

# From Wuerttemberg to Zoar: Origins of a Separatist Community

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## ***Apocalypse Chapter 18: The fall of Babylon.***

*And after these things, I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power: and the earth was enlightened with his glory. And he cried out with a strong voice, saying: Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen: and is become the habitation of devils and the hold of every unclean spirit and the hold of every unclean and hateful bird: Because all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication: and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her; And the merchants of the earth have been made rich by the power of her delicacies.*

*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying: Go out from her, my people; that you be not partakers of her sins and that you receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven: and the Lord hath remembered her iniquities.... Therefore, shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine. And she shall be burnt with the fire: because God is strong, who shall judge her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived in delicacies with her, shall weep and bewail themselves over her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning: Standing afar off for fear of her torments, saying: Alas! alas! that great city, Babylon, that mighty city: for in one hour is thy judgment come.*

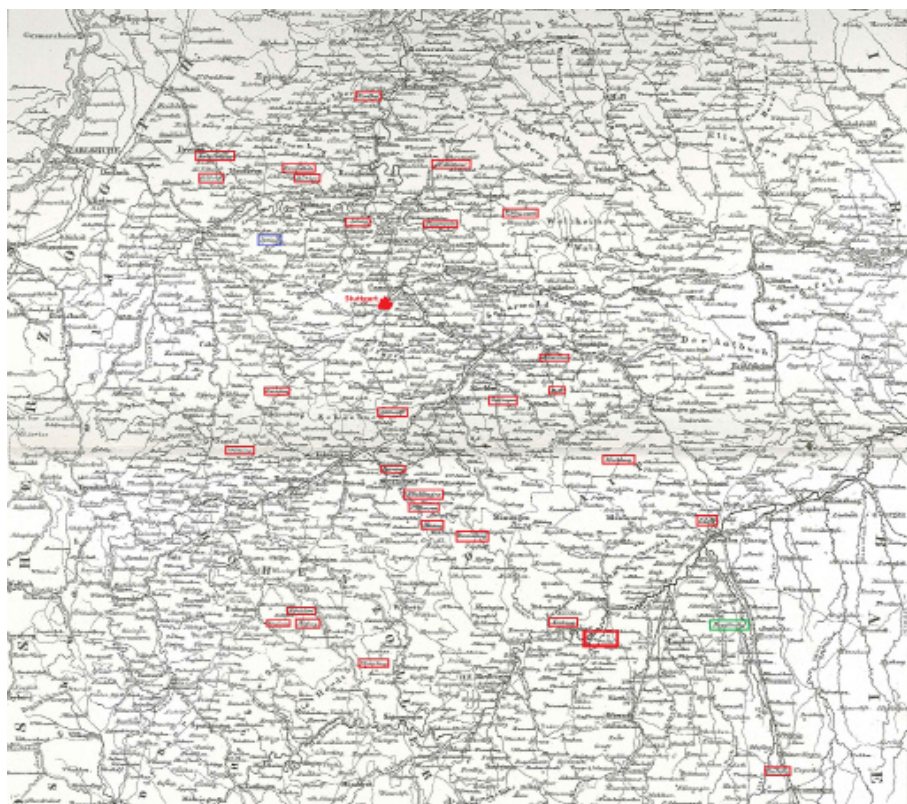
*Rejoice over her, thou heaven and ye holy apostles and prophets. For God hath judged your judgment on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone, as it were a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying: With such violence as this, shall Babylon, that great city, be thrown down and shall be found no more at all.*

**Zoar**, the name of the community of Separatists from the Duchy of Wuerttemberg founded in 1817, holds a message. It refers to the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrha, two cities in ancient Israel which were destroyed by huge fires. According to the story in the Old Testament, God sent down fire from the skies to punish the inhabitants for the sins they had committed. But Lot, whom God wanted to save, left Sodom in time and he escaped to Zoar, a hamlet not far from the city. In English, Zoar means refuge, or sanctuary. In Ohio, the members of the community regarded their village as a sanctuary, a safe haven separated from an otherwise evil, sinful world. The community's chosen name implies they felt they had escaped from Wuerttemberg. Most of the Separatist groups they belonged

to had been established in the years after 1801. Thus, we know two dates for certain, but if you research the story of the founders of Zoar there remain many mysteries.

If we talk about the Separatists of Rottenacker and their friends all over Wuerttemberg we also have to talk about George Rapp, the founder of the Harmony Society and of three consecutive communities at Harmony in Pennsylvania, New Harmony in Indiana, and Economy in Pennsylvania. Rapp and his followers laid the foundation of the Separatist movement in the late eighteenth century, and the founders of Zoar followed the example of the Harmonists in many ways. Therefore it is very important to outline and understand Rapp's activities and principles. We must see the Harmonists' and the Zoarites' history as one story, an ongoing movement of Radical Pietism or Separatism. Of course, as the times changed, that movement also underwent changes; however, the basic ideas are the same. After Rapp had left for America, leadership shifted to the Separatists of Rottenacker and their followers in villages like Dettingen unter Teck, Boll, Unterhausen, Schlaitdorf, Nordheim, and Horrheim, to name only the most prominent ones.

The Zoar story begins at the village of Rottenacker in the south of the former Duchy of Wuerttemberg. Actually, the village as an exclave was situated outside of the duchy, and was surrounded by Catholic villages. On clear days you could see the Swiss and Austrian Alps beyond Lake Constance, and connections between southern Germany and Switzerland had always been tight. By that time, people either were Catholic, Protestant, or Reformed like people from the Protestant parts of Switzerland. With very few exceptions, no Catholics were allowed to live in a Protestant village like Rottenacker, and vice versa no Protestant could live in a Catholic village. And here, on the border between the Duchy of Wuerttemberg and territories in Upper Swabia, Catholics and Protestants lived in neighboring villages. But mostly they remained on their own which meant that many inhabitants married someone from their village or from some scattered Protestant exclave villages in the area. In fact, most inhabitants in Rottenacker were married to a partner from the village, and although people of a different faith had to cope with each other they were taught that their denomination was the only one that would lead them to heaven.



*A map of the Separatist villages from the circle around Rottenacker. Rottenacker is bordered in thick red. The community of Regglisweiler where the Domain of Brandenburg was situated is bordered in green. And Iptingen, the center of the first Separatist movement around George Rapp, is bordered in blue.*

To understand the Pietists and Separatists it is very important to regard the situation in the Duchy of Württemberg in the late eighteenth century and its towns and villages. Since the mid-sixteenth century the entire country was Protestant. In 1565 all subjects of the reigning Duke of Württemberg had obliged themselves and their descendants to stay forever Protestant. That declaration remained valid until the Duchy ended in 1803. Every citizen in Württemberg was required to attend church services on a regular basis. But the most significant testimony of his or her faith was the Holy Communion. As one of the two Protestant sacraments it was the most significant Protestant feature. While the Catholics during

the mass only received the host, the Protestants received both bread and wine, a significant difference between the two.

But how did the church control all this? There are two answers to that question. Because all the citizens in Wuerttemberg were Protestants and the reigning Duke had been designated by Martin Luther as head of the State Church, the church and the state were not separated. In a village like Rottenacker, people were very well aware of this in everyday life. Two persons represented the authorities in the village: the mayor (*Schultheiss*) as the director of the local administration and the pastor (*Pfarrer*) as the representative of the church. They were by law obliged to support each other in fulfilling their duties. In every town and village there was a court called the *Kirchenkonvent* which consisted of the mayor, the pastor and some other prominent local representatives. The *Kirchenkonvent* supervised the morals of the villagers by punishing single women who were pregnant, settling matrimonial differences, and disciplining people who were drinking heavily or who were cursing. At the same time the *Kirchenkonvent* directed the local school which was run by the church. When parents held back their children from school for whatever reasons without a valid excuse they had to pay a fixed fine for each day their child did not attend. Poverty was not accepted as an excuse because the church sponsored the school taxes for those in need. The local pastor who was in charge of controlling the teacher visited the school regularly. Although classes were huge, almost all boys and girls were able to read and write when they left school. We must keep in mind that most Separatist men and women were peasants and craftsmen who belonged to the middle class. The fact that they eventually managed to organize huge emigrations to the United States shows that some very capable people acquired extraordinary skills in the small world of a village school and a rural family.

Along with these official modes of supervising, the church relied on a mutual moral control of the villagers. As Hermann Ehmer explained: "In the village church every person had a designated pew according to their station in the village society. When a pew stayed empty everybody of course asked why. In order to receive communion, people had to register with the pastor. Records were kept, meaning if anyone stayed away for an unacceptable time without a good reason, their case would be passed to the *Kirchenkonvent*. In this way, significant control was exercised by the church on each individual within a village such as Rottenacker."

For some time before 1800, religious tensions had developed within Rottenacker. People may have been affected by the remote location of the village, far away from the capital of Stuttgart and the central parts of the country. It is very hard to figure out what had really happened because documents are very scarce. However, we know that some men from Rottenacker traveled on business in Northern Switzerland, among them Stephan Huber who traded with fabric. There they got in touch with men and women who criticized the Reformed church. At Rottenacker, it only required a leader to set the scene on fire. And that person arrived in 1801. A young Swiss woman named Barbara Grubenmann came to Rottenacker to work as a farmgirl for a local farmer. She was somehow peculiar, and yet we do not know much about her. We know for sure that she was born at Teufen in Appenzell-Ausserrhoden, not far from the Southern shore of Lake Constance. But there were three girls of the same name and of about the same age. The documents give very few details, through which I identified one of those women as the Barbara Grubenmann who came to Rottenacker but there remains some uncertainty. In the documents concerning Rottenacker the family name is sometimes given as Grubermann but Grubenmann is the original Swiss family name. Barbara Grubenmann had to leave Teufen because of peculiar religious ideas and because she stated that she had some visions. Some people even thought that she was simply mad. Once she was arrested but managed to escape, and finally in 1792 she came to Rottenacker to work for Stephan Huber.

Some time after the woman from Switzerland arrived in the village word began to spread that she held secret meetings with some local Pietist men and women. This is remarkable because we do not have any previous hint of a Pietist group at Rottenacker before. Basically Barbara Grubenmann did nothing wrong because religious assemblies were legally allowed under certain conditions which had been published in a Ducal decree back in 1743. But the authorities always were afraid of people who separated from church. If any citizen refused to fulfil this obligation against state or church he or she excluded himself or herself from the society. Now people in Rottenacker soon rumored that the men and women who met with Barbara Grubenmann did not behave according to the rules of the decree on Pietism. They stayed together until late at night which was prohibited, and worst of all, more and more Pietists separated from church by withdrawing from the services and the Holy Communion. Obviously Barbara Grubenmann taught them mystical ideas, establishing an own

religious group.

Separation from church would not necessarily have threatened the state and the community. When George Rapp separated from church together with many followers fifteen years earlier he had been treated rather mildly by the authorities. He had only been arrested and held in a tower at Maulbronn for one night, and he had been fined primarily for holding back his two children from school. But as Rapp had become quite wealthy, he had been able to pay these fines straight away. It was not until 1801 that Rapp realized that the situation drastically changed. While he had risen to the leader of a big Separatist movement, a Catholic Duke was reigning in Wuerttemberg had been forced to transfer the direction of the church to his church administration. The church officials feared that if they would prosecute Rapp too harshly they would create a martyr among his Separatist followers. Therefore they were quite tolerant, and as Rapp obviously did not engage himself in politics they had many reasons to treat him rather tolerantly.

Johann Georg Rapp had risen to be a leader at the same time the Duchy of Wuerttemberg had been thrown into crisis due to an increasing population. The pastors were no longer able to care for each individual church member because the villages had grown so much. And Separatism has always developed or risen in times of crisis. But during Rapp's formative years as a Separatist leader the events in Middle Europe led to an atmosphere of uncertainty which boosted apocalyptic ideas. Strongly religious people understood the signs of the times as a fulfilling of biblical prophecies, mainly those in the Book of Revelation. The French Revolution influenced Germany as well, and nobody knew how it would turn out for the smaller German states. During the Revolution the reigning Duke Karl Eugen of Wuerttemberg traveled to the city of Paris, and he was staying in the city when King Louis XIV was beheaded by the revolutionaries. After the end of the Bourbon monarchy, a general named Napoleon Bonaparte from Corsica rose to First Consul and became an influential political leader. In 1803 he sold Louisiana territory, which was much bigger than the present State of Louisiana, to the United States. This prevented George Rapp and his followers from buying land in the French territory of Louisiana where they initially had planned to found their community. Obviously they saw in Napoleon a mighty protector of their religious liberty.

In Wuerttemberg a younger Duke ascended to the throne in 1797. Duke Friedrich II began to reign at the time when the situation in Europe



grew increasingly confused. Back in Württemberg Friedrich II was an energetic and authoritarian ruler who showed little tolerance against any opposition in his country, be it political or religious. He no longer regarded the Separatists as a peculiar sort of religious dissenters but rather as enemies of the state. And he did not hesitate to show his authority. When George Rapp preached in a brick kiln near the city of Knittlingen in 1801, a military command suddenly appeared, disturbing the meeting. Shortly before, a riot had arisen at Knittlingen so the situation in the city was politically very sensitive. Therefore Duke Friedrich II sent out his military when he heard that the Separatist preacher held a meeting with his followers there. The soldiers dispelled the Separatist assembly. Rapp, although he was not arrested, was shocked. He became aware that the times of tolerance were over, and he began to prepare his emigration to America. He finally left his home village of Iptingen in 1803, followed a year later by about seven hundred men and women. They established their first community, Harmony in Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh.

Shortly before George Rapp left for America, a tailor from Unterhausen who followed him got in touch with the Separatists of Rottenacker. However, Rapp was too busy to pay much attention to that new group or to get interested in their principles. In fact, some of their attitudes were very different from his own. Although the Separatists of Rottenacker stayed away from church and held their children back from school as Rapp had done, they obviously were far more politically motivated than religiously. If we look at Rapp's activities in Württemberg he was a truly religious leader who knew the Bible and many religious books by heart. As a preacher he spread the word of God, and he mostly criticized the clergy for not living according to Christian principles. In contrast, the Rottenacker Separatists harshly criticized the Duke's officials and even the Duke himself. They called him a tyrant and a pharaoh, and certainly these were not exactly the attributions the Duke was willing to tolerate. In all about seventy men, women, and children belonged to the local Separatist group at Rottenacker. Some men like Stephan and Daniel Huber and Johannes Breymayer traveled around to make followers where the decree said that only local meetings were allowed. On their extensive journeys they motivated Pietists to separate from church in some villages in Württemberg, like Boll, Dettingen unter Teck, Schlaitdorf, Horrheim, and Nordheim, to name only a few. We do not know what they were preaching because no written testimonies have survived, but they must have been so

charismatic that they convinced many people to separate from church. Although they never made as many followers as Rapp—I think that about three thousand people followed him—a few hundred men and women can be regarded as fellows of the Rottenacker Separatists. Even in Bavaria a few Separatists belonged to that group, mainly from the former Imperial city of Memmingen. And formally, Separatism was not restricted to the Protestant church but the Separatists welcomed everybody who followed their ideas. But with the Catholic church being very hierarchical, very few of its members separated from church. One example is the family of cooper Joseph Faupel from the Catholic village of Lauterach, who played a role within the Rottenacker movement.

So what were their principles, and which of them were different from Rapp's ideas? Let's start with the common principles:

**Absence from services and the Holy communion:** Because the Separatists despised the official church as the whore of Babylon as described in the bible all of them stayed away from the services and the Holy Communion. They were very critical of the church, the pastors, and the Holy communion and did not hesitate to insult the church officials.

**Baptizing children, burying the dead without a service:** The Separatists believed that no rituals at all were necessary for true Christians. Although they baptized their children they did it themselves immediately after birth because they knew that the baptism would not be repeated in church. Basically every Christian was entitled to baptize but in order to prevent abuse Protestants were obliged to have their children baptized by a pastor except in cases of emergency. The same goes for funerals with the exception that only the pastor was entitled to conduct the service.

**Holding back children from school:** As the school was directed by the church and religious lectures were a big part of the lessons it was considered by the Separatists as godless. They stated that the wisdom of the world was taught in school and not God's principles. To avoid this they taught their children at home. We do not know the exact differences between the normal school lessons and that early form of homeschooling. But probably the children were reading Separatist literature and learning Separatist hymns.

**Refusing to swear an oath:** Here the Separatists followed the verse Matthew 5:34, "Thou shalt not swear." This may not seem too important by today's standards but in Württemberg all subjects had to swear an oath of obedience each time a Duke ascended to the throne. This had been the



case in 1793 and 1795, when two elderly Dukes ascended to the throne, followed by Duke Friedrich in 1797.

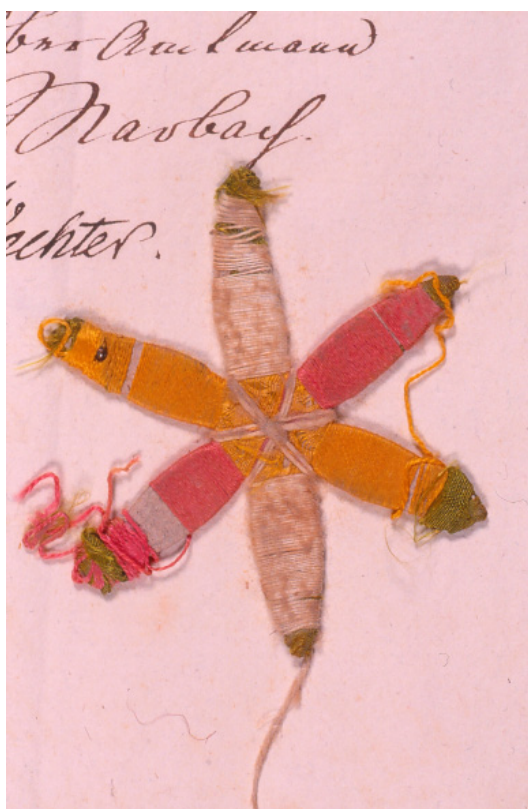
**Refusing military service:** This was a strong Separatist principle. As they believed in an invisible church of all true Christians they refused to kill other men, be they Protestants or Catholics, or most probably in theory even heathens.

**Disobeying political authorities:** As Separatists believed that the Elector Friedrich and all the authorities were godless they did not feel obliged to obey them. They only promised to keep the laws which they believed were according to God's will.

**Entertaining close connections with their fellow Separatists:** As the Separatists believed in an invisible church consisting of all their fellows, they traveled extensively, visiting their brothers and sisters in Christ and preaching in the assemblies. Therefore they are mentioned as 'swarmers' in many documents. But the Protestant church was based on the principle of a local community which was served by a pastor. Therefore, it was prohibited to preach in other assemblies, as people were expected to attend the local service. Moreover, Separatists were used to extending their assemblies until late at night, which was also prohibited, let alone strangers staying overnight. Late-night assemblies were regarded as unorganized, wild meetings.

These principles were followed more or less by Rapp and his followers as well as be the Separatists of the circle around Rottenacker. But as the latter were more politically oriented, they behaved aggressively against the authorities. So the Separatists of the circle around Rottenacker followed some principles of their own which they did not have in common with Rapp:

**Addressing everybody with 'Du' and not lifting the cap:** In Germany all people are addressed *Sie* except for family, friends, or close people who are addressed *Du*. Back in the eighteenth century rules were even tighter, and many children addressed their parents *ihr*. High officials were always addressed *Sie*, and it was an insult to address some official *Du*. The officials addressed the common man in the third person, e.g., "Where was He born?" But Separatists believed that all men were created equal, and so they addressed everybody *Du* and never lifted their hat or cap as required. As these reverences to persons of higher class were mandatory those who did not behave accordingly were harshly punished.



*A Separatist star, the only one known to exist in Wuerttemberg.  
It is attached to a document in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.  
Courtesy of the Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart A 213 Bü 3091.*

**Wearing stars and cockades:** While the Separatists wore clothes in special colors and hats in a particular shape, they wore cockades in the colors of the French Revolution on their hats. Those colors blue, white and red are also represented in the French flag. Moreover, men and women wore stars of many colors on their clothes. The cockades were regarded as symbols of opposition to the state and the king. The stars appeared as a caricature of the orders which the king and his officials wore. But each color symbolized a special meaning. Although the Separatists stated that they regarded the stars as a mere religious symbol and each color referred to the Bible and Jesus Christ, King Friedrich was decidedly unwilling to tolerate these symbols.

Later in Zoar the Separatists did not eat any pork according to the Jewish tradition, but we do not know how far back this practice reaches. If some evidence would be found that they avoided pork even back in Wuerttemberg it would be another of their religious principles. However, we do not find any hint that they avoided alcohol, tobacco, or meat. Drinking no alcohol would have been almost impossible as villages like Nordheim or Horrheim had huge vineyards, and many inhabitants earned their living as vintners. We do not know if in Zoar there existed any distilleries like in the Harmonist communities. Brandy was consumed in small amounts but also as medicine. And for a pipemaker, as was Joseph M. Baeumler, it would have been impossible not to smoke.



*King Friedrich II.*

Courtesy of Archiv des Hauses Wuerttemberg, Altshausen

These are the main Separatist principles. But unfortunately we do not really know much about their specific religious ideas. No manuscripts of sermons in their assemblies—if there ever had been any—have been preserved, nor any correspondence. There must have existed a tightly organized group of Separatists at Rottenacker but we know neither exactly where they met nor what they read. Nowhere any hint can be found that these Separatist men preached in the assemblies or that the Separatist group was organized as tightly as the group around Rapp. George Rapp had written many letters to his followers, mostly less of private content but rather sermons about his religious ideas which could be passed over to other people. The Separatists from Rottenacker spread their ideas by traveling around, and it is a question if people like Stephan Huber or Johannes Breimaier or even Barbara Grubenmann were capable preachers. There must have been Separatist assemblies at Rottenacker, but not a single document we know is giving details about what was preached there. The few letters by Barbara Grubenmann which are preserved in the Zoar archives contain mostly mystic ideas. Like Rapp's letters they hardly include any personal affairs but are almost entirely dedicated to religious meditations, some of which are very difficult to understand.

Duke Friedrich II had every reason to prosecute the religious rebels. Meanwhile, First Consul Napoleon had extended his power to Middle Europe, and he began to restructure the territories by dissolving the monasteries and dismantling the lower nobility of their power. All these small territories were turned over to the rulers of bigger states who were elevated in their ranks. Thus, Duke Friedrich II became Elector, and his country was enlarged considerably. Many small territories in the vicinity of Rottenacker now also belonged to Wuerttemberg. This meant that Protestantism no longer was the exclusive faith in the country, but the Elector also reigned over Catholics and Jews as well.

When Friedrich heard about the insults from the Separatists of the circle around Rottenacker he became furious. In 1804 he sent out soldiers to the villages of Rottenacker, Dettingen unter Teck, and Boll. In these three villages the most fervent Separatists were arrested and questioned about their ideas and behavior.

Almost none of them declared himself willing to change his attitude. Therefore, fourteen men from Rottenacker were carried away by a military command and transported to the Fortress of Hohenasperg, not far away from the capital Stuttgart. They were condemned to prison sentences at

the Fortress which meant that they also were forced to work there. All over Wuerttemberg, about sixty men were arrested and sent to the Fortress of Hohenasperg. Their home villages had to pay for them if they were not able to work. You can imagine what they thought of their radical citizens who caused so much costs and trouble.



*A late-nineteenth century painting of the fortress Hohenasperg where about sixty Separatists were imprisoned, some for as long as twenty years. In the foreground is a group of prisoners guarded by soldiers.*

Courtesy of Archiv des Hauses Wuerttemberg, Altshausen

In this critical situation two things happened. Barbara Grubenmann left Rottenacker because she was afraid of persecution. Almost immediately she vanished completely from the scene. Actually, she is not even mentioned in the questioning of the Separatists. We know almost nothing about her further fate. All we know is that some of her letters were preserved by the Separatists because they can be found in the Zoar archives. Similar to George Rapp, these are not personal letters where she writes about herself. They consist of complex mystical ideas which are hard to understand today.

Life at the Fortress was not easy. The prisoners had to work very hard on the Elector's estates. At that time, Friedrich had an old, unfinished



baroque castle renovated not far from the Fortress. Behind this small castle there was a rectangular lake which made it quite unique. Now instead of the old basin the Elector wanted to create an artificial lake, but when he came to visit the building site he did not want to see any prisoners at work. Therefore all the work had to be done during the night, which was extremely hard for the prisoners. Even throughout the cold fall and winter months they went on digging out the lake, and some of the prisoners died because of illness and exhaustion. On the other hand, some people from the surrounding villages got in touch with the Separatists. To some of the villagers the Separatists appeared as Christian martyrs who obviously suffered for their faith. A few men and women followed them and also separated from church. When the castle and the lake were finished the Elector called it 'Monrepos' (My Rest). Today it is a very popular place to visit, and although the artificial islands in the lake are not open to the public you can imagine how hard the prisoners had to work to dig the lake. Especially on cold, misty days you get an image of the cruel conditions under which those people served.



*Monrepos Castle, painted by Jean Baptist Seele. King Friedrich, who opposed and arrested the Separatists, is in the foreground with his court company. At right is the artificial lake which the imprisoned Separatists helped to dig. In the background is the Fortress of Hohenasperg, where the King had the Separatists imprisoned.*

Courtesy of Schloss Ludwigsburg KRG 1157



At the Fortress, the Separatists were regarded as exemplary prisoners. Some of them were sent away with huge sums of money, and they neither escaped nor stole any of the money. Others worked as craftsmen in the castle of Stuttgart, where they carved the marble for the Marble State room, a central spot in the Royal palace. The king appreciated the perfect processing of the marble which required very hard work.

When the fixed prison sentences ended Friedrich did not allow the Separatists to be released. Instead, he ordered them to be questioned again whether they would change their attitude and become obedient citizens again. If they refused they should be kept on the Fortress until they changed their mind. Many of the Separatists would not give in, and they kept staying on Hohenasperg for years. Actually, a few of the Separatists remained prisoners for twenty years!

Back in the home villages, the prisoner's women had to run the farm or the craft enterprise together with relatives and friends. But some of them were as passionate Separatists as their husbands, and they held back their children from school. They were not afraid of the fines they had to pay, and they absolutely refused to send their children. The authorities reacted as harshly as they did with their husbands. Many Separatist women were arrested and sent to a penitentiary or working-house, and many children were brought to the stately orphan's house at Stuttgart. Astonishingly, there they were educated properly, and two boys from Rottenacker succeeded in their career. Matthaeus Schacher became a renowned teacher while a Johannes Breimaier was esteemed in Wuerttemberg as a painter.

At Rottenacker and at the other Separatist villages, most of the Separatists tried to eschew further prison sentences by avoiding any action which could provoke the authorities. They did not return to church but they behaved less aggressive than earlier. In this situation, the women appear as having been more radical than the male Separatists. They were the ones who still held back children from school, and they kept the Separatist ideas alive. Some marriages broke up, however, when one partner was not willing to tolerate the Separatist attitude of the other one.

When the Huber brothers and Stephan Breimaier together, with other very radical Separatists from all over Wuerttemberg, were away at the Fortress of Asperg their fellow Separatists from Ulm took over the leading position within the movement. A pipemaker named Johann Michael Baeumler established himself as the new leader. He had been converted to Separatism around 1804 by Konrad Schacher and Georg Striebel

from Rottenacker. From the beginning his position was never as strong or authoritarian as George Rapp's had been among his followers. Although Baeumler's appearance is described as less attractive because his head was very big, he squinted a little, and he was limping, he seemed to be the right person to direct the Separatists. Obviously he managed to establish a higher level of organization about which we know almost nothing but which became effective later on. In the beginning Baeumler and his fellows were rather active in the region south of Ulm in Western Bavaria. Some followers lived in the city of Memmingen, like Ulm a former Imperial city. The group was very small because very few men and women were ready to bear the cross and live outside the church.

With Joseph Baeumler, it is almost the same as with the Rottenacker Separatists or Barbara Grubenmann. We do not know much about his early years. He appears to have worked as a teacher in a little village for two years before going to the city of Ulm. There he married Barbara Danzer, and he bought a house. Like George Rapp's wife Christina, Barbara Baeumler did not play any important role among the Separatists, and she is hardly ever mentioned. She died at Ulm in 1804, and Baeumler did not remarry immediately as many widowers did after the passing of their spouse. At the same time we do not know if Baeumler himself preached in any Separatist assemblies. Like the Huber brothers and Breimaier, he traveled around to meet his followers but he was never punished or imprisoned. There are some reports about him which say that he tried to make new followers but with very limited success. But generally there is not too much information about him.

However, we know a little more about Baeumler's religious ideas because a little handwritten songbook which he possessed turned up in the Church Archives at Stuttgart. It's just six song lyrics that are included in that hymnal, but nevertheless it appears most important because we get an idea of what was sung in the Separatist assemblies. We do not know if Baeumler himself wrote the lyrics or if he only copied them. They were sung along to popular melodies, some of which were jolly ones played at village dances. This was another thing that worried the church: contrary to the sustained melodies of the church hymns, the Separatist songs were vibrant, happy ones, accompanied by instruments like fiddle, zither, or guitar. We know that one Separatist from Rottenacker even had an organ built in his house to accompany the singing in the assemblies. Despite all that, some of the lyrics are contemplative, like *O selige Stunden* (O blessed

hours) or *Hab mir ernstlich vorgenommen, daß ich woll in Himmel kommen* (I sincerely decided that I want to go to heaven. I do not want to lose heaven, and therefore I will change my life. At all costs I will do so because for heaven nothing is too much).

But there are also triumphant lyrics like *Auf, Triumph, es kommt die Stunde* (Triumph, triumph, the hour will come, where the sad, beloved Zion will rejoice. Babylon will be destroyed and will cry about her sorrow, pains, and griefs). These raw translations of the originally rhymed lyrics show their mystical content. The Separatists knew the Bible and especially the relevant apocalyptic texts by heart so everyone knew that according to the eighteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, Babylon meant the official church. On the other hand, the Separatists rejoiced about the future fall of Babylon as described in the Book of Revelation: *Viktoria, Viktoria, der Sieg ist nicht mehr weit* (Victoria, Victoria, the victory is near!). In one of the contemplative songs, *Meine Seele sehnet sich*, the name Zoar appears for the first time: *My soul is longing for silence until it enfolds in you, Father. Do always lead me out of danger and pain to your peaceful Zoar – if it is your will*. Interestingly enough, the lyrics to three of the six songs, *Hab mir ernstlich vorgenommen*, *Meine Seele sehnet sich*, and *Bei der Weisheit wohnen* (Living near the wisdom) were included in a hymnbook of the Zoar community *Sammlung auserlesener geistlicher Lieder, zum gemeinschaftlichen Gesang und eigenen Gebrauch in Christlichen Familien* published in 1855, after Bimeler's death. Obviously the hymn *Auf, Triumph, es kommt die Stunde* was outdated because Jesus had not come again in 1836 as predicted by the Separatists. It is an open question whether the young generation really understood all those references to the Book of Revelation in this song.

Although Rottenacker remained the center of the Separatist movement, around this time there apparently were different kinds of Separatists. As no dominant leader emerged to succeed Rapp and establish a mandatory religious system, every local group shared its own ideas. For instance, up in Northern Wuerttemberg some groups adored French Emperor Napoleon as the re-born Christ. In 1804, Napoleon had crowned himself at Paris, and now he conquered many European countries. By the French Emperor's grace, the Elector Friedrich of Wuerttemberg was made a king in 1806, and Wuerttemberg rose to a Kingdom. Again, the country was enlarged by territories of noblemen and former abbeys. In reverse, the new King Friedrich had to deliver soldiers from Wuerttemberg for the French army and the Emperor's wars. The Separatists generally followed strong pacifist ideas, and when the young men were levied as soldiers they got in serious trouble. Some of them refused to become soldiers and were imprisoned at

the Fortress of Asperg.

Despite all that, Emperor Napoleon was very much admired in Wuerttemberg because he appeared as a very strong, modern monarch who introduced a uniform law and other uniform norms in the countries he controlled. Some Separatists at the villages of Nordheim and Horrheim went as far as regarding Napoleon as the returned Son of God. At Horrheim, a Separatist named Johann Michael Hahnenkratt named his twins born in 1811 'Napoleon' and 'Marie Luise' after Napoleon's wife, the French Empress.

But for most people even by contemporary standards the religious worship of Napoleon as a God appeared crazy. Therefore, the authorities did not take these religious aberrations too seriously, contrary to another habit of many Separatists. Everybody who wore stars was heavily punished so some Separatists were hiding them under their clothes, displaying them only when they met their fellows. It is no accident that later on in Zoar the stars played such an important role, They were a reminder of the persecutions back home in Wuerttemberg and the crucial symbol of the Separatist beliefs.

Back in Rottenacker the Separatist group had shrunk because some members were imprisoned for many years. Until 1806, a bailiff, as a representative of Wuerttemberg, had resided in a big, splendid house near the church. But when Wuerttemberg became a kingdom he was obsolete and so he left Rottenacker and an empty house. In 1811 a group of Separatists bought the building and established a community. Now in Wuerttemberg it was not possible to live legally in a community of goods because everything was based on private property. But although the members of the group formally kept their private properties they lived a common life where everybody was allowed and obliged to regard all the properties as common goods. We do not know how it worked and what conflicts arose among the members of that small community. But obviously, there they embraced the idea of a communal life in Wuerttemberg. Perhaps they were inspired by the Harmonists in New Harmony, Indiana, because Rapp and his followers also came from Wuerttemberg, and reports of those successful communities were spread back in Wuerttemberg. During these years the authorities appear to have been more tolerant with the Separatists, because firstly they were no more provoked, and secondly they became aware that the Separatists did not make too many new followers.

But the situation changed dramatically when the Kingdom of

Wuerttemberg faced a severe crisis. French Emperor Napoleon conquered Russia, and King Friedrich had to deliver twelve thousand soldiers. In a very cold winter the campaign ended in a catastrophe, and only about five hundred of these soldiers returned. Moreover, a series of crop failures caused inflation and distress among the poorer part of the population. 1816 was the worst year at all. During the previous year a volcano in Indonesia had erupted, and the ashes of that dramatic eruption polluted the atmosphere all around the world. As a result, heavy rains and cold weathers destroyed the crops almost completely in 1816. Many people starved as the food prices exploded. King Friedrich had prohibited emigration from Wuerttemberg because he needed young men as soldiers. But now it was impossible for him to uphold the ban, and in 1816 it was lifted. At the same time, the Czar of Russia had sent offers of cheap land in Southern Russia to Wuerttemberg—where his sister Katharina was queen—because he wanted to lure thrifty settlers to this part of his country. In 1816 and 1817 about ten thousand people from Wuerttemberg left their country for Southern Russia, among them some Separatists from Rottenacker. Only about half of the emigrants reached their destination, the others died of epidemics.

At the Fortress of Asperg, the Separatist prisoners sent an letter to King Friedrich, offering to leave Wuerttemberg for America if they were allowed six weeks' time to settle their affairs. The King granted permission, and so most of the Separatists were released from the Fortress. But as soon as they were free they followed a different plan. On the border to the Kingdom of Bavaria, a bankrupt's estate named Brandenburg was offered for sale. The Separatists founded a society which offered to buy Brandenburg in order to establish a religious community. They hoped that King Friedrich would allow such a community in the most remote part of his country where the Separatists obviously could not do any harm. But when they sent him a petition the king ordered his officials to tear the paper and send it back. Shortly afterwards the King suddenly died, and the Separatists saw it as a sign from God that their worst enemy had perished. But his son and successor King Wilhelm also refused to license the community, so the Separatists had no other choice than to emigrate to America.

Again, it is mysterious that Johann Michael Baeumler does not appear among those signing the Brandenburg petition. In the summer of 1817 a group of Separatists from the Rottenacker circle boarded the ship 'Vaterlandsliebe' and sailed to America. This seems to have been the core

group. Other Separatists came on other ships, including Baeumler himself. And there is even a list of passengers on which Barbara Grubenmann appears! This would support Hilda Dischinger Morhart's statement that the woman from Switzerland went on a ship for America but died during the voyage. When such a case happened the body was thrown into the sea. But on other lists her name is missing so her fate after she left Rottenacker still remains a mystery.

George Rapp offered the arriving Separatists to settle with him and become members of his community at New Harmony, Indiana but they refused. Most probably they had learned how authoritarian Rapp had become in his society. Some of the men and women of the Rottenacker circle had suffered as prisoners at the Fortress and in the jails for many years. Obviously they did not want to be directed again by an authoritarian leader who had imposed sexual abstinence in his society. Instead they bought land in Ohio which had been offered in 1803 to George Rapp as well. But in founding a community of their own they faced the same problems as Rapp had faced over a decade earlier. They were short of money, and they needed a leader who was responsible for their religious and financial welfare. Stephan Huber from Rottenacker who had been a prominent Separatist back in Wuerttemberg did not have the abilities to cover that position. Johann Michael Baeumler appeared on the scene and he was chosen as the leader of the new community which was named Zoar. In America he changed his name to Joseph M. Bimeler to make communication easier. It turned out that he was a man of many talents, which in fact he had to be, because times were very hard. The community faced some severe problems which threatened its existence. They not only had to build houses and infrastructure but they established some enterprises as well to earn money. This meant that the Zoar Society was forced to communicate with its American neighbors and set up a trading business. Although the states of Ohio and Pennsylvania were very much influenced by Germans, English was the main language.

In this critical situation—a similar crisis can be watched during the first years after 1804 at Harmony as well—drastic steps had to be taken to avoid a complete failure. First, the majority of settlers were female which is not necessarily a disadvantage. But if a woman gets pregnant she will not be able to work as hard as required in building houses, cultivating the fields, etc. The community was not able to hire workers because assets were small, and there were considerable differences in the individual families' fortunes.



After some very hard discussions it was decided to establish a Society by following Rapp's example where every member inserted all his money. From here on, the members of the Zoar Society lived in a community of goods. Furthermore, they decided to live in celibacy for some time so the women were able to work like the male members. But while the decision for a communal life was disputed by some, the decision to live abstinent seems to have been voluntary if dictated by the conditions.

Those early years of the Zoar are most fascinating because actually the Zoarites were forced to establish a new tradition. They could not rely on the leading figures of the earlier period back in Wuerttemberg. It turned out that Joseph M. Bimeler was never as authoritarian a leader as George Rapp. From the beginning the position of the member families was much stronger, and Bimeler appears to have been a more tolerant personality than Rapp. Both men died around the same time, both societies kept on existing under a new leadership. However, after Bimeler's death no charismatic religious leader emerged within the Zoar Society. The religious ideas of the founder fathers were virtually frozen which meant that it turned out almost impossible to pass them on to a new generation. Almost inevitably, during the decades after the first leaders' passing, more and more problems arose. The Harmony Society struggled with the demise of its membership and the advancing age of the remaining members. The Zoar Society struggled with the attitudes of the third generation. Young people were no longer willing to follow their fathers' and grandfathers' ideals. They became soldiers during the Civil War. Later on they criticized the community of goods which supported the lazy, uncaring members as much as those who worked hard. Finally, both societies had to be dissolved in the 1890s.

So why do we celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of Zoar in 2017? There are different reasons. First, a community with a new social concept was established two hundred years ago at Zoar. Second, the Separatists took advantage of the religious liberty in the United States of America. Third, they followed a vision that all men are created equal and that the weak ones are as much supported as the strong ones. We saw that following this ideals was not easy, and finally the Society failed. But perhaps the message remains vital even today, in a modern society two hundred years later.