Fig. 14.1: Epitaph of Christen Staffensen Bang and his wife Helene Hansdatter, Romedal Church, 1636.

Arne Bugge Amundsen

Chapter 14

Christiania – Jerusalem or Babel? Conflicts on Religious Topography in Seventeenth-Century Norway

In the Norwegian town of Christiania two different interpretations of the religious topography were put forward. The radical lector theologiae Niels Svendsen Chronich argued that the true Jerusalem was to be found in the hearts of the believers and in their conventicles, while the vicar Christen Staffensen Bang held the more traditional view that Christiania was an offprint of Jerusalem. The two theologians contributed to a public discussion of this issue, thus demonstrating the inner ambivalence of the Jerusalem code.

Eivor Andersen Oftestad has in a separate chapter¹ introduced an attempt from the seventeenth-century Lutheran minister and author Christen Staffensen Bang (c.1588–1671) to interpret the reconstructed city of Christiania, Norway, as an earthly Jerusalem (Fig. 14.1). His interpretation was, however, not unchallenged at the time. Quite the contrary, Bang's interpretation must be analyzed as part of a larger public debate on piety, church organization, and theological ideals, and Bang's position was – albeit very prominent – not the only possible one. Was the city of Christiania to be compared with biblical Jerusalem, or was it more similar to Babel, on which true Christians should turn their backs?

As a consequence of the city being ruled by the same king as Denmark, Norway became the object of a Lutheran Reformation in the years 1536 and 1537. Seemingly, the Reformation in Norway was a success, and within a few generations most Norwegians had become true Lutherans, at least on a superficial level.² With the old bishops removed and the monasteries dissolved, there were few options left for the local clergy in a country with almost no urban centers and with long distances between the parishes. The new clergy slowly lost its possibilities of controlling and communicating with the laity. Rituals were abandoned or simplified, old beliefs such as purgatory

¹ See Chapter 13 (Eivor Andersen Oftestad), 235–65.

² Arne Bugge Amundsen, ed., *Norges religionshistorie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2005), 163–65.

or the necessity of final unction were officially disputed and prohibited by the new church.³

The Lutheran clergy became the instruments of both civil and ecclesiastic law and rule, and the political, cultural, and even fiscal power of the new clergy was obvious to anyone and was a forceful reality in the local communities.⁴ Religious protests or non-conformism were both legally and politically regarded as unacceptable positions if one was to be accepted as a full member of society and as one of the King's subjects.⁵

The Politics of Piety

A very important element of this was, of course, that the Lutheran King was expected to defend the true religious faith and practice. This duty was strictly performed by the kings of Denmark–Norway. King Christian IV (1577–1648, r. 1588–1648) was, as were many of his colleagues on other European thrones at the time, sternly convinced that the welfare of his kingdom was deeply interrelated with the religious standards of his subjects. If their moral standards or religious values decreased, God's wrath would follow quickly, and an important element of Christian IV's laws and decrees was accordingly the confirmation of true religion. True religion should be found both in the collective structures and on the individual level.⁶

Christian IV's conceptions of the "political" importance of piety were the explicit motivation for quite a number of ecclesiastical laws on penitence and concentration on religious activities. The leading motif in these laws was that the more his subjects were praying for their own and the King's salvation, the more the land would prosper, and the longer the Last Judgement would be postponed. It is not sufficient for anyone simply to take part in formal religious activities. Only through prayers, religious meditation, individual penitence, and introspection would the rituals of the Christian life have the necessary effect.

This way of defining the form and intention of pious conduct of course also influenced the ways Christian IV's subordinates and subjects perceived the clergy and their own religious standards. With the King as the predominant example, the clergy had to reflect on this religious philosophy and its focus on the gap between formal ecclesiastical structures and authorities and the inner life of faith.⁷

³ Amundsen, *Norges religionshistorie*, 169–72.

⁴ Amundsen, *Norges religionshistorie*, 189–90.

⁵ Arne Bugge Amundsen and Henning Laugerud, *Norsk fritenkerhistorie 1500–1850* (Oslo: Humanist Forlag, 2001), 31–32, 35–36.

⁶ Amundsen, *Norges religionshistorie*, 213–42; Øystein Rian, *Den aristokratiske fyrstestaten 1536–1648, Danmark–Norge 1380–1814* vol. 2, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 368ff.

⁷ Amundsen and Laugerud, *Norsk fritenkerhistorie 1500–1850*, 213–17.

Most historical sources from the first part of the seventeenth century give no information as to how this situation affected local religious life, thus making the importance of some seemingly unprecedented events in the middle of the seventeenth century even greater. From a period of about ten years, there appeared a quite extensive number of written sources on a Norwegian religious movement dominated by the “inner aspects” of religion. This movement was concentrated in the city of Christiania (now Oslo), the administrative centre of Norway, as it was from 1642 the residence of the Governor, Hannibal Sehested (1609–66), who was also the son-in-law of King Christian IV. The religious movement flourished most strongly in the 1640s and 1650s, led by Niels Svendsen Chronich (c.1608–c.70).⁸ This movement is an important backdrop to Christen Bang’s book on Christiania as an earthly Jerusalem.

Niels Svendsen Chronich

Niels Svendsen Chronich⁹ was born in the Danish city of Kolding and was married to a daughter of the Bishop of Ribe, Jens Dinesen Jersin (1588–1634). Bishop Jersin was among the ardent defenders of the penitential elements of the Lutheran orthodox piety.¹⁰

Chronich received his basic theological education at the University of Copenhagen, where he was one of the first to pass a formal test of theological knowledge. This “attestatio” was introduced by King Christian IV in 1629 as part of a strategy for controlling the orthodoxy of the clergy. Later, when Chronich’s conflicts with his colleagues in Christiania were emerging, he several times made a specific point about his own “attestatio”: he had actually been controlled by the theological professors in Copenhagen!¹¹ Chronich also had a briefer stay at the University of Groningen, where he matriculated in 1633. He received a Master’s degree (Magister) from the University of Copenhagen in 1637 and, regardless of the later controversies, was regarded and respected as a “learned man” for his time.¹²

⁸ Amundsen and Laugerud, *Norsk fritenkerhistorie 1500–1850*, 89–93. Arne Bugge Amundsen, “Chronich, Niels Svendsen,” in *Norsk biografisk leksikon* (Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget, 2000), 214.

⁹ He usually writes his name Niels Svendsen, but sometimes he adds Chronich(ius) or Chronius, Bjørn Kornerup, “Nye bidrag til separatisten Niels Svendsen Chronichs historie,” in *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 6, no. 4 (Copenhagen: Gad, 1942): 84. Holger F. Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich og hans Tilhængere,” in *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger*, edited by Holger Fr. Rørdam, vol. 4 (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1882–84), 509.

¹⁰ Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 511–12.

¹¹ Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 509–10; Amundsen, *Norges religionshistorie*, 220–21.

¹² Kornerup, “Nye Bidrag til Separatisten,” 60–62.

Fig. 14.2: Isaac van Geelkerck, from the acclamation of King Frederik III at Akershus Castle, Christiania, 1648. The Royal Danish Library (Det Kongelige Biblioteks billedsamling), Copenhagen.

In 1639 Niels Chronich was – without any formal application, according to him – appointed as lecturer of theology (*lector theologiae*) at the Cathedral school in Christiania. In this position he was expected to give public sermons in the Cathedral on certain occasions during the year. He used this duty an excellent opportunity to present his message of penitence and true Christian piety to a broader public. Parallel to his public sermons and his lectures in the Cathedral school, Chronich arranged private meetings or so-called conventicles where he gathered people sympathetic to his message and sharing his visions of the pure Christian life.¹³

At the same time, Chronich intensified his public messages. During Christmas 1642 Chronich made a public scandal by accusing the clergy of the city of “un-Christian behaviour”. The situation developed so dramatically that the Bishop of Christiania, Oluf Boesen (1583–1646), withdrew Chronich’s admission to the pulpit of the Cathedral in 1643. The Bishop’s action was understandable, but it seems that it not was final. The Bishop was more or less forced by the Governor, Hannibal Sehested, and the Norwegian Chancellor, Jens Bjelke (1580–1659), to withdraw his order, and Niels Chronich once again was allowed to enter the pulpit.¹⁴ Still, in the years 1649–50, Niels Chronich was repeatedly called upon to be interrogated by his peers, the clergy of the Cathedral.¹⁵ At this time the conflict between Trugels Nielsen and Niels Svendsen Chronich had reached its peak – during a loud and public quarrel between them Trugels Nielsen said to Chronich: “Stay away from me, you Satan!” Niels Chronich then replied: “I am no Satan, you are a Satan yourself!”¹⁶ The most central part of the subsequent interrogations during the winter of 1649–50, however, centred on Chronich explaining and defending his theological opinions before the ecclesiastical court lead by the Bishop, Magister Henning Eggertsen Stockfleth (1610–64), who had succeeded Oluf Boesen in 1646.

In the court Chronich and one of his colleagues at the Cathedral school, Jens Hansen, were accused of heterodoxy, of intimidating their colleagues, and of disrespect to civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Jens Hansen had to admit that he had identified the clergy of Christiania with the “priests of Baal” and that his opinion was that the reformer Martin Luther was a “secular philosopher who had failed in many ways.” The clerical court found this to be far beyond what should be accepted by a Lutheran lecturer in theology, and immediately dismissed Jens Hansen from his position.

¹³ Cf. Einar Høigård, *Oslo Katedralskoles historie* (Oslo: Grøndahl & Søn, 1942).

¹⁴ Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 514.

¹⁵ In fact, as *lector theologiae* Chronich himself was a member of this ecclesiastical court, the Chapter Court.

¹⁶ P. Coucheron, “Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder med Præsteskabet i Christiania i Aarene 1642–1652,” *Theologisk Tidsskrift for den evangelisk-lutherske Kirke i Norge* 1, no. 1 (1858b): 274–75.

When the Governor Hannibal Sehested was forced to leave his position in Norway in 1651, the situation rapidly changed for Niels Svendsen Chronich. The ecclesiastical authorities for a long time had tried different strategies to remove him as a lecturer and a problematic colleague. Now a definitive solution seemed at hand. Chronich was summoned by direct royal order to defend his theological opinions at the Consistory of the University of Copenhagen, and in 1652 a special court was appointed and convened in Christiania to deal with Chronich's case. Once again, it does not appear that he was formally sentenced. In any case, the result was that in 1652 he left his position as a lecturer in Christiania and settled with his family in Christianshavn outside of Copenhagen. The King gave him a quite good pension, and in Copenhagen he seems to have made a living by offering to teach Hebrew to students of theology.¹⁷ We can leave Niels Chronich in Copenhagen, since his later destiny is not the focus here.

Chronich's Followers in Christiania

Chronich was not alone. The group of followers counted among its members one of Chronich's own colleagues, Jens Hansen, who was also a teacher at the Cathedral school, and Hans Madsen Fagerholt, a merchant and member of the city council. Most of Chronich's sympathizers seem to have been craftsmen and shopkeepers from the city of Christiania – both men and women. Their names in some instances indicate that their bearers were of foreign origin.¹⁸ Some of the parishioners were offended by the lecturer and his sermons, while others spread rumours about the Cathedral's ministers or showed hostile attitudes against them inspired by Chronich's public sermons.¹⁹

In the different interrogations handling this matter between 1643 and 1651, information is given that the ecclesiastical authorities had actually suspected several members of the group of sympathizers to be what they labeled "separatists" even before Chronich arrived in 1640.²⁰ This indicates that Chronich was probably not

17 Chronich's last years in Copenhagen are discussed at length in Rørdam, "Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich."

18 P. Coucheron, "Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder med Præsteskabet i Christiania i Aarene 1642–1652," *Theologisk Tidsskrift for den evangelisk-lutherske Kirke i Norge* 1, no. 1 (1858a): 243. Coucheron, "Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder" (1858b), 262.

19 P. Coucheron, "Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder Med Præsteskabet I Christiania I Aarene 1642–1652," *Theologisk Tidsskrift for den evangelisk-lutherske Kirke i Norge* 1, no. 2 (1859): 46–47.

20 Coucheron, "Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder" (1858b), 294.

the actual founder of the group of “separatists” or conventiclers in Christiania, although little is known about the situation before his arrival in the city. At any rate, Chronich eventually seems to have revitalized this group and expanded it, and soon became its spiritual leader. To arrange prayers or reading of devotional books in private households was in itself not a problematic activity at the time. Problems first occurred regarding such activities if persons who were not members of the household in question took part in them – then the authorities identified such an activity as a threat to God’s own order, and it became a schismatic meeting or – a conventicle.²¹

Distribution of Books

One of the significant elements in the controversies between Niels Chronich and his opponents was the use of the printed word. In fact, the very existence of “suspicious books” among Chronich’s followers was sufficient to convince their critics that they were criminals.

In the discussion about the character of the Chronich disorder, the clergy argued that such “suspicious books” had been observed and their owners persecuted in Christiania even well before the lecturer arrived in the city, but at the arrival of Niels Svendsen Chronich the use of such books seems to have flourished even more than in earlier years. Among the accusations meeting Chronich in 1652 was that he both defended and distributed “prohibited books” by authors like Johann Jacob Fabricius (1620–73) alias Justus Kläger, Abraham Graf von Franckenberg (1593–1652) alias Amadeus von Friedleben, and Christian Hoburg (1607–75) alias Elias Prætorius. Allegedly, the worst of them all was a pamphlet by Elias Prætorius called “*Spiegel der Missbräuche beim Predigerampt im heutigen Christenthum*.” This book had become so popular that it was read by both learned and unlearned people, clergymen and civil servants. The court reminded Chronich that King Christian IV had already in 1617 passed a law to prevent this kind of literature being imported, translated, and sold in Denmark and Norway.²²

It is likely that Chronich was inspired by such authors and books, and earlier scholars have tried to compare Chronich’s message and written style with spiritualists like Christian Hoburg alias Elias Prætorius in order to establish a reliable line of

²¹ The dean Trugls Nielsen repeatedly called such meetings “Vinkelmesser,” i.e. “masses or services celebrated in hidden places,” Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 553.

²² Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 558–59. Coucheron, “Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder,” (1858b), 263, 297. Holger Fr. Rørdam, *Danske Kirkelove 1536–1660*. vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Danmarks Kirkehistorie, 1889), 54–55. The original title of the book was *Spiegel der Misbräuche bey dem Predig-Ampt im heutigen Christenthumb*, and the first edition appeared in 1644.

inspiration for Chronich's own sermons and books.²³ However, it may seem difficult to identify one or two specific persons who directly influenced Chronich. Chronich himself was said to have read the books of Jacob Böhme (1575–1624) with interest and consent, and there have also been speculations that he had actually met Böhme during his stay abroad in the 1630s. The only author he himself referred to publicly was in fact Jacob Böhme, which occurred in a discussion with Trugels Nielsen, who explained that he had also read books by Böhme – although he did not understand or agree with most of what he read. Despite this, it could be argued that Chronich both in his sermons and in his printed books made use of arguments, genres, and expressions that were quite common among radical and critical theologians in the middle of the seventeenth century.²⁴

In order to understand the identity of the Chronich movement in Christiania it is undoubtedly more important to study the books of Niels Chronich and their levels of functioning. Whenever the controversies in Christiania escalated he published a new book. After the conflicts in 1642 to 1643 he published what he had said from the pulpit in the Cathedral – “with some additions.” When the clergy renewed their efforts to convince the authorities that the only possible solution was to sentence Chronich at the end of the 1640s, he published a collection of religious songs intended to strengthen his followers. Moreover, during the final controversy and interrogation in Christiania in 1651 he published his last book in which he defended his own theological viewpoints. The use of written books was important not only to Chronich, but to his group of sympathizers, and the discussions and conflicts around the group of “true Christians” were made even more public through the use of books and pamphlets.

How important this last aspect actually was, is indicated by the fact that even Chronich's opponents made use of the printed word in order to convince both the “heretics” and the other members of the congregation of the Chronich supporters' criminal and ungodly opinions. Although he himself denied it, the peer commission in 1651 was convinced that the dean Trugels Nielsen in fact had translated and published a German pamphlet called “On the Terrible and Blasphemous Enthusiasts and Heretics Knipperdolling and Jan van Leyden and Their Followers.”²⁵ The intention of this pamphlet was to demonstrate the negative effects of religious disorder and dissent.

²³ Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 510; Coucheron, “Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder,” (1858a), 238–39.

²⁴ Many parallels can also be found in the thinking of Fredrich Breckling (1629–1711), see Jonathan Strom, “Krisenbewusstsein und Zukunftserwartung bei Friedrich Breckling,” in *Geschichtsbewusstsein und Zukunftserwartung in Pietismus und Erweckungsbewegung*, eds. Wolfgang Breul and Jan Carsten Schnurr, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus* 59 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

²⁵ Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 515–16, 550, 564–65.

At the same time, the use of printed books and pamphlets must also have contributed to making Chronich's message known beyond the limits of the parish of Christiania. Potentially the printed word appealed to pious readers – and fervent opponents – all over Denmark–Norway. His prolific publishing activity was made possible by the establishment in 1643 of the first printing press in Christiania.²⁶ Chronich was able to publish his thoughts and arguments directly to the local audience, thus creating a local public sphere for discussing religious issues. It was into this local public sphere that Christen Staffensen Bang in 1651 introduced his book on Christiania, the year when the conflict surrounding Niels Chronich reached its peak.

The Spiritual World View – Christiania as Babel?

Another interesting question regards the inner life and world of Niels Chronich's group of believers. In his 1642 Christmas sermon Chronich attacked those in the congregation who found their pleasure in worldly wealth, eating, drinking, and adultery. Such people did not celebrate Christmas in a Christian way, in his opinion.²⁷ Both in this sermon and elsewhere Chronich presented a harsh critique of the average piety, of the order of church and society, and of empty forms of authority. While "they," that is the "outsiders," represented Satan, were blind, and only had power over what was empty and idle, "we" – Chronich's group – were the true followers of God's commandment, they were the only ones truly seeing, and were filled with spiritual authority. The division between "them" and "us" went through any congregation, passed the borders of parishes, and did not respect any differences between laity and clergy, or between governors and governed.

The 1642 sermon resulted in complaints from many of those who had been present at the service and felt that they had been attacked by Chronich. He and his followers, however, interpreted this reaction as just another divine sign that their message was inspired and following the inner meaning of Christian belief – the followers of Christ should expect no mercy from the public, from authorities, and from servants of Satan.

While his public sermons, especially his 1642 Christmas sermon, were primarily intended to describe those who were to be expelled from the Kingdom of God, another of Chronich's publications from these years shows the spiritual world with which he and his followers identified themselves and created their Christian identity.

²⁶ Cf. Leiv Amundsen, *De første boktrykkere i Norge 1643–1654* (Oslo: Grøndahl & Søn, 1925).

²⁷ Niels Svendsen Chronich, *Aandelige Jule-Betenckning, om den allerstørste Glæde at bekomme udi vor Frelseres Jesu Christo formedelst hans hellige Fødsel. Prædicket paa 1. Juledag 1642* (Christiania: Tyge Nielsen, 1644); Coucheron, "Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder," (1858a), 247.

In 1649 he published “Three Spiritual Hymns,” where the main perspective is the experiences and identifications of the true believers.²⁸

In these hymns the believers are described as the “lovers and confessors of Christ.” The true power of life and love strengthens them as they fight the war of the righteous. Their opponents are no less than “Babel” and the “Ertz-hore” – the whore of whores – notions often used by Chronich when describing the institutionalized church. The true believers had to expect torments and struggles, but they were also waiting for “the great day” when Christ would return and make the final division between the righteous and the hypocrites, between good and evil. This day was not far away, according to Chronich. Recent signs in heaven and on earth had demonstrated and proved that God was now quite impatient with his creation, and was planning to restore it to its original shape. Chronich at this point refers to the famous comet that had been observed and commented on by many in 1618. Likewise, in 1648 there had been new signs from heaven: a remarkable miscarriage, rumours about war and catastrophes, storms, earthquakes, and other phenomena in nature.

This was all meant to show that God’s wrath was a terrible thing, and that any man should fear God’s judgement. Yet, if they immediately separated from “Babel,” the true and modest believers would receive their reward – the position near the throne of God. The ultimate message, then, was that the true believers should leave the sinful world; they should “go out with spiritual sighs,” and show that they were not hypocrites or followers of Satan.

A Religion of Free Hearts

Chronich’s ideal was a “religion of free hearts,” a Christian belief which showed that “Christ our Lord lives / and dwells in my heart / where his Spirit is moving around / with its light.”²⁹ In 1642 Chronich told his audience in Christiania that the real Bethlehem was the heart of a spiritually living person. Without such a heart, there was no use, for instance, in attending church services or taking part in Holy Communion.³⁰

²⁸ Niels Svendsen Chronich, *Tre aandelige Sange 1. om disse Aaringens Straff; 2. om den store vor Herris Jesu Christi Dag, somdu nast tilstunder, dat. 1647. 3. Aandelige Glæde udi Christo Jesu imod hans herlige Tilkommelse, dat. 1646* (Christiania: Melchior Martzan, 1649). Niels Svendsen Chronich, *Niels Svendsøn Chronich’s Tre Aandelige Sange* (Christiania: Thronsen, 1882).

²⁹ “NAar den HErre Jesus Ieffuer / Oc boer I Hiertet mit / Oc hans Aand der inde suefuer / Oc giffuer Liusit sit,” Chronich, *Niels Svendsøn Chronich’s Tre Aandelige Sange.*, the introduction to the “third song.” My translation.

³⁰ Coucheron, “Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder,” (1858a), 248.

His position as a “free spirit” is demonstrated in the discussions about his use of the Holy Communion. His enemies accused him of “staying away” from the collective religious actions of his local congregation. The strategy of “staying away” is a very common element in the identification and self-identification of Christian opposition,³¹ and it showed how the argument about who was and was not worthy to receive Holy Communion could be reversed. In 1651 Chronich explained to his peers in court that he had stayed away from Holy Communion for almost two years. His own reason for this was that his conscience told him that he could not receive the blood and flesh of Christ from a vicar with whom he was not reconciled and within the framework of a congregation dominated by severe conflicts about what was the definition of true and false.³² Chronich added that according to the Holy Scripture specific places or persons to administrate the Holy Communion were not necessary, and he admitted that he found it problematic to accept or use the exact words in the official liturgy about the effect of Holy Communion – impure sinners and people who would not repent properly should not be told that their sins were forgiven.³³

Chronich’s conceptions of the true Christian life and belief, then, were based on the value of individuality and personal choice. In one perspective, these conceptions must have lead to a considerable cognitive alienation – the social and cultural reality was empty, dangerous, and in the process of being destroyed. In another perspective, Chronich’s message argued that it was necessary to establish alternative social and cultural entities, and that the true believers should be waiting for better times, when they would live in eternal peace, praising God and loving each other. The conventicles became prefigurations of this prosperous future, and were demonstrations that the troubles and persecutions “here” would be rewarded “there.”

In their opinion, the ecclesiastical and civil structures had lost all authority. When Chronich himself entered the pulpit of Christiania Cathedral, it was not as a representative of the King’s clergy, but as a messenger from the Holy Spirit. No court could sentence him, and the only reasonable thing to do was to wait for the Last Day. He was a “free spirit,” a “separatist” waiting for this world to vanish before God’s wrath.

False Prophets in Christiania

An important part of the way Niels Chronich tried to explicate the identity of his message and his supporters is the many warnings about the false prophets. According to

31 Amundsen and Laugerud, *Norsk frietenkerhistorie 1500–1850*, 186–90.

32 Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 535–39, 556–57.

33 Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 539–40.

him they were everywhere, but it was possible to identify them by their “unchristian behaviour” and by the fact that they neither preached nor admonished their congregation in the right way. On the contrary, they “hid the signs of the last days,” confused the true believers, and comforted the unworthy and impious. This was a permanent theme in Chronich’s sermons and writings.

Among the accusations from the clergy of Christiania that were succeeded by the formal interrogation of Niels Chronich in 1649, his four colleagues put forward that his invectives regarding them were so severe they could not possibly be accepted. Moreover, they were not able to understand by what right Niels Chronich tried to present himself as a “novum reformatorem & generalem admonitorem.”³⁴ They quoted him saying that they were the Apostles of “Sathan, Baaliticos, Bellisicos et Hypocriticos Ministros,”³⁵ gossiping parrots and dogs, whose mouths could be shut by a piece of meat.” Such invectives, his colleagues continued, made their work among the members of the congregation almost impossible: many people showed their contempt and spread rumours about their own clergy. That is why, they concluded, we want the authorities to end the conflict and refute Niels Chronich’s public accusations.³⁶

In his response to the peer commission Chronich showed his unusual skills in turning arguments and playing with words and expressions. According to him, the Holy Scripture used much harsher words against the false prophets than he had ever expressed. Moreover, if his enemies were actually God’s own messengers, they should not feel embarrassed by the expressions used by Chronich, but on the contrary agree with him and join him in his general warnings against the false and evil in Christiania and elsewhere.³⁷ As well – in these last days of this world – one should not be surprised if more than one Judas or Anti-Christ was in the middle of any congregation.³⁸

Of course, this undermined any conception of collegiality. His ministry was that of the Holy Spirit, and that was a ministry to be taken as seriously as that of the formally ordained clergy. His ordained colleagues were not in the position to reserve the true ministry for themselves.³⁹ Yet, Chronich pursued his alleged spiritual right to advise the sinners and guide his colleagues or “brothers”.⁴⁰ Hence he

34 “A new reformer and general advisor,” Coucheron, “Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder,” (1858b), 282.

35 “The apostles of Sathan, worshippers of Baal, warlike and hypocritical ministers.”

36 Erik Pontoppidan, and Christoph Georg Glasing, *Annales Ecclesiae Danicae Diplomatici*: 4, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Christoph Georg Glasing, 1741), 397.

37 Pontoppidan, and Glasing, *Annales Ecclesiae Danicae Diplomatici*: 1, 399.

38 Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 520.

39 Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 522; Pontoppidan, *Annales Ecclesiae Danicae Diplomatici*: 1, 1, 400.

40 Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 521–22.

challenged in a very direct way the privileges of the ministry to forgive sins on behalf of God. In 1651 Chronich was accused of having said publicly “that the ministry of pastors who did not live pure lives was without effect” He did not directly deny such an opinion,⁴¹ and in fact this argument might be said to have been the inner motivation for his actions against his colleagues – their impious lives made them unworthy of distributing God’s grace through words and rituals.

Awaiting the Last Judgement

Obviously, things were urgent for Niels Svendsen Chronich and his fellow believers in Christiania. This urgency has brought us to the heart of the matter – he propagated quite successfully devotional ideals and spiritual metaphors that challenged the established order. Chronich was definitely apocalyptic in his approach to the Christian message, and he told his followers to await the Last Judgement, and to “separate themselves” from “Babel.” How important this apocalyptic approach was to him, is shown by the fact that when he in 1651 published his last book – *Troens Erindring oc Prøfuelse* (The Memory and Torments of Faith) – his attacks on all the Pharisees and hypocrites among his own colleagues had no limits whatsoever. At the same time, the book is filled with apocalyptic visions and interpretations of signs of the coming Judgement. He returned to the theme of his songs from 1649, namely that just like the famous comet prophesizing the Thirty Years’ War in 1618, God had clearly shown that the “torments of Egypt” were the destiny awaiting the unfaithful of Chronich’s own time.⁴²

Another approach can also be suggested: if we are to consider the cultural and social forms which were the result of preachers and activists like Niels Chronich, it is perhaps relevant to describe this element in seventeenth-century history of religion and mentality as “spiritualism,” as the Swedish historian Ronny Ambjörnsson does in his book on Swedish utopists. Ambjörnsson argues that the “spiritualists” of the seventeenth century during a long period of war, despair, and wide-ranging conflicts tried to establish a concept of a universal society of deeply and individually engaged believers, liberated from the outward forms of ceremonies and rituals and from the oppression represented by formal authorities in church and society.⁴³

41 Rørdam, “Separatisten M. Niels Svendsen Chronich,” 533–34.

42 Niels Svendsen Chronich, *Troens Erindring oc Prøfuelse*, d.e. *Hvorledis enhver af os som kaldis Christne skal ved Guds Ord erindres om den sande Tro* (Christiania: Valentin Kuhn, 1651); Coucheron, “Om Mag. Niels Svendsen Krønikes Stridigheder,” (1859), 50.

43 Ronny Ambjörnsson, *Det okända landet: Tre studier om svenska utopister* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1981), 68–69. Ambjörnsson’s arguments seem to rely quite heavily on the British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper and his theory about the development of a European “erasmism.”

This is probably an important historical reference for the “heart religion” or the “religion of individual conscience” of Niels Chronich.

And whatever epithet should be used for describing Niels Svendsen Chronich and his movement, the challenge which he represented was not at all marginalized in contemporary society. On the contrary, it became the centre of quite dramatic cultural, social, and even political conflicts with reference to conditions and circles far distant from the small Norwegian town. Chronich was, at least for a long period of his career, in line with the devotional ideals of King Christian IV – he was radical but still tolerable. However, he challenged “the household,” the only accepted devotional framework for Christian subjects outside of the service, and he challenged the privileges of the Lutheran clergy, although he stayed in a very ambiguous relationship with his Christiania colleagues – he belonged to their group, and yet placed himself outside of it. In this way, Chronich touched, developed, and challenged the core values of State Lutheranism of the seventeenth century.

Of course, an analysis of these events is a contribution to Danish and Norwegian church history, but it may have even further references. What could be regarded as interesting in a European perspective is perhaps first and foremost that Niels Chronich was actually able to establish a distinct group of followers under the auspices of high civil authorities. As long as this support was undisputed he had the opportunity to express his views and arrange the movement’s private meetings – which gives excellent possibilities for studying cross-confessional contacts and impulses in urban Norwegian piety at a time seemingly dominated by strict Lutheran observances in law and liturgy and in a period where other sources are quite scarce. The Chronich movement may also be used to elucidate the extension of religious multiculturalism in a peripheral part of a confessionally divided Europe.

And finally, Niels Chronich should be written into a long tradition of Christian opposition and dissent in Europe, a history which of course also includes the later Pietist movements. Chronich points to important elements in the “grammar” of this tradition, a “grammar” known and used both before and after the middle of the seventeenth century. His arguments and acts represent an excellent and vivid example of how the “Jerusalem code” brought along its own ambivalence. The “Jerusalem code” had long been used by civil and ecclesiastical authorities to describe and legitimize the present order, the long lines in history, and the future development of church and society. Dissidents, however, could use the same code, the same metaphors and arguments to oppose the present order, to describe an alternative history and – not least – to visualize a new future.

Christiania – Jerusalem or Babel?

In Chronich's perspective the city of Christiania with its cathedral and its clergy could never become or be described as an image of biblical Jerusalem. To him Christiania was Babel, and in that capacity the city was perfectly in line with any other formal, outward, civil structure and order. Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Holy Land were primarily an inner landscape in the heart and consciousness of the individual believer, and – as a consequence – the conventicle created by true believers was an image or a reflection of this landscape.

Christen Staffensen Bang's intervention in the public debate on the status of Christiania cannot be understood without reference to Niels Svendsen Chronich and his actions. Chronich attempted to create a spiritual dividing line between the true Christian believers and any outward structure, building, and position. Bang was not part of the Christiania clergy, but he was closely connected to the city through property and kinship. Chronich, on the other hand, was a leading part of the urban clergy as *lector theologiae* and member of the chapter. Bang and Chronich must have known each other and been well aware of each other's literary projects. In fact, the city's privileged printer Valentin Kuhn (d. 1654) in the first half of 1651 was working simultaneously with Chronich's *Troens Erindring oc Prøfuelse* and Bang's *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis*. While Chronich in words and print dishonoured his clerical colleagues and criticized all the parishioners who trusted in "outward piety," Bang appealed to all authorities in Christiania – civil and ecclesiastical – to unify in their efforts of creating a city worthy of its name and collectively obedient to its ultimate constructor.

When Christen Staffensen Bang⁴⁴ entered the public scene with his book, Niels Svendsen Chronich was on his way out – from the cathedral school and from the city of Christiania. At any rate, both left after their written, contradictory attempts at interpreting the city to their contemporaries. After some turbulent years in Denmark Chronich ended up in Amsterdam and the house of Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670), apparently sharing many of his new landlord's points of view. Bang, on the other hand, moved permanently to Christiania at the end of the 1650s, pursuing a career as a theological writer and publisher.

It is open to discussion which of the two – then dead – authors could have pleaded the victory after the devastating fire in Christiania in 1686.

⁴⁴ Arne Bugge Amundsen, "Pastoral Ideals and Public Sphere in Christiania (Oslo) in the Seventeenth Century," in *Were We Ever Protestants? Essays in Honour of Tarald Rasmussen*, eds. Sivert Angel, Hallgeir Elstad, and Eivor Andersen Oftestad. *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* 140 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 219–42.