

**CHURCH CONSTITUTION OF THE
BOHEMIAN AND MORAVIAN
BRETHREN: THE ORIGINAL LATIN,
WITH A TRANSLATION, NOTES,
AND INTRODUCTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649549368

Church Constitution of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren: The Original Latin, with a Translation, Notes, and Introduction by B. Seiffert

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

B. SEIFFERTH

**CHURCH CONSTITUTION OF THE
BOHEMIAN AND MORAVIAN
BRETHREN: THE ORIGINAL LATIN,
WITH A TRANSLATION, NOTES,
AND INTRODUCTION**

704Y
CHURCH CONSTITUTION

OF THE

BOHEMIAN AND MORAVIAN BRETHREN.

The Original Latin,

WITH A

TRANSLATION, NOTES, AND INTRODUCTION

BY

B. SEIFFERTH,

BISHOP OF THE BRETHREN'S CHURCH.

"Humaniter accepi, et benigne ab omnibus in quorum manus venerint hæc nostra cognosci petimus: et hinc potius quam ex adversariorum aut vulgi sermonibus, aut historicorum etiam quorundam et aliorum minime veracibus scriptis, de rebus nostris statuere."—*Preamium ad Confessionem Fratrum Bohemorum*, A.D. 1535.

LONDON:

W. MALLALIEU AND CO., 97, HATTON GARDEN.

MDCCCLXVI.

c. n. s. d. b.

	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. RATIO DISCIPLINÆ ORDINISQUE ECCLESIASTICI IN UNITATE FRATRUM BOHEMORUM	23
3. TRANSLATION OF THE FOREGOING	91
4. NOTES	177
5. TABLE OF CONTENTS	199

7. Lambert June 7/17

INTRODUCTION.

// It is an interesting fact, that there existed in Bohemia and Moravia a reformed Christian Church, distinguished for the purity of its faith and worship, and for its scriptural constitution and discipline, in the century previous to the commencement of the Reformation, and sixty years before Luther began his work. It was formed among the more spiritually minded of the followers of Huss, after the subsidence of those intestine commotions which were consequent on the death of that faithful martyr of Christ. These men felt in conscience bound to withdraw from the Calixtines, who, with the exception of giving the cup to the laity in the Communion, retained the unscriptural dogmas and usages of the Papal church. Having obtained permission from Podiebrad, the Regent, they retired in the year 1457 to the Barony of Lititz, situated in the north-east of Bohemia. Here they were served in the word and sacraments by ministers who had seceded from the Calixtines or from the Papists. Their numbers were soon increased by the addition of persons from the neighbourhood and from other parts of the country, who were like-minded with themselves. At an early period of this association it assumed the name of "Unitas Fratrum," or Unity of the Brethren; rules were laid down for its regulation, and elders were chosen to pre-

side over it ; and, as congregations in connexion with it were formed in other places, synods, consisting of the elders, ministers, nobles, and representatives of the people, were held from time to time. And thus, before the adoption of that measure, which was to give them a distinct existence as a church, they had already declared their adherence to those doctrines of the Christian faith, which they maintained to the last, and had laid the foundation of that church constitution which is unfolded at large in the following Treatise.

It was in the year 1467, ten years after their secession from the Calixtines, and after they had in vain inquired for a church holding the faith in its purity, with which they could unite, that the resolution was solemnly taken by them in Synod assembled, to seek episcopal ordination from a congregation of the Waldenses at that time situated in the neighbouring country of Austria. For this purpose three of their number were deputed to visit the Waldenses, who welcomed them as brethren, and willingly acceded to their request.* The episcopal element, which was now introduced, led to a modification of their church constitution. The Bishops had seats in the governing Council (in which the senior Bishop always presided), while the office of ordaining to the different degrees of the ministry was of course dis-

* Camerarius, *Historica Narratio*, pp. 103, 104. Comenius, *Historia Fratrum Bohemorum*, § 61. Wengiersky, *Historia Ecclesiarum Slavonicarum*, lib. I. c. 8. Also Gindely's *Geschichte der Böhmischn Brüder*, vol. i. p. 37.

charged solely by them. The whole organization presented a combination of presbyterian and episcopal government. The executive power was lodged in a Board, consisting of bishops and presbyters, while the ultimate authority lay in the Synods, which were stately convened.*

That the system described in the account which we now republish must have been gradually developed, according as circumstances required, may naturally be supposed. Yet in all its main features it existed at an early period. Before the close of the fifteenth century it had assumed in its outline that definite form which is delineated in the "Ratio," although, in regard to the minor arrangements, alterations were subsequently introduced. Gindely, a Roman Catholic historian, fixes the period of this permanent settlement at A. D. 1496-1500.†

When the Brethren sent their several deputations to Luther, it was this that especially struck with astonish-

* Comenius remarks, with reference to the adaptability of the constitution of the Brethren's Church to different forms of political government: "It suits a monarchy, because it has a bishop; an aristocracy, because it has a senate; and a democracy, because it has a synod. Hence Calvin and Bucer, who both highly approved of the order of the Brethren, when invited to diverse places for the reformation of churches, so applied it severally as suited the political government. Calvin instituted presbytery in the republic of Geneva, and Bucer left the episcopate in the kingdom of England. Whether they acted rightly in thus separating the things which work better in union, is shown by the strifes which have thence arisen, and which have with so much injury been agitated among brethren."—*De Bono Unitatis*, § 8.

† *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder*, von Anton Gindely, vol. i. p. 80.

ment the great Reformer. "These Brethren," said he, "do not surpass us in purity of doctrine, but they far excel us in the regular discipline by which they blessedly govern their churches; and in this matter they have the greater praise, which it behoves us to yield to them for the glory of God, and for the sake of truth."*

The outlines of this system may be found in those "Confessions of Faith," which, on several occasions, the Brethren presented to their Rulers, or other men of authority, for the purpose of removing prejudices and warding off persecution. In the Confession addressed to King Wladislaw, A. D. 1504, and the two Letters in answer to the charges of a certain Doctor Augustine, in 1508, traces of their church regulations are met with.† But they are, of course, brought out with much more prominence in those documents which were intended for a friendly eye. When the Reformation began to shine on northern Germany, and some of the neighbouring lands, the Brethren found among the newly awakened minds, men who could sympathise with them in spiritual matters, and who felt an interest in becoming acquainted with the regulations as well as with the doctrine of their church. Their Apologia, which was presented in the year 1538 to the Protestant

* Lasitius, De Ecclesiasticâ Disciplinâ, etc. Fratrum Bohemorum.

† These documents seem to have been first printed in a folio volume entitled "Fasciculus Rerum Expetendarum et Fugiendarum." A.D. 1535, Colonia.