

I Appeal to the Scriptures: Michael Sattler, 1527

Background: After the death of Conrad Grebel (1526) and Felix Manz (1527), Michael Sattler was the most noteworthy leader of the Swiss Brethren. His martyrdom took place only a few months after that of Manz. Captured by the Roman Catholic authorities, he was tried on May 17, 1527, and on May 21, 1527, was tortured then burned at the stake.

Requirements: Four persons

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Narrator: The date is May 17, 1527. The place is the imperial city of Rottenburg in Germany. The court is in session with Count Joachim of Zollern in the chair. On trial is Michael Sattler and 13 other alleged Anabaptists.

Count: Defendants, you may choose a lawyer to represent you.

Sattler: Thank you, sir, but we choose not to be represented. Though we know you are servants of God in your capacity as judges, we also know that the Word of God gives you no right to judge matters of faith. This court is not competent to try us.

Count: You insolent fellow! You will soon see what we are empowered to do to you. Clerk, read the charges.

Clerk: The charges against Michael Sattler are:

- 1) that he and his adherents have acted contrary to the decree of the emperor;
- 2) that he taught, maintained and believed that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the sacrament;
- 3) that he taught and believed that infant baptism does not promote salvation;
- 4) that they rejected the sacrament of extreme unction for the dying;
- 5) that they despised and scorned the Mother of God and the saints;
- 6) that he declared that one should not swear before a magistrate;
- 7) that he has commenced a new and unheard of custom in regard to the Lord's Supper, that is, placing the bread and wine on a plate, eating and drinking of them;
- 8) that he has left his religious order and has married a wife;
- 9) that he said that if the Turks invaded the country, we ought not to resist them, and if he approved of war he would rather take the field against the Christians than against the Turks, who are the greatest enemy of our holy faith.

Count: Michael Sattler, how do you answer these serious charges?

Sattler: May I ask for them to be read again so that I may fully understand them?

Clerk: He has boasted that he has the Holy Spirit. If that is true, we do not need to read the charges again; the Holy Spirit can inform him!

Sattler: Please read them again.

Clerk: Very well.

Count: Will you now reply to these charges?

Clerk: The charges against Michael Sattler are (1) that he and his adherents acted contrary to the decree of the emperor.

Sattler: We deny this. The imperial mandate forbade people to adhere to Lutheran doctrine, and to preach only the gospel and the word of God. We have obeyed this for we have not acted contrary to the word of God.

Clerk: (2) that he taught, maintained and believed that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the sacrament.

Sattler: The second charge I accept as true, and I will show you many Scriptures to defend this.

Clerk: (3) that he taught and believed that infant baptism does not promote salvation.

Sattler: The third also is true, for baptism is for believers, not for infants, as the Scriptures clearly show.

Clerk: (4) that they rejected the sacrament of extreme unction.

Sattler: We have not rejected oil, for it is made by God and so is good. But a blessing by the pope or other clergymen does not improve it.

Clerk: (5) that they despised and scorned the Mother of God and the saints.

Sattler: We do not dishonor the Mother of God, for the mother of Christ is to be praised above all women because God gave her the grace to give birth to the Savior of the whole world. And we do not revile the saints. But the Scriptures do not allow us to treat Mary or the saints as intercessors for us.

Clerk: (6) that he declared that one should not swear before a magistrate.

Sattler: The sixth charge is true, for swearing oaths is forbidden by Christ himself.

Clerk: (7) that he has commenced a new and unheard of custom in regard to the Lord's Supper, placing the bread and wine on a plate, eating and drinking of them.

Sattler: I will make no response to the seventh charge, for it is not worth defending.

Clerk: (8) that contrary to the rule he has married a wife.

Sattler: As to my marriage, this is an ordinance of God. How many chaste priests do you know?

Clerk: (9) that he said that if the Turks invaded the country, we ought not to resist them, and if he approved of war, he would rather take the field against the Christians than against the Turks, who are the greatest enemy of our holy faith.

Sattler: As regards the Turks, we will not fight them for we are told in Scripture “Thou shalt not kill.” We are to beseech God with earnest prayers to repel and resist them. But if it were right for Christians to fight, I would rather go into battle against the so-called Christians who persecute, apprehend and kill pious Christians than against the Turks. Because the Turk is a genuine Turk and knows nothing of the Christian faith. But you claim to be Christians, boast of Christ and still persecute the faithful witnesses of Christ. You are Turks according to the Spirit.

Count: Is this your full reply?

Sattler: I am happy to discuss these matters in greater detail with you if you will allow me to appeal to the Scriptures.

Narrator: The judges became infuriated at Sattler’s calm confidence and began to ridicule and threaten him, but he did not lose his composure. At length they conferred, pronounced him guilty and declared the sentence.

Two days later Sattler was executed. His ordeal began in the market place where a piece was cut from his tongue. Pieces of flesh were torn from his body with red-hot tongs. He was tied to a cart and the tongs were used five more times on the way to the site of execution. To the guards’ amazement, Sattler was still able to speak and he could be heard praying for his persecutors. Then he was bound to a ladder and pushed into the fire.

Sattler: Almighty God, eternal God, you are the way and the truth. Because I have not been shown to be in error, I will with your help this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood.

Narrator: When the ropes on his wrists burned through, Sattler raised the two forefingers of his hands, giving the promised signal to the brethren that a martyr’s death was bearable. Then the crowd heard him say through seared lips:

Sattler: Father, I commend my spirit into your hands.

Sources: 16th century court records in *Martyrs’ Mirror*, 416-418; supplemented with documents in John H. Yoder, ed., *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 69-80. Stuart Murray (alt); <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/sattler.html>

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