

Schwarzenau Brethren

The **Schwarzenau Brethren**, the **German Baptist Brethren**, **Dunkers**, **Dunkards**, **Tunkers**,^[1] or simply the **German Baptists**, are an Anabaptist group that originally dissented from several Lutheran and Reformed churches that were officially established in some German-speaking states in western and southwestern parts of the Holy Roman Empire as a result of the Radical Pietist ferment of the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

Hopeful of the imminent return of Christ, the founding Brethren abandoned Reformed and Lutheran churches that were established in some German states and formed a new church in 1708 when their apocalyptic hopes were still unfulfilled. They thereby attempted to translate "the Philadelphian idea of love into concrete congregational ordinances obligatory for all the members."^[2] Unlike the Philadelphians, Brethren rejected Leade's embrace of direct revelation and emphasized early ("Apostolic" or "primitive") Christianity as the binding standard for congregational practices. The founding Brethren were also in conversation with Mennonites and influenced by Anabaptist writings.

In German-speaking Europe, the Brethren became known as *Neue Täufer* (New Baptists), in distinction from the older Baptist groups with which they had no formal ties. In the United States, they became popularly known as "Dunkers", "Dunkards", or "Tunkers", forms that stem from the German verb *tunken* (Pennsylvanian German *dunke*), to dip, to immerse. Another religious group related historically to the same Radical Pietist ferment as the Brethren is the Community of True Inspiration.

German Baptists are not to be confused with Primitive, Separate, Southern, Particular, and all other mainline Baptist denominations who, although generally unified on rudimentary doctrines such as baptism, would have conflicting views in other areas, such as non-resistance, etc. In addition, German Baptists are not to be confused with a recent, small, renewal movement of "Plain," "Covered" Baptists, who, for all intents and purposes, have comparable beliefs and practice of the historic German Baptists for the most part (albeit in wide variance), but are of different origins.

Contents

History

Beliefs and practices

Divisions

- Early schisms

- "Old Order" vs. "Progressives"

- Divisions within traditionalists

- Divisions within progressives

- Brethren divisions

Brethren World Assembly

The Brethren Card

Unrelated Brethren

References

Further reading

History

The Schwarzenau Brethren was first organized in 1708 under the leadership of Alexander Mack (1679–1735) in Schwarzenau, Germany, now part of Bad Berleburg in North Rhine-Westphalia. They believed that both the Lutheran and Reformed churches were taking liberties with the true, pure message of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament,^[1] so as they began to have the New Testament available in German and read it for themselves, they rejected established liturgy, including infant baptism and popular Eucharistic practices in favor of following New Testament practices. The founding Brethren were broadly influenced by Radical Pietist understandings of an invisible, (nondenominational) church of awakened Christians who would fellowship together in purity and love, reaching out to the lost and hurting in Jesus' name and working together while awaiting Christ's return.

A notable influence was Ernest Christopher Hochmann von Hochenau, a traveling Pietist minister. While living in Schriesheim, his home town, Mack invited Hochmann to come and minister there. Like others who influenced the Brethren, Hochmann considered the pure church to be spiritual, and did not believe that an organized church was necessary. By 1708, the date of the first Brethren baptisms, Mack had rejected this position in favor of forming a separate church with visible rules and ordinances—including threefold baptism by immersion, a Love Feast (that combined communion with footwashing and an evening meal), anointing, and use of the "ban" against wayward members.

Religious persecution drove the Brethren to take refuge in Friesland, in the Netherlands. In 1719 Peter Becker brought a group to Pennsylvania. In 1720 forty Brethren families settled in Surhuisterveen in Friesland. They settled among the Mennonites and remained there until 1729, when all but a handful emigrated to America, in three separate groups from 1719 to 1733.

Peter Becker organized the first American congregation at Germantown, Pennsylvania, on December 25, 1723. In 1743 Christopher Sauer, an early pastor and a printer by trade, printed a Bible in German, the first published in a European language in North America.^[1]

Many members of the Schwarzenau Brethren came from the Southwest of Germany, the same region where the Pennsylvania German dialect originated. Because they settled in Pennsylvania among other Germans, who mainly came from the Palatinate and adjacent regions, they took part in the dialect leveling, that was the cradle of Pennsylvania German. Their language therefore was or soon became what today is called "Pennsylvania Dutch" or better "Pennsylvania German".

In 1782 the Brethren forbade slaveholding by its members. In 1871 these Brethren adopted the title German Baptist Brethren at their Annual Meeting. The group continued to expand and from Pennsylvania, they migrated chiefly westward.^[1] By 1908 they were most numerous in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota^[1] Arkansas, and California.

Beliefs and practices

“ [Brethren] take the Scripture as their only guide, in matters both of faith and practice. ..such Christians I have never seen as they are: so averse are they to all sin, and to many things that other Christians esteem lawful, that they not only refuse to swear, go to war, etc. but are so afraid of doing any thing contrary to the commands of Christ, that no temptation would prevail upon them ever to sue any person at law, for either name, character, estate, or any debt, be it ever so just. They are industrious, sober, temperate, kind, charitable people; envying not the great, nor despising the mean, they read much, they sing and pray much, they are constant

”

attendants upon the worship of God, their dwelling houses are all houses of prayer. They walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless both in public and private. They bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. No noise of rudeness, shameless mirth, loud vain laughter is heard within their doors. The law of kindness is in their mouths; no sourness or moroseness, disgraces their religion; and whatsoever they believe their Savior commands, they practice without requiring or regarding what others do.

—Elhenan Winchester (Universalist preacher), 1803, qtd. in Rummel, Merle C. (November 2009) [1998], *Four Mile Church: THE DUNKERS* (http://www.cob-net.org/docs/brethrenlife_dunkers.htm)



Brethren emphasize simplicity and humility in their life, including their architecture—as exemplified by this simple church built by Dunkers in Germantown, Philadelphia, pictured c. 1905.

The beliefs of the *Schwarzenau Brethren* include triple or trine immersion baptism, which provides that the candidate kneel in water and be immersed, face first, three times in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit;^[1] the New Testament as the infallible guide in spiritual matters;^[1] communion service celebrated in the evening, accompanied by the love feast; the ceremony of the washing of feet; the salutation of the Holy kiss; prayer and anointing with oil over the sick; and nonresistance.^[1] See also The Brethren Card.

Many of the early *Schwarzenau Brethren* believed in universal restoration, a variant of universal salvation that foretold that after the judgment and harsh punishment described in the New Testament, God's love would one day restore all souls to God. Brethren typically kept this teaching to themselves, and it was

largely abandoned by the late nineteenth century.^[3] They were among the first to take Christian universalism to America when they emigrated there.^[4]

The church leaders are ministers, teachers, and deacons, though the positions may vary slightly in the various branches. The official role of elder, while no longer recognized in many congregations, was the most respected position in the church. Ministers and deacons are elected by the members of the congregation in which they hold membership. Ministers preach the word, baptize, assist deacons in anointing, solemnize marriages, and officiate at communion. Deacons serve the church by arranging for visitation to members or their families during illness or crisis, and often function in the capacity of stewards.

Divisions

Early schisms

The first schism from the general body of German Baptist Brethren occurred in 1728, but more followed after the American Revolution, as different groups sought their own ways. The first separatists became the Seventh Day Dunkers, whose distinctive principle was that they believed that Saturday was true Sabbath.^[1] They were founded by Johann Conrad Beissel (1690–1768).^[1]

In 1732, Beissel-led establishment of a semi-monastic community with a convent and a monastery at Ephrata, in what is now Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.^[1] While celibate, the community also welcomed believing families; they lived nearby and participated in joint worship. The monastic feature and celibacy were gradually abandoned^[1] after the American Revolution.

In 1814 the Society was incorporated as the Seventh Day Baptists^[1] or Seventh Day German Baptist Church. Several branches were established, some of which still exist.^[5] A group called the Church of God or "New Dunkers" withdrew in 1848. They disbanded in August 1962.

"Old Order" vs. "Progressives"

The "Old Order" Dunkers opposed 19th-century Brethren adoption of innovations such as revival meetings, Sunday Schools, and foreign missionary work. Stressing church discipline, Annual Meeting authority, and the preservation of the "ancient order" of church ordinances, worship, and dress, they formed the Old German Baptist Brethren (OGBB) in 1881.

In 1882 the Progressives, who stressed evangelism and objected to distinctive dress and strong Annual Meeting authority, formed The Brethren Church at the time of H. R. Holsinger.

The largest body continued as German Baptist Brethren until 1908, when they adopted the title Church of the Brethren. The current Church of the Brethren found itself representing those parishioners who constitute the "middle ground" on matters of doctrine and practice as Christians.

Divisions within traditionalists

In 1913 and 1915 the Old Brethren, centered in Salida, California, Dayton Ohio and Camden, Indiana, withdrew from the Old German Baptist Brethren (OGBB). In 1921, the Old Order German Baptist Brethren, centered in Dayton, Ohio broke with the OGBB. Attempts in 1929–30 to reunite the Old Brethren and OGBB were unsuccessful. The Old Brethren subsequently divided into two groups, the more conservative of which took the name of Old Brethren German Baptists and was centered in Camden, Indiana and Missouri. A small conservative group calling themselves The German Baptist Brethren split from the OGBB after 1996. The most recent split came in 2009 with the establishment of the Old German Baptist Brethren, New Conference.

Because of what some believed was a gradual drift away from apostolic standards, in 1926 a small group of conservatives withdrew from the Church of the Brethren and formed the Dunkard Brethren Church.

Divisions within progressives

In 1939 the "Progressive" Brethren Church experienced another schism, with those seeking an open position to the issue of eternal security maintaining the name Brethren Church with headquarters in Ashland, Ohio, and those seeking a firm affirmation of eternal security becoming the National Fellowship of Brethren Churches, since renamed Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC), commonly called the **Grace Brethren** Church, headquartered in Winona Lake, Indiana.

In 1992, because of doctrinal disagreements within the FGBC (primarily related to the connection between water baptism and church membership), the Conservative Grace Brethren Churches, International (CGBCI) was formed. It has no centralized headquarters at this time.

Brethren divisions

- German Baptist Brethren (Schwarzenau Brethren, Dunkers), changed their name to Church of the Brethren in 1908
 - Ephrata Cloister (1732–2009; known as German Seventh Day Baptist Church from 1814 then on)

- Church of God (New Dunkers) (1848–1962)
- Old German Baptist Brethren (1881–)
 - Old Brethren (1913–)
 - Old Brethren German Baptists (1939–)
 - Old Order German Baptist Brethren (1921–)
 - Old German Baptist Brethren, New Conference (2009–)
- The Brethren Church (1883–)
 - Grace Brethren Church (1939–)
 - Conservative Grace Brethren Churches, International (1992–)
- Dunkard Brethren Church (1926–): Though many churches retain the word "Dunkard" in their names, they may be congregations of more conservative "Old Order German Baptists", less conservative "Progressives", or the current "Church of the Brethren", also called in the 19th century "Fraternity of German Baptists" or simply "German Baptists", or within the community called "Dunkards".

Other associated churches which associate with the term German Baptist include:

- Brethren Reformed Church

Brethren World Assembly

As of 2003, six Brethren bodies meet together in the Brethren World Assembly: Church of the Brethren, Conservative Grace Brethren Churches, International, Dunkard Brethren, Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, Old German Baptist Brethren, and The Brethren Church. The first Assembly was held in Pennsylvania in 1992. They met at Elizabethtown College and celebrated the 250th anniversary of the first known Brethren Annual Meeting in 1742. That first meeting gathered near Conestoga in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The second Assembly met in 1998 at Bridgewater College in Bridgewater, Virginia. The third Assembly was held by Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, in 2003. The Assembly represents some 600,000 members around the world.

The Brethren Card

Brethren are noncreedal, but have summarized their beliefs in a variety of ways for the purpose of evangelical outreach. One such statement, developed during the late nineteenth century was the *Brethren's Card*, a version of which was endorsed for general distribution by the 1923 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. Variations on the Card were used by both the Old German Baptist Brethren and the Church of the Brethren.^[6] This is an early version that was widely circulated:^[7]

Be it known unto all men,

1. That there is a people who, as little children (Luke 18:17), accept the Word of the New Testament as a message from heaven (Hebrews 1:1–2), and teach it in full (2 Timothy 4:1–2, Matthew 28:20).
2. They baptize believers by trine immersion (Matthew 28:19), with a forward action (Romans 6:5), and for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and lay hands on those baptized, asking upon them the gift of God's Spirit (Acts 19:5–6).
3. They follow the command and example of washing one another's feet (John 13:4–17).

4. They take the Lord's Supper at night (John 13:30), at one and the same time, tarrying one for another (1 Corinthians 11:33–34).
5. They greet one another with a holy kiss (Acts 20:37, Romans 16:16).
6. They take the communion at night, after supper, as did the Lord (Mark 14:17, 23).
7. They teach all the doctrines of Christ, peace (Hebrews 12:14), love (1 Corinthians 13), unity (Ephesians 4), both faith and works (James 2:17–20, Ephesians 2:8–10).
8. They labor for nonconformity to the world in its vain and wicked customs (Romans 12:2).
9. They advocate nonswearing (Matthew 5:34, 37), anti-secretism (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17), opposition to hatred, violence and war (Matthew 5:21–25 and 5:43–48, John 18:36), doing good unto all men (Matthew 5:44, 46).
10. They anoint and lay hands on the sick (James 5:14, 15).
11. They give the Bread of Life, the message of the common salvation offered unto all mankind without money or price (Matthew 10:8).
12. Dear reader, for the above we contend earnestly, and you, with all men, are entreated to hear, to examine and accept it as the word, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

The 1923 version, influenced by both increasing formalism and the Fundamentalist Christianity of the 1910s differed in both tone and content:^[8]

1. This body of Christians known as Brethren originated early in the eighteenth century: the church being a natural outgrowth of the Pietistic movement following the Reformation.
2. Firmly accepts and teaches the fundamental evangelical doctrines of the inspiration of the Bible, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the sin-pardoning value of his atonement, his resurrection from the tomb, ascension and personal and visible return; and the resurrection, both of the just and unjust (John 5:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).
3. Observes the following New Testament rites: Baptism of repentant believers by trine immersion for the remission of sins (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38); feet-washing (John 13:1–20, 1 Timothy 5:10); love feast (Luke 22:20, John 13:4, 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, Jude 12); communion (Matthew 26:26–30); the holy Christian greeting or salutation (Romans 16:16, Acts 20:37); proper modest appearance in worship (1 Corinthians 11:2–16); the anointing with oil for healing in the name of the Lord (James 5:13–18, Mark 6:13); laying on of hands (Acts 8:17, 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14). These rites are representative of spiritual facts which obtain in the lives of true believers, and as such are essential factors in the development of the Christian life.
4. Emphasizes: daily devotion for the individual, and family worship for the home (Ephesians 6:18–20, Philippians 4:8–9); stewardship of time, talents and money (Matthew 25:14–30); taking care of the fatherless, widows, poor, sick and aged (Acts 6:1–7).
5. Opposes on Scriptural grounds: War and the taking of human life (the Antithesis of the Law; Romans 12:19–21, Isaiah 53:7–12); violence in personal and industrial controversy (Matthew 7:12, Romans 13:8–10); intemperance in all things (Titus 2:2, Galatians 5:19–26, Ephesians 5:18); going to law, especially against our Christian brethren (1 Corinthians 6:1–9); divorce and remarriage, (Mark 10:2–12, Luke 16:18, 1 Corinthians 7); every form of oath (Matthew 5:33–37, James 5:12); membership in secret societies (2 Corinthians 6:14–18); games of chance and sinful amusements (1 Thessalonians 5:22, 1 Peter 2:11, Romans 12:17); extravagant and immodest dress (1 Timothy 2:8–10, 1 Peter 3:1–6).
6. Labors earnestly, in harmony with the Great Commission, for the evangelization of the world; for the conversion of men to Jesus Christ; and for the realization of the life and love of Jesus Christ living in every true believer (Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–16, 2 Corinthians 3:18).
7. Maintains the New Testament as its only creed, in harmony with which the above brief doctrinal statement is made.

This version was officially circulated by the Church of the Brethren in its publications until the middle part of the twentieth century, and it continues to be issued through the efforts of Brethren Revival Fellowship.

The teachings of some other groups are similar to this, but can differ widely in emphasis and scope. For example, the Grace Brethren are varied on the requirement of trine immersion, do not practice the Christian salutation, do not oppose war, and do not formally adhere to plain dress or modesty. Only the Conservative Grace Brethren Churches have retained a published use of the motto, "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible".

In the progressive and liberal Church of the Brethren, significant emphasis is placed on social issues. In the Brethren (Ashland) and Grace Brethren groups, significant emphasis is placed on exegesis of the Bible. Several of the groups maintain a larger "Doctrinal Statement" or treatise, but only for the purpose of clarifying their Biblical position.

Most Brethren groups maintain that the Bible is the sole authority and will revise their statement of faith if they perceive any difference between it and sound Biblical doctrine. Some of the Old Order groups incorporate church authority as a mechanism for unifying the interpretation and application of Biblical teachings.

Unrelated Brethren

There are several religious groups named Brethren that are not related to the Schwarzenau Brethren movement. The Moravian Brethren and Swiss Brethren are not related to the Schwarzenau Brethren. The Plymouth Brethren arose in England and Ireland early in the 19th century. The United Brethren originated in 18th-century Pennsylvania with William Otterbein and Martin Boehm. The River Brethren movement adopted the view of trine immersion and most other Anabaptist beliefs and practices from the Schwarzenau Brethren. Today, the Old Order River Brethren are very similar to the Old Brethren. The Apostolic United Brethren is a group within the Latter Day Saint movement and is not related to the Schwarzenau Brethren.


References

1. Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "German Baptist Brethren" (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/German_Baptist_Brethren). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. **11** (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. pp. 769–770.
2. Meier, Marcus (2008). The Origin of the Schwarzenau Brethren. Philadelphia: Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc. p. 144.
3. Bowman, Carl (1995). Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a Peculiar People. Johns Hopkins University Press.
4. Richard Eddy. *Universalism in America*. Universalist Publishing House. 1884. p. 35.
5. German Seventh-Day Baptists (<http://germanseventhdaybaptist.com/>)
6. Brethren Encyclopedia, Volume IV (2005). *Brethren's Card*. p. 2152.
7. Bowman, Carl (1995). Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a Peculiar People. Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 186–187.
8. "The Brethren Card" (http://www.brfwitness.org/?page_id=51). Brethren Revival Fellowship. Retrieved 2010-04-26.

Further reading

- Bowman, Carl F. (1995). *Brethren society: The cultural transformation of a peculiar people*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. ISBN 978-0-8018-4905-3.
- *Brethren Encyclopedia, Vol. I-III*, Donald F. Durnbaugh, editor (1983) The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc.
- *Brethren Encyclopedia, Vol. IV*, Donald F. Durnbaugh and Dale V. Ulrich, editors, Carl Bowman, contributing editor (2006) The Brethren Encyclopedia Inc.
- Melton, J. Gordon, ed. (2003) [1978]. *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Gale. ISBN 978-0-7876-6384-1.
- Durnbaugh, Donald F. (1997). *Fruit of the vine: A history of the Brethren, 1708-1995* (<https://archive.org/details/fruitofvinehis00durn>). Elgin, IL: Brethren Press. ISBN 978-0-87178-003-4.
- Atwood, Craig D.; Mead, Frank S.; Hill, Samuel S. (2010). *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=YKUxFebHUIwC>). Abingdon Press. ISBN 978-1-4267-0048-4.
- *A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America*, (Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/ahistorygermanb01brumgoog>)), by Martin Grove Brumbaugh
- Durnbaugh, Donald F. (1984). *Meet the Brethren*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press for the Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc.
- Jones, D.E. (2002). *Religious Congregations & Membership in the United States 2000: An Enumeration by Region, State and County Based on Data Reported for 149 Religious Bodies* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=qfEpAQAAMAAJ>). Vol. 1. Glenmary Research Center. ISBN 978-0-914422-26-6.
- Durnbaugh, Donald F. (2003) [1968]. *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=KGqvCwAAQBAJ>). Wipf & Stock Publishers. ISBN 978-1-59244-348-2.
- Gillin, John Lewis (1906). *The Dunkers: A Sociological Interpretation* (<https://archive.org/details/dunkersasociolo00gillgoog>). ATLA monograph preservation program. Columbia University.
- Meier, Marcus (2008). *The Origin of the Schwarzenau Brethren* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3idpPgAACAAJ>). Brethren encyclopedia monograph series. Brethren Encyclopedia, Inc. ISBN 978-0-936693-52-1.
- Piepkorn, Arthur Carl (1977). *Profiles in belief: The religious bodies of the United States and Canada* (<https://archive.org/details/profilesinbelief00piep>). Profiles in Belief. Harper & Row. ISBN 978-0-06-066580-7.

External links

- [Origins of the Church of the Brethren and Other Brethren Groups](https://web.archive.org/web/20031202223548/http://www.berksgenes.org/brethren.htm) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20031202223548/http://www.berksgenes.org/brethren.htm>)
 - [The Brethren Encyclopedia](http://www.brethrenencyclopedia.org/) (<http://www.brethrenencyclopedia.org/>)
 - [Brethren World Assembly](http://www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/BWA/Index.html) (<http://www.brethren.org/genbd/bhla/BWA/Index.html>)
 -  Texts on Wikisource:
 - "German Baptist Brethren". *New International Encyclopedia*. 1905.
 - "German Baptist Brethren". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). 1911.
 - Carroll, H. K. (1920). "German Baptist Brethren" ([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Encyclopedia_Americana_\(1920\)/German_Baptist_Brethren](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Encyclopedia_Americana_(1920)/German_Baptist_Brethren)). *Encyclopedia Americana*.
-

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Schwarzenau_Brethren&oldid=945971945"

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.