

Zwölf Artikel

The „12 Articles“

The "Twelve Articles", written by the Memmingen lay preacher Sebastian Lotzer, are a milestone in the struggle for freedom rights. With reference to the Word of God, it is stated that there are principles of law which may not be overridden by any local or other special law. It calls for the legitimation and restriction of sovereign power.

In the holy bible, the farmers read that they „are and ought to be free“. With their message of the dignity of every human being, the "Twelve Articles" are an early proof of the universality of human rights. As monuments to the human struggle for freedom, they are considered a unique document of German constitutional history.

In spring 1525, Sebastian Lotzer anonymously wrote a pamphlet containing the farmers' most important complaints, the so-called "12 Articles". They represent the only and most important programmatic document of the uprising of the "common man" in European history and considered to be a manifesto for a society of freedom and ethical responsibility.

1. Each parish is to select a priest to strengthen its faith.
2. The tithe is to be used for the priest's salary, for the deserving poor and tax reserves
3. By the crucifixion of Christ, people became free. This is why serfdom is to be abandoned.
4. Peasants are to receive hunting and fishing rights. Non-vouched claims to power are to be declared unenforceable.
5. Due to the "fundamental need for wood", wooded areas are to be returned to the parish, unless they were bought.
6. Compulsory Service is to be performed according to source and Word of God, but must not be increased at random.
7. Fiefs must secure the peasants' existence. This is why additional services to Lordship are to be rewarded.
8. Excessive levies for goods force the peasants into ruin. Therefore, the levies should be reassessed by "honorable men".
9. Instead of arbitrariness in criminal prosecution, old, written legal principles corresponding to the crime are to be observed again.
10. Former community meadows and fields shall be returned to the parish, unless they have been legally acquired.
11. Inhuman, degrading levies in the event of the death of a peasant (case of death) are to be eliminated completely.
12. All demands correspond to the Word of God. A counter-opinion must be based on the gospel.