwitz! You immortal star of my life. As long as you remain happy and love me, my life is yet bearable.”¹³ In September 1827, Tholuck informed Charles Hodge that while he was in Berlin, he had visited “my patriarch,” Kottwitz, who “streamed peace and love for the Savior into my heart without even speaking. When I see how much fellowship with such old disciples has contributed to our Awakening, I hope even more for such a close relationship with Christ.”¹⁴ Soon after Kottwitz’s eightieth birthday in 1837, Tholuck paid tribute to him again, writing, “If I ask myself in my innermost being, what is the pulse that runs through all my work for God’s sake—it is Father Kottwitz. He is my apologetics, who keeps me safe and secure from [David Friedrich] Strauss and everything else.”¹⁵ In December 1821 he wrote, “It is a special grace to live together with so many believers as are here in Berlin. It is like being in the earliest days of Christianity ... O you faithful Lord of glory! Thank you that you have given me such examples, like Spangenberg, Zinzendorf, and Kottwitz. Amen!”¹⁶

After his conversion, Tholuck’s heart was so filled with joy and excitement—as well as love for others—that he wanted everyone to share his glorious experience. In 1870, while reflecting on his conversion, he stated, “Yes, I viewed it as a miracle, how since that time [his conversion] this passion [for Christ] came into my heart. At that time, this young man [i.e., Tholuck himself] viewed everyone who did not know Christ as a fortress to be conquered, to be stormed in the name of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ In a sermon he preached to an annual mission festival in Halle in 1834 he expressed skepticism that people who were indifferent and cold toward missions and the saving of souls could truly be saved themselves.¹⁸ Several times in 1821-22 Tholuck confided to his diary and to friends that he wanted to become a missionary.¹⁹ However, when he was on the verge of accepting an appointment as a missionary to Malta, he ultimately concluded that his health problems did not suit him for foreign missions.²⁰ He also recognized that God was using him in Germany to win souls. In a diary entry in

November 1822, he expressed the wish to become a missionary to Malta, but he also mentioned that he had received a letter from a friend Julius Müller (who was later his colleague as a theology professor at the University of Halle), who credited Tholuck with being his awakener (*Erwecker*).²¹ Indeed, in that letter Müller wrote that what Tholuck had done for him was so extraordinary that he found it impossible to express fully his thankfulness and love for Tholuck. He stated, “When we stand before our Savior and he asks me, ‘Who brought you to me?’ I will point to you.”²²

Though Tholuck did not become a foreign missionary, he ardently supported missions in whatever way he could. Shortly after his conversion in January 1818, he wrote at the top of his diary nine principles that he wanted to live by. The first one was to pray every morning and evening for love, humility, faith, his brothers in Christ, his enemies, and for missions.²³ Tholuck also volunteered in 1820 to provide language instruction to missionary students in Pastor Johann Jänicke’s missionary school in Berlin. Initially Jänicke asked him to teach Arabic to two of his students.²⁴ A year later Tholuck joined the board of directors for the Prussian Main Bible Society in Berlin, a position he held until 1825.²⁵

Tholuck, together with other leading figures in the Berlin Awakening, helped found two mission societies in Berlin. In 1822 the British ambassador to Germany, Sir George Rose, urged Christians in Berlin to form an auxiliary to the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (which carried the same name translated into German—*Gesellschaft zur Beförderung des Christentums unter den Juden*). Not only did Tholuck attend the founding meeting and agree to become one of three secretaries of this new missions organization, but in 1823 his offer to become a paid representative of the London Society was accepted. His duties included not only corresponding on behalf of the society, but also translating tracts for Jews into German, as well as editing a periodical, *Der Freund Israels* (*The Friend of Israel*), which discussed missions to the Jews.²⁶ Tholuck was so excited about reaching the Jews with the Christian message that he wrote in his diary in May 1824 that he and some friends “spoke with delight about the awakening of Israel. I recognize it as grace that the Lord has awakened me for this or rather assigned me to this.”²⁷ Apparently the Berlin Society had some success, for Tholuck reported in 1824 that they had already baptized fifty Jews and the following year they baptized another hundred.²⁸ Though his

periodical ceased publication after two years (1824-25), Tholuck continued supporting missions to Jews after moving to Halle in 1826. Another mission society Tholuck helped establish and support was the Berlin Mission Society (formally known as the Society for Promoting Protestant Missions among the Heathen). Tholuck was one of ten men at its founding meeting in February 1824.²⁹

When Tholuck moved to Halle in 1826 to take up his professorship there, he continued promoting missions. In 1829 he and a couple of friends formed the Halle Mission Society, which was an auxiliary of the Berlin Mission Society. By the mid-1830s Tholuck was speaking at almost every monthly meeting, despite efforts to recruit other speakers. He complained to a friend that he did not have the calling to interest people in missions, but it seems that Tholuck was probably more successful than he thought. He reported in February 1835 that the mission meetings were so full that many people had to be turned away.³⁰ A close friend of Tholuck, Rudolf Stier, a pastor in nearby Frankleben who had earlier taught at the Basel Mission School, occasionally addressed the Halle Mission Society, though not as frequently as Tholuck wished. Stier insisted that he did not have the time to come very often, despite Tholuck's invitations. Stier recognized Tholuck's quandary, however, stating, "Tholuck does everything possible to make it stirring, though one knows that he takes it upon himself merely as a duty."³¹ At the second annual missions festival in Halle in 1834 Tholuck preached a moving sermon from Romans 9:1-5, about Paul's willingness to perish himself if it would bring his fellow Jews to salvation. At the close of this sermon he challenged his audience with the words that had aroused the young Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf over a century earlier. Tholuck stated, "Before you all today the Son of Man with the crown of thorns on his royal forehead stands and asks you: 'I did that for you, what are you doing for me?'"³² In addition to addressing the mission festivals in Halle, Tholuck also preached at mission festivals in other cities, such as Wittenberg, Naumburg, and Magdeburg.³³

Tholuck also encouraged his students to become missionaries. When Tholuck arrived in Halle in 1826, one of the few students with a vibrant faith, George Müller, was already interested in becoming a missionary. Because his father opposed these plans, Müller decided that he should no longer accept any funds from his father. Tholuck intervened by providing Müller with

work as a German tutor for three of his American students—including the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge—who paid Müller well for his services. Later, using his connections with the British-based Continental Society for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge over the Continent of Europe, Tholuck helped arrange for Müller to go as a missionary to Hungary. A war broke out to scuttle these plans, but then Tholuck helped him try to become a missionary to Jews.³⁴ In 1828 the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews accepted Müller as a missionary to Jews, contingent upon him completing their training in London.³⁵ While in England, Müller eventually broke with the Jewish missionary society and became a pastor in the Plymouth Brethren movement. In December 1836, Müller wrote to Tholuck, telling him that he had already established six schools for children, one Sunday School, one adult school, and two orphan houses with 66 children. He then told Tholuck, “Take encouragement from my case. For without boasting I can say it, that God has led me forward since the year 1826, when first you began to take me by the hand ... I shall have reason to praise God for ever [sic], that you were instrumental in bringing me to England.”³⁶ Despite their doctrinal differences (the Plymouth Brethren practiced believers’ baptism, for instance), Tholuck remained on good terms with Müller.³⁷

Tholuck’s writings also played a major role in furthering the Awakening Movement. Many historians consider his 1823 book, *Die Lehre von der Sünde, und vom Versöhner, oder Die Wahre Weihe des Zweiflers* (*The Doctrine of Sin and of the Reconciler, or The True Consecration of the Doubter*), one of the most important books to emerge from the Awakening Movement and to stimulate further revival.³⁸ In the foreword to the seventh edition, Tholuck revealed that he wrote this book at the instigation of Samuel Elsner, a leading figure in the Berlin Awakening. Elsner asked him to write a tract addressing the question, “Do you believe that you are a sinner?” Tholuck admitted that initially he was not very interested in this project, but within three weeks he had written an entire book that was “a reflection of my own inner developments.”³⁹

In the preface to *Lehre von der Sünde* Tholuck exulted in the revival that had recently visited the German Protestant churches. He called the Reformation in the sixteenth century the time of the first resurrection, but after that time, he thought, the churches had died again. Three hundred years

later (thus in the early 1800s) the church experienced a second resurrection, according to Tholuck, who added, “Who would deny that we are living in this time of resurrection?”⁴⁰ The content of his book appealed to those who were already participating in this renewal, and it also helped spread the revival message. The German theologian Gunther Wenz calls Tholuck’s book the “standard tract” of the Awakening. He then identifies several features of the book that reflected the primary concerns of the Awakening Movement: an intense awareness of sin, a focus on grace and reconciliation with God, an emphasis on the Bible, an eschatological vision of history, an inclination for the mysterious and visionary, and the intention of providing edification for believers.⁴¹

Die Lehre von der Sünde is a fictional account of two friends—Guido and Julius—corresponding about their religious life. In his extensive analysis of Tholuck’s book, Sung-Bong Kim asserts that these two characters probably correspond to two of Tholuck’s friends—Guido Neumann and Julius Müller. However, the correlation is probably rather loose, because the Guido in Tholuck’s book becomes a zealous convert to Christianity, while Guido Neumann was not yet converted when Tholuck was writing. As Kim explains, Tholuck wove into both characters elements of his own inner struggle and experience, too.⁴² In the case of Guido this is so pronounced that some commentators think Guido corresponds to Tholuck himself.⁴³ In their fictional correspondence, Julius informs Guido that he has experienced a radical change, a new birth. Guido is skeptical at first, so Julius explains to him the Christian doctrine of sin, which, he claims, provides the best explanation for how humans can have so many noble characteristics, yet at the same time can be so degraded.⁴⁴

Later in the book Guido’s life is also radically transformed. He then becomes enthralled with a godly man named Father Abraham, whose life is dedicated to caring for the poor and downtrodden. Tholuck obviously patterned this admirable character very closely after his beloved Kottwitz (later he explicitly admitted this).⁴⁵ When Guido asks Father Abraham if he thinks this is a time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the latter answers, “Yes, a great resurrection morning is breaking. Hundreds of young people are being awakened all over the place through the Spirit of God. In every community converted people are forming closer relationships. Even the scholarly world is becoming a servant and friend of the Crucified One.”

Guido also attends a fellowship meeting led by Father Abraham, who reads a sermon and prays. Guido is thunderstruck by the old man's closing prayer: "I had not believed, Julius, that a man could be so close to God, as this old disciple was in this prayer." Guido determines to emulate Father Abraham and pursue after Christ with all his heart.⁴⁶

Tholuck's book was a sensation. It was released—anonously at first—in July 1823, and by December the first edition was sold out.⁴⁷ During Tholuck's lifetime eight editions were published, and it was translated into English and several other languages. Tholuck's friend, the theology professor Hermann Olshausen, wrote to Tholuck from Königsberg in October 1823, "Here everyone is reading your book, men and women, young and old; they praise you."⁴⁸ A prominent pastor in the Berlin Awakening, Christian Ludwig Couard, wrote to Tholuck in 1824 that he had eagerly read Tholuck's book and was impressed by how it pointed to what is most important in life. Couard then wrote, "I thank you for much enjoyment for my heart, and much teaching for my mind. You have borne witness to the truth."⁴⁹ In October 1836 Tholuck told an American theology student that he continually received letters informing him about people who were converted through his book.⁵⁰ One person converted by reading his book was a pastor who thereafter played a significant role in the Awakening Movement, Karl Johann Philipp Spitta.⁵¹ Interestingly, Tholuck's book so impressed a young woman, Henriette Heydrich, when she read it in 1826 that she prayed that God would allow her to marry the author, whom she did not know at the time. In 1829 they wed (though she died in 1831).⁵²

To stir up his countrymen to seek revival, in 1834 Tholuck published a German translation of an English-language biography of the great eighteenth-century British revivalist George Whitefield. In his foreword, Tholuck explained that he thought Wesley was even greater than Whitefield, but he also considered Whitefield a powerful man of God. He did not think Germans knew enough about Whitefield. He hoped that this book would convince people that the apostle Paul's zeal for souls was not confined to the first century, but "can come even in these times into the hearts of those who seek their wisdom and strength by turning seriously and faithfully to the source of all power in the Lord." According to Tholuck, Wesley and Whitefield brought life into a dying church, which sometimes persecuted them for doing so. Tholuck continued,

But if at that time such a small number of men, animated by the apostle Paul's spiritual fire, were able to bring forth new life from the dead masses, which spread to millions, why should it not also be possible now among us, through Gods' assistance in the midst of faithful and fiery struggles for the cause of the gospel? Hopefully the reading of this little book by some of our younger theologians will contribute toward igniting this hope and awakening this zeal.⁵³

This Whitefield biography sold well enough to go into a second edition in 1840.

Tholuck also published many scholarly theological works that contributed to the Awakening Movement. In 1824 he published a commentary on the book of Romans, which was based on lectures he gave at the University of Berlin. This book presented a theological case for many of the doctrines he had discussed in more popular fashion in *Die Lehre von der Sünde*. Tholuck was calling his fellow theologians, pastors, and theology students to return to belief in the sinfulness of humanity and salvation by faith.⁵⁴ His commentary on Romans went through five editions by 1856. In 1827 Tholuck published a commentary on the gospel of John, which went through five editions in its first ten years. In addition to these and other commentaries, in 1837 Tholuck published *Die Glaubwürdigkeit der evangelischen Geschichte* (*The Trustworthiness of the Gospel History*), which was a book refuting David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. Strauss had denied the historicity of the gospel accounts about Jesus's life. Tholuck also wrote many articles on apologetics for a journal he established in 1830 and edited for twenty years, *Litterarische Anzeiger für christliche Theologie und Wissenschaft überhaupt* (*Literary Journal for Christian Theology and Scholarship*).⁵⁵

Not only did he promote the Awakening through his writing and scholarship, but Tholuck was also a powerful revival preacher. In an 1834 sermon he explained the impact that he thought sermons should have on their audiences: "Every Sunday the word from this pulpit should fall as the fire of God into your hearts, so that every churchgoer goes home with a blazing heart. Every Sunday it should flow down like a spring rain on parched land, so that every Sunday new green shoots are awakened."⁵⁶ Many testified to the powerful impact Tholuck's sermons had. A review of a collection of his sermons published in 1829 stated, "The calling of this dear author as a preacher is to work to awaken those who are Christians in name

only to a true knowledge of themselves and their sins, and to encourage the quiet seriousness of the Christian faith and life.”⁵⁷

Even before he preached his first official sermon at a church in Berlin in July 1824, Tholuck often spoke to private fellowship meetings, both in Berlin and during his many trips, where he visited Christian colleagues. When Tholuck lived in Berlin, Kottwitz often asked him to share a message at the weekly gatherings at his Voluntary Employment Institution. By December 1821, if not earlier, Tholuck was preaching occasionally at Kottwitz’s meetings.⁵⁸ Earlier that year during his travels, Tholuck had given a discourse on the Sermon on the Mount at a Bible study in Kiel with ten students present.⁵⁹ A pastor in Elberfeld, Karl August Döring, thanked Tholuck for sharing with his young men’s meeting in the summer of 1823. Döring stated, “Your words in the young men’s meeting ... penetrated deeply into the hearts. You brought more blessing through it than you can know or would expect.”⁶⁰

In his first two years in Halle, he only preached occasionally, but when he did, George Müller relished the opportunity to hear him.⁶¹ In 1828-29 he spent a year in Rome as the preacher for the German Protestant Church there. The German ambassador, the Prussian Crown Prince, and others who heard him there were impressed by his ability.⁶² After he returned to Halle in 1829, he preached often as the university preacher and drew large crowds. An American who studied under him, Henry Boynton Smith, wrote to a friend in May 1838, “I have been reading some of his [Tholuck’s] sermons, and admire them exceedingly, they are so impassioned; there is so much movement, feeling, energy, and naturalness in them.” A few months later Smith was travelling with Tholuck, and one Sunday just the two of them held their own church service; they prayed, Smith read a scripture, and Tholuck expounded on it. Smith reported that Tholuck preached as animatedly as if he were addressing a large congregation. A little later during that same trip Tholuck preached a sermon that Smith considered the best he had heard from Tholuck, and “all the auditory was melted to tears by its pathos and power.” A couple of months later Smith wrote to a friend that he loved to hear Tholuck preach: “He has a very great sway over his audience. I have seen them almost all melted to tears.”⁶³

Indeed, Tholuck’s sermons were potent enough to bring at least some of his listeners to repentance and conversion. The American Baptist

theologian Barnas Sears, who studied under Tholuck in 1833-34, reported that Tholuck drew large crowds to the local church when he preached. Sears stated, "Standing almost alone in his evangelical sentiments, Tholuck attracts throngs of rationalists to hear his melting appeals in behalf of a religion pure and undefiled. The first discourse that I heard from him was upon Luther's birthday. He preached like a reformer, and it seemed as if the congregation were ashamed of having departed so egregiously from the standards of the faith." Sears noted that Tholuck's sermons were powerful and then asserted, "As might be expected, he is often the instrument of conversion, not only in his preaching, but also in his private intercourse and in his extensive correspondence."⁶⁴ The German theologian and pastor Otto von Gerlach, a friend of Tholuck, wrote to Charles Hodge in February 1834 that Hodge would soon hear from an American friend who was studying in Halle "how powerful Tholuck's sermons were presently working." Gerlach added that one of his friends and his friend's wife had recently been "awakened" by Tholuck's sermons.⁶⁵ Gerlach's brother Ludwig reported that around 1833 a lawyer in Halle was converted after his wife and mother-in-law convinced him to go hear Tholuck preach.⁶⁶

Tholuck's preaching also made a strong impression on the woman who would become his second wife, Mathilde von Gemmingen. She met him on July 29, 1838, when he spoke to an evening fellowship meeting in Bad Kissingen during one of his trips. After hearing him preach, she wrote, "Tholuck's sermon about love that serves others made an unforgettable impression on me. Both the content and the tone were overpowering for everyone; I was unable to think about anything else." Though she initially balked at his marriage proposal, Tholuck visited her family and received their permission, so she consented and became Mathilde Tholuck on October 9, 1838.⁶⁷

The content of Tholuck's sermons was calculated to elicit a response. He often preached a message of repentance and faith. In a sermon in June 1833 he stated, "Repentance and self-knowledge—that is the threshold to the Christian temple." He also explained that repentance is not just a one-time event for those who are without Christ, but must be repeated throughout one's Christian life.⁶⁸ Elisha Ballantine, an American who studied under Tholuck in 1834-35, reported that Tholuck preached in Halle to a crowded church, and that in his sermons, "all is used to lead his hearers

to repentance.”⁶⁹ In another sermon Tholuck called his contemporaries to repentance by telling them to return to the faith and practice of the early church.⁷⁰

In addition to his writing and preaching, Tholuck used his position as theology professor to try to sway young men to embrace the gospel message. In April 1821, after his first semester as a lecturer (*Privatdozent*) at the University of Berlin, Tholuck wrote in his diary, “The Lord has granted me the most precious thing that I could ever wish; he has given me influence over immortal souls, to direct the immortal souls of those who are redeemed to their Redeemer. I never wish for anything greater, and I don’t know anything more glorious.”⁷¹ Of course Tholuck used the classroom to try to bring revival to his students. Ballantine claimed that in his lectures Tholuck addressed the young men’s hearts, not just their minds. Tholuck, he explained, “often turns the lecture-room into a Bethel [house of God].”⁷² But Tholuck found other means to reach his students, too. Ballantine reported that Tholuck hardly ever dined or walked without two or three students with him. He also held weekly fellowship meetings for his students.

While lecturing at the University of Berlin in the early 1820s he began holding Thursday fellowship meetings in his home for theology students and other Christian friends. In 1821 twenty-six young men were involved with about twenty coming to any given meeting. At that time they would read a chapter of Romans and someone would expound on it, after which they would close with a song.⁷³ Later, in 1823-24, attendance at these meetings generally ranged from about twelve to twenty-five. During that time Tholuck would often read some edifying literature, such as a sermon by Wesley or an excerpt from Spener’s writings.⁷⁴ When the revival preacher Ignaz Lindl, a leading figure in the earlier Catholic Awakening in Bavaria who had embraced Protestantism, was in Berlin in 1824, he spoke a couple of times at Tholuck’s meetings.⁷⁵

Tholuck’s transition to Halle in 1826 was difficult for him, because the theology faculty and student body were imbued with Enlightenment rationalism, and he found few like-minded Christians there. Halle was a spiritual desert compared to the oasis in Berlin, where his spiritual father Kottwitz, his professor colleague Neander, several Awakened preachers, and many Christian friends lived. Not only that, but Tholuck faced considerable opposition from the rationalist faculty and

students in Halle. Of course, this was not his first experience with persecution for his beliefs. The theologian Heinrich Leonhard Heubner wrote to Tholuck in June 1821 that one of Tholuck's friends had shared with him "how you have recently had to endure testing by being laughed at and ridiculed by the children of this world."⁷⁶ In Halle the theology faculty protested against his appointment, and many of the students arrayed themselves against him.⁷⁷ At first many people scoffed at him and even hissed during his public worship services to express their contempt for him.⁷⁸

One of the bright spots of his first year in Halle, however, was the arrival in late February 1827 of an American student, Charles Hodge, who had also experienced a revival when he was a student at Princeton College over a decade earlier. Tholuck and Hodge developed a close relationship and spent hours together each week. Hodge told the testimony of his salvation to one of Tholuck's friends, Ludwig von Gerlach, who recorded it that day in his diary. Hodge claimed that as a boy he had felt touched by God, but after that time he struggled spiritually. Despite his qualms, an older student at Princeton suggested he apply for church membership. He did and was accepted. On the following Sunday, he and fellow students were going into the church, and he parted from a friend to go among those taking communion, while his friend went among the non-communicants. His friend thought: "He goes to heaven, and I to hell." His friend's conviction of sin brought about the Princeton revival in 1815, where many students converted and prayer meetings were in every room. Gerlach related that Hodge's greatest joy was to remember this move of the Holy Spirit in Princeton.⁷⁹

Tholuck considered it a "gracious providence of God" that Hodge came to Halle at that time, so they could spend time together. He often commented in his diary about the blessing that Hodge was to him. One Sunday he wrote (in English), "Had a delightful season of prayer with dear Hodge. Oh how much he refreshes my spirits."⁸⁰ Before heading off to Rome in 1828, Tholuck wrote to Hodge, who was in Berlin, "I cannot express what I feel at the idea of my not seeing you again. You have been sent to me through God's mercy as a messenger of God's tidings, as a comforter in cheerless hours, as an elder brother to show me the simple way to heaven."⁸¹

Hodge was likewise delighted to be able to spend so much time with Tholuck. He wrote to his brother that he loved Tholuck, whose knowledge amazed him. He then stated that "my intercourse with him has

been one of the principal sources of improvement which I have yet found in Halle.”⁸² When Hodge transferred to the University of Berlin in mid-1827, Tholuck put him in contact with Kottwitz and other Christian friends there.⁸³ From Berlin Hodge wrote to Tholuck in November 1827, “I shall retain as long as I live my deep sense of your kindness and cherish the recollection of the hours I have past [sic] in your society as the most agreeable & profitable I have enjoyed in Eur[ope].”⁸⁴ Hodge was so attached to Tholuck that he kept a picture of Tholuck on his desk for the rest of his life.⁸⁵

A German student heavily impacted by Tholuck in his first year in Halle was Friedrich Beta, who had been instrumental in George Müller’s conversion by taking him to a fellowship meeting. Beta wrote to Tholuck in late 1827 that “the Lord has truly done great things to me, even through you. Your sermons, your sighing, your praying often made me recognize my inadequacy and made me eagerly long for the pleasure of the glory of the children of God, when I was full of the love of the world.”⁸⁶

It is impossible to know how many of his students converted through his influence in these early years, but Adolf von Harless, who later became a theology professor at the University of Erlangen, credited Tholuck as the decisive influence on his spiritual transformation. He came to Halle in 1826 after reading Tholuck’s commentary on Romans. He found new life through Tholuck and began zealously studying the scriptures and the church fathers. In 1828 Harless returned to Erlangen, where he was first a lecturer and later a theology professor. Harless, unlike Tholuck, embraced the Old Lutheran position, which rejected interdenominational cooperation.⁸⁷ Tholuck, on the other hand, rejected strict confessionalism and remained open to fellowship with anyone having a vibrant faith, whether Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, Quaker, or some other denomination.

In January 1830, Tholuck faced a rather awkward situation, when a close friend of his, Ludwig von Gerlach, anonymously published an article in the *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*, which was highly critical of the rationalist theology of two of Tholuck’s colleagues at the University of Halle. Tholuck implored the editor, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, who was a good friend of his, not to publish the article. Hengstenberg published it anyway. Tholuck did not disagree with the content of the article (and he remained a close friend with Gerlach), but he was concerned about the impact this article might

have on his ministry to students in Halle. Tholuck told Hengstenberg that God had been giving him a bounteous harvest the past few semesters, and he had seventy to eighty students who were coming to his meetings in rotation. He thought the article would stir up hatred toward him, and indeed it did, especially because some students suspected that Tholuck wrote it. Tholuck's first lecture after the article came out was interrupted by students, and they held other demonstrations against Tholuck, too. Tholuck claimed his wife could not even leave the house, because of the danger.⁸⁸

Despite the intense wave of persecution in early 1830, Tholuck weathered the storm and continued winning souls to Christ. He wrote to Hodge in late March 1830 that he did not approve of Gerlach's article and thought it might hinder his ministry. "Yet," he admitted, "in the winter [semester] among perhaps thirty students a more intimate and more living bond of love was present than ever before."⁸⁹ Five years later he reported that God was blessing his work in Halle, and he had personal contact with eighty to a hundred students at that time.⁹⁰ In 1836, Tholuck told the visiting American theologian Benjamin Mosby Smith that he had endured considerable opposition. Smith recorded in his diary, "He has borne it all and is now reaping his earthly reward in the affection of a hundred young men who are attached to him individually and of many citizens who will attend his preaching, tho[ugh] designed mainly for the students."⁹¹ In the 1830s Tholuck held Tuesday evening meetings for his students, and in 1835 he told Ludwig von Gerlach that more students were coming than he could accommodate.⁹² This does not mean all opposition ended. Tholuck wrote to Hodge in February 1836, "The Lord has made me meet with much happy success all the time among the students, but I am still surrounded by enemies and intrigues."⁹³

In the mid-1830s, his American student Ballantine called Tholuck "a man of powerful genius, immense learning, and a most devoted Christian and preacher."⁹⁴ Later he wrote to his wife that Tholuck's "life is yet eminently one of the humblest piety and closest walk with God. He is to me a most instructive and quickening example. I thank God for giving me his acquaintance and intercourse and friendship."⁹⁵ After returning to the United States, Ballantine wrote a series of articles about the status of theology in Germany. There he wrote about Tholuck that "it is right to say that I don't know any where [sic] a holier, more humble and devoted man."⁹⁶

Another American student impressed with Tholuck's spirituality was

Henry Boynton Smith. In August 1838 he summed up his view of Tholuck in a letter to his parents:

As we kneel together to pray, his prayers are so simple and so fervent; as we talk upon religious experience, his feelings are so deep, his faith so childlike and sincere; as we discuss questions in philosophy and theology, his knowledge is so extensive, and his philosophy so Christian; or as we talk upon men and manners, his remarks are so just, his criticisms so acute, and his detection of the humorous so rapid, that, take him all in all, I have never met and do not expect again to meet such a man. Here he is universally beloved. Wherever he goes troops of admirers and friends crowd around him.⁹⁷

Smith's accolades almost seem like hyperbole, but so many of Tholuck's students shared his sentiments, that it seems credible—except that Tholuck was not really “universally beloved,” because he faced opposition at times.

Indeed, the eminent Swiss-born American church historian, Philip Schaff, was also effusive in his praise of Tholuck. Schaff not only studied under Tholuck in 1839-40 in Halle, but he lived for six months in Tholuck's home. In his *Personal Reminiscences* Schaff wrote that Tholuck

was a man of genius, extensive learning and fervent piety. His lectures were fresh, suggestive and stimulating. His chief power and usefulness lay in his personal magnetism and devotion to the students, whom he loved as his own children, himself being childless. He took daily walks at eleven and four with two or three of them at a time, instructing and entertaining them by easy conversation, anecdotes and sallies of humor. He took special interest in honest sceptics and inquirers. He had himself a sceptical vein, and knew how to deal with honest doubts.⁹⁸

In the spring of 1840 Schaff accompanied Tholuck to Berlin, where Schaff intended to complete his studies. According to Schaff, “Dr. Tholuck introduced me to Baron von Kottwitz, his spiritual father who came as near being a perfect saint as any one I have ever known.” Tholuck also introduced him to other Christian friends. In Berlin Schaff often visited Hegel's widow, who was Tholuck's wife's aunt.⁹⁹

In Schaff's 1857 book on theology at the German universities, he devoted a chapter to Tholuck and paid him this wonderful tribute:

Next to Neander [Schaff's professor for church history at the University of Berlin], no German divine of the present century is more extensively known in the Protestant churches of France, Holland, England and America, than Dr. Frederick Augustus Tholuck, of Halle. His disciples are scattered nearly all over the Protestant world, and gratefully remember his genial influence and personal attention. His name will always be honorably connected with the history of the revival of evangelical theology and piety in Germany.¹⁰⁰

Schaff also pointed out that one of the ways that Tholuck contributed to the resurgence of more orthodox Protestant theology in Germany was by influencing the appointment of like-minded professors, including his own convert, Julius Müller, at the University of Halle.¹⁰¹

One of the main thrusts of the Awakening Movement and a primary concern of Kottwitz, his spiritual father, was charitable activity. Tholuck was not as well known for his good works as he was for his theological scholarship, interaction with students, and preaching. Thus, I was rather surprised when I visited Halle in 2017 to discover a Mathilde-Tholuck-Haus, named after Tholuck's second wife. Indeed, Tholuck and his wife founded a charitable organization that in 1857 opened a hospital with twelve beds for adults and six for children.¹⁰² It seems to have been modelled on Theodor Fliedner's work in Kaiserswerth, since this hospital in Halle was staffed by deaconesses. The Mathilde-Tholuck-Haus in Halle today continues to carry on the Tholucks' legacy of good works by caring for elderly people with dementia. Tholuck also engaged in prison ministry at times. He wrote to Ludwig von Gerlach, probably in 1834, that he had just spoken to some jail inmates and "it brought me considerable joy."¹⁰³

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In 1873 one of Tholuck's former students, Leopold Witte, who later became his biographer, delivered an address about Tholuck's life—written by Tholuck—to a conference in New York City. After reading Tholuck's essay, Witte remarked that Tholuck was being rather modest, so he added: "We

know that in a great measure the wholesome change from Rationalism to faith which has been granted to our native country within the past fifty years is, next to God's grace, owing to the restless zeal of this brave 'miles Christi,' [soldier of Christ] a genuine 'good knight without fear and without reproach.'" Thousands, Witte asserted, call Tholuck their spiritual father, because "His firmly clinging love embraces young hearts with heavenly power, and wrestles with God for the peace and victory of his students."¹⁰⁴

Tholuck was indeed more than just an influential theology professor who rejected the dominant rationalist theology of his day. He was also a powerful revival preacher who converted both students and others through his sermons. He cultivated personal interactions with his theology students that brought new life to some and edification to others. He also promoted missions in whatever way he could. He had a tremendous impact on the lives of many theologians, pastors, and others, including some who later became rather famous, such as George Müller, Charles Hodge, and Philip Schaff. His spiritual zeal and his love for others, which motivated him to help others experience the wonderful gift of salvation that he had received, reflected the concerns of the German Awakening Movement in the early nineteenth century.

¹ This article is based on research that will hopefully result in a book-length study on the German Awakening Movement in the early nineteenth century.

² August Tholuck, April 9, 1822, in *Tagebuch, 1821-22*, Franckesche Stiftungen Archiv, at: <https://digital.francke-halle.de/fsha/content/pageview/578418>.

³ Tholuck, April 16, 1822 [Tholuck incorrectly wrote 1821], in *Tagebuch, 1821-22*, Franckesche Stiftungen Archiv, at: <https://digital.francke-halle.de/fsha/content/pageview/578418>.

⁴ August Tholuck, "Evangelical Theology in Germany: Survey of My Life as a Teacher of Theology," translated and delivered by Leopold Witte, in *History, Essays, Orations and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance, Held in New York, October 2-12, 1873*, ed. Philip Schaff and S. Irenæus Prime (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), 86.

⁵ August Tholuck, "Ansprache des Herrn Dr. Tholuck," in *Dr. Tholucks fünfzigjähriges Jubiläum am 2. December 1870* (Halle: Julius Fricke, 1871), 12, 10.

⁶ Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 81-83, briefly discusses Tholuck, but focuses entirely on his theology, not on his role in the Awakening Movement. David Ellis in *Politics and Piety: The Protestant Awakening in Prussia, 1816-1856* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), is interested in the political inclinations of the aristocrats involved in the Awakening; he has little interest in Tholuck and does not even render Tholuck's full name correctly.

⁷ Andrew Kloes, *The German Awakening: Protestant Renewal after the Enlightenment, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 62-68; another English-language work providing a brief discussion of Tholuck (along with some of his writing) is *The Spirituality of the German Awakening*, ed. David Crowner and Gerald Christianson (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 45-52.

- 8 Sung-Bong Kim, *“Die Lehre von der Sünde und vom Versöhner”*: Tholucks theologische Entwicklung in seiner Berliner Zeit (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992).
- 9 August Tholuck, “Mein Leben,” Franckesche Stiftungen Archiv, pp. 16, 19-20, at: <https://digital.francke-halle.de/fsha/content/titleinfo/577784>.
- 10 Leopold Witte, *Das Leben D. Friedrich August Gottreu Tholucks*, vol. 1: 1799-1826 (Bielefeld: Velhagen und Klasing, 1884-86), 83-84.
- 11 August Tholuck, February 9, 1822, in Tagebuch, 1821-22, Franckesche Stiftungen Archiv, at: <https://digital.francke-halle.de/fsha/content/pageview/578418>.
- 12 Witte, *Das Leben D. Friedrich August Gottreu Tholucks*, 1:124.
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- 15 Adolf Hausrath, *Richard Rothe und seine Freunde*, 2 vols. (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1902-6), 1:139.
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- 18 A. Tholuck, “Predigt an dem zweiten Jahresfeste des hallischen Missionsvereins,” in R. Stier and A. Tholuck, *Weckstimmen für das evangelische Missionswerk* (Halle: Eduard Anton, 1834), 52.
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- 20 August Tholuck, “Mein Leben,” pp. 25-26, in Franckesche Stiftungen Archiv, at: <https://digital.francke-halle.de/fsha/content/titleinfo/577784>; August Tholuck, “Evangelical Theology in Germany: Survey of My Life as a Teacher of Theology,” translated and delivered by Leopold Witte, in *History, Essays, Orations and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance*, edited by Philip Schaff and S. Irenæus Prime (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), 85.
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- 56 A. Tholuck, "Predigt an dem zweiten Jahresfeste des hallischen Missionsvereins," 45.
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- 60 Karl August Döring to August Tholuck, April 2, 1824, August Tholuck Papers, Franckesche Stiftungen Archiv, Halle [this was misfiled in letters from Friedrich Christlieb Döring; it was written from Elberfeld and was clearly from Karl August Döring].
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