

**A HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS**  
TRACED BY THEIR VITAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES  
1887

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**APPENDIX.**

**THE EARLIEST BAPTIST CONFESSION KNOWN.**

*Letter of brotherly union of certain believing baptized children of God, who have assembled at Schleithem, to the congregation of believing, baptized Christians:*

JOY, peace, and mercy from our Father, through the union of the blood of Christ Jesus, together with the gifts of the Spirit (who is sent by the Father to all believers for strength and comfort and constancy in all distress unto the end, Amen) be with all who love God, and with the children of the light everywhere scattered abroad, wherever they are appointed by God our Father, wherever they are assembled with one accord in one God and Father of us all. Grace and peace in heart be with you all. Amen.

Beloved in the Lord, brothers and sisters, we are first and specially concerned for the comfort and assurance of your minds, which have perhaps been disturbed; that you should not always, like foreigners, be separated from us and almost cut off, justly, but that you may again turn to the true implanted members of Christ who are armed by long-suffering and knowledge of himself, and so be united again with us in the power of one divine spirit of Christ and zeal toward God.

It is also plain that with a thousand wiles the devil has turned us away, in order that he may disturb and destroy the work of God, which has been mercifully and graciously begun in us. But the true Shepherd of our souls, Christ, who has begun this in us, will direct and guide the same to the end, to his honor and our salvation. Amen.

Beloved brethren and sisters, we, who are assembled together in the Lord at Schlaitten Am Randen, make known to all who love God that we have agreed in certain points and articles, which we should hold in the Lord, as the obedient children of God, and sons and daughters who are and should be separated from the world in all things we do or forbear. And, to God be everlasting praise and glory, we were perfectly at peace, without opposition from any brother. By this we have perceived that the harmony of the Father and our common Christ, with their Spirit, was with us; for the Lord is the Lord of peace and not of contention, as Paul shows.

But that you may understand what these articles were, mark and understand. Scandal has been brought in among us by certain false brethren, so that some have turned from the faith, because they have presumed to use for themselves the freedom of the Spirit and of Christ. But such have erred from the truth and are given over (to their condemnation) to the wantonness and freedom of the flesh; and have thought faith and love may do and suffer all things. and nothing would injure or condemn them as long as they thus believed. Mark, you members of God in Christ Jesus, faith in the Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ does not thus prove itself, does not work and deal in such ways as these false brethren and sisters do and teach. Take heed to yourselves; be warned of such; for they do not serve our Father, but their father, the devil. But you are not so, for those who are of Christ have crucified the flesh, with all lusts and longings. You understand *me*<sup>1</sup> well, and the brethren whom we mean. Separate yourselves from them, for they are turned away. Pray the Lord for their acknowledgment unto repentance, and for our constancy to walk in the way we have entered, for the honor of God and his Christ. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> These articles are said to have been drafted originally by Michael Sattler, an ex-monk, highly educated and amiable, who suffered martyrdom, May 21st, 1527, at Rothenburg, on the Neckar. This change to the first person is an interesting confirmation of this view of their origin.

The articles we have discussed, and in which we are one, are these: 1. Baptism. 2. Excommunication. 3. Breaking of bread. 4. Separation from abominations. 5. Shepherds in the congregation. 6. Sword. 7. Oath.

1. In the first place, mark this concerning baptism: Baptism should be given to all those who have learned repentance and change of life, and believe in truth that their sins have been taken away through Christ; and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to be buried with him in death, that with him they may rise; and to all those who with such intention themselves, desire and request it of us. By this is excluded all infant baptism, the Pope's highest and first abomination. This has its foundation and witness in the Scriptures and in the usage of the Apostles — Matt. 28, Mark 16, Acts 2, 8, 16, 19. This we would with all simplicity, but firmly, hold and be assured of.

2. In the second place, we were united concerning excommunication, as follows: Excommunication should be pronounced on all those who have given themselves to the Lord, to walk in his commandments, and on all those who have been baptized into one body of Christ, and who call themselves brothers and sisters, and yet slip away and fall into sin and are overtaken unawares. They should be warned the second time privately, and the third time publicly rebuked before the whole congregation, or be excluded according to the command of Christ, Matt. 28. But this should take place, according to the order of the Spirit of God, before the breaking of bread, that we may with one mind and with one love break and eat of one bread and drink of one cup.

3. Thirdly, we were one and agreed concerning breaking of bread, as follows: All who would break one bread for a memorial of the broken body of Christ, and all who would drink one draught as a memorial of the poured out blood of Christ, should beforehand be united to one body of Christ; that is, to the Church of God, of which the head is Christ, to wit, by baptism. For, as Paul shows, we cannot at the same time be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of the devil; we cannot at the same time partake and drink of the cup of the Lord and of the cup of the devil; that is, all who have communion with the dead works of darkness, they have no part with the light. All who follow the devil and the world have no part with those who are called from the world to God. All who lie in the wicked one have no part with the good. Hence, also, it should and must be, whoever does not have the call of one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one spirit, to one body, common to all the children of God, he cannot be made one bread with them, as it must be if we would in the truth break bread according to the command of Christ.

4. Fourthly, we were agreed concerning separation: This should be from the evil and wicked, whom the devil has planted in the world, to the end alone that we should not have association with them or run with them in the multitude of their abominations. And this because all who have not entered the obedience of faith, and who have not united themselves to God to do his will, are a great abomination before God, and naught can possibly grow or issue from them but abominable things. Now, in all creatures there is either goodness or evil; they either believe or are unbelieving; are darkness or light; of the world or out of the world; temples of God or of idols; Christ or Belial, and none may have part with the other. Now, the command of God is plain to us, in which he calls us to be ever separate from evil. Thus will he ever be our God, and we shall be his sons and daughters. Further, he warns us to go out from Babylon and carnal Egypt, that we not be partakers of their torment and sufferings, which the Lord will bring upon them.

From all this we should learn that everything that is not at one with our God and Christ is nothing else than abomination, which we should avoid and flee. By this is meant all Popish and anti-Popish work and worship, assembly, church-going, wine-houses, citizenship, and enjoyments of unbelief, and many other similar things which the world prizes, though they are done directly against the command of God, according to the measure of all unrighteousness, which is the world. From all this we should be separate and have no part with such, for they are clear abominations, which will make us abhorrent to our Christ Jesus, who has delivered us from the service of the flesh and filled

us for the service of God by the Spirit whom he has given to us. Therefore, there will also from us undoubtedly depart unchristian and devilish weapons — sword, armor, and the like — and all use of them for friend or against enemies, through power of the word of Christ, 'Resist not evil.'

5. Fifthly, we are united respecting the pastor in the congregation of God, thus: The pastor in the congregation should be one in entire accordance with the direction of Paul, who has a good report from those who are outside the faith. His office should be to read, exhort, and teach; to warn, reprove, excommunicate in the congregation, and to lead in prayer for the bettering of all brethren and sisters; to take the bread, to break it, and in all things to care for the body of Christ, that it be edified and bettered, and that the mouth of the blasphemer be stopped. But when he is in want, he must be supported by the congregation which elected him, so that he who serves the Gospel should also live from it, as the Lord has ordained.

But if a pastor should do anything worthy of reproof, nothing should be undertaken with him without two or three witnesses; and if they have sinned, they shall be reproved before all the people, that the others may fear.

But if the pastor is driven away, or is taken by the cross to the Lord, immediately another shall be chosen in his place, that the little flock of God not be destroyed.

6. Sixthly, we were united concerning the sword, thus: The sword is an ordinance of God outside of the perfection of Christ, which punishes and slays the wicked and protects and guards the good. In law, the sword is ordained over the wicked for punishment and death, and the civil power is ordained to use it. But in the perfection of Christ, excommunication is pronounced only for warning and for exclusion of him who has sinned, without death of the flesh, only by warning and the command not to sin again. It is asked by many who do not know the will of Christ respecting us, whether a Christian may or should use the sword against the wicked in order to protect and guard the good, or for love?

The answer is unanimously revealed thus: Christ teaches and commands us that we should learn from him, for he is meek and lowly of heart, and so we will find rest for our souls, Now, Christ says to the heathen woman who was taken in adultery, not that they should stone her according to the law of his Father (yet he also said, 'as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do'), but in mercy, and forgiveness, and warning to sin no more, and says, 'Go and sin no more.' So should we also closely follow according to the law of excommunication.

Secondly, It is asked concerning the sword, whether a Christian should pronounce judgment in worldly disputes and quarrels which unbelievers have with one another? The only answer is: Christ was not willing to decide or judge between brothers concerning inheritance, but refused to do it; so should we also do.

Thirdly, It is asked concerning the sword, Should one be a magistrate if he is elected to it? To this the answer is: It was intended to make Christ a King. and he fled and did not regard the ordinance of his Father. Thus should we do and follow him, and we shall not walk in darkness, For he himself says, 'Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' Also, he himself forbids the power of the sword and says, 'The princes of the Gentiles exercise lordship,' etc., 'but it shall not be so among you.' Further, Paul says, 'for whom he foreknew he also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son.' Also, Peter says, 'Christ has suffered (not ruled), leaving us an example that you should follow in his steps.'

Lastly, it is remarked that it does not become a Christian to be a magistrate for these reasons: The rule of the magistrate is according to the flesh, that of the Christian according to the Spirit; their houses and dwelling remain in this world, the Christian's is in heaven; their citizenship is in this world, the Christian's citizenship is in heaven; the weapons of their contest and war are carnal and only against the flesh, but the weapons of the Christian are spiritual, against the fortresses of the devil; the worldly are armed with steel and iron, but the Christians are armed with the armor

of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the word God. In short, as Christ our head was minded towards us, so should the members of the body of Christ through him be minded, so that there be no schism in the body by which it is destroyed. For every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to destruction. Therefore, as Christ is, as it stands written of him, so must the members be, that his body be whole and one, to the edification of itself.

7. Seventhly, we were united concerning oaths, thus: The oath is an assurance among those who dispute or promise, and was spoken of in the law that it should take place with the name of God, only in truth and not in falsehood. Christ, who teaches the perfection of the law, forbids to his people all swearing, whether true or false, neither by heaven nor by earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by our head, and that is for the reason which he immediately after gives, 'Because you cannot make one hair white or black.' Take heed, all swearing is therefore forbidden, because we are not able to make good that which is promised in the oath, since we cannot change the least thing upon us. Now, there are some who do not believe the simple command of God, but they speak and ask thus: If God swore to Abraham by himself because he was God (when he promised him that he would do good to him and would be his God if he kept his commands), why should I not also swear if I promise a person something? Answer. Hear what the Scripture says: 'God being willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath, so that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.' Mark the meaning of this Scripture: God has the power to do what he forbids to you, for to him all things are possible.

'God swore an oath to Abraham,' says the Scripture, 'in order that he might show his counsel to be immutable;' that is, no one can withstand or hinder his will, and therefore he can keep the oath.' But, as was said by Christ above, 'We have no power either to hold or to give,' and therefore we should not swear at all.

Further, some say God has not forbidden in the New Testament to swear, and he has commanded it in the Old; but it is only forbidden to swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and by our head. Answer. Hear the Scriptures: 'He that swears by heaven swears by the throne of God; and by him that sits on it.' Mark, swearing by heaven is forbidden, which is only the throne of God; how much more is it forbidden to swear by God himself! You fools and blind, which is the greater, the throne, or he who sits upon it?

Still, some say, If it is wrong to use God's name for the truth, yet the apostles Peter and Paul swore. Answer. Peter and Paul testify only that which God promised to Abraham by oath, and they themselves promised nothing, as the examples clearly show. But to testify and to swear are different things. When one swears he promises a thing in the future, as Christ was promised to Abraham, whom we received a long time afterwards. When one testifies, he witnesses concerning that which is present, whether it is good or bad, as Simon spoke of Christ to Mary and testified, 'Behold, this one is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.' Similarly Christ has taught us when he says, 'Let your communication be yes, yes, no, no; for whatever is more than these comes of the Evil One.' He says, your speech or word shall be yes and no, and his intention is clear.

Christ is simple yes and no, and all who seek him simply, will understand His word. Amen.

Dear brethren and sisters in the Lord, these are the articles which some brethren have understood wrongly and not in accordance with the true meaning; and thereby they have confused many weak consciences, so that the name of God has been grossly blasphemed; for which cause it was necessary that we be united in the Lord, which, God be praised, has taken place.

Now that you have well understood the will of God, which has been manifested through us, it is necessary that from the heart, and not wavering, you perform the known will of God. For you well know what is the reward of that servant who sins wittingly.

All that you have done unwittingly, and that you have confessed that you have done wrong, is forgiven you through believing prayer, which was made by us in the assembly for the sin and guilt of us all, through the gracious pardon of God and through the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark all those who do not walk according to the simplicity of divine truth which is contained in this letter, as it was apprehended by us in the assembly, in order that each one among us be governed by the rule of discipline, and henceforth the entrance among us of false brethren and sisters be guarded against. Separate from yourselves what is evil, so will the Lord be your God, and you shall be his sons and daughters.

Dear brethren, be mindful how Paul exhorts Titus. He speaks thus: 'The grace of God' that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' Think of this and practice it; so will the Lord of peace be with you.

The name of God be eternally praised and glorified. Amen.

The Lord give you his peace. Amen.

ACTA SCHLAIITTEN AM RANDEN AUF MATTHIAE, *February 24th, Anno MDXXVII (1527).*

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