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the Radical Reformation*

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VI

*Trial and Martyrdom
of Michael Sattler¹*

ROTTENBURG, 1527

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL SATTLER (c. 1490-1527) WAS AN outstanding leader of Swiss and South German Anabaptism. Stirred by the evangelical preaching in the Breisgau, he abandoned his position as prior of St. Peter's and went to Zurich, where under the influence of William Reublin he joined the Swiss Brethren and was present at the third magisterially authorized disputation on baptism on November 6, 1525. Expelled from Zurich, he turned to Strassburg, where he was received by John Denck and where he was enabled to discuss the Anabaptist position with Capito and Bucer. At the invitation of Reublin, Sattler made the upper Hohenberg region of Wurtemberg his missionary field with Horb as his headquarters. His success was so great that he was chosen to preside at the great Schleithem conference on Anabaptist principles which drew up the influential Confession in Seven Articles, February 24, 1527. (This important document has been several times translated.) Shortly thereafter he was apprehended by the Austrian authorities. The record of the trial and martyrdom was carefully preserved with much of the simplicity and vividness of the authentic acts of the early Christian martyrs. The account as here translated is the version rendered familiar to generations of Mennonites in the *Martyrs' Mirror* of Tilman J. van Braght (1660). Van Braght took it over from the still earlier *Het Offer des Heeren* (1570). These two compilations are the Mennonite counterpart of the Hutterite

¹ The best orientation to the place of Sattler is the article of Gustav Bossert, Jr., translated by Elizabeth Bender, "Michael Sattler's Trial and Martyrdom in 1527," *MQR*, XXV (1951), 201. Most of the following notes are based upon this work.

Chronicle from which Selection I was taken. (The *Chronicle*, incidentally, has an independent account of Sattler's trial.) Thus Selection VI is doubly noteworthy, at once as a sampling from a stirring martyrology and as a document in its own right, illustrative of the martyr theology which sustained the whole Anabaptist movement. Here we behold the ideal Anabaptist in whom four formative Christian anthropological types are blended, namely, the monk as *miles Christi*, the missionary or apostle, the pilgrim to Jerusalem, and the martyr citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem.²

The court glimpsed here in session happens to be Catholic and the charge of disloyalty made against Anabaptists in general is here compounded by the seemingly irresponsible utterance of Sattler about the Turks. In warding them off, the Austrian authorities had immediate responsibilities as at once Catholic and imperial, for they were in direct contact with the common enemy of Christendom.

² Cf. Franklin Littell, "The Anabaptist Theology of Missions," *MQR*, XXI (1947), 5; Ethelbert Stauffer, "Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom," *MQR*, XIX (1945), 179.

The Trial and Martyrdom³ of Michael Sattler

ROTTENBURG, 1527⁴

THE TEXT

After many legal transactions⁵ on the day of his departure from this world,⁶ the articles against him being many, Michael Sattler . . .⁷ requested that they might once more be read to

³ There are four extant accounts of the trial and martyrdom. The first is that of the Swabian Protestant Nicholas von Graveneck, who had apparently been forced to proceed to Rottenburg with arms to protect the court. His account was written down, probably by his brother-in-law, and sent to Zurich. It is preserved in Wolfenbüttel. The second appears as an appendix to the Seven Articles of the Schleithem Confession in the drawing up of which Sattler played the leading role, February 24, 1527. The third account, with some dramatic flourishes, was sent by William Reublin to the Brethren in Zollikon and elsewhere in Switzerland. (It has been most recently edited by Leonhard von Muralt and Walter Schmid, *Quellen zur Geschichte der in der Schweiz*, I [Zurich, 1952], No. 224.) The fourth, briefer account, is that of the Hutterite *Chronicle*. The Acts of Michael Sattler (Version 2) were translated into Dutch in 1560 and taken up in *Het Offer des Heeren* in 1570 (the only non-Dutch episode so honored)

[Continued on next page.]

⁴ The trial opened on Friday, May 17, and continued on Saturday. The execution took place on either May 20 or 21.

⁵ It was shortly after the Schleithem conference that Sattler and his wife along with Reublin's wife and others were apprehended in and around Horb, the center of Sattler's mission, and to the congregation gathered therein he wrote his beautiful letter (preserved in the *Martyrs' Mirror*). The trial was several times postponed because of the danger of uproar from many who were sympathetic and also because the charges against the Anabaptists were ecclesiastical as well as civil and the attempt was made to secure at least two clerics from the university faculty of law (Tübingen or Freiburg).

⁶ More accurately on the second day of the trial when the verdict against him was delivered.

⁷ At this point the *Mirror*, in line with its general tendency to connect Anabaptism with an ongoing remnant of the faithful in the Middle Ages, asserts that Sattler belonged to the Waldensian brotherhood.

him and that he might again be heard upon them.⁸ This the bailiff,⁹ as the attorney [for the defense] of his lord [the emperor], opposed and would not consent to it. Michael Sattler then requested a ruling. After a consultation, the judges¹⁰ returned as their answer that, if his opponents would allow it; they, the judges, would consent. Thereupon the town clerk of Ensisheim,¹¹ as the spokesman of the said attorney, spoke thus: "Prudent, honorable, and wise lords, he has boasted of the Holy Ghost. Now if his boast is true, it seems to me, it is unnecessary to grant him this; for, if he has the Holy Ghost, as he boasts, the same will tell him what has been done here." To this Michael Sattler replied: "You servants of God, I hope my request will not be denied, for the said articles are as yet unclear to me [because of their number]." The town clerk responded: "Prudent, honorable, and wise lords, though we are not bound to do this, yet in order to give satisfaction, we will grant him his request that it may not be thought that injustice is being done him in his heresy or that we desire to abridge him of his rights. Hence let the articles be read to him again." [The nine charges, seven against all fourteen defendants, two specifically against Sattler, are here omitted, as they are answered seriatim by Sattler.]

Thereupon Michael Sattler requested permission to confer with his brethren and sisters, which was granted him. Having conferred with them for a little while, he began and undauntedly answered as follows: "In regard to the articles

Footnote 3 continued

and then reprinted in the *Martyrs' Mirror*. (On the relation of *Het Offer* and the *Mirror*, see Gerald Studer, "A History of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, *MQR*, XXII [1948], 163 ff.) Because of the widespread influence of this version in the formation of Mennonite piety the present translation is based on it. The critical Dutch text is found in two places in *BRN*, II, pp. 62-67; V, pp. 645-50. Back of this lies the German original edited by Walther Köhler, *Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation*, II (1908) Heft 3, but slight alterations have been introduced to bring this version into general conformity with what Gustav Bossert, Jr., regards as the most accurate transcript of the proceedings.

⁸ The trial had opened on the preceding day with the reading of nine charges, but naturally Sattler wished to have them fresh before him in writing, if possible, when called upon to respond.

⁹ Jacob Halbmayr, mayor of Rottenburg, whom Sattler considered ultimately responsible for the outcome of the trial, although it was Hoffmann (n. 11) who did most of the speaking against him.

¹⁰ There were twenty-four judges drawn from several towns and presided over by Landeshauptmann, Count Joachim of Zollern.

¹¹ Eberhard Hoffmann, a vindictive spirit, who had had much experience with Anabaptist trials in the seat of Austrian government in Alsace.

relating to me and my brethren and sisters, hear this brief answer:

"First, that we have acted contrary to the imperial mandate, we do not admit. For the same says that the Lutheran doctrine and delusion¹² is not to be adhered to, but only the gospel and the Word of God. This we have kept. For I am not aware that we have acted contrary to the gospel and the Word of God. I appeal to the words of Christ.

"Secondly, that the real body of Christ the Lord is not present in the sacrament, we admit. For the Scripture says: Christ ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of his Heavenly Father, whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead, from which it follows that, if he is in heaven and not in the bread, he may not be eaten bodily.

"Thirdly, as to baptism we say infant baptism is of no avail to salvation. For it is written [Rom. 1:17] that we live by faith alone. Again [Mark 16:16]: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Peter says the same [I, ch. 3:21]: Which doth also now save you in baptism (which is signified by that [Ark of Noah]), not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but rather the covenant of a good conscience with God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"Fourthly, we have not rejected the oil [of extreme unction]. For it is a creature of God, and what God has made is good and not to be refused, but that the pope, bishops, monks, and priests can make it better we do not believe; for the pope never made anything good. That of which the Epistle of James [ch. 5:14] speaks is not the pope's oil.

"Fifthly, we have not insulted the mother of God and the saints. For the mother of Christ is to be blessed among all women because unto her was accorded the favor of giving birth to the Saviour of the whole world. But that she is a mediatrix and advocatess—of this the Scriptures know nothing, for she must with us await the judgment. Paul said to Timothy [I, ch. 2:5]: Christ is our mediator and advocate with God. As regards the saints, we say that *we* who live and believe are the saints, which I prove by the epistles of Paul to the Romans [ch. 1:7], the Corinthians [I, ch. 1:2], the Ephesians [ch. 1:1], and other places where he always writes 'to the beloved

¹² The Catholic authorities quite naturally assimilated Anabaptism to Lutheranism, but, of course, Sattler was keenly conscious of the difference. They were referring to the Edict of Worms (May 21, 1521) against Luther and Lutherans; Sattler skillfully appeals to the subsequent imperial mandate of the Diet of Nuremberg, February 9, 1523.

saints.' Hence, we who believe are the saints, but those who have died in the faith we regard as the blessed.

"Sixthly, we hold that we are not to swear before the authorities, for the Lord says [Matt. 5:34]: Swear not, but let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay.

"Seventhly,¹³ when God called me to testify of his Word and I had read Paul and also considered the unchristian and perilous state in which I was, beholding the pomp, pride, usury, and great whoredom of the monks and priests, I went and took unto me a wife,¹⁴ according to the command of God; for Paul well prophesies concerning this to Timothy [I, ch. 4:3]: In the latter time it shall come to pass that men shall forbid to marry and command to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving.

"Eighthly, if the Turks should come, we ought not to resist them. For it is written [Matt. 5:21]: Thou shalt not kill. We must not defend ourselves against the Turks and others of our persecutors, but are to beseech God with earnest prayer to repel and resist them. But that I said that, if warring *were* right, I would rather take the field against so-called Christians who persecute, capture, and kill pious Christians than against the Turks was for the following reason. The Turk is a true Turk, knows nothing of the Christian faith, and is a Turk after the flesh. But you who would be Christians and who make your boast of Christ persecute the pious witnesses of Christ and are Turks after the spirit!

"In conclusion, ministers of God, I admonish you to consider the end for which God has appointed you, to punish the evil and to defend and protect the pious. Whereas, then, we have not acted contrary to God and the gospel, you will find that neither I nor my brethren and sisters have offended in word or deed against any authority. Therefore, ministers of God, if you have neither heard nor read the Word of God, send for the

¹³ Sattler fails or perhaps disdains to take up what was the seventh article in the charge read against him, namely, that "he has commenced a new and unheard of custom in regard to the Lord's Supper, mingling the bread and wine together on a plate and eating and drinking the same." This is an understandable distortion of what the Catholic authorities had been told was a common meal in place of the Mass.

It is to the prosecution's eighth charge that Sattler is here responding, namely, that he had left his order and taken a wife. He had been prior of the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter's in the Breisgau.

¹⁴ He married a Beguine, called by Valerius Anshelm "a talented, clever little woman," *Bernische Chronik*, V, 185 ff.

most learned men and for the sacred books of the Bible in whatsoever language they may be and let them confer with us in the Word of God. If they prove to us with the Holy Scriptures that we err and are in the wrong, we will gladly desist and recant and also willingly suffer the sentence and punishment for that of which we have been accused; but if no error is proven to us, I hope to God that you will be converted and receive instruction."

Upon this speech the judges laughed and put their heads together, and the town clerk of Ensisheim said: "Yes, you infamous, desperate rascal of a monk, should we dispute with you? The hangman will dispute with you, I assure you!"

Michael said: "God's will be done."

The town clerk said: "It were well if you had never been born."

Michael replied: "God knows what is good."

The town clerk: "You archheretic, you have seduced pious people. If they would only now forsake their error and commit themselves to grace!"

Michael: "Grace is with God alone."

One of the prisoners also said: "We must not depart from the truth."

The town clerk: "Yes, you desperate villain, you archheretic, I say, if there were no hangman here, I would hang you myself and be doing God a good service thereby."

Michael: "God will judge aright." Thereupon the town clerk said a few words to him in Latin, what, we do not know.¹⁵ Michael Sattler answered him, *Judica*.

The town clerk then admonished the judges and said: "He will not cease from this chatter anyway. Therefore, my Lord Judge, you may proceed with the sentence. I call for a decision of the court."

The judge asked Michael Sattler whether he too committed it to the court. He replied: "Ministers of God, I am not sent to judge the Word of God. We are sent to testify and hence cannot consent to any adjudication, since we have no command from God concerning it. But we are not for that reason removed from being judged and we are ready to suffer and to await what God is planning to do with us. We will continue in our faith in Christ so long as we have breath in us, unless we be dissuaded from it by the Scriptures."

¹⁵ Hoffmann may well have resorted to Latin when he observed the bad impression his intemperance was making on the court. The only word that our informant, Nicholas von Gravenack, could pick out was Sattler's "Give judgment."

The town clerk said: "The hangman will instruct you, he will dispute with you, archheretic."

Michael: "I appeal to the Scriptures."

Then the judges arose and went into another room where they remained for an hour and a half and determined on the sentence. In the meantime some [of the soldiers] in the room treated Michael Sattler most unmercifully, heaping reproach upon him. One of them said: "What have you in prospect for yourself and the others that you have so seduced them?"¹⁶ With this he also drew a sword which lay upon the table, saying: "See, with this they will dispute with you." But Michael did not answer upon a single word concerning himself but willingly endured it all. One of the prisoners said: "We must not cast pearls before swine." Being also asked why he had not remained a lord¹⁷ in the convent, Michael answered: "According to the flesh I was a lord, but it is better as it is." He did not say more than what is recorded here,¹⁸ and this he spoke fearlessly.

The judges having returned to the room, the sentence was read. It was as follows: "In the case of the attorney of His Imperial Majesty vs. Michael Sattler, judgment is passed that Michael Sattler shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution and cut out his tongue,¹⁹ then forge him fast to a wagon and thereon with red-hot tongs twice tear pieces from his body; and after he has been brought outside the gate, he shall be plied five times more in the same manner. . . ."²⁰

After this had been done in the manner prescribed, he was burned to ashes²¹ as a heretic. His fellow brethren were

¹⁶ Another reading: "When I see you get away, I will believe in you!" In this same version it is another person who speaks the next part.

¹⁷ See above, n. 13, second paragraph.

¹⁸ Another version says that he went on to show his improved state from Scripture.

¹⁹ Actually only a piece was cut out because he continued to utter speech.

²⁰ What the *Mirror* converts in the next sentence into narrative, other versions make a part of the original verdict.

²¹ Reublin (Version 3) reported that a sack of powder was mercifully tied around Sattler's neck to hasten his death. The Wolfenbüttel version (1) gives further details of the execution. From the ladder to which he was bound he admonished the people to be converted and to intercede in prayer for his judges. He then prayed: "Almighty, eternal God, Thou art the way and the truth; because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with thy help this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood." When the ropes on his hands were burned, he raised the two forefingers in a promised signal to his group and prayed: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Köhler, *op. cit.*, p. 332, n. 2.

executed with the sword, and the sisters drowned. His wife, also after being subjected to many entreaties, admonitions, and threats, under which she remained steadfast, was drowned a few days afterward.²² Done the 21st day of May, A.D. 1527.

²² The Countess, spouse of the presiding judge, sought to dissuade her. She was drowned eight days after her husband's death.

VII

A Letter to John Campanus
By Sebastian Franck¹

STRASSBURG, 1531

INTRODUCTION

JOHN CAMPANUS WAS A RADICAL LUTHERAN WHO turned Anabaptist under the influence of Melchior Hofmann (Selection IX). Campanus' ideas, carried by the Wassenberg preachers, were a factor in building up that fateful combination of restitutionism and millennialism which was the Münster theocracy. On the eve of this disastrous outburst within radical dissent, when the aberrant forces released by the Reformation were swirling toward a climax, Sebastian Franck, polyhistorian and free spirit, wrote the following memorable Letter to Campanus. It embodies in a remarkably complete form the Spiritualist's vision of the universal, invisible church of the Spirit and gives vivid expression to his philosophy of religion and history born of despair. Like Schwenckfeld (Selection VIII) and Obbe Philips (Selection X), Franck could not accept the claim of any one church because of the rival and mutually exclusive claims of all. He was most sympathetic with the Evangelical Anabaptists but their exclusiveness distressed him. He agreed with them that the apostolic church had disappeared in its accommodation to the state but deplored their feverish attempts to recover the worn-out sacraments and other practices from the infancy of Chris-

¹ The best accounts of Franck in English are those of Rufus Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, Ch. iv, and J. F. Smith, "S. F., Heretic, Mystic, and Reformer of the Reformation," *Theological Review*, XI (1874), 163-179. The classical study is that of Alfred Hegler (1892). See introduction, above, p. 27. The extensive German literature on Franck is surveyed and evaluated by Eberhard Teufel in *Theologische Rundschau*, N.F., XII (1940), 99-179. The most recent biography is also by Teufel, "Landräumig" *Sebastian Franck: ein Wanderer an Donau, Rhein und Neckar* (Neustadt an der Aisch, 1954).