

The First Brethren in Christ Confession of Faith

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One of the recent gains in research regarding the history of the Brethren in Christ Church (formerly known as the River Brethren, and in the earliest years designated by themselves simply as Brethren) has been the identification of the original River Brethren Confession of Faith. It had been known that the Confession was ancient, but no attempt had been made to establish the date of writing or to discern the historical context in which the Confession was written. It now can be asserted that the Confession was written at the time of the formation of the Brethren in Christ Church, or approximately in 1780. It was a time of religious awakening among the Germans of Pennsylvania, and the emergence of the River Brethren was in the context of the awakening. The data for the affirmations is both historical and theological.

Before marshalling the evidence, it would be well to note that at present five texts, in English, are extant. Of the German texts behind the five translations, three are in existence. Unfortunately, the two other German texts have disappeared. The five English texts are recorded below.

The historical evidence identifying the Confession as to time and place is related to the fact that three of the five English texts were signed by the same eight men, some of which are known to have been founding fathers of the River Brethren Church. The eight names are John Myers (or Meyer), John Funk, Samuel Betzner (or Bentzner), Jacob Engle, Stofel Hollinger, Philip Stern, John Greider (or Crider), and Benjamin Byers. Of these known to have been related to the founding of the Brethren in Christ are Jacob Engle, John Funk, Benjamin Byers, and John Greider.

It has been commonly believed that the Brethren in Christ organized themselves in Donegal Township of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. A study of the Donegal Township tax lists (begun in the 1750's) shows that six (out of eight) men with the names of those listed above lived in Donegal Township in the years assigned to the emergence of the River Brethren.

The six were Jacob Engle (1775-1833), Samuel Betzner (1769-1793), John Greider (1770-1782), Philip Stern (1773-1783), Stofel Hollinger (1779-1786), and John Myers (1756, 1757, 1786, 1793-1801). The data from the tax lists underscores the place of origin of the River Brethren.

A further study of the dates connected with the names indicates that five of the eight were living in Donegal Township in the years 1779 to 1782. The logic of the data is that the Confession was written within these years. No absolute statement can be made, but the evidence suggests the Confession was written in or about 1780. Other historical data supports the beginning of the River Brethren in the years around 1780.

The question of who authored the text, whether it was a group effort or the work of one individual, cannot be answered with certainty. At the same time it should be noted that two of the texts, the L text and the O text, state that John Engle was the author. This data is in keeping with the fact that John Engle, a brother of the first River Brethren leader, Jacob Engle, is known to have played an active role in the formation of the River Brethren. It would also possibly explain why he did not sign the document. Such modesty was in keeping with the sense of humility that was a part of the early River Brethren. Evidence contrary to the authorship of John Engle is the suggestion found in connection with text E. There it is stated that Hans Moyer was the author. Thus it is clear no definitive conclusion can be stated, but attention should be called to the fact that the L text was found in a publication printed 1829. The point is that the L document appears to be the earliest of the five texts and thus would be most authoritative of the texts.

In addition to the above-mentioned texts, there is evidence of the existence of a confession of faith among the River Brethren in the nineteenth century. In the account of the beginnings of the River Brethren by "A Familiar Friend" (1848), it is stated that about thirty years ago there was drawn up a "compendium of Doctrine" by the ministers of the Church. This statement was proposed for adoption by the Church but was rejected by the majority of the meeting.¹ In the minutes of the annual conference of the Brethren in Christ there is a notation that in 1874 the "manuscript of the confession of the fathers of the church was read."² In an 1888 issue of the *Evangelical Visitor* it is stated that there was in the possession of Peter Winger of Stevensville, Ontario, the early "rules of faith and many articles written in Pennsylvania." The rules of faith "bear reference and date 'Donegal, September 21st, 1799.'"³ There is no final proof that one or any of these three references relate to the Confession of the texts, but no other early statement of faith is known to have existed.

Whether the Confession was ever officially adopted by the River Brethren cannot be answered with absolute certainty. There is evidence in both directions. It will be noted below that two of the texts affirm that the Confession was "signed in the name of the fellowship (Gemeinde)." At the same time there are statements which state the Confession was never officially adopted.⁴ It did represent the beliefs of most if not all of the founding fathers.

The theological evidence has been distilled through a theological analysis of the Confession. This has been done in some detail, and the conclusion of the analysis is that the founding fathers of the River Brethren sought to integrate the

Pietist emphasis of the deeply felt crisis new-birth experience with the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church and the relationship of the church to the world.⁵ The content of the Confession is at one with the Pietist concept of conversion and the Anabaptist view of the church.

These two traditions were active in Lancaster County in the decades surrounding the founding of the River Brethren. A Pietist oriented awakening transpired in those decades. The renewal was felt among the Pennsylvania Germans, including the Mennonites and German Baptist Brethren. The converts of the revival gradually crystallized as the United Brethren. The River Brethren were at one with the emerging United Brethren in relation to the understanding of the new birth. At the same time, they believed that the Bible called for a new corporate existence among Christians. Thus they combined the belief in the crisis new birth with the Anabaptist-rooted conception that the church is the new society living a life of brotherhood, love and mutuality. The church was to be the visible community of the redeemed living in keeping with the New Testament Church and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To the first River Brethren salvation was both an individual matter and a group reality.⁶ Christ calls people not only to personal holiness, but also into a new holy community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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2. Copies of conference minutes are located in the Brethren in Christ Archives, Messiah College, Grantham, Pa.
3. A Bearss, "Origin of the Tunkers in Canada," *Evangelical Visitor*, June 1, 1888, p. 154.
4. A Familiar Friend, p. 553.
5. For the analysis proper see Martin H. Schrag, "The Impact of Pietism upon the Mennonites in Early American Christianity." Manuscript in possession of author, scheduled to be published soon.
6. For an able introduction to the emergence of the River Brethren see C. O. Wittlinger, "The Origin of the Brethren in Christ," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, January, 1974.

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use.
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FIVE TEXTS OF THE EARLIEST BRETHREN IN CHRIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

THE "B" TEXT

The B text was found in 1963 in the Sarah Bert papers, (B for Bert), the text is in script form, and undated. The translation, given below, is by Mr. William D. Meikle. The German text is located in the Brethren in Christ Archives at Messiah College.

(A. The Conversion Experience)*

(1. Introduction)

A Copy of the Confession of Faith of the Brethren

We believe and confess a Triune, Everlasting and Almighty Being, and that a Holy, Almighty God has been from eternity, and is, and will remain, and has provided Jesus Christ as Savior of mankind before the foundation of the world;

(2. Authority)

(3. Atonement)

and afterward Man was created in His image; and through the devil's envy he reverted to death; thus He promised him that he was to tread upon the serpent's head; and He appeared in the fulness of time, giving for the Redemption of men favor, honor, esteem, body and blood. He reconciled God and offered a sacrifice that holds good forever, so that all who believe on Him shall not be lost, but shall have eternal life.

THE "L" TEXT

The L text is in the book, David Landes, *Das Guldene A B C* printed in 1829. The English translation given below is by Mr. William Meikle. The Landes book is located in the library of Juniata College with errored copy at Messiah College. The Confession is presented as a portion taken from a writing of Johannes Engle.

(This document is to be only an indication to the Testament; The Testament is to be the Foundation and End of our Faith.)

Faith, however, is a certain confidence, and because we do not have this faith by nature, we must first seek its beginning. Because Adam and all his seed lost the divine image, that is, faith, love and trust, and in their stead developed fear, unrest and doubt, which have been inherited from generation to generation up to our time. Because God, however, in the beginning promised the serpent-destroyer Messiah or Savior from this evil, and the same came into the world in due time, and as ransom for this evil has given favor, honor, dignity, body and blood, in order that He might reconcile us again with the Father,

THE "C" TEXT

The C text (C for Climenhaga) is printed in the book, *History of the Brethren in Christ Church*, (1942) by A. W. Climenhaga. Dr. Climenhaga found the German manuscript underlying the printed form in the possession of Bishop Charles Baker of Canada. The translating into English was done by Bishop Baker and a Chambersburg, Pennsylvania German teacher. The German manuscript is no more extant.

(1. Introduction)

Articles of Faith of the Church of the Brethren.

We believe in and acknowledge one Triune Ever-existing and Almighty Being, and that this one Ever-existing Almighty God always existed and ever will exist, and has foreseen for us an Ever-existing Saviour before the foundation of the World. To learn to know this Saviour, or to find him, we must pass through true repentance unto forgiveness of sins and become reconciled with God, wrought by God, through the blood of Christ.

(2. Authority)

So therefore must this faith be laid for a foundation upon the Word, and the Truth, for upon the Truth rests the whole Godhead and Majesty.

(3. Atonement)

And while this faith is a sure confidence, yet—since we have not this faith according to nature, it is therefore first necessary to consider where this faith takes its beginning, while Adam and all his seed lost the Godly likeness, that is, faith, love and confidence, and instead awoke fear, unrest and doubt, which we have inherited from generation to generation. But since God in the beginning had promised the serpent Treader, the Messiah, the Saviour, from the loss which man sustained, who in fulfillment of time came into the world, laying aside his glory and honour, and gave himself, both body and blood, as a ransom from this loss, and thereby has reconciled us again unto the Father.

*Headings in parentheses are added to the text.

THE "E" TEXT

The E text is embedded in the book, *History of the Engle Family in America*, 1754-1927, by Morris M. Engle. Author Engle states the underlying German manuscript was found in the family Bible of Daniel Engle, the greatgrandson of Jacob Engle, the first overseer of the River Brethren. Mr. Engle further suggests the confession was the work of one Hans Moyer, (written "about A.D. 1770") said to be the father-in-law of two of the sons of Jacob Engle. The German manuscript has disappeared.

(A. The Conversion Experience)*

Articles of Faith

We believe and confess a triune eternal almighty being and that an eternal almighty God was from eternity and is now and ever shall be and has given unto us an eternal Redeemer and Propitiator before the foundation of the world. To recognize or to find this Redeemer we must obtain and receive forgiveness of sins by means of true repentance, be reconciled to God by the blood of Christ and being reconciled we obtain the living faith in Jesus.

Faith must be based on the word and the truth must be laid as a foundation, for the entire divinity and majesty rests upon the truth and since

faith is the substance of things hoped for and since we do not possess this faith by nature we must first investigate where this faith originated. As Adam and all his seed had lost the divine image, i.e. faith, love and trust and instead fear, unrest and doubt were awakened which were passed on from generation to generation till the present time. But since God had promised in the beginning the bruiser of the serpent, the Messiah as a healer for this wound, and sent him forth when the fullness of times was come and he has given honor, favour respect, body and blood as a ransom for this hurt in order that he might reconcile us to the Father,

THE "O" TEXT

A few years ago there surfaced among the Old Order (O for Old Order) River Brethren a copy of the Confession under study. An English translation was made by Jacob W. Brechbill in 1902. The German original is presently in the hands of L. T. Brechbill of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The confession is presented as "Johannes Engel's Brief," a letter or statement of John Engle—almost certainly the brother of the first River Brethren leader, Jacob Engle. The 1902 translation is the copy following.

(1. Introduction)

A copy of the Confession of Faith of the Brethren.

We believe and acknowledge one three in one eternal almighty being and that one eternal and powerful God exists from eternity and is and ever will be and that Jesus Christ the only begotten of the Father, was provided before the foundation of the world was laid, to be a Saviour of man.

(2. Authority)

(3. Atonement)

And after man was created in the likeness or after the image of God, and through the envy of the devil had fallen from his first estate under the power of death, so has God promised that one should be born of the seed of the woman (namely Jesus Christ) that should bruise the serpent's head. And he has appeared in the fullness of time and has for the Redemption of man laid aside majesty, honor, respect, body, and blood. And has made or become a sacrifice that is forever sufficient to reconcile us to God. So that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

(4. The New Birth)

This has all happened outside of ourselves, but to reveal this in us there appeared the healing Grace of God to convict us and to teach us that we confess that we have by nature a heart averse from God, devious and sinful. If this is confessed and acknowledged, it works a regret and sorrow and inner soul-pains; in short, the Light reveals to us the fall into which Adam and we all have fallen; and this causes a longing, a praying, a weeping, and a calling to the promised Savior, to the World-Messiah, who died bleeding before such poor sinners, Into such an open, poor sinner's heart the Lord Jesus will and can come, holding the communion meal; that is, to bestow comfort, peace, love and trust. Then the record of sins as well as the guilt of Adam is stricken out, he receives comfort and forgiveness of sins and eternal life. A poor sinner feels and experiences that; and there the living Faith has its beginning, for Faith is a positive confidence. Here his name is written in the Book of Life, when the poor sinner offers himself obediently and subjects himself to live for the Lord Jesus and to be true from now on - to the One who has accepted him in adoption. So we confess that to be a new birth, revival of the mind, revival of the Holy Spirit.

(B. The Church Concept)

(5. The Believing Community)

Here the Lord Jesus Christ has become a Redeemer, therefore He will be and is to be a pattern, and because children love the one who bore them, so also they love the one who is born from Him; and we recognize that to be a believing community through the unity of the Spirit, which is the first and real reception in faith in the community.

(6. Baptism)

If this is lacking, there will be a deficiency and the Water cannot give it or make it good; and because we have said the Lord Jesus has become a pattern for us, so we believe and acknowledge from the pattern in the Written Word and through the illumination of the Good Spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted and commanded, as an outer sign for such newborn children, the outer baptism of water, which He Himself and His apostles and the first churches practiced, thereby renouncing the devil and the world and all sinful living by means of a threefold baptism in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as a sign of the burial. We believe and confess also that basically all awakened souls, becoming believers through true repentance, who were baptized in

everything is outside of us, but this is in us. The saving grace of God appeared to be known, to convert and teach us; the heart sinful and turned away from God by Nature. If this is confessed and acknowledged, it works a regret and sorrow and inner soul-pains; in short, the Light reveals to us the fall into which Adam and we have fallen, and this causes a longing, a praying, a weeping and a calling to the promised Savior, to the Messiah, who died bleeding for such poor sinners. Into such a poor sinner's opened heart the Lord Jesus can and will enter and hold the communion meal. That is comfort, peace, love and trust; then the record of sins as well as the guilt of Adam is stricken out; that is forgiveness of sins. A poor sinner feels and experiences that; and there living faith has its beginning, when the poor sinner offers himself obediently and subjects himself to live now for the Lord Jesus and to be true, as He has accepted him into adoption. So we confess that to be a new birth, conversion of the mind, renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Here the Lord Jesus has become a Redeemer, so He will and is to be a pattern for us. And because children love the one who bore them, so also they love the one who is born from him; and that we recognize to be a believing community.

And because, as we have said, the Lord Jesus has become a pattern for us, so we believe and acknowledge from the pattern in the Written Word, and through the leading of the Good Spirit, that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted and commanded, as an outer sign for such new born children, the outer baptism of water, which His apostles and the first churches practiced, thereby renouncing the devil, the world and all sinful living.

(4. The New Birth)

All this is all of grace, and not of works. But to know and experience this in our heart, the grace of God hath appeared, to convince and to teach us that we according to nature have wandered from God with a wayward and sinful heart. If we learn this and acknowledge it, it will work in us true repentance and sorrowfulness of heart. In short the Light reveals unto us the fall wherein Adam and we have fallen, and this causes within us longings, praying, weeping and calling upon God through the promised Redeemer, who, bleeding, died for such poor sinners, and in such a poor sinner's opened heart the Lord Jesus will then enter in and sup with and be with Him. That is consolation, love, peace and trust bestowed. Then is our sinful record as the guilt of Adam erased. That is consolation, forgiveness of sins and receiving of everlasting life and that feels and experiences every poor sinner that comes to God through Christ. Here will his name be written in the book of life, and here has the living faith its beginning, wherein the poor sinner saved, then offers and fully submits himself to the Lord Jesus to live and to be true to Him who has adopted him into the family of God. And this acknowledge we to be the new birth, renewing of the mind and receiving of the Holy Ghost.

(5. The Believing Community)

Now has the Lord Jesus become our Saviour, so shall he also be our example. And since such children now love Him, who begot them, so they also now love them that are begotten of Him. And this acknowledge we to be a believing body of Christian believers, united through the unity of the Spirit, which is the first requisite necessary for personal reception into Christian fellowship.

(6. Baptism)

Where this is lacking there always will remain a lack, and water cannot give or make good that which is wanting. And while we said that the Lord Jesus has become our example, so also we believe and acknowledge from the example given in the written Word, and through the leadings of the good Spirit, that the Lord Jesus Christ gave for an outward bond-token, for such new-born children the outward water baptism, having observed it Himself and His apostles, and that likewise the early churches observed the same, after denying the devil, the world and all sinful life, and were baptized by a threefold baptism under water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as a token of the burial. We believe and acknowledge as a foundation that all true penitent, believing and forgiven souls that have upon their faith in

(B. The Church Concept)

then Jesus has become our Redeemer and therefore he will and shall be likewise an example, and as such children now love Him who has begotten them, they love also everyone who is begotten by Him. And therefore, we confess to be a believing fellowship through the unity of the Spirit which is the first and real reception under the fellowship of faith.

If this should be missing there would be a deficiency and the water could not give it or make it good and since we said that the Lord Jesus has become an example to us, so we believe and confess according to the example of the Written Word and through the guidance of the Good Spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ has instituted and commanded the external baptism of water for such new-born children as an external sign of covenant, as practiced by Him and His Apostles and the first churches, by renouncing the Devil and the world and all sinful life, by means of a three-fold immersion under the water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as a sign of the burial we believe and confess as fundamental that all souls awaken by true repentance and all truly believing souls who are baptized unto the faith in Jesus belong to Zion. And by

(4. The New Birth)

This hath all been done without us. But to reveal this unto us, the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto us to teach us and to convince us how that we have by nature a sinful heart inclined to wander away from God, seeking after the things which are of this world and not the things which are of God, and if we come to see and to know this, giving room to the grace of God, it worketh a repentance and a sorrow of heart and an inward pain in the soul. In short that light revealeth unto us the fall of Adam, and we all have fallen. And this causeth a desire for praying, weeping, and calling to the promised redeemer (or deliverer) to the Saviour of the world, who for such poor sinners did bleed and die upon the cross. Into such poor sinners open heart can and will the Lord Jesus enter in and sup with him (that is with the Sinner) bestowing comfort, peace, love, and confidence. At this place the record of sin as the debt of Adam is cancelled (or blotted out) and the sinner receives rest, comfort, and forgiveness of sin and eternal life. This can a sinner experience, feel and know. Here the living faith hath its beginning that the sinner can now confidently say, I know that my Redeemer liveth, for this faith is a true dependence on God and worketh by love. Here his name will be inscribed into the Book of Life. And if now such a poor sinner that is set free will in obedience, sacrifice his all and submit and promise to live hence forth to the Lord Jesus and to abide and to remain faithful to Him that hath adopted him as a child. This we claim to be a new birth. John 3:3, a renewing of the mind. Romans 12:2, and a receiving of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2, 4:38.

(5. The Believing Community)

Here the Lord Jesus is become a Redeemer. So will and shall he now also be an example for us. And since such children Love Him that hath begotten them, they also love those that are born of him and this we claim to be a faithful membership through the unity of the Spirit which is the first and only receiving in the faith into membership.

(6. Baptism)

Is the foregoing wanting, then there does a want abide, or remain. And the water in baptism can not give it or make it good and since we have said that the Lord Jesus has become a pattern (or ensample) for us, So we believe and claim out of the pattern of the prescribed word and through the enlightening (or light giving) good spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ has for an outward covenant (or witness) instituted and commanded for all such new born children the water baptism which He Himself and the apostles and the first Christians did practice having first renounced the devil, the world and all manner of sinful living through a three fold immersion in the water in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost as a sign of a burial of their former way of living and we believe and confess too, that in truth every enlighten-

(6. Baptism continued)

belief on Jesus, are included in Zion, and out of this Spiritual Congregation or Church are born as new men, as the dew out of the glow of morning.

(7. Lord's Supper)

We also believe that the Lord Jesus instituted the communion meal and practiced it with His disciples with bread and wine in the last night of agony, when He was betrayed; this they were to commemorate and after His departure they did commemorate His broken body and His shed blood, where in also His followers stand constantly in the teaching in the Communion, in bread-breaking, in prayer and in taking the elements with steadfast hearts, praying to God with joy.

(8. Feet-washing)

Furthermore we see, believe and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ at and during His communion meal, by washing His disciples' feet, has established, practiced, and ordered it to be practiced, as a sign of true humility and abasement out of love and obedience to Jesus, our pattern. Herein has man entered into adoption by God, yes, inheritance of the Grace, shoots on the Vine, members in the body of Jesus Christ.

(9. Growth)

We also recognize a growth according to the Holy Scriptures - cleansed, healed, and made blessed through the bath of re-birth and renewing of the Holy Spirit. To this end means are necessary, public as well as private-public assemblages where the Word is brought for penance-calling, and private where such children often gather and reveal to each other, filially, one to the other. From this, love grows, and faith, and confidence is strengthened, because such children are exposed to many temptations and when through filial revelation the craftiness of the devil is discovered, then one can talk open-heartedly with the other so that the body of Christ is renewed, and because such children are still in flesh and blood, a Christian regulation is necessary as in the household of God, according to the Scripture, Matt. 18;

(6. Baptism continued)

Jesus been baptized, have entered into Zion, and all of this spiritual body, as God's children, are born, as new men, as the dew of the morning glow.

(7. Lord's Supper)

We also believe that the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's supper and observed it with his disciples, with bread and wine in the last night of his suffering when he was betrayed, that they, after his departure, when partaking of the same, should remember his broken body and shed blood for them, wherein also his disciples and followers were steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayer, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God with a joyful heart.

(8. Feet-washing)

We further believe and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ at the time he instituted the Lord's supper, also washed his disciple's feet, instituted it, observed and commanded it to be observed as a token of true humility and humbleness, in obedience, out of love to Jesus, our example. Here we stand by God in grace, separated from the children of this world, yea, branches of the true vine, and members of the body of Christ.

(9. Growth)

We also acknowledge a growth in grace according to the Holy Scriptures, cleansed, sanctified, and saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. To accomplish this, it is necessary to have public gatherings where the Word is preached and the people are exhorted to repent. To this end there are also private gatherings necessary and helpful, where the penitent souls can confess and relate their experience in a childlike manner one to the other, by so doing the love of God in their heart will increase and their faith and their confidence be strengthened. And inasmuch as such children are exposed to many temptations, therefore such childlike confessions one to the other at such gatherings will have a tendency to uncover the craftiness of the enemy, and that good advice can be given to those present so that the body of Christ can be built up. And since such children are yet in the flesh, there is therefore a Christian order necessary in the household of God according to Matt. 18.

this spiritual congregation or church all children of God are born as new men as the children from the womb of the women

We likewise believe that the Lord Jesus has instituted the Lord's supper and practiced it with His disciples with bread and wine in the last night of His Passion, in which He was betrayed, that they should remember and after His departure should think of His body broken for them and of His blood shed for them, wherever His disciples and followers continued steadfastly in the doctrines and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer took the food with a humble heart, and praised God rejoicing.

But we see and confess that the Lord Jesus Christ at and during His supper, washed the feet of His disciples and instituted this right, practiced and commended it to be practiced as a sign of true humanity and humiliation out of love and obedience thru Jesus, our example. Here we stand in the grace of God as His elected children, yes, as branches on the vine and members of the body of Jesus Christ.

We confess also according to the Holy Scriptures a development of those purified, sanctified and saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. For this purpose certain means are necessary as public and private gatherings, public ones to present the Word and to call to repentance, private ones, where such children may often gather to reveal themselves childlike to each other, by which means love is increased and faith and trust are strengthened and when such children are exposed to temptation for instance, the cunning of Satan is discovered by this child-like revealing and one may counsel the other for edifying of the body of Christ and while such children are in the flesh and blood, Christian order is necessary as in the household of God according to Matthew 18,

(6. Baptism continued)

ed or convicted soul that has become renewed or new born through a true repentance come to a change of heart will be willing to be baptized and to be faithful to Jesus and to be thus enclosed as a spiritual member of the body of Christ or the church of Zion, to which all new born children of God belong, too because being born from him as the dew of the morning.

(7. Lord's Supper)

We too believe that the Lord Jesus has ordained the Lord's Supper with bread and wine and practiced it and partaken thereof with his disciples in the night of suffering when he was betrayed. Wherewith they should bring to remembrance his broken body and his shed blood after he had gone hence. Wherein his followers were faithful and abode in the doctrine in the communion in breaking of bread and in prayer and accepted their spiritual nourishments with simplicity of heart and praised God with joy in their hearts.

(8. Feet-washing)

And further we believe and acknowledge too, that the Lord Jesus Christ at his last supper washed the feet of his disciples and instituted and practiced and commanded it that it should be observed as an evidence of love and humility and lowliness and self denial to our crucified Redeemer. There the redeemed comes to the childhood of God, an heir of grace, a branch at the vine, and at the Lord Jesus Christ who is the true vine and members of his body an heir of God, yea a joint heir with Christ, through whom we can say Abba Father.

(9. Growth)

We too claim a growing in the grace and knowledge of God. According to the sacred scriptures to be purified, sanctified and to be made a blessed people through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost where unto necessary regulations are required such as public and private meetings. Public where the Word is set forth to call sinners to repentance, and private where such children frequently come together to relate one to the other in a childlike manner their feelings or experience. Out of which growth love and faith; and confidence in one and another is strengthened while such children are set bare to many temptations and where revealing one to another the artful wiles of Satan are made known when they can speak open hearted one with another, the Body of Christ is built up and while such children yet remain in flesh and blood it is necessary that they have a Christian like rule or government where to live by as in the family of God as the Saviour has taught in Math. 18 Ch.

(10. Total Community)

and furthermore, because such children are bound through love to watch out for each other, we consider it necessary and decided that nobody in important affairs should do anything without brotherly advice, such as marry, or change his dwelling, buy land, or whatever important may occur.

(11. Discipline)

We also acknowledge a ban or separation of offending members, yet with a difference as above noted in Matt. 18. If a brother sins against you in small affairs and wishes to show submission, he may be addressed in filial love, not aggressively and not in childish talk. If, however, the accused brother or sister cannot understand it, let it be said to one or two and lastly to the congregation. If he is not agreeable, then consider him as a heathen and a publican. But as for such as let themselves be called brethren or sister, according to I Cor. 5:11: if they, however, fall into vice, there is no need of the above brotherly investigation, but they are to be given over to judgment, to which they already really have reverted. Mark the expressions of Paul: "We bid you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother who walketh disorderly, Thes. 3:6-14. Have nothing to do with him, so that he may become "shame-red." "Now I have written to you that ye shall have nothing to do with him, not even to eat with them who are so idolatrous or have fallen into vice, to avoid them completely with hand and kiss, in eating and drinking," until the time of true repentance, sorrow and penance; "however, keep him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother," be help to him in need, in order to move him with love. If true repentance then follows, sorrow, penance and submission, so that they again in Jesus' blood have found forgiveness for their past sins, then also the members will again, through acquaintance with them, feel the unity of the Spirit; and they shall again be received openly to Communion, comforted and strengthened, so that they do not sink into excessive sadness. 2 Cor. 2:7.

And furthermore because such children are bound to watch out for each other, we consider it necessary that nobody in important affairs should undertake anything without brotherly advice.

We recognize also a separation of offending members, yet with a difference as above noted: Matt. 18 - If your brother sins against you - that can begin in small things - and is willing to show submission in order to speak and be spoken to in filial love, do not gossip nor be aggressive.

[But if your brother sins against you, go and punish him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have won your brother. If he does not hear you, take one or two with you, so that everything may be established from the mouth of two or three witnesses. If he does not hear them, tell it to the congregation. If he does not listen to the congregation, consider him as a heathen and tax-collector.]

Mark the difference here: Jesus ate and drank with heathens and publicans, and had at need commerce with them, gave them good teaching in order to convince them. But to let such be called Brother or Sister (I Cor. 5:11) that is a sin. In that case the above brotherly investigation is not necessary, but they are to be given over to the court, to which they already really have reverted. Mark the expressions of Paul: "We bid you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walketh disorderly, until the time of a true confession, repentance and penance; but do not consider him an enemy; warn him in a brotherly manner, be helpful to him also in need, in order to move him with love. If true repentance then follows, sorrow, penance and submission, so that they again in Jesus' blood have found forgiveness for their past sins, then also the members will again, through acquaintance with them, feel the unity of the Spirit; and they shall again be received openly to communion, comforted and strengthened, so that they do not sink into excessive sadness.

(10. Total Community)

And furthermore, while such children are in duty bound, out of love, to watch over one another, we therefore deem it necessary that no one undertake anything of importance without asking brotherly advice in such matters that might endanger the peace and progress of the brotherhood, such as change of residence, buying of property and other important matters.

(11. Discipline)

We also acknowledge an order in separation of disorderly members, yet with difference, as above stated from Matthew 18 "if thy brother shall trespass against thee," etc. This, of course, can have its beginning in small matters. If the offender shows a submissive spirit and accepts the brotherly admonition in childlike love, does not defend or justify himself, neither is strong or domineering, it is all right, but if he will not acknowledge his fault, nor mend his ways, then take with thee one or two more, and at last tell it to the church. If the offender, however, is not submissive to the church, then let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. But one who is called a brother, or according to the German, "one who allows himself to be called a brother," I Cor. 5:11, but remains in sin, then there is no official investigation necessary, but only to give them into the hands of God for judgment, Notice the expression of Paul: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, II Thes. 3:6 and 14, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." I Cor. 5:11, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company" or to eat with such who are so ungodly and have fallen into such grievous sins and to utterly withdraw yourselves from greeting them with the right hand of fellowship and with the holy kiss and in eating and drinking, until they are truly enlightened and become truly penitent. But, however, count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Be also helpful to such in time of necessity, in order to draw them again unto you by love. Should they become truly enlightened and in penitence and humbleness again obtain pardon for their transgression, in Jesus' blood, then will also the other members, having become acquainted with their penitence and humbleness of mind, feel the unity of the Spirit, and thus can such again be received into church membership, to comfort and to strengthen them so that they may not in over-much sorrow sink into despair.

and because such members are joined by love to watch out for each other, we deem it necessary and ordered that in important matters, nobody should undertake anything without brotherly counsel, for instance, to marry, to change his residence, or to buy real estate, or whatever of importance may come up.

Therefore, we also recognize a separation, or way of the angry members, yet with distinction as quoted above from Matthew 18: If thy brother shall trespass against thee, that may begin with minor things, He may be willing to submit and permit himself to be addressed in childlike love, not slandering and not ruling. But, when the accused brother or sister cannot understand it, then I may tell it to another one or two and finally unto the church, and if he shall neglect to hear, let him be as an heathen man and a publican. But in the case of those who call themselves brothers and sisters according to I Cor. 5-11, there is no need of the above brotherly investigation, should they fall into vices, because they are reserved unto judgment to which they really surrendered themselves, as is indicated by the saying of Paul: We command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that, ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. II Thes. 3: Have no company with him that he may be ashamed, but now I have written unto you not to keep company with him, nor eat with such a one, who are so idolatrous or fallen into vices, to avoid them entirely, hand and foot, in eating and drinking, until the time of true acknowledgment, sorrow and repentance. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother, assist him also in need, to move him through love. Should this be followed by a true acknowledgement, repentance and humility so that they find again forgiveness of their sins in the blood of Jesus, the members will likewise feel again the unity of spirit because of the acknowledgement and they shall be again received publicly into the fellowship, they shall be comforted and strengthened that they may not fall into too great a sorrow.

(10. Total Community)

How we are to be humble and submissive and how we are to love and watch and care one for the other. Therefore in all important matters we deem it necessary to ask advice and to seek brotherly council in such things as marriage or in buying land or in changing residence or in whatever of importance it might be.

(11. Discipline)

We also claim that an expulsion (or putting away) of offensive members is necessary yet with a difference as above referred to in Math 19 Ch. If thy brother trespass against thee, this can take place in small things and showeth us the need of love and submissiveness one to the other, to tell and to be told in humble childlike love, not as one that rules, neither shall we tell it to any one else, but it shall be between thee and him alone and if he repents forgive him. But if the brother or sister cannot understand it or should justify themselves then take one or two more and go to the accused member in love and prayer and admonish him. If he hears, forgive him. But if he yields not to the second admonition then tell it to the church. The church is then to admonish him with brotherly council and love and if he hears and repents the church is to forgive as our Heavenly Father has forgiven us, but if the brother or sister hears not the church then let them be unto thee as a heathen man or a publican. (Matt 18 ch, 17 v) But such as permit themselves to be called a brother or sister according to 1 Cor 5 Ch. 11 v., if they fall into gross and willful sins before the world, then there is no need of the first and second admonition but the church shall give them over to judgment to which they have truly fallen already. Mark the expression of the Apostle Paul, "We command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and have no company with him that he may be ashamed." (2 Thes 3.6. 14.) "But now I wrote unto you that you should have nothing to do with him even not to eat with them that have become idolatrous or have fallen into great sins from such wholly to turn away." And avoid to salute them with the hand and kiss or in eating and drinking with them, until they become truly sensible of their state and condition and manifest sorrow and repentance and deep humility and contrition of heart yet count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother, (2 Thes, 3.15.) and also in time of need we should be willing to help and assist them to move them in love and if there follow a true sense of the evil that they have committed and repent and turn to the Lord with a whole heart and again find peace and pardon of their sins in the blood of Jesus Christ so there will again be an acquaintance with them and a unity of the spirit. Then they shall again be in public received in church fellowship so that they may be comforted and encouraged lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow (2 Cor. 2 Ch., 7 v.)

(12. Infant Baptism)

What, however, concerns other grounds, such as child baptism and unregenerate baptism, we leave to those who can satisfy themselves with them; where the teaching of the Lord Jesus and His apostles is silent, there we will also be silent.

(C. Relationship to the World)

(13. Matrimony)

We also maintain that when believing persons, who have united themselves with God and their soul-bridgroom, are joined in matrimony, they are joined in eternity, in righteousness and uprightness, in grace and compassion Hosea 2. Should, however, a person come to new life or to reconciliation with Christ but be not yet baptized, and yet not contrary, he also has admission to marriage, for when souls are received by God we are also willing to receive them, even children of Brethren, when the elders are obedient and follow; because children stand under the elders, the elders under the congregation, the congregation under Christ, and everything is right and proper in its order. So the congregation can join their youth in marriage with advice, and they will not be sent out into the world; and it is our heart's wish and prayer to God, the All-Highest, that each first should have spiritual marriage with Jesus, the soul-bridgroom, and then the outward or body marriage.

(14. Oath and Nonresistance)

We also learn from the doctrine of the Lord Jesus that swearing of pledges is forbidden, therefore it shall be forbidden to us also. Matt. 5:34. Therefore it is also completely forbidden to bear the sword for revenge or defense. Verses 39, 40.

What, however, concerns other grounds, such as child-baptism, those we leave to those who can satisfy themselves with them; where the teaching of the Lord Jesus and His apostles is silent, There we will also be silent.

The swearing of pledges is absolutely forbidden in the teachings of Jesus, therefore, it is forbidden to us. Matt. 5:34. Sword, revenge, defense are absolutely forbidden Verses 39-40.

(12. Infant Baptism)

What, however, belongs to other fundamentals, such as the baptism of infants and the unconverted, we leave it with them that are satisfied therewith. Where the teachings of our Lord Jesus and that of the Apostles are silent, there we will be silent also.

(13. Matrimony)

Then also we believe and acknowledge if two believing persons living apparently as man and wife, who before God have solemnly agreed between themselves to always live together in righteousness, that if one or the other should come to the new life, or become reconciled and yet not baptized, but is not opposed thereto, such a person has the privilege of being baptized after being united in marriage, for if souls are accepted by God so are we also willing to accept them (to church membership.) Then also obedient brethren's children, who are obedient whilst they are under their parents, and the parents are under the church and the church under Jesus Christ, and everything else is in order and right, so can the marriage of such children take place with members in the church, with advice, and not be sent out into the world. Yet, after all it is the wish of our heart and prayer to God, the All-Highest, that every one and all did first unite themselves in the Spiritual marriage with Jesus the Bridegroom of the soul, and afterward the outward or natural marriage.

(14. Oath and Nonresistance)

And inasmuch as oaths are altogether forbidden in the teachings of our Lord Jesus, they are therefore also forbidden to be used by us. Matt. 5:34. The Sword, revenge and self-defense are also entirely forbidden, verses 39 and 40.

What, how-

(C. Relationship to the World)

But with reference to other fundamentals, for instance, the baptism of the little ones or of the unconverted, we leave that to those who are satisfied with them. When the doctrine of the Lord Jesus and that of the Apostles remain silent, then we will keep silent likewise.

We also confess in two, believing persons in holy wedlock who have betrothed themselves with God and the bridegroom of their soul forever, betrothed in righteousness and in judgment. But should a person have come into the new life or reconciliation and yet neither be baptized nor ready to be received, then nevertheless it has a right to be copulated; for when souls are acceptable to God, then we are also willing to accept and receive them as obedient brotherly children who are obedient and follow the parents, as the children are subject unto the parents, the parents unto the church, but the church unto Christ and everything is according to order and right, thus the copulation may be made with the counsel of the congregation and they should not be driven out into the world. But at that, it is the wish of our heart and our prayer to God, the Most High, that everybody and all may first attain the spiritual wedding with Jesus, the bridegroom of the soul and then the external wedding ceremony.

As it is forbidden by the doctrine of Jesus to swear an oath, that is also forbidden to us. Matthew 5, sword, vengeance and resistance are altogether denied, v. 39-40.

(12. Infant Baptism)

But what concerns other doctrines such as Baptizing infants and the unconverted or unregenerated persons. These things we leave to such as can content themselves therewith where the gospel of the Lord Jesus and his Apostles are silent we also will say nothing.

(13. Matrimony)

We also claim and confess that there are to be two faithful persons united together in the holy bonds of matrimony such as have betrothed themselves to God in righteousness and in judgment and in loving kindness and mercy. Hos 2 Ch 19 v. as the bridegroom of their souls forever. But if a person should have come to the new birth or reconciliation with Christ, but not yet been baptized, if such a soul desires to enter into marriage with a brother, or sister, and the brother or sister is not opposed, so we will also accept of it to give them in marriage, for when souls are accepted with God, then we are also willing to receive them. And also the children of the brethren, such as hearken and obey their parents. Since the children are under the parents, and the parents are subject to the church, and the church submissive to Christ, (or in Christ) and every thing in its right order is just and right, so can the members of the church also give their descendants in marriage one to another with council and advice, so that they may not be sent out into the world. After all, it is still our heart's desire and wish to God the Highest that is above all and over all that each and every one would first seek to unite themselves to Jesus, the bridegroom of the soul, and then afterwards the outward or bodily marriage.

(14. Oath and Nonresistance)

We also acknowledge and confess out of the teachings of the Lord Jesus, that we are forbidden to take an oath, (Matt 5 Ch. 34 v.), and likewise are we forbidden to use the sword for revenge or self defense, (Matt 5 Ch. 39, 44 v).

(15. Government)

We also learn from the doctrine of the Lord Jesus and His apostles that it is forbidden to any member or follower of Jesus Christ to occupy authoritative offices, and therefore it is and shall be forbidden to us. We are not to withstand authority, but be obedient in all that is right and good, paying them tax and tell and protection-money, because Paul calls it God's servant (Rom. 13); so we see that God rules all nature, and has men who rule nature, and this is for the benefit of the children of God, else it would be still more difficult to live in this world; therefore Paul commands us to pray for them, that they may perform their duty loyally, so that the children of God under them may lead a quiet and blessed life. But we shall not use them for power;

(16. Corporate Identity and Goal)

for the rest, we wish in God, the All-Highest, that He might build His congregation and plant and hold it in sound growth, that we also can be green sprouts on the vine and remain in all length of Eternity in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The above is and was signed in the name of the fellowship (Gemeinde) by Johannes Meyer, Johannes Funk, Samuel Bentzner, Jacob Engle, Stofel Hollinger, Philip Stern, Johannes Greider, Benjamin Beyer.

From the doctrine of the Lord Jesus and his apostles we learn that it is forbidden to any member or follower of Jesus Christ to occupy authoritative offices; therefore it is and shall be forbidden to us. We shall, however, not oppose authority, but be obedient in everything good, paying taxes or for protection, because Paul calls it God's servant. Rom. 13. We also see that God rules all Nature and has also servants - men who are to rule Nature; and that is also for the benefit of God's children, otherwise it would be still more difficult to live in this world.

Therefore Paul bids us pray for them, so that they accomplish their duty faithfully, that the children under them may lead a quiet life, pleasing to God, but may not need them for force.

End of the excerpt taken out of the writing of Johannes Engle.

(15. Government)

Out of the teachings of our Lord Jesus and His apostles we also understand that no member or follower of Jesus Christ is allowed to serve in worldly governmental offices, therefore it ought also be forbidden to us. But we ought not withstand the worldly governments, but be subject to them in all that is good, and earnestly pray for them that God may give them light and wisdom, so that they may be able to perform their duties truly. We are also exhorted to pay tribute, or protection money unto the governments, because Paul calls them God's ministers, Romans 13. And since God rules the whole universe, so God has ordained that man should rule natural men, or the world, and that is also for the good of God's children, otherwise it would still be worse to live in this world. Therefore, Paul commands us to pray for them, as above stated, so that they may be able to perform their duties truly, so that the children of God under their protection may be able to live a quiet and God-fearing life, and that they do not use the children of God as power or force in order to quell disturbances or to oppress or to bring others into subjection to the governments under whose protection we live.

(16. Corporate Identity and Goal)

Further, we wish from God the All-Highest, that he may build and plant and keep his church in healthy growth, and that we also may be green branches on the true vine, and remain so in all the length of eternity, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Signed) Philip Stern, John Myers, Jacob Engle, John Greider, John Funk, Stofel Hollinger, Benjamin Byer, (or Zeyer) and Daniel Batzner. (Zatzner.)

(15. Government)

We learn from the doctrine of the Lord Jesus and that of His Apostles that no member or follower of Jesus Christ is allowed to serve in public offices and therefore it shall be forbidden to us, likewise we shall not oppose those in authority but be obedient in everything that is good and earnestly pray for them, that God may grant them light and wisdom to perform their duties faithfully, and to pay them tribute or customs, because Paul calls the Government (Rom. 13) the minister of God, and as we observe that God rules the entire nature, so he makes use of men to rule the natural man and of course, that is also for the benefit of the children of God, otherwise life in this world would be more miserable yet. For that reason Paul commands us to pray for those in power, as mentioned above, that they may perform faithfully their duties, in order that the children of God may lead under them a quiet and godly life, but not use them as a power.

For the rest we ask of God, the Most High that he may build up his church and plant it and keep it in a healthful state of growth, that we may remain as green branches on the vine, in and through Jesus Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

(16. Corporate Identity and Goal)

And further we wish and pray to God, the Highest, that He may build up and propagate and maintain his church in sound doctrine and growth that we can be green fruit bearing branches at the true vine, Jesus Christ, and abide through all the length of eternity through Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

The foregoing was written and signed in the name of the fellowship (Gemeinde) by John Myers, John Funk, Samuel Bentzner, Jacob Engle, Stofel Hollinger, Philip Stern, John Crider, Benjamin Byers.