

The Prophecies of Lienhard Jost (1532)

Abstract

Lienhard (or Linhart) Jost was active in the Anabaptist circles surrounding Melchior Hoffman in 1530s Strasbourg. He and his wife, Ursula, both illiterate peasants, garnered significant attention for their religious prophecies. His visions and biography are significant not only for their reflection of Anabaptist spiritual priorities, including concern for the poor, Reformation era apocalyptic sentiment, the continuity between medieval and early modern spiritual traditions, and the role of prophecy in early modern religion, but also for the way they reflect early modern views of madness and efforts to control religious orthodoxy, even in relatively tolerant Strasbourg. While the events reflected here took place in 1523, before the rise of the various Anabaptist movements, they were popularized by leading Anabaptist figures in the 1530s.

Source

The third chapter

After I had shown this, as mentioned above, to the lords and leaders of the city of Strasbourg and passed on the message, in the night the glory of the Lord surrounded me one more time and spoke to me forcefully in my heart: Well, up! You must go there stark naked and unclothed. The Mord Glock must be rung before it is day.

That same hour I had to wake, and I could not stay according to my preference. And I said to my wife: Ursula, I must go out stark naked, as I was told. When I came out onto the streets of Strasbourg in the open air, my arms immediately moved apart from each other and I went from there [so quickly] that I cannot know whether I remained on the ground or not.

That same hour my mouth opened and I had to speak and yell at the top of my voice: Murder upon murder! The child in its mother's womb must and shall be terrified before the word of the Lord comes to pass. Murder once again! If the rulers and lords only knew that their princely clothes will be removed from them before God and the world, that they might seek God again, they would all cry along with me: murder upon murder!

But after this the child in its mother's womb will rejoice again and there will be much peace for all who have been sad.

In this midst of this aforementioned crying out I was snatched in this state, naked, and captured by my neighbours and handed off to the aforementioned city councillor Herrto Ludwig, and he handed me over to the hospital the next morning and recommended me to its overseer.

The sixth chapter

After this—since they believed I was out of my wits, God alone knows how it was—they placed and led me to a further prison, that is the asylum.

When I came before this prison, my heart began to speak and the glory of the Lord spoke through me: to the left of me there lies a man, who will say why I am here, and will betray me.

As I came into the asylum and they all mocked me, I spoke to my neighbour Erasmus Lentz, who was

then across from me in the asylum: give me your hand, and I will show you that these things are not from me but from God. And he still remembers and can speak of these things.

When everyone had gone from me a voice came to me and said: turn your bed around, and to the right side of your [place of] rest lies Adam, and to the left Cain, who was the first one who began to rule against God.

And when the voice[‘s message] was over, I heard a man lying on the right side of me in a bed, whom I did not know, and I still do not know who he was. This man began to cry out with a loud voice, and did it all day twice in the evening and in the morning, speaking thus: fire! Fire over my children! Help me to return to them! Lienhard of Strasbourg has forsaken wife and child for the sake of God’s will.

And when night fell and I had eaten supper and laid myself down to rest, the brilliance of the lord once again permeated and surrounded my heart, and my heart and my mouth began to speak loudly and I spoke thus: are you a mercy from God? What do you want to work through me, such a poor and despised creature? For I have been placed here so that no one can see or hear me, and I am utterly despised.

Then the wonder of the Lord said and spoke to me: many will hear you and yet not hear. Many will see you and yet not see. Many will hear you and yet not see. Many will see you and yet not hear. You have a daughter named Elizabeth. When she is fourteen years old the people will see Me in my brilliance and will recognise great wonders, and at the same time I will turn the sorrows of all people into joy. For when I awakened you at Hanau on the Rhine, in the twenty-second year, My heart had mercy on for the people of Israel.

But I have let out My breath over them, and have enlightened My little sheep. I have awed them in their work, and in their homes, and in the hedges, so that from now on they will speak divine truth in all their writings and will recognize Me, from the least to the greatest.

The tenth chapter

Further this wonder and glory of the Lord came over me again and surrounded my heart and said to me: speak and say to your brothers, go forth into the house of Israel and tell them to hold themselves to my path alone. You shall no longer bless water and salt, for I have blessed the whole earth. They have obscured my word and spread out their word, but few are the words through which one is saved.

They have sought after their honour and their greed, but I will destroy the false writings they have made, which they introduced next to My Word. And also tell your brothers to no longer allow lords and great priests to blaspheme, when God, your Father [and the Father] of all is the only Lord, and Christ the High Priest and the greatest.

You shall guard yourselves lest you eat unworthily the bread of the Supper, which was blessed through the word of the gospel and the Lord’s Supper, but rather you shall share it also with others present, who are hungry and thirsty, and further more at eight or nine o’clock, when the little sheep are coming from their rest, you shall share with them the holy Gospel and teach them all the doctrines of the faith and hope, and to trust in Me alone.

I showed this to the man who was waiting on me with food and drink, how the glory of the Lord and the wonder of God had come over me, and asked him for paper and ink in order to write it down. Then he said to me: you are fantasizing! You cannot even read! Then came to me a good brother named Veith Schelhamer, to whom I told this whole story. And he went out and brought one of the preachers, and he wrote down the whole story [that I told him], including this speech and these words.

Then, when I had come out of the asylum and was brought again into the hospital in the common room, I

had come to me one of the preachers, the Doctor and also Zimprion, and when they came to me I asked them, speaking thus: what do you think concerning the brilliance that impels me to speak and to cry out, namely the three voices and the other one above me. To this they answered me and believed that it was the ghost of the devil, and I should test it well and then spit it out.

Then I said to them, if this is a ghost, then all our faith is nothing. For I have always spoken and prayed thus when it came and still comes to me: Almighty eternal God, You have created me and all my footsteps were taken in Your power. I do not ask you for temptation. Is this a grace from You? Yea, what You want, I want too. And so come, and stay with me, and teach me Your will. But if you are not a grace from God, then go far away from me. The aforementioned men did not answer me concerning this. Then I asked them to pray to God the Father for me, that if it was a ghost and a tribulation, that He might release me from it. And I further asked them that, if they were our shepherds, they would have the princes and lords and the pious governors and regents of all the cities before their eyes. And with this they left me.

Further reading

Christina Moss, “‘Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophecy’: Visions, Apocalypticism, and Gender in Strasbourg, 1522-1539,” PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 2019, S. 263-264, 267-268, 273-275.

Christina Moss, *An Examination of the Visions of Ursula Jost in the Context of Early Anabaptism and Late Medieval Christianity*. University of Waterloo, 2013.

Erik. H. C. Midelfort, *Witchcraft, Madness, Society, and Religion in Early Modern Germany: a Ship of Fools*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013.

Jonathan Green, “The Lost Book of the Strasbourg Prophets: Orality, Literacy, and Enactment in Lienhard Jost’s Visions.” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 46, no. 2 (2015): 313–329.

Source of original German text: Linhard Jost, *Ein Worhafftige Hohe und Feste Prophecey des Linhart Josten van Stroßburg*, Deventer: Albert Paffraet, 1532, Fol. B3r, B4r-v, C2v-C3v. Available online at: https://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO_%2BZ169334206

Translation: Christina Moss

Recommended Citation: The Prophecies of Lienhard Jost (1532), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-the-reformations-to-the-thirty-years-war-1500-1648/ghdi:document-5455>> [April 02, 2025].