

Detmold Confession

In 1702, Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau, a mentor of the Brethren founder Alexander Mack, was incarcerated in the prison of Detmold castle for his Pietistic activities, and one of the conditions of his release was to articulate his religious beliefs in a written statement. The Detmold Confession expresses not only Hochmann's own theology, but also gives us a window of opportunity to more clearly understand the Brethren during their early formation, because this document was used by Alexander Mack to undergird the practices and ordinances of his Schwarzenau congregation. It was printed by the Christopher Sauers at Germantown, and nearly became a creed for a denomination which denounces the use of creeds. The Detmold Confession represented for colonial Brethren what the Augsburg Confession meant for Lutheranism. Each article of Hochmann's confession is represented, but only selected portions of the longer sections. Editorial comments appear in braces { }, because Hochmann and Brumbaugh also use parenthesis () freely. It is reproduced from: A HISTORY OF THE GERMAN BAPTIST BROTHERS - Martin Grove Brumbaugh, Brethren Publishing, Mount Morris, Illinois, 1899, reprinted 1961, pp. 83-88.

After it had been announced to me that His Excellency had acceded to my dismissal, respectfully requested, if I would beforehand make a short confession of my belief, I have herewith given a short outline of this, as follows:

1. I believe an eternal, sole, almighty, omnipresent God, as he has revealed himself in the Old Testament as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but in the New Book as the Father, Son and Ghost (Matthew 28, v. 19), and I do not consider it necessary in my soul to dispute or criticise much about it: but I consider it better to submit one's self humbly to this eternal Godly being in the Father, Son and Ghost and to experience his inner working, just at the Father reveals the Son inwardly and the Son again the Father, and this by the powerful working of the Holy Ghost, without which nothing can be known in Godly things and this too is alone the eternal life, that one should rightly acknowledge this one God, as Christ speaks (John 17:3): and that I may explain myself in few words about this: I profess with mouth and heart the well known old Aussenic Creed, Credo in Deum, etc.
2. Concerning baptism, I believe that Christ instituted it only for the grown up and not for the little children, because one cannot find an iota of an express command about it in the whole holy Scripture; for arguments and good opinions cannot be sufficient (hung together) on these points, but there must be express commands, expressed by God or Christ, as there is an express command about the circumcision of the Israelite children.
3. Concerning the Lord's Supper, I believe that it is instituted for the chosen disciples of Christ, who by the renunciation of all worldly things, follow Christ Jesus in deed and truth; and that the covenant of God will be much reviled and his anger inflamed over the whole community, if the Godless children of the world are admitted to the love feast, as unfortunately is done at the present time.
4. Concerning perfection (the full coming of the Spirit), I believe that although I have been conceived and born in sinful seed, yet that I may be sanctified through Jesus Christ, not only justly but perfectly, so that no more sin may remain in me, when I shall have come to complete manhood in Christ.....{snip}.....
5. Concerning the sacrament of the Holy Ghost. I believe that Christ alone, who is the head of the church, can appoint teachers and preachers and give them the qualification for it. And no being but only Christ, risen above all heavens and fulfilling everything, has appointed some apostles, some however prophets, some evangelist, some pastors (flock-keepers) and teachers, so that the saints may be fitted for the work of the ministry. Ephesians 4:10,11, Acts 20:28 state expressly that the Holy Ghost (N.B. {New Book} and not man) had made them bishops to pasture the congregation of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.

6. Concerning high power. I believe that it is a divine ordinance, to which I willingly submit in all civil matters according to the teachings of Paul (Romans 13:1,7). On the other hand, however, with all true evangelical (believers) I accord no power to those who struggle against God's Word and my conscience or the freedom of Christ: for it is said: We ought to obey God, etc. (Acts 5:29), and if anything should be charged against God and my conscience I should rather suffer unjust force than act contrary to this and I pray that God may not put it to the account of those magistrates, but may convert them.....{snip}..... I confess that I as a spiritual statistician have learned from God's Word to reflect more upon the rising sun of justice than upon the high powers of the world soon to depart; for that will last into the eternity of eternities, but these will soon have reached their limit (periodum), by the great impending judgements of God.

7. Finally, as concerns the restoration (redemption) of damned men I do not see how this is the place to carry it out, since it demands a circumstantial deduction, if it is to be understood distinctly and clearly; I will only here add very briefly that as in Adam all men have fallen, so also must all men be born again, through the other Adam, Jesus Christ; if this were not so, it would necessarily follow that Christ were not powerful enough to restore the human race which was lost through Adam and in this can be read and from this may be seen how the restoration in the mediatorship of Christ has been much stronger and more mighty than the fall of sin in Adam.....{snip}..... And although I may not be present any more in this land or house, henceforth, I shall not leave off continuing my heartfelt prayers to God the Father of the spirits of all flesh for the soul of the most loved Frederick Adolph, and as long as I live I remain the most humble intercessor for the whole house of the Count.

Ernest Christopher Hochmann von Hochenau (present day Lauenburg, Germany)

November, 1702