

# Anabaptist Confessions of Faith

The Waldensians were an ancient sect dating back to antiquity, called in French Vaudois. They originated in the late 12th cent. as the Poor Men of Lyons, a band organized by Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant of Lyons, who gave away his property (c.1176) and went about preaching apostolic poverty as the way to perfection. Being laymen, they were forbidden to preach. They went to Rome, where Pope Alexander III blessed their life but forbade preaching (1179) without authorization from the local clergy. They disobeyed and began to teach unorthodox doctrines; they were formally declared heretics by Pope Lucius III in 1184 and by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In 1211 more than 80 were burned as heretics at Strasbourg, beginning several centuries of persecution. The Waldenses proclaimed the Bible as the sole rule of life and faith. They rejected the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and the mass, and laid great stress on gospel simplicity. Worship services consisted of readings from the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, and sermons, which they believed could be preached by all Christians as depositaries of the Holy Spirit. Their distinctive pre-Reformation doctrines are set forth in the Waldensian Catechism (c.1489).

The **Schleitheim Confession** was widely circulated. Ulrich Zwingli translated it into Latin and attempted to refute it already in 1527. It was in print in its original German form as early as 1533. John Calvin used a now-lost French translation of the Seven Articles in his refutation of Anabaptism published in 1544. By 1560 there was also a Dutch translation of the confession. The English translation in W. J. McGlothlin's *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Philadelphia, 1911, 3-9, was made from Zwingli's Latin translation. For an excellent survey of known manuscript copies and printed editions of the

Schleitheim Confession, see Robert Friedmann's article in The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XVI, 2 (April, 1942), 82-87. [ ]

The church of the Anabaptists was unique in that it was a disciplined and regulated church. The discipline was accepted voluntarily by the individual, as it concerned how he should live in the brotherhood; and by the church, as it concerned how the fellowship should be maintained if the principles of the Sermon on the Mount were to be applied practically. A church-order (*Gemeinde-Ordnung*) or "discipline" thus was called for as a set of rules. The Schleitheim Articles was the first such discipline, and Robert Friedmann<sup>1</sup> has identified another, from the same period, long concealed in the Hutterian chronicle (*Geschicht-Buch der Hutterischen Bruder*). The section of the *Geschicht-Buch* containing twelve brief articles seems to have come from the pre-Hutterian period (before 1528, when part of the movement began to practice communism and pacifism in Moravia). [ ]

The brief document gives the impression of being a first or preliminary draft. A finished draft may never have appeared because the Tyrolean government broke up the Anabaptist congregation at Rattenberg. Many members lost their lives and the others fled to Moravia. The Discipline was carried with the refugees, preserved, and its instructions were observed faithfully