

The Articles and Confession of Balthasar Hubmaier ¹

10/11 March 1528

By His Majesty the King's command ² to the authorities of Innsbruck concerning Doctor Balthasar Hubmaier, the same Doctor Balthasar was discovered when the town of Waldshut was captured, and in his possession were found the schemes and plans of the peasants, some eight pages of Articles which Dr Balthasar had written in his own hand, the rest written by other hands but corrected by him.

And he teaches here that the people of every territory should come together to form a league. The time has already arrived when God will no longer allow the temporal lords to flay and fleece, fetter and shackle, grind and bind and carry out other acts of tyranny. They treat the poor people as Herod did the innocent children. The murderous Duke of Lorraine has given us an idea at Saverne ³ and in other places of what his princely Grace is capable of. So that we may stop this, the people must unite and make laws according to God's word.

Therefore the common people should write to their lords once, then twice and then three times, requesting that they join the brotherhood and alliance. If they will not join, then each territory should be permitted to take the sword from its rulers and give it to another. If the territory does not do so, then it will share in the guilt of the lords' wickedness.

And he teaches how to appoint kings, princes, dukes and lords. That is, when the people gather together, they shall make an oath to keep God's word; twelve men shall be proposed and from them the peasants will elect one, with no special treatment given to the nobility. And if the man who is elected should later prove unsuitable, then he may be removed after the people of the territory have given him three warnings. In this event, the territories will pledge all its members to risk their bodies, honour, goods and blood.

¹ Translated here is a report delivered to Duke Georg of Saxony by the Catholic Bishop Johann Fabri, concerning the trial and confession of the radical Swiss Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528). It is known that Hubmaier encountered Müntzer in south-west German in 1524/25, and there are some grounds for believing that the first four "Articles" reported here either came from, or were strongly influenced by, Müntzer. Hubmaier was burned at the stake on 10 March 1528, in Vienna. This report by Fabri was printed as a pamphlet in Dresden in 1528, by the printer Wolfgang Stöckel. This document is also known as the *Verfassungsentwurf* (Draft Constitution). It exists in no other form than the letter by Fabri.

The text translated here is contained in G.Franz (ed) *Quellen zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges*, Munich 1963 (pp.231-234).

² Most likely Ferdinand I, King of Hungary and Bohemia (later Holy Roman Emperor).

³ In 1525, Duke Anton of Lorraine recaptured the town of Saverne (Alsace) from the peasant armies.

If the lords who have been deposed should seek revenge, he says in his fourth Article, then the new lord will place them under a worldly ban; if this ban has no effect, then the new lord shall levy the land or hire mercenary soldiers at the expense of the territory, and attack the recalcitrant enemy, until the bloodthirsty tyrants have been rooted out.

Afterwards there follows in Dr Balthasar's handwriting instructions on how to win over towns, markets and villages and a letter to all the territories calling for insurrection, with the Articles enclosed, dated at Waldshut.

And so that everyone should know what the worldly ban is, he has added a special chapter as follows: ⁴ those who are not, or do not wish to be in this alliance should have no companionship in eating, drinking, bathing, milling, baking, ploughing or mowing, nor given any food, grain, drink, wood or meat. And they will be sent off to the enemy, along with wife and children. And from then on, all castles, monasteries and priests' houses will fall under the ban and all those who live in such castles and monasteries will be forced to move into commoners' houses. And anyone who supports the recalcitrants will be placed under the ban, and all honours, oaths and duties will be abolished, and there are also many threats against those who stay with their expelled princes.

These same Articles contain so many unchristian articles and words of sedition that I cannot even write them down, nor do I wish to, in case trouble arises from them.

Apart from these instructions which he sent out to Hall and other places, he also drew up the Peasant Articles which were later printed, which meant that the peasants of Stühlingen and Klegau were the first to rise up against authority, and from that came all the terrible and terrifying uproar and bloodshed, for which he – after Luther – bears the blame; unfortunately one hundred thousand peasants were slain and many hundreds of thousands of widows and orphans were made.

His actions were wicked; His Majesty had the trial documents, the judgement and the signed confession placed before the judges and the Council of Vienna, and his confession was read aloud before several thousand people, as follows, and then a copy was sent to me by one of the judges in Vienna. ⁵

Translated by Andy Drummond, March 2016

⁴ What follows is a brief summary of the 'Letter of Articles of the South German Peasants' (*Artikelbrief*)

⁵ In the original letter, a transcript of Hubmaier's lengthy 'Confession' follows. This has been omitted here.