

Jakob Sylvan's preface to the Zoarite Anthology *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* as an introduction to un(der)studied separatist principles

PHILIP E. WEBBER

* This research was first reported at the 1998 Communal Studies Association conference at Zoar Village, Ohio.

In August, 1817 some 300 Separatists who had broken with the established Lutheran church in the southern German state of Wurttemberg arrived in Philadelphia. Though its immediate needs for shelter and support were met by sympathetic Quakers, the group soon arranged to purchase a 5,5000-acre tract of land along Ohio's Tuscarawas River. Under the leadership of Joseph M. Bimeler (earlier: Baumler, 1778-1853), this band of German immigrants made its way to Ohio, where the first cabin in the new settlement was completed in early December, 1817. Thus began an experiment in communal living whose fortunes ebbed and flowed until 1898, when the Society of Separatists at Zoar was formally dissolved.¹

Only two major works were printed by the Zoarites. One of these is *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* ("True Separation, or Rebirth") consisting primarily of sermons delivered by Zoar's founding leader, Joseph M. Bimeler.² These sermons, often called "The Discourses," were first recorded from memory in 1822 by Johannes Neef, a youthful member of the community whose father had become deaf. By the time of Neef's untimely death in 1832, he had trained himself to recall and transcribe entire sermons verbatim; beginning in 1834, another individual continued the work (I, vii-viii). The other imprint of the Zoar press was the hymnal *Sammlung ausgelesener geistlicher Lieder*?

When Bimeler died in 1853, no successor appeared, and it was found that reading "from good books and from Holy Scripture" (*aus guten Buchern und der Heiligen Schrift*, I, viii) simply did not suit the needs of the membership

(*wollte nicht so ganz angenehm seyn, ibid.*), and hence it was decided to print and read from the collected sermons of the departed leader, and to reserve the use of Scripture lessons for the afternoon services.⁴ While there was no expectation that the work would enjoy immediate widespread popularity (*es wurde in gegenwärtiger Zeit nur wenig oder gar keinen Anklang finden, ibid.*), hope remained that in the future these volumes would receive due recognition and interest (in *der künftigen Zeit aber erst hervor gesucht und erkannt [werden], ibid.*).

Fortunately for scholars, much of the Preface by Jakob Sylvan and two of the earliest recorded sermons (No.3, I, 12-17; No. 14, I, 74-80), as well as much

of the surrounding material (especially from the beginning of "The Discourses" through sermon No. 15, I, 80-86), deal with the principles of Zoarite Separatism. I have attempted here to present a distillation of salient points from *Die wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* that elucidate and complement Sylvan's Preface as an introduction to the history and thought of the Society of Separatists at Zoar.

Sylvan advises the reader not to be surprised by the inclusion, alongside spiritual material, of statements in *Die wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* on ethics and mores (*von auBerlicher Moral und Sittlichkeit*, I, ix), observations on the health and function of the human body (Bimeler, for example, favored vegetarianism, I, 18), and advice on day-to-day household affairs (*von guter Ordnung im hauslichen Leben*, I, ix). This variety of topics is not really so very surprising. Sylvan reports Bimeler's claim that, as a rule, he came without forethought to the worship service, but that as soon as he began to speak, his mind was more than filled with many thoughts, from which he might draw as he deemed best (*Wenn ich [Bimeler] hierher komme, so komme ich gewöhnlich leer, und weiß noch nicht von was ich reden solle, es wird mir erst hier in Gemuth eingegeben, über oder von was ich reden solle, und aber dann, so bald ich anfang zu reden, so eröffnet sich vor mir ein weites unubersehbares Feld von Vorstellungen, so daß ich nur nehmen darf und kann, wie ich will, oder was mir das Nothwendigste scheint*, I, iii).⁵

(It may be noted, in connection with the variety of subjects in "The Discourses" that Bimeler, who also served the Zoar community as its physician, expressed in his sermons a keen interest in the natural sciences and medicine, while making clear his conviction that humanity would never fully uncover the secrets of the physical universe, composed of the (pre-Socratic) elements of earth, water, air and fire (e.g., I, 40-41). Material on medical and related practices in Zoar, while far from complete, is extant in a volume suggesting the importance of overall interest in this area by the Zoarites.⁶)

Sylvan conveys in his Preface a sense of urgent need to counter the chronic dissatisfaction of community members at various periods, beginning in the earliest years on American soil and continuing through rebellions such

as that of 1844-45 (I, xiii). There is direct and indirect mention throughout the

work of the Zoarites' waning zeal for their spiritual tradition, and expressions of a special concern that the youth acquire an interest in their heritage (ibid., cf. I, vii; cf. IV, 421-430, with non-chronologically sequenced anniversary sermons from 1823, 1824, 1852, and 1826, commemorating the Separatists' arrival in America). Bimeler noted in 1830 that, in the quarter century or so since the inception of this spiritual community, a generation had arisen with little or no inclination to follow in the footsteps of its spiritual forebears (*welches wenig oder keine Disposition besitzt, in denselben Wegen ihrer Väter und Vorfahren zu wandeln*, I, 14). True, *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* attempts to offer edification; it is also intended, as is made abundantly clear in the Preface, to enhance the propagation of an already dwindling cohort of the faithful.⁷

Hence, the sermons frequently contain appeals to the younger hearers not to reject the sound counsel of their elders (e.g., I, 80). Bimeler admonishes parents not to defeat their own purposes by imposing unduly harsh or legalistic control upon their children (*Auf eine andere Art wird ebenfalls viel an der Bildung der Kinder verdorben, nemlich durch unkluge Behandlung und unzeitige Bestrafung, oder durch eine all zu gesetzliche Strenge in religiösen Uebungen*, I, 30), and to bear in mind that enforced devotional exercises can easily arouse dread and apprehension in children who do not yet have an appreciation for such activities (*Es ist bekannt: Kinder haben und finden kein Vergnügen am beten oder sonstigen religiösen Handlungen, wenn sie beten sollen, so ist es ihnen schon zum voraus Angst, und mit Unmuth und Mißvergnügen sehen sie dem Augenblick ihrer Entlassung entgegen*, ibid.) One must not forget that "God wanted to have free creatures who would like to serve Him out of their own motivation and their own conviction," since "after all, we do have the freedom to do good just as much as we have to do evil" (*Gott wollte freye Geschöpfe haben, welche Ihm aus eigenem Antrieb und aus eigener Ueberzeugung, dienen mochten. . . . wir [haben] doch ja die Freiheit, eben so wohl Gutes zu thun! wie wir sie haben Böses zu thun*, I, 19).

All this concern about the training of the young is consistent with the tenth point of the "Principles of the Separatists" (*Grundsätze der Separatisten*) in which the faithful pledge not to send their children into the schools of Babylon, but rather to assume the responsibility themselves for their children's education (I, xv, 16). It is unfortunate, therefore, that Bimeler himself issues a number of rather blunt and unflattering comments about his young followers, for instance, that they lack "the perspective and feeling" (*die Ansicht und das Gefühl*, I, 75) needed to grasp even the most basic "Principles of the Separatists." In one long tirade, he states with categorical pessimism that, on the whole, the young concern themselves only with the pleasures of this life and the joys of the world, rush to dissipation, undermine their health, turn a deaf ear to warning, and show little or no evidence of any inclination toward improvement (1,25). One can only speculate about the extent to which Bimeler

had unwittingly cast himself in the role of the harsh and self-defeating father of his own spiritual household.

Bimeler offers an insight into the origin of some of his own feelings about free will and the training of the young when he outlines the course of his own spiritual crisis and conversion. Drilled by his parents in the foundations of the Christian faith, he soon learned to give the desired answer to questions about his beliefs. This, however, did not satisfy the young Bimeler.

As long as I was in a state of not thinking or judging for myself, I was a good Christian; when, however, I was able to examine myself, I saw ... and recognized that my life was not at all in agreement with that of a Christian. (*So lange ich nun nicht selbst zu denken und zu urtheilen im Stande war, so war ich ein guter Christ, als ich aber einmal mich selbst prüfen konnte so sahe ich... und erkannte daB mein Leben gar nicht mit dem eines Christen ubereinstimmte*, I, 23)

Sacraments and absolution failed to provide any remedy, and Bimeler encountered the anger of a God who refused to let sin go unpunished. Only when he found divine grace and repented, did Bimeler sense the beginnings of improvement in his spiritual standing. For his own part, Bimeler stated a preference for the religious upbringing of children in America, which he perceived as less forceful, less likely to wrest a conversion without conviction from the young, and less likely to be based on a single and unchallenged sectarian view (I, 20).

Crucial to spiritual reawakening is understanding the essential opposition of soul and body as "two very different beings" (*zwey ganz verschiedene Wesen*, I, 54) torn by the irreconcilable forces of light and dark, of good and evil (e.g., I, 9, 18, and passim). We see in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17 f.) not merely the source of inescapable confrontation with the existence of good and evil, but indeed the origin of humanity's inordinate and fatal craving to mix the two, to find "the middle between the two, and indeed half good and half evil ... for all humans have inherited from their father Adam the tendency to prefer eating from the tree of the knowledge [of good and evil] rather than eating from [just] one of the two" (*das Mittel zwischen jenen beyden, und sogleich, halb gut und halb böse . . . denn alle Menschen haben von ihrem Vater Adam die Neigung geerbt, lieber von dem Baum des Erkenntnißes zu essen, als von Einem der beyden andern*, I, 18). "Human self-interest ... is the Serpent that spoke to Eve in Paradise" (*Die Eigenheit des Menschen... ist die Schlange, welche zu Eva sprach im Paradies*, I, 15) to praise the forbidden fruit. As a result, "Adam... lusted after a mixture of good and evil" and "right up to the present day, all descendants of Adam love this world as the Kingdom of Mixture [of good and evil]" (*Adam . . . liebte nach einer Vermischung von Gut und Böse . . . alle Nachkommen Adams, bis auf den heutigen Tag, [lieben] diese Welt, als das Reich der Vermischung*, I, 18-19). The doctrines of many errant sects are based, in the Separatist view, on a desire to rationalize and justify humanity's pernicious

yearning to enjoy simultaneously the mixed spiritual polarities of good and evil (I, 22-23).⁸

All believers, like Peter, must be converted before reaching out to others (I, 21); that they need to begin their efforts with their own nearest of kin (ibid.); that immoderately zealous efforts to proselytize may exacerbate problems of spiritual superficiality and lead eventually to sectarian splintering (I, 21-22); that danger lies in the fact that,

"as a rule, each sect attempts to bring validity and weightiness to the viewpoint of its principles through the [numerical] majority of its members, and therefore is always at great pains to increase its numbers as much as possible" (*Eine jede Secte sucht zwar gewöhnlich die Aechtheit ihrer Grundsätze durch die Mehrzahl ihrer Glieder, geltend und gewichtig zu machen, und ist deswegen immer eifrig bemüht, ihre Anzahl so viel wie möglich zu vergrößern*, I, 22).

Citing the account of Noah, and also Christ's exhortation in Matthew 7:13-14 to be among the few who enter at the narrow gate, Bimeler and his compiler make it clear that they expect the number of the redeemed to be small (I, iii, 77, and passim), and that the spiritual metamorphosis of the converted (*Verwandlung*, I, 13 and passim) is best undergone in gradual and incremental steps (*stufenweise*, I, 13-14 and passim).⁹

Despite an unflinching recognition of original sin, these sermons also reflect the Utopian and essentially romantic notion of the era that humanity has the (too often untapped) capacity for improvement (*Verbesserung*), ennoblement (*Veredlung*) and even perfection (*Vervollkommnung*, all I, 59 and passim). Also, though Bimeler preaches grace, he insists that human initiative is necessary in order to attain a state of being made spiritually worthy (*Wurdigmachung*, e.g., I, 39), and that the spiritual indwelling of the believer is calculated (*berechnet*, I, 76) according to one's state of worthiness and the degree to which one lives a holy—i.e., separated—life (ibid., cf. I, 35 f.; 1,56). Bimeler was fully convinced from experience and observation that a thoroughgoing conversion (*grundliche Bekehrung*) is anathema to human nature, which "would rather seek its refuge in other things"

(*so gerne seine Zuflucht zu andren Dingen nimmt*, 1,20). Despite that realization, he nevertheless challenges his followers to consider that if an individual "can spend time and be occupied with vain and useless things that the soul desires and enjoys, why not also [do the same] with God?" (*sich doch . . . mit eitlen und unnutzen Dingen recht wohl abgeben und beschäftigen kann, an Dingen wozu die Seele Lust hat, oder woran sie Vergnügen findet, warum denn nicht auch mit Gott?* I, 20).

All that notwithstanding, Zoar's founding leader was himself in no way adversely predisposed toward the enjoyment of riches by any whom God has chosen to reward with the elements of material well-being (e.g., I, 78-79).¹⁰

For those who are able to separate themselves not only from the world, but also from their own selfish interests, duty becomes desire when individuals love others not because of prescription or constraint, but rather "out of an

inner motivation, and out of a heartfelt inclination" (*aus innerem Antrieb, und aus einer herzlichen Neigung*, I, 48). The character of the God-filled life becomes "visible and important" (*anschaulich und wichtig*, I, 9), and virtue manifests itself (I, 59-73 and *passim*) as believers undergo "perfection and ennoblement of the soul" (*die Vervollkommnung und Veredlung ihrer Seele*, I, 59). Chastity, both spiritual and physical, ensues (I, 29, 44, 66 and *passim*), and

such an individual certainly finds no reason to accuse God of being a hard man, but on the contrary cannot marvel enough at how inexpressibly friendly, loving and kind He is (*Ein solcher findet gewiß keine Ursache, Gott als einen harten Mann zu beschuldigen, sondern er kann sich nicht genug wundern, wie unaussprechlich freundlich, liebevoll und gutig ER ist*, I, 39).

All these spiritual insights need to be acquired experientially, and not via the sort of reasoned arguments that had rendered the work of the established clergy so ineffectual (I, 16). Bimeler takes pains in his sermons to differentiate between natural and spiritual training (*um . . . den Unterschied zwischen der natürlichen und geistlichen Bildung begreiflich zu machen*, I, 31), and cites the example of the Apostle Paul, whose lasting reward for loyalty and diligence (*Treue und Fleiß*) came only after he moved beyond his excellent formal education to an experiential encounter with the Lord (I, 32). However, for those who do truly comprehend "that natural wisdom is passing and earthly happiness is fleeting" (*daß die natürliche Weisheit, vergänglich, und die irdische Glückseligkeit unbeständig ist*, I, 41), godly fear and the reward of godly wisdom follow, as well as an outflowing of divine powers, and with them, satisfaction in the virtuous life (I, 42, 64). As scholars have noted, Pietism based on such principles was indeed an alternative, perhaps even an antidote, to the spiritual barrenness of the Enlightenment.¹¹

Indeed, the choice to stand outside the mainstream of contemporary religious and intellectual currents is certainly a crucial aspect of "separating oneself from the world and giving obedience to the demands of the **Spirit** [original boldface] of Separation" (*sich von der Welt abzusondern, und den Forderungen des Geistes der Separation Gehor zu geben*, I, 12). To remain content with the conventional practices and ceremonies of the church, which were, after all, "the main cause of Separation" (*die Haupt- und Ursache der Separation*, I, xv), is to allow the atrophy and death of true Christian love (I, 38). The world may give Separatists a bad name, but "Christ himself was a non-conformist, and in fact the greatest non-conformist who ever lived on earth" (*Christus selbst war ein Sonderling, und zwar der grösste Sonderling, der je auf Erden gelebt hat*, I, 24, cf. I, 39), and as such, the role model for all true believers to follow.

The Separatist may be a non-conformist, but not an individualist. There is a strong sense of peoplehood enforced by the shared experiences of having

come together from many backgrounds (I, ix), having withstood brutal perse-

cution from the state and from other Christians (I, x-xi, *passim*), having emigrated (I, xii), having enjoyed miraculous protection (I, xiii, 12, 14, 74), having shared a common conversion experience (I, 23-24), and having received the assurance of being among the blessed few (I, 77 and *passim*).¹² Terms such as a "people" (*Volk*) appear throughout *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, often in connection with the term *Bund*, which may carry the multiple meanings of an association, of a covenant, or even of a compact with guarantees of special protection (e.g., I, v, vi, 12, 77, and *passim*).

While Sylvan portrays the decision to implement communitarianism among this strongly self-identified people as a measure of expediency with blessed results (I, ix-x), Bimeler sees it as the community's destiny (*Schicksal*, esp. 1, 38-39, 74) in which the human disinclination toward such a system is overcome by the "spirit of unity and peace" (*Geist der Einigkeit und des Friedens*, I, 35). Quoting from the Lutheran translation of the Bible, Bimeler sees in communitarianism a revitalization of the system of sharing described in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, in which all are of "one heart and one soul" (*ein Herz und eine Seele*, Acts 4:32, cf. I, 35, 37). One might well wonder how Zoarites accounted for the perfidy of Ananias and Sapphira, described in the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that signaled an end to communitarianism in the apostolic era. Be that as it may, there is no indication in his sermons that Bimeler, who initially had reservations about the Zoarites' ability to reject private ownership, promoted communitarianism as merely convenient or temporary.¹³

The Zoar community may have been subject to one stress or another, but for the Zoarite Separatist faithful, it was virtually an article of faith that the Separatist cause could not fail, because its adherents were perceived to be citizens of the millennial kingdom. Among the rare allusions to secular history *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* are references to the political and social conditions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, (esp. I, viii-ix, 8-9). In 1831, Bimeler explained that about sixty years earlier, there appeared throughout broad circles of society "an exceptional fermentation" (*eine auBerordentliche Gahrung*, I, 8) that assumed more definite form about a decade later, and found expression in the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon (I, 8-9).¹⁴ During the reign of Prince Charles Eugene of Wiirtemberg, the Spirit of God began to work mightily, an inspired instrument (*Werkzeug*, I, ix, 9) came forth to proclaim God's plan, and the faithful saw signs of the imminent return of Christ to set up his millennial reign (1,9).¹⁵ The Zoarites considered this point in time (*Zeitpunkt*, I, 12), approximately that of the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, to be the beginning of their Separatist movement (I, 12, cf. I, v-vi, ix, 38). It was also at this point that a signal star (*Signalstern*, I, ix, 9) illuminated the wise faithful who followed it like the magi of old, albeit this time on the pathway of Separation (esp. I, 9). It would be interesting to investigate connections between the symbolism of

this spiritual "signal star" and the seven-pointed star worn by some German Separatists, including early members of the Zoarite movement, and later incorporated in a symbolically intriguing position at the head of the stairway in the main building at Zoar.¹⁶

Not so fully understood today is the Zoarite belief that the millennial reign had indeed begun, though not in the manner originally anticipated. Sylvan states that "it is impossible that the great decision of God to set up His Kingdom [at this particular point in time] should be reversed or nullified, since already at the end of the preceding century He had made such great preparations for it," "and hence

His plan and intention will go forward, albeit more in a spiritual than in a physically visible manner (*Denn es ist unmöglich, daß der große Ratschluß Gottes, Sein Reich aufzurichten, sollte zurück oder gar zu nichts gehen, da Er so große Vorbereitungen schon am Ende des vorigen Jahrhunderts gemacht hat... Sein Plan und Vorhaben wird fortgehen, jedoch mehr in geistlicher als leiblicher sichtbarer Weise*, I, viii).

Bimeler makes a number of similar statements (e.g., I, 12-13), and adds that in the beginning our understanding of the coming of Christ was very imperfect, since we believed that Christ would come in physical form in the clouds of heaven and be personally with and among us (*daß unsere Begriffe von der Zukunft Christi anfangs sehr unvollkommen waren, denn wir glaubten, Christus werde in leiblicher Gestalt in den Wolken des Himmels kommen, und Persönlich bey und unter uns seyn*, I, 76).

There is no need to wait for the future return of Christ: he has in fact already come and is actively working in and through His faithful (*Wir brauchen also nicht erst auf die Zukunft Christi zu warten. Er ist schon gekommen, und hat sein Werk in seinen Glaubigen*, *ibid.*).¹⁷ The author of "The Discourses" flatly denies the validity of other interpretations for Christ's promise in Matthew 28:20 that He would be with His followers to the end of the world (I, 77).

Separatism, as the necessary consequence of dedicated faith, was believed to have arisen out of God's decision, at a definite point in time, to punish sin, to effect an improvement of humanity, to set up His kingdom, and to implement the Kingdom rule of Christ and His saints who had separated themselves from the world and chosen to live a holy life (*. . . daß Gott beschlossen habe, zu dieser unserer Zeit, die Menschen um ihrer Sünde willen zu strafen, und eine Verbesserung im menschlichen Geschlecht vorzunehmen; ... zur nemlichen Zeit... daß Gott Sein Reich aufrichten werde;... daß nur Solche in dieses Reich aufgenommen werden, welche von dem Leben der Welt ausgehen und nach denen nun von Gott aufgestellten oder gemachten Forderungen leben werden, oder mit anderen Worten, die ein heiliges Leben führen werden. Ferner daß Christus als König in diesem Reiche regieren werde, und mit Ihm Seine Heiligen, tausend Jahr*, I, 75).¹⁸

A thought-provoking interpretation of Old Testament Scripture suggests

something of the Separatist perspective. Throughout *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, the believer is exhorted to come out of Babylon. Those who become so involved in their own achievements will be like King Nebuchadnezzar, who, instead of exhibiting humility before God, actually expressed pride in the magnificence and splendor of the city of Babylon that he claimed to have erected by his own efforts (Daniel 4:27, cited I, 76). As a consequence, Nebuchadnezzar was reduced to living like an animal. Only after he humbled himself, did Nebuchadnezzar regain his right mind and return to his noble state. Those able to come out of spiritual Babylon, i.e., the Separated, will, as the Reborn, be those few saints chosen to share in the reign of the Millennial Kingdom. Understanding this concept is crucial to a full appreciation of the very title of this book, and of its assertion that the one true form of Separation is indeed spiritual Rebirth: *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*.

The Preface by Jakob Sylvan to Joseph Bimeler's *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*¹⁹

[iii]

Christ speaks, Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

In the Lord God much-beloved, God-seeking reader!

Here is a book with its own special sort of content, consisting purely of sermons (*Reden*) and meditations (*Betrachtungen*) delivered in the community of the Separatist Society at Zoar, Ohio in the years and on the dates given at the beginning of most sermons.

The content of these discourses (*Vorträge*) differs completely from the didactic system of the learned. This is not scholarship acquired in higher schools, yet cloaked in certain forms and practiced only outwardly. Rather, it consists of a fundamental recognition of the ways of Separation or Rebirth, attained through personal experience and the pure doctrine of Christianity as taught and followed at the time of the Apostles and of the first Christians. It is completely a matter of the heart and of the spirit (*Gemüt*), flowing from the pure source of divine wisdom and communicated through a faithful servant of God, a pupil of heavenly wisdom, whose name is written in the living book of the Lamb, and who, out of true humility, wished that his earthly name would remain unknown.

These sermons and meditations, spoken in a very clear style and language, along with a great number of others delivered every Sunday and on other occasions over the course of thirty-six years, were—in contrast to the usual practice of the learned—not studied, written down, and then read or

delivered; rather, they were inspired spontaneously by the Holy Spirit and proclaimed with great power and dignity, as from an inexhaustible, overflowing source. For that reason our dear friend, who has passed on to eternity, often expressed himself by saying "When I come here, I usually come empty, and do not yet know what I ought to talk about. What I am supposed to talk about is only given to my spirit here, and as soon as I begin to speak, there opens up before me a broad, vast field of thoughts (*Vorstellungen*) from which to take whatever seems to me most necessary." This is so very true about a faithful and wise servant whom the Lord set over his household, to give them their meat in due season: "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods." Matthew 24:45 [-47]. He is also like a good shepherd who completely gives himself over to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and only thus is in a position to lead his sheep to a good pasture, and to present to each the food that is necessary and suitable for the condition of its soul. For not all need just one and the [iv] same kind of food, but rather each should have the instruction necessary and salutary for its own soul.

These sermons and meditations often treat many and varied subjects, as shared by the Spirit, who best knows the conditions and needs of the souls. And that is just how it was. All who were earnestly concerned about the salvation of their souls and had embarked upon the way of Separation or Rebirth, and attended the assemblies with attentiveness, always found themselves satisfied, consoled, encouraged, strengthened and instructed to continue their pilgrimage in the Rebirth, so that they might take part in the great feast (*Abendmahl*, also a term for communion) of the Heavenly King. And this is, and was, precisely our great God and King's plan and goal for our present times. More than ever, He is urgently and cordially calling and admonishing humanity through His servants to come to repentance, to make themselves suitable and worthy so that they might appear at the great feast of the Heavenly King in a wedding garment, adorned as wise virgins, with the oil of true faith and with burning lamps. From the beginning to the end of this book, such was the goal and purpose of these sermons and meditations, as the thoughtful reader will sufficiently discern for himself from a reading and unprejudiced consideration of them. For he will find the pure teaching of wholesome, genuine repentance, sincere improvement of the essential condition of his soul, denial of self and of all that is earthly, mortification of his own will, and thorough subjection to the will of God, taking upon himself his own cross, and thereby following Christ through the narrow gate to rebirth. He will love God with all his heart, and in pure brotherly love, live in a community of goods (*Gememinschaft der Guter*). These all are things and attributes that one must truly have and practice in their essence, if one is to appear as a worthy participant and guest at the great feast, and be saved. And it is written "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage feast of the Lamb. These are the

true sayings of God." Revelation 19:9.

This book teaches a basic recognition of self, and especially how all humanity gradually leaves the state of innocence or paradise and enters the natural state of this world where, independent of God, one simply lives according to one's own will, and wanders on the broad way that leads to the damnation that will be his inescapable lot unless, like the prodigal son, he turns back and yearns in true remorse and confession for his Father's house, subjects himself to the chastisement of the Heavenly Father by obeying the command to repent, and thereby comes again into God's friendship and eventually into union with Him. This is the only way to salvation; all outward means usually applied to this end are useless and ineffective, and impact only the outward body, while the soul, spiritual in nature, is left empty and void. Christ speaks in Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, will sup with him, and he with me." This tells us plainly enough that we must partake spiritually, if our soul is to experience and attain true benefit. The present book offers sufficient instruction and explanation as to how all this can be comprehended through the divine light of truth.

In particular, the reader seeking the truth will find the parables and wonders of Christ explained here in a wonderful manner, with universal applications to the spiritual life, [v] Especially those individuals entering the Re-birth can draw great instruction and benefit from these teachings.

Our dear reader will also find that in this book the Christianity of false appearance and profession, and particularly the formalism of so-called Christianity, is openly exposed in a fallen condition so degenerate and off the right pathway that it is rejected as unfit and useless by God himself, and even by the spirit of these present times. Bearing this in mind, it is easy to see that, at God's command, we had to approach the holders of the so-called spiritual or priestly office and expose the unworthiness and sinful life of those who, without a calling from God, have pushed their way into office for the sake of pay and a comfortable life, and lead a godless life as hirelings who allow the souls of mankind to go astray and fall prey to the wolf. In this book such individuals are severely called to task, exposed, and declared to be incompetent and unworthy of holding such an important office. They are useless and lazy servants who do not give the household of the Lord the appropriate food, and do not take the sheep to pasture. But, that is exactly what the people want.

All this, however, has been recognized through the light of truth, without prejudice or respect of person. It is with good intention that people are warned not to entrust their souls to such deceivers, but rather to Jesus Christ, the true Shepherd of their souls, the only good and true physician of their souls, who best knows the essential condition of souls and their needs. In all circumstances, it is He who desires and is able to help, to the extent that the soul's desire is earnest and its intentions sincere. In the true repentance of a soul,

empty appearance and dead faith are of no avail. Rather, this must be a thorough, genuine and fundamental affair of the heart, resulting in "a new creature in Christ" as Saint Paul puts it. If our dear reader wishes to make good progress in Separation, on the pathway of Rebirth, he finds sufficient guidance in the present book.

It may seem somewhat unusual to the reader that the word "Separation" is used so often, and even in the title of the book. To give a bit of explanation: the Latinate word Separation means "setting aside" in our language, and appears so frequently in this book because at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in an era of great human activity and of divine intervention, virtually everyone could see that something unusual and special was about to happen in the world. Those souls who were illuminated by the divine Light recognized this era as the inception of the much-discussed and long-awaited Kingdom of God or thousand-year reign in which Jesus Christ, King of all kings and Lord of all lords, would take power and rule, and would gather a chosen people for himself upon earth. (At that time, it was believed that all this would take place in an outwardly visible manner.) Hence it was that the mighty voice came from heaven to the people of the Lord, both inwardly in their souls and outwardly through His servants who proclaimed "Come out of her (Babylon) my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Revelation 18:4-5. This and many other passages in Holy Scripture, and especially a genuine and basic conviction in the souls of God's people, caused a formal separation from the world, the so-called Christian church, and most of all from the godless and unspiritual clergy, [vi] And thus it was that this Reformation was designated by the spirit of the times as the "Separation."

The world held this name and its work in deepest disrespect, and showed utter contempt and abuse toward its adherents. To the people of God, however, it was precious, worthy and agreeable, since it provided a barrier of protection by which to keep away, or even to expel, any unworthy individuals. Indeed, being called by this name meant far more. At this time it was the Ark of Covenant, which God prepared for His own, to preserve and keep them from the ruin and judgment of the world. For no matter how much the devil, hell and the world raged, ranted and raved against it, they could not bring harm to those who entered into this covenant, remained true to it, and despite all, were kept intact. At this time God wanted nothing other than to accept as His children those individuals who allowed themselves to be incorporated into this covenant that He had allowed awakened souls to sense mightily and thoroughly in their innermost being. Through this covenant, it was revealed to the first true witnesses that God would visit humanity with great punishment for its sins, but that he did not wish to eradicate or obliterate them altogether. It was also at this time that great wonders and strange things were

revealed from the world of the eternal to these faithful witnesses concerning preparations for the approaching Kingdom of God. This served wonderfully, along with their inner conviction, to strengthen the faith of these first true witnesses, and give them endurance in sorrow. These sufferings and sorrows were truly arduous and difficult for the outer man, as discussed below.

Our dear reader will find sufficient evidence in this book that true Christianity is not something which has to do with the practice of any ceremonies or with outward maintenance of the so-called sacraments; as far as salvation is concerned, they can be dispensed with. The evil enemy captures human souls with such outward things, and through his servants depicts these practices as altogether sufficient, so that one will not inquire whether there exists anything better, and thereby strive for true and essential Christianity. Part of the calling of this blessed man was to witness and contend with all his might against the abuses by which so many individuals were being misled, living in their sins without any concern, and thinking that they would be saved—as the reader will often discover in this book.

The reader will find that the matter of true Christianity has to be an earnest thing of the heart. The individual has to put away all his evil traits and passions, die off to them, deny his own evil will, subject his will to God, and thereby improve the basic condition of his soul, so that Christ might take form in him, or, as others express it, that the old man (Adam) might die and Christ might arise and live as the new man. In short, in this book everything is treated and presented in its most thorough and basic form: the state in which the first man was created in the image of God; how he fell from this happy, holy and perfect state through the seduction of Satan; how man entered the world and its natural order; how he lived and wishes to live according to his own will, independent of God; how it is impossible to be saved in this condition, unless one is reborn in Christ, through whose spirit and power that becomes possible.

An impartial and unprejudiced reader will be happy to discover divine truths presented here freely and honestly, in easily understood language, cleansed of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees and harmful prejudices, [vii] Even a number of good books written by truly pious men show the evident constraint of a particular form of religion whose goals the authors did not wish, or dare, to transgress. The writings of the late man of God, Gerhard Terstegen, certainly constitute an exception to this. They present divine truths in the most thorough and splendid manner. Still, we grant full respect and recognition to all works inspired and written under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Their insights will not have the same significance in every era. The condition and needs of people are not the same at all periods, and the revelations of God are not always the same, but rather move ahead with the times. Just how wonderful and mighty these were in the time of the Separation is evidenced in this book, which treats the movement's form of doctrine, its

special way of interpreting the Kingdom of God, its view of the eternal worlds, such as heaven (and of what nature those must be who are able to dwell there), hell with its trappings and inhabitants, and the spirit-world and its inhabitants. The latter is denied by the Protestant churches but recognized by the Catholics, though they treat it in a deceptive and abusive manner. Still, it exists, and in this book sufficient evidence is presented, based both on Holy Scripture and on reasoned consideration, that it cannot be otherwise.

Now it should also be pointed out to the reader how this book had its inception. As soon as the Society of Separatists came to this country and settled at Zoar, the place determined by divine providence, counsel was taken as to what the occupation and activity (*Unterhaltung*) of its members should be on Sundays. It was the unanimous wish that something should be done for the edification of the soul, particularly for the sake of the youth. To this end, it was considered most suitable to assemble for sermons (*Reden*) held according to our principles. Our loyal departed friend and brother in faith was appointed as the only appropriate and capable person for this position, which he occupied with the greatest endurance and loyalty from 1817 until his blessed end in 1853. Not only in this office, but at all times, he offered a worthy example to his little flock, and himself practiced and personally experienced everything that he preached to others.

But just as for all true servants and beloved of God, so here too in full and even excessive measure, this man found himself despised, ridiculed, maligned and persecuted by Satan, the world, and the children of evil. Most of all, he was maligned by the unfaithful and lapsed members who were sometimes present. But he followed his Lord and King Jesus, patiently and courageously bearing this crown of thorns, and no-one ever saw him despondent, discouraged, or baffled in the midst of the myriad blows of fate that worked against him and the Society. Like a good shepherd and hero, he stood before his little flock and protected them when hell's wolf wished to creep up and break in. In truth one can say: he fulfilled, with as much fidelity as is possible for a human being, the office and calling laid upon him by God himself.

Now for the story of the book. There was here a pious, God-fearing and most virtuous youth whose natural father [viii] completely lost his sense of hearing. This old man was a very attentive participant in the gatherings for worship (*Versammlungen*), and since he could no longer hear, he requested that his son write down something of what had transpired. This good lad did just that, and beginning in 1822, recorded at home the main points which he had committed to memory. He usually did this at night, since during the day he attended strictly to his work. Through untiring practice and the aid of a good mind, he finally came to the point that, by 1832, he could record almost an entire sermon and meditation verbatim, and that so thoroughly that he completely avoided any additions of his own. But as often the case, God took this noble individual from this world, in order to entrust to him a more impor-

tant sphere of activity in eternity, and thus he died at the end of 1832. His written materials were carefully preserved, albeit without any thought that they would someday be printed. Another capable individual assumed this activity in his place and recorded with considerable accuracy the sermons held in 1834, which constitute the fourth section of this book.

However, by divine counsel and will, God in 1853 took his faithful servant and friend to Him in eternity, and there was no small consternation about the fact that there was no-one to take his place. For a time, an attempt was made to read from good books and from Holy Scripture (the latter still constituting the afternoon lesson), but this did not seem to be altogether agreeable. Finally, the idea was struck upon of delivering the above-mentioned written texts. Since this was found to be agreeable, the items were copied so that they could be read aloud more easily. Since a press was available, an attempt was made at printing. All this, however, was done by untrained hands, which is why a good portion of the first part of the work appears rather defective. Later a better press was obtained, as well as a trained setter, and from then on the work went better.

It is not the intent, at least not just now, to make the book generally well-known, but rather simply to preserve it for personal use, since at the present time there would only be a few, or none at all, who would greet it with approval. And since we have so many examples to show that truly holy and pious men and their books were mostly ignored and maligned by their contemporaries and only later sought out and recognized for what they were, it is also our hope that God will preserve this precious contribution for that day. It is becoming increasingly clear to us that such a precious and true testimony as this ought not to remain lost or hidden, and that God, at a time known to Him, will once again set it upon a lampstand to shine out. We entrust this to His wisdom and His faithful, almighty hands.

For this reason, we also believe that we would commit a great sin if we would bury and hide such a costly treasure in the earth, and so with God's help we wish to present it so that He can use it how and when He wishes. For it is impossible that the great decision of God to set up His Kingdom should be reversed or nullified, since already at the end of the preceding century He had made such great preparations for it (as the attentive reader will discover over and again in reading this book). His plan and intention will go forward, albeit more in a spiritual than in a physically visible manner.

It is certainly true, indeed only too true, that the joyous prospects of the Kingdom of God in this world are becoming ever dimmer and darker in our eyes, [ix] The first true witnesses and confessors of the truth have already departed for eternity, and many others, who know nothing of the wonders and deeds that God did for His small band of people (*Volklein*), love the world and its pleasure more than God. Most of their works are not good, and only with difficulty can they be brought back by any means other than heavy suffering

and sorrows. If this does not help them to improve, they will need to be cast out altogether. They can blame no-one but themselves, since enough was done to lead and keep them on the good way. The present book testifies to that.

The reader will surely not be offended if sometimes an item not pertaining altogether to the spiritual domain appears in this book, such as a discussion of outward morals and custom, good order in domestic life, maintenance of health, moderation, cleanliness, and similar topics. There is also medical material, including a description of the inner parts of the human body, and how they are brought out of order by circumstances and, especially, by immoderation resulting in illness and even death. Our friend now in eternity was also an expert in matters of human nature and the parts of the body, and through his own efforts (*durch eigene Übung*) had attained extensive knowledge of medicine and its practice, and served the community as its physician. Nevertheless, he always and earnestly pointed people to the true physician of the soul and the body.

It often proved necessary to discuss matters in the field of domestic life, since the Society lived as one family in a community of goods, and under these circumstances, it was most necessary, important and consequential that proper order be introduced and maintained, and where possible, that equity be sought among the members in all things.

Our dear reader will also often find, perhaps to his regret, that a particular matter will not be developed and explained in complete detail, or than an important context is missing. This simply results from the manner in which the material was collected and written down (from memory, as noted above), and hence needs to be excused. In the talks themselves (*in den Vortrögen selbst*), all the recorded sentences were worked out and explained in the most exact and comprehensible manner. If the reader inclined toward seeking the truth will read the entire book, however, he will nevertheless find in it a complete whole (*ein vollkommenes Ganzes*) with which he can be satisfied.

Our dear reader is no doubt somewhat curious to learn about the inception and existence of the society. One can discover the best treatment of the origins of this society at various places in this book itself. Just as the kingdom of darkness was making its cruel impact felt most intensely (through the French Revolution, terrible wars, and a highly depraved humanity with its spirit for vices and all their consequences), God prepared an instrument (*Werkzeug*) to counter all this, and raised a light that should shine among the peoples, and it did shine and spread its beams. In the souls of those who allowed themselves to be illuminated by this light, a bright signal star (*ein heller Signalstern*) arose, and seeing this very light, they could be glad and rejoice in it. This light showed them clearly and convincingly what God proposed to do at that time with humanity, and how He now intended to set up His kingdom. This light brought about a wonderful unity among those who

received it: people who lived far from one another, without having known or ever having seen one another, upon first coining together and barely speaking a word with one another, found such an astonishing unity, and the spirits (*Gemuter*) flowed together into [x] one (*schmolzen zusammen in Eins*), the love was heartfelt, and individuals called each other Brother and Sister. In this manner the Society had its beginning, albeit with individuals spread out across all parts of the land, so that those wishing to see one another found it necessary to undertake a special visit.

At this same time, in the first years of this century, the express order went out from God, both indirectly and directly, that His people should depart from Babylon, separate themselves from the world, the depraved church, and its ceremonies, and announce to the world the severe and punishing judgment that awaited it. Many other things were revealed to this people about how they should act in order to do away with so many abuses. One of the first steps was no longer going to church, attending its hypocritical services, or seeking to be absolved by the clergy. In addition, they no longer allowed their children to go to schools consecrated to such hypocritical service. They gave only to God, and not to any mortal man, the honor of removing the hat and bowing the knee. They addressed every person with the simple form "Du" and thereby avoided completely all hypocritical expressions of honor. They were also to do away with many other such abuses, as our dear reader will see for himself in this book.

The two basic principles just discussed were the main reasons for persecution. The holders of so-called spiritual offices saw their deception laid bare, and themselves in danger of losing credibility in the secular world. Consequently, they appealed to the secular authorities, who also found their sense of pride under attack, and undertook serious measures, including the heartless and inhuman beating and mistreatment of both men and women. No-one would harbor the victims, since the common rabble would have liked to have seen still harsher punishments carried out, even the death penalty. A certain local official (*Bauern-Schulze*) declared them outlawed, and anyone who so wished could strike them to death. The official started the process himself by ordering two innocent women, a mother and daughter, beaten to death by his lackey; had not divine providence intervened, the deed would doubtless have been carried out.

As a further consequence, most of the faithful were robbed of their possessions, houses, and any valuable items. Children were taken and placed in orphanages, for which parents had to pay. Men and women were taken captive, and in such a manner that their enemies did not give them any hope of ever being set free alive, except under the condition that they renounce their principles. That trap was always available to them, by means of which the devil and his servants expected to be able to prey upon them, and yet most of the prisoners remained true. The men were sentenced to hard and difficult

labor among the prisoners held by the tyrant of Wurttemberg. However, the taskmasters of that tyrant believed that the prisoners deserved even harsher punishment than the worst criminals under their command, and assigned them to the most desolate and arduous work-stations, with awful and often spoiled rations, and locked them at night in a stinking jail crawling with vermin, so that they could not even get a refreshing night of sleep. In bitter cold and heat, in pouring rainstorms, in the dreariest snowstorms, and also often having been beaten, they were forced to stay at their labor. No day of celebration was granted them for recovery, be it a holiday, Sunday or work-day, except for the birthday of the tyrant on which they, like the others, were allowed not to work.

The women were locked up in the penitentiary, where they had to work. It was their fate that for years they had to live among the wildest and most depraved dregs of humanity. In addition to [xi] that, they were so completely confined that none of their own kin or of their brothers and sisters in faith were allowed to visit them. Still, with all these acts of mistreatment, most remained true, and even though they had little hope of being set free by their enemies, God through His grace nevertheless maintained a certain living hope in them that their King Jesus would most surely rescue and liberate them. This gave them courage and resoluteness to endure in their sufferings. A number, however, died in prison.

Another reason for the imprisonment was unwillingness to serve in the military, because a Christian, according to Christ's own pronouncement, might not insult even his enemy, much less murder his friend. This led to believers, after enduring physical mistreatment, being sentenced to punishment lasting as long as a term of military obligation. The shortest sentence was eight years. These prisoners suffered the same fate as those sentenced previously, though in later years the officers at these penal institutions came to know the honesty and loyalty of the prisoners, and accorded them somewhat milder treatment.

Here we feel obligated to counter the prejudicial view of those who did not wish to concede that the Separatists suffered such protracted persecution because of their principles. It was universally claimed that what befell to them was their own fault. One could not expect anything better from the people of the world who are blind in the ways of the Lord. From those, however, who did not wish to be on equal footing with the world and considered themselves pious and righteous (and outwardly appeared to be just that) one would have expected a better and more merciful assessment. Exactly the opposite was true. Believers found themselves even more harshly judged by such individuals than by those who publicly denied God, yet were much fairer than others in their assessment of the Separatists. It was exactly as with Christ and His disciples, who were more hated and persecuted by the pious Pharisees and Scribes than by others. "Yes," the self-esteeming pious opponents of the Separatists declared, "we are not such fools that we would allow ourselves to be

troubled to such an extent. We keep our mouths shut and can still be pious, think as we wish, and still be saved, just as they. In these present times, it is not at all necessary to suffer so much for the sake of one's religion." But this raises the question, whether one is also right, or has a better claim to the Kingdom of God, if one is pious, or claims to be so, at his own choosing, when it pleases him, and when it is comfortable. Such a person lives according to his own will under a religious cloak of piety, and does not inquire into the will of God, but rather is pious in a way that pleases himself, and not God. Matthew 7:21. And if ever there is any prospect of suffering, this person will retreat and slip away. Is this in agreement with the example of Christ and all the saints? Did they accept and follow such hypocritical ways? The answer is: No! Rather, with their wounds they confessed before all the world what they believed in their hearts, despite the fact that most of them had to give up their lives for the sake of their testimony. In general, one ought to be extremely guarded in judging those whom one sees suffering for faith (*Religion*) or conscience. First, one ought to investigate and carefully consider the principles of such persons before pronouncing contemptuous judgment upon them, since [xii] those willing to suffer for their faith are very rare; one would almost assume that there are none. Even the pious individuals mentioned above have no desire to be such fools as are willing to suffer for their faith. Paul, however, states in one of his epistles that "all who would live a godly life must suffer persecution." All!

The Separatists had a certain command from God as to how they should act and testify, and they did as was commanded, remained true to this command, and as a result bore a blessed assurance in their hearts and consciences that they had done their duty and could enter eternity with great joy, where without doubt they will receive their reward for remaining true. Whoever wants to contend with them must contend with God. It is one of the gravest sins, and God considers it most evil, to judge, disdain, hate, or even persecute His own, and Holy Scripture testifies to that fact.

Let us now go on with our account. By the time that these persecutions and sufferings had lasted about thirteen years, an opportunity presented itself for those who were still free and had some means to purchase an estate on the southern border of Wurttemberg, with the intention of there forming a community and living according to their principles. And because a "certain individual" who stood in favor at the court of the tyrant promised to help them and to approach the tyrant on their behalf, most sold all that they had, relocated, and began to make themselves at home and to build; they lived in the new location several months. Suddenly, however, there came an order from the tyrant that the place they were occupying must to be vacated at once. Naturally, this was impossible, and a petition for several days' time was tendered via the highest offices to the tyrant himself. This document would have softened a stone, but did not soften the heart of the tyrant. With his own hands

he made a huge tear in it and sent it back unheeded. The Separatists had to leave. Since most no longer had a home, they were forced to emigrate, and it was decided to set out for America. At this time, permission to emigrate was requested and granted. During all this the tyrant died and his son came to power. Petitions were also sent to him, since no one was eager to face the prospect of leaving the fatherland. This effort was also in vain. Even when all military prisoners were released at the death of his father, the son did not release our brothers who had refused military service. The other prisoners had to be released because of prevailing emigration laws.

This was late in 1816. Over the course of the ensuing winter, moves were made toward emigration. Representatives were sent to Holland to reserve a ship, and in April, 1817, the trip was undertaken from the seaport of Antwerp. From there it was on out to sea. We had a very long and stormy voyage, however, that lasted 93 days. We landed on a quiet evening, August 14, in Philadelphia, where God's providence had made arrangements for us. The Society of Friends (Quakers) in England had sent a considerable sum of money to the Society of Friends in Philadelphia, to be used for our support. Hence, a large house (a hospital) had already been prepared for us where we could stay until we resumed our trip. This was an act of inestimable kindness, since we had arrived poor and destitute. The money and resources that some of our members still had when we left Germany were almost completely depleted to pay for the transoceanic voyage. Most had only as much as they needed; some had nothing at all, [xiii]and those who still did have something left, paid for impoverished members. That same autumn, the land on which we are now living was bought on credit. Our departed friend and a number of members moved out here prior to the winter, so that on December 1, 1817 the first huts were erected so that there would be a place to reside. Right away some small cabins were built, so that there would be emergency lodging for the long and hard winter. In the spring, a few more such houses were built, and bit by bit more of the members who had stayed behind began arriving. Some planting was done to provide food. Throughout this year of 1818, there was as yet no communal sharing of goods, and each individual lived for himself. But it was found that this would not work, since there were destitute old people who were too poor to buy a little piece of land, and too weak to feed themselves. Others capable of work were forced to work for the Americans in order to get by, and this impeded the work at home, which was not making headway.

Over the next winter, several members met together and considered whether it would not be better to take up a communal way of life. Bit by bit, this proposal gained support, and finally the decision and consensus was reached to begin and try it out. And so on April 15, 1819, the first articles of the Society were presented and signed; a revision was undertaken and signed on March 15, 1824; in 1832, the Society was incorporated and on May 14, a constitution was accepted and signed. From that time on, however, when the

Society came together as one family, there has no longer been any lack of the necessities of life. An extraordinary blessing from God, shared by the hand of a blessed "Joseph," soon met in abundance all needs, whether physical needs or, even more so, spiritual needs. The land was soon paid for, and more purchased and paid.

Along with this, however, the Society also experienced some very adverse turns of fate. The most significant were these. Already in the first years, there were several indignant apostates who not only separated themselves from the Society, but even tried to completely ruin and destroy it. The honest members, and most of all our friend now in eternity, had to suffer a great deal from this. Likewise in 1844 and 1845, a gang of rebels arose and attempted the same thing, and though they were unable to achieve anything, nevertheless brought exceptional costs to the Society, which in those years was still quite poor. However, God helped out again and protected his little band (*Vdtklein*), and in the almost forty years of their history, has showered them with an exemplary blessing, both spiritual and physical. And oh, if only we would better recognize it, and allow ourselves to be led to repentance! But alas, just the opposite is the case, as the time of visitation (*Heimsuchung*) will no longer be discerned by many.

This is now a short description of the history of this Society and its fate. Let us call it short, because if an exact and comprehensive description were to be made, it would fill quite a book. This bit, however, is the truth, recorded by a friend of the truth who, for some fifty years, has for the most part seen these things himself and can attest to them.

In order to avoid any misunderstandings that might occur to the honest reader, let us note the following correct definitions. Whenever the term "our King" occurs without the name Jesus, it always refers to the Heavenly King Jesus. He alone is recognized as our King, and none apart from Him, not even the potentates and despots of the kingdoms of this world, but rather only [xiv] our King Jesus Christ, the King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords. Revelation 19:16.

In addition, it may appear to be something new when we talk about the merit of Christ, his suffering, and his blood. While it is proclaimed in the world that all humanity has a part in it, our understanding is that only truly repentant individuals who follow Christ into the Rebirth will profit from this "most precious thing" (*dieses "theuerste Gut"*), which they cannot acquire—as would the people of the world—through means of power. Rather, in the deepest humility and modesty, believers leave it up to their Redeemer how He wishes to deal with them in this matter. True, if all people were to repent and enter into the Rebirth, that would be all-sufficient. Most, however, render themselves unworthy through their inability to repent (*ihre Unbußfertigkeit*).

Since we hope and believe that in due time and through divine providence this book will come into the hands of readers who love the truth and

eagerly desire salvation, we can offer such the surest and repeated guarantee that the sermons and meditations are testimonies that originated and flowed forth from the center of purest light, which God at that time raised up and allowed to shine. But here too: "The light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." Hence also these testimonies can only be understood and comprehended through the illumination of divine light and the Holy Spirit, without which one would scarcely find any true pleasure and usefulness in them. Hence, we commit our dear reader to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who leads in all truth, and to the saving grace of God, Amen! Zoar, August 9, 1856

[xv]

Basic Principles of the Separatists

1) We believe and confess the **Trinity of God**, in the **Father**, **Son** and **Holy Spirit**;

2) the fall of Adam and of all humanity, that is, the loss of the likeness to God;

3) the restoration (*Wiederbringung*) through Christ to God, our actual and true (*rechtmäßiger*) Father;²⁰

4) Holy Scripture as the guide to life (*Richtschnur des Lebens*), and the standard against which to judge truth and falsehood (*Probirstein des Wahren und Falschen*);

5) banishment of all ceremonies as meaningless and injurious, since these were the main cause for Separation (*Haupt- und Ursache der Separation*).

6) We show to no mortal the honor that is due only to the living God, such as by baring the head and kneeling; without flinching, we use "Du" as the universal form of address;²¹

7) We separate ourselves from all ecclesiastical regulations (*Verfassungen*) and connections, since it is not the essential character of a Christian that promotes sects, but rather received ceremonies.

8) Marriage is to be by mutual consent before witnesses and subsequent notification of the civil authorities, that is, altogether without any services or ceremony by the clergy.

9) Sexual intercourse, except to propagate the race, is sinful and contrary to divine order (*der Ordnung Gottes zuwider*), with recognition of total chastity as the better way.²²

10) It follows that we cannot send our children into the school of Babylon, which opposes our teachings. Without morals and religion, the village schools turn out a gang of idlers who subject their fellow-pupils to malice and dissipation, and who make the most of the chance to rally support.²³

11) We cannot serve the state as bodily soldiers, since a Christian cannot murder his enemy, much less his friend.

12) We recognize the necessity of secular authority to maintain order, to

protect the good and the true, and to punish evil; no-one can ever prove that we were disloyal in this respect, but rather the opposite.

These are, then, the Basic Principles that, for ten years, brought us so much and so many forms of persecution. Indeed, we cried loud [xvi] for justice, but matters did not become much better; our enemies still had as their weapons the decrees directed against us, and because of others' hate and envy, many a family lost its possessions and freedom.

No-one can imagine by himself the plight of the Separatists, and that a human being, pursuing only the salvation of his soul and the welfare of his brothers in faith, could be so terribly misjudged and treated in such a barbaric manner. The only crime was following the impulse of conscience: no murder, theft, adultery, prostitution, or other vices mark the record of the Separatists. Neither the courts of justice nor the criminal courts possess records that document our enemies' charges against us. Our enemies impeded and obstructed all avenues of higher appeal, and even if we could have made an appeal, our plain, straightforward speech (*unsere platdeutsche Sprache*) would have been too strikingly conspicuous, and the cost to us would have been so high that we were virtually incapable of daring to make such a move.

And we are complaining only about past injustice, suffered when we were tormented over time for freely practicing the truth in speech and deeds. It cannot be of greater service to the higher authorities when their subjects are dishonest, hypocritical and disloyal, yet worship them like heathen slaves, than when we, for the sake of God and of our consciences, serve them with loyalty and honesty, and render to the emperor what is the emperor's, and to God what is God's. With God and our consciences we can attest that we never had any other intention than to leave the godless life of the world, to fulfill with fidelity our duties to God and to man, to live in the inner circle of love and friendship, and thereby to create a compensation for the difficulties of our pilgrim journey.

The clergy, as the creators of ceremonies, were the first to sound an alarm, because we recognized their counterfeit wares, consequently refused to allow ourselves to be absolved by them, and exposed their politics and questionable credibility (*ihren wankenden Credit*). They thought up the most ludicrous and distasteful pranks to make us appear suspicious to their absolved Christians, and they succeeded. Not only the masses, but also the authorities were won over to them, hence for the most part that our freedom, wives and children, houses and goods were taken from us.

We could attest to this and much more as being the holiest truth by affirming it with the "Yes!" that in every case takes the place of an oath.

ENDNOTES

1. Among studies on Zoar, there are two that remain essential to a preliminary orientation: E. O. Randall, "The Separatist Society of Zoar: An Experiment in Communism—from its Commencement to its Conclusion," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications* 8 (1900): 1-105; Edgar Burkhardt Nixon, *The Society of Separatists of Zoar*, diss. Ohio State University, 1933. A popular account that is not without merit is Hilda Dischinger Morhart, *The Zoar Story*, 3rd ed. (Strasburg, Ohio: Gordon Printing, 1981).

2. Joseph Michael Bimeler, *Die Wahre Inspiration, oder die Wiedergeburt, Dargestellt in Geistreichen und erbaulichen Versammlungs-Reden und Betrachtungen. Besonders auf das gegenwärtige Zeitalter anwendbar. Gehalten in der Gemeinde in Zoar, im Jahr 1830 [1831, 1832, 1834]*, 4 vols. (Zoar, Ohio: Press of the Separatist Society of Zoar, 1856-60). This work is cited in the present study by volume and page; quotation marks in English indicate a translation of the following German passage, whereas their absence indicates a paraphrase; the German appears in its original orthography. My research on this compilation was encouraged by Kathleen Fernandez and Steve Shonk of Zoar Village, and by Donald F. Durnbaugh of Juniata College; a microfilm copy was purchased with help from the Central College Faculty Committee on Research and Development. Translation was enhanced by support of the Ohio Historical Society. A nineteenth-century reaction to Bimeler's sermons appears in the (now) seldom-cited work by Karl Knortz, *Aus der Mappe eines Deutsch-Amerikaners: Frommes und Gottloses* (Bamberg: Schneider, 1893), summarized by Randall, especially 17-23. A brief selection of passages in translation appears in Morhart, 91-96. Usually regarded as an addendum to *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* is the devotional compendium by Joseph Michael Bimeler, *Etwas für's Herz! oder Geistliche Brosamen von des Herrn Tisch gefallen . . .*, 2 vols. (Zoar, Ohio: Press of the Separatist Society of Zoar, 1860-61).

For historical perspectives on the theology of the Zoarites, see Elizabeth Siber White, "The *Wiedergeburt* Experience in the Religion of the Zoarites," M.A. thesis, Western Michigan University, 1984. In deciding which theological issues to include in this study, I have attempted to focus on those points of potential interest to the readership of this journal; White's thesis, submitted for a degree in Medieval Studies, presents her material from a somewhat different (yet not at all irrelevant) perspective.

Alongside passages taken from Scripture (frequently without citation of book or verse), there are a fair number of allusions in *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt* to the thinking of various individuals or movements, albeit with few references to the origins of such ideas. This latter practice may be due to an unawareness of the actual genesis of specific ideas, to a preference for anonymity concerning individual achievement and contribution, and/or to the conviction that even good books were often tainted by an author's urgent need to write from a sectarian point of view (*Denn ouch manche sehr gute Bücher, von wahrhaftfrommen Männern geschrieben, haben etwas Zwang an sich, durch welchen sie an ihre Religionsform gebunden sind, und dieses Ziel nicht überschreiten wollten oder durften*, I, vii).

3. *Sammlung auserlesener geistlicher Lieder zum gemeinschaftlichen Gesang und eigenen Gebrauch in christlichen Familien* (Zoar, Ohio: Press of the Separatist Society

of Zoar, 1855). This earliest printing is not listed in the bibliographic data of George Butts Landis, "The Society of Separatists of Zoar, Ohio," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1899* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 165-200 and bibliography 203-204. Landis lists the first publication as 1856. Interestingly, the imprint of 1867 called itself the second, enlarged edition (*zweite, vermehrte und verbesserte Auflage*). Perhaps the imprint of 1855 was a trial run for the relatively new press at Zoar, and not yet intended for widespread proliferation. The view expressed by Randall, "The Separatist Society of Zoar," 17, that the hymnal was a collection of Terstegen's hymns is only partly true: other authors are also represented, as noted *inter al.* by Nixon, 119-20, who notes that some authors make direct reference, in the hymns, to Zoar. Whether the collection is based on a hymnal of the same title published in Reutlingen in 1850, as posited by Nixon, *The Society of Separatists of Zoar*, 252, or (as suggested by the description of the OhioLINK library cataloging database) on a hymnal of the same title that appeared in Basel in 1810, remains to be investigated. Other books were used by the Zoarites, such as various editions and imprints of the *Davidisches Psalter-Spiel*, obtained from the Inspirationists at Ebenezer, New York, and later at Amana, Iowa, as documented by Kathleen M. Fernandez, "Communal Communications: Zoar's Letters to Harmony and Amana," typescript paper from the 1984 Communal Studies Association Conference held at Amana.¹³ That Terstegen's *Geistliches Blumengartlein* was reprinted at Zoar, as claimed by Nixon, *The Society of Separatists of Zoar*, 252, remains to be fully demonstrated.

4. This is stated in Jakob Sylvan's Preface to *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, I, viii; for an idea of what worship services had become over the years, see Morhart, *The Zoar Story*, 87-90.

5. Knortz, cited by Randall, "The Separatist Society of Zoar," 19, was annoyed by Bimeler's seemingly random choice and juxtaposition of topics, but conceded that this might be due to the conditions under which the scribe labored. When Christian Metz, leader of the Inspirationists that later settled at Amana, visited Zoar in 1842, he found the Ohio Separatists and their leader in a state of spiritual impoverishment. We are not told directly whether this was felt by Metz to be linked to Bimeler's peripatetic style. The Zoarites, for their part, were not well disposed toward the physical manifestations that accompanied Metz's altered state during inspiration. See Nixon, *The Society of Separatists of Zoar*, 114-116; William Alfred Hinds, *American Communities*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1902), 275-276; Gottlieb Scheuner, *Inspirations-Historie oder Historischer Bericht von der neuen Erweckung, Sammlung und Grundung der Wahren Inspirations-Gemeinden in Deutschland, so wie deren Auswanderung nach Amerika und spatere Uebersiedlung von Ebenezer nach Amana, und was weiter in und mit dieser Gemeine in dem Zeitraum von 1817-1867 sich begeben hat* (Amana, Iowa: 1891), 321-322; *Jahrbücher der wahren Inspirations-Gemeinden. Aus- und Einsprachen, oder: Bezeugungen des Geistes des Herrn in Aus- und Einsprachen, im Jahre 1842 und 1843 durch Christian Metz*, 18 (Eben-Ezer by Buffalo, New York: 1860), 97-101, 275-277; *ibid.*, 20 (Eben-Ezer by Buffalo, New York: 1862), 130-132.

6. Raimund E. Goerler, "The Society of Separatists at Zoar (1817-1898). A Register of Its Papers (1817-1851, 1860-1873, 1894, 1911) in The Western Reserve Historical Society," typescript prepared in 1971 and available from The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; the accounts book for 1840-42, detailing the Society's medical activities, is preserved in Container 4, Folder 2. There are many ways in which Bimeler's

debt to Friedrich Christoph Oetinger merits closer investigation. Although Bimeler might not have asserted as Oetinger did in 1749 that chemistry and theology were one (*Die Chemie und die Theologie sind bei mir nicht zwei, sondern Ein Ding*), or that the basis of all science lay in Scripture, Bimeler probably would not have altogether disagreed. See Albert Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 3 (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1886), 140-142. In Bimeler's possession was a copy of Heister's *Chirurgie* which I have not been able to examine directly. There is also extant the medical kit of Dr. Clemens Briel, a homeopathic practitioner who arrived at Zoar approximately 1847.

7. The person(s) who recorded and/or printed the sermons noted that much more was said than could be captured in the written text. Interestingly, such disclaimers appear in association with sermons outlining the historical tradition of Zoarite Separatism and its tenets, e.g., I, 17 and IV, 430. It is hard to disregard the lingering impression that Bimeler and others were seriously concerned that younger Zoarites might reject basic doctrines and convictions simply because they lacked familiarity with the context in which such ideas arose. No doubt many of the young sensed the irony pointed out by Donald E. Pitzer, "The New Moral World of Robert Owen and New Harmony," in *America's Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 88-134, specifically 107, that this group "named themselves the Society of Separatists at Zoar regardless of the fact that Ohio had never had an established church" from which to separate. While many points touched on in this paper may be of potential interest to theologians and historians of religion, I hasten to note that I am attempting here to shed light on the thinking of the Zoarite community, rather than to offer a theological study as such.

8. I am thankful to Prof. Donald Durnbaugh for noting that Bimeler's abhorrence of spiritual mixture is reminiscent of the exhortation of Quakers "to come out of the mixture." Because the Separatists who settled at Zoar were initially hosted by Quakers in Pennsylvania, it is possible that Bimeler's thinking was influenced by that group. This is a point meriting additional research. Especially helpful will be the paper that Prof. Durnbaugh shared with me in its pre-publication draft, "'Strangers and Exiles': Assistance given by the Religious Society of Friends to the Separatist Society of Zoar in 1817-1818."

9. The Preface itself begins with Matthew 7:13-14, in which Christ warns that only a few will find the Narrow Gate to Life.

10. There is no question that Bimeler felt that the attainment of material well-being, tempered by modesty and simplicity, was entirely compatible with the Christian doctrine as he understood it. Christian Metz admired the achievements of the Zoarites in this area: *Jahrbücher der wahren Inspirations-Gemeinden. Aus- und Einsprachen*, 20, 130-132; Morhart, *The Zoar Story*, 19-23; Hinds, *American Communities*, 91-123; Randall, "The Separatist of Zoar," passim; Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States. From Personal Visit and Observation* (New York: Dover, 1966 reprint of 1875 edition), 99-113. Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth. Utopian Communities in America 1680-1880*, 2 ed. (New York: Dover, 1966), 95-100, presents a somewhat less favorable assessment.

11. Martin Brecht, "Der württembergische Pietismus," in *Der Pietismus im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 2, ed. Martin Brecht and Klaus Deppermann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 225-295, especially 282 and passim. At the time that the present study was completed, Ulrich Gabler, *Neunzehntes*

und zwanzigstes Jahrhundert, Geschichte des Pietismus, vol. 3, had not yet appeared.

12. Martin Brecht, "Der württembergische Pietismus," 287-289, reports a virtual epidemic of *Apokalyptomanie* and emigration fever among Separatists at this period; cf. Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 3, 181-182, where Separatist emigrations from Germany in the early nineteenth century are reported not only to America, but also to other "frontier lands" such as underpopulated parts of the Russian empire.

13. Nixon, *The Society of Separatists of Zoar*, 29; cf. Randall, "The Separatist Society of Zoar," 79-80.

14. For this period, see especially Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 3, 120 f. and particularly Section 47, "Die Gemeinschaften," 159-192; Martin Brecht, "Der württembergische Pietismus," 225-295.

15. Hans Schneider, "Der radikale Pietismus im 18. Jahrhundert," in Brecht and Deppermann, *Der Pietismus im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, 107-197, specifically 146-151. The term *Werkzeug*, also used by the Inspirationists who eventually settled in Amana, may be a translation of influential French Pietism's term *instrument*. The main *Werkzeug* of the Zoarites was Barbara Grubermann. Perhaps Ulrich Gabler's forthcoming, *Neunzehntes und zwanzigstes Jahrhundert*, Geschichte des Pietismus, vol. 3, will shed more light on Grubermann. Meanwhile, she is profiled in Morhart, *The Zoar Story*, 11-12; Nixon, *The Society of Separatists of Zoar*, 9-13. I have been unsuccessful in tracing some of the sources cited by Nixon. See also note 11, above.

16. Morhart, *The Zoar Story*, 12-13, 21-23; regarding the star worn by European Separatists, see Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 3, 182. Some of those who first came to Zoar are remembered in local tradition as having suffered imprisonment "for wearing the star." Eberhard Fritz, who has announced a forthcoming article on the Rothenacker Separatists, has shared some of his findings with Kathleen Fernandez at Zoar Village, who in turn has passed along important references from Fritz's research. Evidently, resources at the State Archives at Ludwigsburg, D41Bu3934, detail the fines and incarcerations in the tower ranging from one to four days for five women who wore the star: Anna Marie Lutz, Anna Marie Morlach, Marie Elisabeth Morlach, Christiane Nonnenmacher, and Anna Katharine Sindlinger. Fritz's analysis of state suppression of the Pietists will be a welcome addition to the body of scholarship.

17. The Zoarites were not the only Pietist group to take this stand: see Martin Brecht, "Der württembergische Pietismus," 289 and the literature cited; Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 3, especially 179-181; reactions in Knortz, *Aus der Mappe eines Deutsch-Amerikaners*, passim.

18. A study for scholars with specific theological-historical background would be an investigation of passages in Bimeler, *Die Wahre Inspiration, oder die Wiedergeburt*, e.g., I, 43 and I, 77 suggesting parallels between Zoarite Pietism and the holiness movement in some branches of the Protestant (and, for that matter, the specifically Pietist) movement.

19. The translation appears with the page divisions of the original text indicated in brackets. While I am not aware of having introduced any substantive change of meaning from the original text, I have nonetheless attempted to render the essentially correct meaning in reasonably idiomatic English, even if doing so means loss of a word-for-word literal rendering. Words and terms especially pregnant in meaning in the original German are given in parentheses following their translation. The departed "friend" to whom mention is frequently made is Joseph Bimeler. *Die Wahre Separation, oder die*

Wiedergeburt, like Luther's translation of the Bible, does not always distinguish clearly between Babel and Babylon (e.g., Daniel 4:27). I have translated throughout with the term *Babylon*.

20. The doctrine of the restoration of all things, expressed by terms such as *Wiederbringung* and *Neumachung*, was widespread among German Pietists: Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 3, 144-146. The doctrine is given a separate rubric in the so-called Second Amana Catechism: *Catechetischer Unterricht von der Lehre des Heils, dargestellt nach den Aussprüchen der heil. Schrift, auf den evangelisch-apostolischen Sinn des Geistes Gottes gegründet. Zum gesegneten Gebrauch für die Glieder der Inspirations-Gemeinden. II. Theil.* (Ebenezer by Buffalo, New York: 1857), 79-82.

21. The Zoarites declined to kneel or remove their hats to show respect to humans, refused to take oaths, and always used the informal German pronoun *du*. Referring to Zoarite speech as *platdeutsche Sprache* in *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, I, xvi, does not mean, as it would today, that the dominant dialect of the community was Low German (i.e., from northern Germany, the opposite end of the German linguistic territory from the original European homeland of the mostly Swabian Zoarites). The term *platdeutsch* may, at this period and in this context, simply refer to plain and readily understood and unaffected speech.

22. Cf. Randall, "The Separatist Society of Zoar," 45-46; Bimeler preached that wanton procreation merely fills the world with sinners: *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, I, 74; many a sermon focused at least in part on marriage, both as a temporal institution and as a metaphor for eternal union with Christ, e.g., *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, IV, 258-269. Bimeler did marry Dorothea Huber in 1830, after the policy of celibacy had ended.

23. Again, see Bimeler's sermon in *Die Wahre Separation, oder die Wiedergeburt*, IV, 258-269. Regarding the Zoarite care of children and schooling, see Morhart, *The Zoar Story*, 107-108; Randall, "The Separatist Society of Zoar," 43-45, 64, and *passim*.