

## Preface

THIS WORK IS ESSENTIALLY my doctoral dissertation submitted to Bristol University in 1992 in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy, conferred in 1993. To bring the literature review up to date I have rewritten chapter 3, Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Enigma.

This work explores the place of Balthasar Hubmaier in the broad context of Reformation studies, and more specifically Anabaptist studies, using the much-proclaimed idea of “the clarity of Scripture” as the interpretative lens to bring into focus his hermeneutic. Previous studies of Hubmaier’s hermeneutic have drawn on a limited selection of his writings and not placed him in the broader Reformation context. This work draws on the whole corpus of Hubmaier’s published works and compares him with key Reformation figures such as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli and Desiderius Erasmus, as well as the Swiss Brethren and Hans Denck.

To orient the reader to the place of Hubmaier in the early Reformation period, a brief biographical sketch is provided in chapter 2. Chapter 3 is an assessment of Hubmaier’s place in Anabaptist research, including an overview of research into Hubmaier’s hermeneutic in the broader context of Reformation hermeneutics. Chapters 4 to 8 explore the development of Hubmaier’s hermeneutic in his writings, which are grouped chronologically. While Hubmaier shares aspects of his understanding of the “clarity of Scripture” with Luther, Zwingli, Erasmus, the Swiss Brethren, and Hans Denck, he maintains his own position.

Hubmaier develops his hermeneutic over the period under investigation. His early understanding of the clarity of Scripture is at first much closer to Zwingli and Luther than to Erasmus. However, as Hubmaier adopts the practice of believers’ baptism and is persecuted for that belief, he moves closer to the more literal interpretation of Scripture that typifies the Swiss Brethren. However, like the Magisterial Reformers, he too moves

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away from his understanding of the clarity of Scripture as interpreted in the congregation, and back towards a more elitist position. Whereas the Magisterial Reformers place their emphasis on the necessity of understanding the biblical languages as the key to understanding Scripture correctly, Hubmaier adopts the method of distinguishing between different categories into which texts are placed, thus maintaining the unity of the Scriptures.

It is argued therefore that Hubmaier is closer to the Magisterial Reformers in his hermeneutic of the clarity of Scripture than to Erasmus, the Swiss Brethren, or the South German-Austrian Anabaptists.

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