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Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Enigma

In current Anabaptist historiography, Balthasar Hubmaier is an enigma. Prior to 1944, Hubmaier was unequivocally considered by friend and foe alike to be an Anabaptist. By those who viewed Anabaptism negatively, as well as Free Church historians who viewed him positively, he was often considered a leader, if not the leader, of the Anabaptists. Among the heirs of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, his theology of baptism and his martyrdom confirmed his identity as an Anabaptist.

Among those who opposed the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, Hubmaier was acknowledged as a leader of among the Anabaptists. His former Roman Catholic colleagues Johann Eck and Johann Fabri declared Hubmaier to be "the most dangerous leader of the Anabaptists"[1] and "the patron and first beginner" of Anabaptism.[2] By the time of the Council of Trent, Roman Catholic authorities identified Hubmaier as one of the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists that originated in Saxony. He was also included along with Luther, Zwingli, John Calvin, and Caspar Schwenckfeld in the list of "heresiarchs."[3]

Among his contemporaries, Hubmaier was also considered an Anabaptist. Zwingli is said to have considered Hubmaier "the greatest threat

1. Johann Eck, quoted in Loserth, *Doctor Balthasar Hubmaier*, 210.
2. Johann Fabri, quoted in Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Seine Stellung*, 77–78.
3. Gonzalez, "Balthasar Hubmaier," 72n7.

among the Anabaptists to the Zurich Reformation."[4] In 1528, Luther wrote against Hubmaier "the Anabaptist" for misrepresenting his views on infant baptism as being the same as the Anabaptists.[5]

Among groups that claim continuity with sixteenth-century expressions of Anabaptism, Hubmaier is acknowledged as a part of Anabaptism. In their *Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* (1581) the Hutterites, a group that had once been part of Hubmaier's Nikolsburg congregation, only declare Hubmaier to be a "brother" after reporting his alleged acknowledgment that he had "unjustly opposed Hut on several points" and that "he was guilty of giving too much to worldly freedom in regard to retaining the sword." Only following the record of his declaration of repentance is Hubmaier's martyrdom recorded, and that of his unnamed wife.[6] Hubmaier's contribution is acknowledged, as are his powerful writings, in which he defended "true baptism and opposed infant baptism with proofs from Holy Scripture," and two songs he composed "that are still known in the church."[7] In the Dutch Mennonite Thieleman van Braght's *Bloody Theatre* (1660), Hubmaier does not appear with the likes of Conrad Grebel or Felix Mantz, but appears out of chronological sequence among the 1542 martyrs. Hubmaier is represented as one among many from the time of Zwingli who were "hated and persecuted by the world."[8] He is noted as a "learned and eloquent man" who after "manifold trials and long imprisonment . . . was burned to ashes, suffering it with great steadfastness." Hubmaier's unnamed wife, who was drowned for her steadfast commitment to her faith "received from God," is also included among the martyrs.[9] These comments by the Hutterites and Mennonites appear to accept grudgingly that Hubmaier was part of Anabaptism at its inception.

ORIGINS OF ANABAPTISM AND SWISS ANABAPTISM

This consensus that Hubmaier should be included among the Anabaptists was not challenged until 1944 with the publication of Harold S. Bender's paper "The Anabaptist Vision." In Bender's opinion, Hubmaier was "a transient aberration from original and authentic Anabaptism," worthy of

4. Ibid.
5. Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 229.
6. Hutterian Brethren, *Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren,* Vol 1, 48–49.
7. Ibid., 49.
8. Van Braght, *Bloody Theatre*, 465.
9. Ibid.

mention only as a footnote.[10] Normative or evangelical Anabaptism was represented by Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, and those other early supporters of Zwingli who become the Swiss Brethren.

John Howard Yoder, while following Bender's view that the Swiss Brethren constituted normative Anabaptism, softened Bender's totally negative assessment of Hubmaier. He argued that Hubmaier "played no essential part"[11] in the beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism since Hubmaier had no connection with Grebel prior to 1523. Yoder maintained that Hubmaier's questioning of infant baptism is "not an indication of direct contact between him and the Zurich circle of radicals."[12] In the formative years of the Swiss Brethren prior to 1523, Yoder argued that Hubmaier continued to follow the Reformers rather than the Brethren regarding the authority of the state to reform the church, resulting in the demand that Christians "disobey biblical injunctions (oath, armed defense, interest, defense of the property structure)."[13] Yoder concluded that prior to Easter 1525:

> In full awareness of the issues involved, Hubmaier refused to join the Brethren. He had not made the long pilgrimage in which they had been engaged since 1523. The rejection of state authority in matters of faith (October–December 1523); the understanding that the true church must be a persecuted minority (spring and summer of 1524); the rejection of Thomas Müntzer's gospel of revolution (September 1524); and the repeated unsuccessful attempts to carry on a conversation with Zwingli (ending in December 1524) had all gone on outside the realm of his interest and knowledge. This difference of orientation remained significant even after he finally had accepted believers' baptism. Precisely because he came to the problem of baptism as a trained thinker dealing with a theological problem as such, he was ever to remain distinct in his emphasis from the Swiss Brethren, for whom believers' baptism was only one expression of a whole new way of understanding faith and the church.[14]

While Yoder does not accept that Hubmaier played a part in the beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism, he does concede that Hubmaier contributed

10. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," 51. This is a reprint of Bender's original 1944 essay.

11. Yoder, "Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," 5.

12. Ibid., 6–7.

13. Ibid., 17.

14. Ibid., 7.

to wider Anabaptism through his tract *On the Christian Baptism*. Yoder declared Hubmaier's tract "a minor masterpiece" and opined that it had a "broader effect" than Zwingli's *Of Baptism*.[15]

About the time Yoder was reassessing the place of Hubmaier in the beginnings of the Swiss Brethren, a broader debate about classification of Anabaptists in the wider Reformation was taking place between Roland H. Bainton and George Hunston Williams. Bainton argued that Anabaptists were part of the "left wing of the Reformation" along with another distinct subgroup, the Free Spirits.[16] All the other Reformers were Protestants. Williams preferred to identify the groups as either Magisterial Reformers or Radical Reformers, with the Radical Reformers subdivided into Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Evangelical Rationalists.[17] In both classifications, Hubmaier is included among the Anabaptists along with the likes of Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, and Michael Sattler. Williams's classification of Magisterial Reformers and Radical Reformers, together with its subgroupings, has dominated Reformation and Anabaptist scholarship.

Yoder's assessment of Hubmaier's place in the beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism in particular, and Anabaptism in general, did not go unchallenged. As "profane" historians explored Anabaptism from social and cultural perspectives, they challenged the conclusions of those "confessional" historians who continued to view Anabaptism primarily from a theological perspective.[18] The individual studies of James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann were synthesized in their 1975 essay "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis." They argued that Anabaptism did not have a single-source origin from the Swiss Brethren in Zurich but had multiple points of origin: the Swiss Brethren in Zurich; South German and Austrian Anabaptism, tracing its beginnings to the influence of Thomas Müntzer through the agency of Hans Denck and Hans Hut; and Central German and Dutch Anabaptism, whose principal early figure was the one-time Lutheran lay preacher Melchior Hofmann.[19] Stayer, in his 1972 work *Anabaptists and the Sword,* acknowledges that Hubmaier had associated

15. Ibid., 9, 11.

16. Bainton, "Left wing of the Reformation," 121.

17. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 1992, "Introduction to First Edition," xxiv.

18. This debate can be traced through the pages of the *Mennonite Quarterly* Review. Stayer, Packull, and Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis," 83–121; Goertz, "History and Theology," 177–88, and the various responses to that article in that edition of the MQR; Snyder, "Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism," 501–645 and the various responses to that article in the same edition of the MQR.

19. Stayer, Packull, and Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis," 83–121.

with the Swiss Brethren of Zurich but remained separate from them and closer to Zwingli's "realpolitical view" of the magistracy. Rather than being one of the founders of the Swiss Brethren, Stayer argued Hubmaier was one of the founders of the upper German Anabaptist sects, along with Denck and Hut.[20] Not having Hubmaier among the founders of the Swiss Brethren aligns Stayer with Yoder, at least on this point. Nevertheless, Stayer's definition of Anabaptism: "they are members of sects practicing baptism of believers and forming religious groups on that basis,"[21] includes Hubmaier as a genuine Anabaptist, while Yoder's definition excludes him.

However, the role of Hubmaier as a founder of South German-Austrian Anabaptism is predicated on his influence on Denck and Hut. Packull, in a 1973 article, challenged Hubmaier's role among the South German-Austrian Anabaptists by rejecting the proposition that Hubmaier baptized Denck, who in turn baptized Hut.[22] Gottfried Seebass's PhD on the work, life, and theology of Hut reinforced Packull's view when Seebass concluded that Hubmaier played no significant role in the development of Central German Anabaptism.[23]

In 1975, on the 450th anniversary of the beginnings of Anabaptism, Hans-Jürgen Goertz presented a compendium of essays representative of the tensions between the varieties of approaches then current in Anabaptist research.[24] In 1979, he summarized the key features of these tensions between profane historical research and confessional theological research, warning the theologians against presuming "a hermeneutical primacy of theology in the study of church history."[25] While Hubmaier is not mentioned in Goertz's article, he is identified in several of the responses to that article. Using either the methodology of social history or the modified theological methodology of the younger Mennonite historians, Hubmaier remained difficult to place in Anabaptism.[26]

The work of C. Arnold Snyder attempted to move forward the debate over the priority of history or theology in Anabaptist studies. In 1994,

20. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 141.

21. Ibid., 20.

22. Packull, "Denck's Alleged Baptism," 327–38.

23. Seebass, "Müntzers Erbe."

24. Goertz, *Umstrittenes Täufertum*.

25. Goertz, "History and Theology." 186.

26. Oyer, "Goertz's 'History and Theology,'" 195; Klassen, "History and Theology," 198; Davis, "Vision and Revision," 207; Stayer, "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom," 215.

he contributed a chapter[27] to H. Wayne Walker Pipkin's *Essays in Anabaptist Theology.* This was expanded and published in 1995 as *Anabaptist History and Theology*.[28] His definition of Anabaptism is minimalist: "The principle we have followed for the inclusion or exclusion in 'Anabaptism' is simply whether or not the person in question believed that only adults (and not infants) should be baptized, following a mature confession of faith."[29] He confidently included Hubmaier among the Swiss Anabaptists, while explicitly separating the Swiss Anabaptists from the South German-Austrian Anabaptists on the basis that there is "no documented historical connections to the Swiss movement."[30] He agrees with Walter Klaassen that Anabaptism is neither Catholic nor Protestant, rather Anabaptism reflects a more conservative than radical approach to reformation of church and society.[31] He argues, "The origins of Anabaptism undoubtedly lie in large measure in the radical reformers who first articulated an alternative view of evangelical reform; but they also lie with the regenerationist and ascetic tradition of late medieval piety which conceived of salvation in terms of sanctification . . . the Anabaptist movement has a distinctive theological "shape" that is rooted in medieval piety and spiritual ideals."[32] His assessment of the early Swiss Anabaptists identifies Hubmaier as "an early Swiss Anabaptist leader of surpassing importance who has been unfairly marginalized by modern historians. Hubmaier did more to define an early theological core of Anabaptist teaching than did anyone else. His writings on baptism continue to be cited verbatim by Swiss Brethren into the seventeenth century."[33] He utilizes Hubmaier's *A Christian Catechism* as articulating the "theological core" of early Anabaptism.[34] Nevertheless, he admits, "Hubmaier presents one of the great ambiguities of Swiss Anabaptist beginnings."[35]

Snyder's confident identification of Hubmaier as the leading influential figure of Swiss Anabaptism is utterly rejected by Andrea Strübind.[36]

27. Snyder, "Beyond Polygenesis."
28. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*.
29. Ibid., 9.
30. Ibid., 6.
31. Ibid., 30.
32. Ibid., 91.
33. Ibid., 107.
34. Ibid., 143.
35. Ibid., 107.
36. Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli.*

She reads the origins of Swiss Anabaptism primarily as a theological narrative and rejects the revisionist approach of Stayer and others. The publication of her work led to a sharp exchange of views between her and Stayer in the April 2004 edition of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.[37] In 2006 Snyder reentered the debate in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review.*[38] He briefly reviewed the historiography of Hubmaier research before stating his own position: "Hubmaier did not learn 'Anabaptism' from these reformers (Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Hofmeister) rather, Hubmaier's primary base of support for the institution of adult baptism was the group of Zurich radicals including Conrad Grebel, as an analysis of their continuing contact and his earliest writings make clear."[39] He maintains the close identification of Hubmaier and pre-Schleitheim Anabaptism by arguing that they shared a common ecclesiology in that they "are of one mind in excluding state intervention and coercion in the church itself, which is to be governed only by the Word of God and God's Spirit."[40] Demonstrating his synthesis of theological and social history methodologies, Snyder goes on to argue that "Hubmaier's state-affirming Anabaptism and the separatist Anabaptism of Schleitheim grew out of the same Swiss Anabaptist roots, but divergent anthropological and regenerationist principles eventually bore fruit in significantly different ecclesiologies, under the pressure of changing social and political circumstances."[41] In his response to Snyder's article, Geoffrey Dipple acknowledged that Synder's reevaluation of separatist ecclesiology and pacifism among the Zurich radicals "opens the door to a much greater role for Hubmaier in early Swiss Anabaptism."[42] Thomas Finger totally rejected Snyder's conclusion: "Only one early Anabaptist ecclesiology, so far as I can see, endorsed government and its sword, and it did not derive this principle from Anabaptist roots."[43] J. Denny Weaver argued "that the difference between the theology of the nonpacifist Hubmaier and pacifists such as Felix Mantz or those of Schleitheim is more than a matter of differing views of anthropology and regeneration," it is in the concept of "office."[44] By this he means, "Hubmaier

37. Stayer, "New Paradigm"; Strübind, "New Paradigm."
38. Snyder, "Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism."
39. Ibid., 558.
40. Ibid., 527.
41. Ibid., 627.
42. Dipple, "Response," 659.
43. Finger, "Response," 665.
44. Weaver, "Response," 689.

rules out in principle and in advance the possibility of living according to the example of Jesus,"[45] which he further defines as "to live out the nonviolent story of Jesus."[46] Ray Gingerich rejected Snyder's representation of Hubmaier's nonseparatist, nonpacifist Waldshut congregation as the "most important Anabaptist community of the time," suggesting rather it was "a most important aberration of Anabaptism until Nikolsburg and later Münster came along."[47] However, ecclesiology is not for him the crucial issue that separated Hubmaier from all the Swiss Anabaptists, it was Hubmaier's view of Jesus. He shares this opinion with Weaver. Gingerich argued that Hubmaier spoke of following Christ rather than Jesus. This view of discipleship "camouflaged . . . behavioral inconsistencies with the teaching and example of Jesus's that account for Hubmaier developing a nonseparatist, nonpacifist ecclesiology."[48]

In 2007, Stayer accepted Snyder's view that there was agreement between Conrad Grebel and Hubmaier regarding nonseparatist and nonpacifist ecclesiology prior to 1525.[49] However, Martin Rothkegel does not share their point of view, arguing that in Nikolsburg Hubmaier rejected "the separatist pacifism as upheld by the Swiss Anabaptists."[50]

Was Hubmaier an Anabaptist? Was he linked to the Swiss Brethren, influenced by the Swiss Brethren, or even a leader among the Swiss Brethren? Alternatively, was he linked to the South German-Austrian Anabaptists? Following these questions through the Anabaptist historiography leaves us with Hubmaier the enigma.

FREE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

While this broader debate about Anabaptism was occurring, two Baptist historians, Robert Macoskey (1956)[51] and Torsten Bergsten (1961),[52] were

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 690.

47. Gingerich, "Response," 673.

48. Ibid.

49. Stayer, "Introduction," xxiv.

50. Stayer, "Introduction," xxiv; Rothkegel, "Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia," 172.

51. Macoskey, "Life and Thought." The essence of Macoskey's findings was made accessible to the wider public in his article "Contemporary Relevance," 99–122.

52. Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Seine Stellung.* Later published in English translation as Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian.*

independently exploring Hubmaier's place in the world of the Reformation. While Macoskey identified Hubmaier as an Anabaptist, he concluded that Hubmaier was "an independent thinker who acted after his own inspiration and followed his own destiny."[53] He idealized Hubmaier as the forerunner of the modern Free Church movement.[54] For Macoskey, Hubmaier is the layman's theologian, one who refused to use the techniques he had learned studying theology under nominalist Scholasticism, rather only dealing with the plain text of Scripture, and the New Testament in particular.[55] The contemporary relevance of Hubmaier's ecclesiology for Macoskey is the challenge Hubmaier presents to the Free Churches in the United States that demand an "utterly free and autonomous church" in an "utterly free and individualistic society."[56] In Macoskey's opinion, the United States is no longer such a society and the Free Churches would do well to consider Hubmaier's theology of the church, which rejects individualism. Hubmaier's view of the particular church and the general church also provides opportunity for American Baptists to reassess the ecumenical movement in a more positive light.[57] While Macoskey noted the possible antecedents of Hubmaier's unique theological amalgam,[58] he did not explore those antecedents, as his focus was more on Hubmaier's contemporary relevance.

Torsten Bergsten investigated three relationships crucial to understanding Hubmaier's place in the Reformation: "1. Hubmaier's relationship to the Reformation and the Anabaptists; 2. Hubmaier and the German Peasants' War; 3. Hubmaier and the modern Free Church movement."[59] Bergsten removes the theological restrictions of Yoder's definition of Anabaptism, using the broad definition, "Anabaptists are only those who practiced or received believer's baptism . . . or adult baptism."[60] Not only is Hubmaier a genuine Anabaptist, Bergsten goes on to assert Hubmaier was the intellectual leader or theologian of the new Anabaptist movement. Nevertheless, he concluded that Hubmaier remained closer to the

53. Macoskey, "Contemporary Relevance," 102.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 106.
56. Ibid., 120.
57. Ibid., 120–21.
58. Ibid., 108.
59. Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian,* 45–46.
60. Ibid., 22.

Zwinglian form of Reformation than to the more radical Swiss Brethren.[61] Bergsten does not exaggerate Hubmaier's role as a prototype of modern Baptists as does Macoskey. Bergsten also begins to look back to the various influences other than Scripture that shaped Hubmaier's theology and acknowledges continuing Roman Catholic features in Hubmaier's theology.

However, in his review of Bergsten's book, Robert Friedmann challenged the appellation of "theologian" of Anabaptism ascribed to Hubmaier, pointing out that the influence of Hubmaier among Anabaptists was restricted to a limited number of theological themes: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and free will. He argues that Hubmaier's writings were "studied and quoted from"[62] only with regard to this very restricted number of theological themes in the seventeenth century, themes that do not fully represent Anabaptism.

Macoskey and Bergsten are part of a long line of Baptist historians interested in Hubmaier as an early representative of the Free Church type of ecclesiology. William R. Estep, in his 1978 translation of Bergsten's biography of Hubmaier, lists the following Baptist historians who had interacted in some way with Hubmaier: Arthur H. Newman, Henry Vedder, Ernest Payne, Jarold Knox Zeman, William R. Estep, Wilhelm Wiswedel, Gunnar Westin, Robert Macoskey and Gerd Seewald.[63] H. Wayne Walker Pipkin updated this overview of Baptist engagement with Hubmaier in the 2006 Hughey Lectures at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague.[64] Pipkin noted the differences of interpretation about Hubmaier among Baptists, especially noting the reticence of English Baptists in the generation after Ernest Payne to see any historical connection between the formation of English Baptists and Continental Anabaptists, including Hubmaier.[65] Nevertheless, there are among English Baptist historians a new generation willing to explore the contemporary relevance of Hubmaier for Baptist and baptistic churches both within the United Kingdom and worldwide.[66]

61. Ibid.

62. Friedmann, "Book Review," 358.

63. Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian*, 39–42.

64. Pipkin, *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr,* 22–31.

65. Ibid., 22.

66. Ibid., 22–23. See, for example, Jones, *A Believing Church*; Randall, *Communities of Conviction*.

McClendon introduced the idea of 'b' baptists for those churches that did not identify with the historic seventeenth-century Baptists but shared many of their perspectives. McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, 23.

The English Baptist engagement with Hubmaier is, however, muted when compared to the "veritable revival" of Hubmaier research in North America. Pipkin identified six doctoral dissertations produced by North American Baptist scholars: Emir Caner,[67] Michael W McDill,[68] Samuel Beyung-Doo Nam,[69] Brian Brewer,[70] Kirk MacGregor,[71] and Darren Williamson.[72] In addition to the Baptist doctoral dissertations cited by Pipkin should be noted William McMullen's 2003 MA thesis[73] on the theme of discipline within Hubmaier's theology. This preempted the 2011 PhD dissertation on the same theme by Simon Victor Goncharenko, a Russian Baptist studying at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.[74] Pipkin warned that "some interpreters write their own agenda onto Hubmaier."[75] There appears to be an agenda driving Hubmaier research originating from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, an agenda that demonstrates the relevance of Hubmaier's ecclesiology to current Southern Baptist practices. Not only are there theses specifically focused on Hubmaier, there are also theses that trace Hubmaier's influence in themes current to Southern Baptists, such as Adam Harwood's *Spiritual Condition of Infants.*

Baptists and "baptists" are not the only Hubmaier researchers seeking to identify how Hubmaier can be relevant to the contemporary church. Younger Mennonite researchers acknowledge in their own church tradition an unhealthy emphasis on individualism. In Hubmaier, they have identified a more communal ecclesiology and are willing to overlook his aberrant status in Mennonite historiography. Tripp York explored the notion of the corporate ethical demands of discipleship inherent in Hubmaier's understanding of the Lord's Supper.[76] Ryan Klassen also explored the relevance of Hubmaier to social ethics, but from the perspective of the interconnection of ecclesiology and social ethics.[77] Gay Lynn Voth traced

67. Caner, "Truth is Unkillable."

68. McDill, "Doctrine of Human Free Will."

69. Nam, "A Comparative Study."

70. Brewer, "A Response to Grace."

71. MacGregor, "Sacramental Theology." This is now published as *Central European Synthesis.*

72. Williamson, "Erasmus of Rotterdam's Influence."

73. McMullen, "Church Discipline."

74. Goncharenko, "Importance of Church Discipline," and *Wounds that Heal.*

75. Pipkin, *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr*, 36.

76. York, "Martyrdom and Eating Jesus," 71–86.

77. Ryan Klassen, "Wielding Two Swords."

how reference to Hubmaier's liturgical writings, especially his writings on the Lord's Supper, enabled a major shift in the liturgical practices of a Mennonite congregation.[78] Hubmaier's writings are therefore proving to be a rich source for reflection for some Mennonites.

In addition to the Baptist dissertations on Hubmaier mentioned above, there are other doctoral dissertations exploring aspects of Hubmaier's life, work, and theology. Ernst Endres's 2003 Doctor of Divinity dissertation "The View of Balthasar Hubmaier of the Church," submitted to the University of Pretoria; Brian Cooper's 2006 PhD "Human Reason or Reasonable Humanity?" submitted to the University of St Michael College; Antonia Lucic Gonzalez's 2008 PhD "Balthasar Hubmaier and the Early Christian Tradition," submitted to Fuller Theological Seminary; and Andrew Klager's PhD "Hubmaier's Use of the Church Fathers," submitted to the University of Glasgow. While these dissertations occasionally allude to the contemporary relevance of Hubmaier's theology, in the main they follow another trajectory of Hubmaier research, the search for Anabaptist antecedents.

SEEKING ANABAPTIST ANTECEDENTS

Rollin Armour's *Anabaptist Baptism* is representative of the approach that looks to the contemporaries of various Anabaptists for the source of potential influence in the development of their ideas. He acknowledges Hubmaier's awareness of Luther's writing on the Mass. This alerted Hubmaier to the importance of faith in the recipient of the sacrament, though his understanding of faith is different to that of Luther.[79] He considers the possible influence of the Zwickau prophets as evidenced in Hubmaier's use of the Markan form of the Great Commission. He asserts that Hubmaier's understanding that corruption in the church stems from a misunderstanding of baptism was "likely" picked up from Müntzer, though this may have come through the Grebel group, or directly from Hubmaier's reading of Müntzer.[80] Erasmus "may have contributed to Hubmaier's distinction between external and internal baptism" and Karlstadt "was probably influential in Hubmaier's rejection of infant baptism."[81] In Armour's assessment, the most important influence on Hubmaier "was probably the

78. Voth, "Anabaptist Liturgical Spirituality," 3–14.
79. Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism,* 24.
80. Ibid., 25.
81. Ibid.

Zurich reformation, Zwingli first and then the Grebel faction."[82] Zwingli's influence was seen in Hubmaier's adoption of "a moderate spiritualism whereby the inner spiritual action of cleansing and regeneration was sharply distinguished, indeed separated, from outer baptism."[83] With regard to the influence of the Grebel group, Armour argued that Hubmaier represented the Grebel group on the third day of the October 1523 Disputation, and probably remained in communication with them late in 1524. Not only did Wilhelm Reublin baptize him but he also became their foremost spokesperson.[84] However, while there is evidence of connection, this does not demonstrate influence. Armour explored Hubmaier's understanding of faith, regeneration, and its association with baptism and concluded that while Hubmaier's theology displays continuity with many aspects of Catholic theology it is "illegitimate" to call Hubmaier's thought Catholic as Hubmaier had "wholly repudiated the Catholic sacramental theology."[85] At the same time, Hubmaier rejects the Protestant understanding of justification as a forensic declaration that leaves the sinner essentially unchanged.[86] Effectively, Armour declares Hubmaier as neither Catholic nor Protestant, a view of Anabaptism in general that was propagated by Walter Klaassen.[87]

Abraham Freisen commented on the influence of Erasmus on the Anabaptist interpretation of the Great Commission:

> In the last thirty years or so the theme of Erasmian influence on the early Swiss Anabaptist movement has grown exponentially, sometimes expressed in quite general terms,[88] at other times in more specific terms. Thus, it has been argued that the Anabaptists were dependent upon Erasmus for their views on the freedom of the will,[89] their pacifism,[90] their ethical sincerity,[91] and

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., 26.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., 34.

86. Ibid.

87. Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant.*

88. Kreider, "Anabaptism and Humanism," 123–41.

89. Hall, "Possibilities of Erasmian Influence," 149–70.

90. Fast, "Dependence of the First Anabaptists," 110.

91. Davis, "Erasmus as Progenitor," 163–178 and *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, esp. ch. 5, 266–92.

> the spiritualism of a Hans Denck.[92] Whereas some Mennonite scholars, such as Harald [sic] S. Bender, have denied a direct influence,[93] a Catholic scholar of the stature of John P. Dolan has said: "There can be little doubt of the perduring influence of Erasmus of Rotterdam on the early development of Anabaptism and his efforts to interpret it as a religious rather than a social revolutionary movement. . . . As an independent movement originating in the immediate circle of Zwingli at Zurich, Anabaptism found its roots in the spiritualism of the Rotterdam priest."[94]
>
> Yet with the exception of direct Anabaptist dependence upon Erasmus in the area of free will,[95] the connections remain conveniently vague, lying too much in the nebulous realm of the "spirit of the times," of vague possibilities of influence, of tenuous connectedness.[96]

Friesen argued that in Zurich there was a broader understating of biblical inspiration than with Luther, and this was probably due to the influence of Erasmus. The Anabaptist followers of Zwingli probably acquired this understanding of biblical inspiration from Zwingli. Nevertheless, the Zurich Anabaptists also developed a strong sense of the "separation of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world" that "irreparably breached" Erasmus's Neoplatonic continuum between the shadows and the Ideal Forms.[97] Friesen uncritically includes Hubmaier among the Swiss Anabaptists, but only mentions him in passing when examining the influence of Erasmus on the Anabaptist understanding of the Great Commission. To include Hubmaier among the Anabaptists who separated the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world is to misrepresent him. In his *On the Sword*, Hubmaier specifically argued against this view as expressed in the *Schleitheim Articles*.[98]

In his 2005 PhD dissertation, Darren Williamson accepts Friesen's judgment that much of the research exploring Erasmian influence on Anabaptism claims only vague possibilities of influence, including Friesen's

92. Dolan, "Review of I. B. Horst," 343.

93. Bender, *Conrad Grebel.* See also his "Pacifism of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists," 119–51, and Friesen, *History and Renewal*, 139–40.

94. Dolan, "Review of I. B. Horst," 343.

95. Burger, "Erasmus and the Anabaptists." 43–204.

96. Friesen, *Erasmus,* 22.

97. Ibid., 37.

98. *PY*, 493.

own work on Anabaptism and the Great Commission.[99] Williamson used three criteria to prove the influence of Erasmus on Hubmaier: possible and verifiable contact; similarity of ideas, in this case using comparative exegesis of selected biblical texts; and source probability, which seeks to exclude all other possible sources for similarity of ideas between Erasmus and Hubmaier.[100] He selected the following biblical periscopes: Matt 28:19–20, the Great Commission; Matt 13:24–30, 36–43, the parable of the tares; and Matt 16:13–20, 18:13–20, concerning the power of the keys. He concluded that Erasmus influenced Hubmaier's understanding of the Great Commission and the parable of the tares, but not the power of the keys.[101] Hubmaier continues to exhibit an independence in his thinking that reinforces his enigmatic character among early Radical Reformers.

The exploration of Hubmaier's indebtedness to his Roman Catholic origins has also been a theme in Hubmaier research. In 1971, David Steinmetz argued that Hubmaier continued to utilize a number of nominalist motifs in his understanding of human free will; that God will give salvation to those who do what is naturally in them, the accompanying idea of merit, and the distinction between the absolute and ordained power of God.[102] In 1981, Walter Moore argued that these nominalist motifs in Hubmaier's theology arose from the teaching of John Eck, Hubmaier's teacher and patron prior to 1522.[103] With regard to the doctrine of free will, he concluded that Hubmaier was either semi-Pelagian or Pelagian in his understanding and remained closer to his Catholic teacher than to Erasmus and Denck, as Thor Hall had claimed in 1961.[104] James McClendon underscored the continuity of Hubmaier with his Catholic heritage when he argued that Hubmaier's "radicality is best understood in terms of his Catholic origins, education, and pastoral service prior to the radical turn of 1524–1525."[105] Nevertheless, Hubmaier fits McClendon's description of "baptists" and as such he classifies Hubmaier as a "Catholic baptist."[106] Christof Windhorst designated Hubmaier a "Reformed Catholic," acknowledging the continuity of understanding of free will with Erasmus, and of Luther in other

99. Williamson, "Erasmus of Rotterdam's Influence," 16n40.
100. Ibid., 19–22.
101. Ibid., 23.
102. Steinmetz, "Scholasticism and Radical Reform," 127–28.
103. Moore, "Catholic Teacher," 73–74.
104. Hall, "Possibilities of Erasmian Influence," 155–56.
105. McClendon, "Balthasar Hubmaier, Catholic Anabaptist." 21.
106. Ibid., 32.

"traditional elements" of his theology.[107] Kirk MacGregor has challenged these views as a "misclassification" of Hubmaier and explored Hubmaier's understanding of the sacraments based on his awareness of the teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux. MacGregor argues that Hubmaier "remained an evangelical reform theologian throughout the duration of his life who was convinced by Reublin to abandon none of his beliefs with the sole yet important exception of the validity of ordination."[108] For MacGregor Hubmaier is a "theological maverick,"[109] a Magisterial Radical. Following the theme of medieval Catholic antecedents, Hubmaier continues to confound simple classification.

The seminal work of Kenneth R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism* (1974), produced a trajectory in Anabaptist research along which the studies of Hans-Jürgen Goertz[110] and C. Arnold Snyder[111] also fall. Davis reviewed fourteenth- and fifteenth-century ascetic reform movements, identifying key features as "a desire for the elimination of institutional and administrative abuses," "a hope and call for 'a revival of fervor, charity, asceticism and discipline' in the masses of individual Christians," and the expectation that "when the renewal and general reform came, it would involve by divine impetus a cataclysmic, institutional upheaval."[112] While Luther's challenge to bring reform did see a "total repudiation of a papal hierarchy, monasticism, and a scholastic sacramental system," it failed to produce an increase in "general piety." The Anabaptists not only took up the theme of piety, but also linked it to the separation of church and state and the insistence on evidence of individual piety as essential to true Christianity.[113] Among the Grebel group in Zurich these ascetic themes found expression in three expectations:

> 1. They expected that any reformation that was truly divinely inspired would promote unquestioning obedience to the Word of God, without any compromise with existing institutions or traditions. 2. They expected and demanded a visible separation on moral grounds of church from nonchurch, the end of a morally mixed society called Christian but obviously not truly

107. Windhorst, "Anfänge und Aspekte," 168.
108. MacGregor, *Central European Synthesis*, 129.
109. Ibid., 10.
110. Goertz, *The Anabaptists*.
111. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*.
112. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, 64.
113. Ibid.

> Christian. In addition, they believed in the church as a *spiritual* entity, to be spiritually governed, with spiritual purposes. This is what led to the secondary notion that in its functional manifestation as churches it must be separated institutionally from "worldly" control whether papal or civil. 3. They expected the restoration of visible churches in which a spiritually vital and an ascetically holy Christian life would typify all members, individually and corporately.[114]

Davis argues that this view of the ascetically motivated church was fully formed among the Grebel group by the time of the first adult baptisms on January 21, 1525. However, Hubmaier's view evolved from being an evangelical view of reform closely aligned with Luther and Zwingli, to the adoption of the Grebel group's position by the time of his baptism on April 15, 1525.[115] Davis does note that Hubmaier differed from the Grebel group on the issue of the magistracy and the sword, but that Hubmaier's post-Easter 1525 view was closer to Grebel's initial proposal of 1524.[116] Hubmaier is therefore understood to be of the same mind as the Swiss Brethren in terms of the reform of the church being the expression of ascetic ideals of reform as mediated through the *via moderna*'s most persuasive exponent, Erasmus of Rotterdam. This view of Hubmaier's conversion to an ascetically motivated reformation of church and society is challenged by Werner O. Packull. Though Packull was investigating mysticism and early South German-Austrian Anabaptism, in which he concluded Hubmaier played no significant role, he does conclude that Hubmaier's position on the relationship between the magistrate and the church identifies Hubmaier's Anabaptism as substantially different from the Swiss Brethren.[117]

Hans-Jürgen Goertz agreed with Davis and Packull that Anabaptism drew much of its distinctiveness from medieval asceticism and mysticism. For Goertz this was expressed in anticlericalism: "Swiss Anabaptism was a child of anticlericalism." Hans Hut, expressing the influence of Thomas Müntzer, was even more strongly anticlerical than the Swiss Brethren.[118] For Goertz, "Anabaptist groups were connected neither loosely nor purely by accident with the anticlericalism of the Reformation period, but rather

114. Ibid., 83.
115. Ibid., 108.
116. Ibid., 107.
117. Packull, *Mysticism*, 104.
118. Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 41.

actually grew out of it, from a reaction to abuses within the old church and in the course of actions geared towards the renewal of Christian life."[119]

One expression of the individualizing of anticlerical sentiment was the appropriation of the *sola scriptura* principle by the laity. Goertz contended that the Grebel group in Zurich had experienced "the explosive anticlericalism of the *sola scriptura* principle under the direction of the reformers,"[120] but it had only been applied to the level of individual salvation and piety. However, for the principle to be fully realized it needed to be applied to all areas of life; individual, ecclesiastical, and public. Goertz argued that the early Anabaptists in Zurich did not apply a "legalistic hermeneutic" but sought to subject the whole of a person's life to Scripture. This approach did not last long, as the Anabaptists soon adopted the position that "whatever was expressly ordered in Scriptures was legitimate and that everything else was forbidden," making the Bible a book of law.[121] Goertz asserts that the early Swiss Anabaptists possibly understood the relationship of the Spirit and the external Word in much the same way as Zwingli and Karlstadt.[122]

A second issue came to divide the Swiss Anabaptists and Zwingli, the relationship of the Old and New Testaments. Goertz argued that only during the course of the debate over baptism did the Grebel group come to oppose the New Testament and the commands of Christ to the Old Testament, and in the process develop a Christology different to that of Zwingli.[123]

A third feature of the early Swiss Anabaptists' critique of the Reformers' view of faith is also seen as an outcome of anticlericalism. A faith that claimed "salvation" yet was fruitless was denounced as "hypocrisy."[124]

Where does Goertz place Hubmaier in relation to the Swiss Anabaptists? He noted that Hubmaier shared their anticlerical attitudes as demonstrated when Hubmaier not only vented his anticlerical spleen against the Roman Catholic Church and Zwingli, but also against himself when he had acted as a priest for the old church.[125]

119. Ibid., 43.
120. Ibid., 50.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid., 51.
123. Ibid., 52.
124. Ibid., 62.
125. Ibid., 39–40.

Goertz makes no specific comment about Hubmaier's view of the relationship between the two Testaments, but his silence may well be taken to mean he saw no difference between Hubmaier's position and that of the early Swiss Anabaptists.

Goertz cited the influence of Augustinian spiritualism as the basis of Hubmaier's understanding that "during the decisive phase of the process of salvation the work of the external word (*signum*) receded in favor of the internal activity of the Spirit (*res)*,"[126] and it was the activity of the Spirit that was related to faith. He further noted that Hubmaier could not be "fundamentally separated" from the early Swiss Anabaptists on the matter of faith that leads to moral improvement, though he acknowledged that Hubmaier's theological reflections on the nature of faith "took him beyond Swiss Anabaptism."[127] Goertz, however, following the lead of Bergsten, argues for a "cautious approach to the mystical notion of a graded path to salvation," an approach to faith and salvation also seen in Denck.[128] However, Hubmaier's understanding of baptism is contrasted strongly with that of the mystic South German-Austrian Anabaptist Hans Hut. The two shared "a demand for faith-baptism on the basis of the commandment of Jesus . . . and a distinction between inner and outer baptism." However, in Hut "the baptism-commandment was stripped of its scriptural meaning and used to formulate a mystical doctrine of the knowledge of God, with which the process of salvation in man began."[129] Goertz concludes that Hubmaier, like the Zurich Anabaptists, was less influenced by mysticism than Hut. In Goertz's opinion, Hubmaier fits the pattern of anticlericalism expressed as early Swiss Anabaptism. The fit is less comfortable when mysticism is added as a criterion, or the date is shifted to after the production of the *Schleitheim Articles.*

In *Anabaptist History and Theology,* Snyder argued that Anabaptism reflected aspects of both anticlericalism and fervent lay piety. He listed six characteristics of medieval piety that the Anabaptists retained but that Luther wanted removed:

1. An ascetic understanding of salvation and the Christian life.

2. An idealization of the life of Christ as the model for pious Christians.

126. Ibid., 51.
127. Ibid., 62.
128. Ibid., 64.
129. Ibid., 77.

> 3. A more communal understanding of life, the cosmos, and salvation.
>
> 4. A linking of spiritual charisma to moral purity.
>
> 5. A view of the world that interpreted life as a struggle between the forces of good and evil, Christ and Satan.
>
> 6. A spiritualized view of the world that still considered the secular realm to be a place where Satan's power held sway.[130]

He argued that these ideas are essentially more conservative and readily accessible and understandable to "common people," whereas the ideas of the Reformers expressed the views of the literate elite of society.[131] Snyder contends that the Radical Reformers were able to articulate an alternative vision of reform to evangelical reform. It was a vision that resonated with the common people as it "expressed long-cherished medieval ideas, tenaciously maintained in a rapidly changing world,"[132] and that emphasized the "regenerationist and ascetic tradition of late medieval piety which conceived of salvation in terms of sanctification."[133] Snyder also specifically identified the "sacramentarian movement in the Netherlands," which denied that matter could be spiritualized, as there was an impassable gulf between the worlds of spirit and matter.[134] Given Luther's tenacious support of the connection of Christ with the physical elements of the Lord's Supper, it is surprising that Snyder would argue the "sacramentarians" were conservatives rather than radicals. In Snyder's estimation, Hubmaier is representative of early Swiss Anabaptism, since "early Swiss Anabaptism was not a sectarian movement of separation from the world," rather it was a "grass roots, alternative movement of popular reform."[135] He went on to claim that "early Swiss Anabaptism was democratic, open to the Spirit, hopeful of reforming church and society. It was an Anabaptism that had yet to resolve many questions."[136] While the publication of the *Schleitheim Articles* might be taken to represent the resolution of these questions for Anabaptism, especially separation of the church from the world and the demand for pacifism, Snyder argued

130. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 30.
131. Ibid., 91.
132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
134. Ibid., 38.
135. Ibid., 109.
136. Ibid., 112.

that the debate simply shifted east to Nikolsburg.[137] Following this line of reasoning, Hubmaier can therefore be represented as the genuine expression of early Swiss Anabaptism, both at Waldshut and later at Nikolsburg. Snyder demonstrates this point of view by utilizing Hubmaier's *A Christian Catechism,* published in Nikolsburg, to illustrate what he describes as the core teachings of Anabaptism.[138] He goes on to argue that it was the disputes over the implications of the core teachings that led eventually to the definition of "rigid boundaries" that separated the identifiable "denominational expressions" within Anabaptism.[139] In his 2006 article "Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism," Snyder maintained his view of the origins of Anabaptism as expressed in *Anabaptist History and Theology*. He does, however, identify a separation between Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz in their letter to Thomas Müntzer, which aligns Mantz with Michael Sattler and the *Schleitheim Articles,* and Grebel with Hubmaier's nonseparatist ecclesiology.[140]

Since 2002, a number of other tributaries of the Catholic antecedent stream have been explored: Hubmaier's sacramental theology;[141] Hubmaier's understanding and use of the church fathers;[142] Hubmaier and the role of catechization linked to baptism;[143] and the exploration of Hubmaier's relationship to Catholic natural law.[144]

Samuel Nam explored the theology of baptism in Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, and Hubmaier and concluded that Hubmaier avoided falling into either Augustinian sacramentalism or Zwinglian spiritualism.[145] While Hubmaier is represented as agreeing with Zwingli that "outward baptism" does not convey God's grace inwardly, he differentiates Hubmaier from Zwingli by noting that Hubmaier retained the connection of the outer and inner through the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer.[146] While

137. Ibid., 117.

138. Ibid., 143.

139. Ibid., 164–66.

140. Snyder, "Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism," 526.

141. Nam, "A Comparative Study"; Brewer, "A Response to Grace"; MacGregor, "Sacramental Theology," *Central European Synthesis*.

142. Gonzalez, "Balthasar Hubmaier "; Klager, "'Truth is Immortal.'" The essential content of Klager's thesis is in "Hubmaier's Use of the Church Fathers."

143. Graffagnino, "Shaping." This followed up Snyder's initial work in "Modern Mennonite Reality."

144. Cooper, "Human Reason or Reasonable Humanity?"

145. Nam, "A Comparative Study," 263.

146. Ibid., 261–62.

this is not sacramentalism in Roman Catholic or Lutheran terms, Nam concludes, "Hubmaier moved from sacramentalism but reaffirmed the importance of the sacrament of baptism as the means of the making of the true church."[147] Brewer argued that Hubmaier "preserved something of his scholastic, medieval past by retaining its sense of sacramentalism, yet transposing the dispensation of grace from the symbol itself to the promise of the believer which the symbol represents and conveys."[148] This view is founded on Hubmaier's understanding of "sacrament" as "sworn pledge," especially as used in Hubmaier's liturgy of the Lord's Supper where it is expressed as the "pledge of love."[149] Brewer recognizes that Hubmaier and Zwingli arrive at the same Eucharistic conclusions, "differing only in their hermeneutical routes."[150] MacGregor questions whether Hubmaier should be considered among the Anabaptists. He suggests the following definition: "Anabaptists should be formally defined as that set of Radicals, or rebaptizers, who regarded baptism and the Lord's Supper as ordinances rather than sacraments."[151] Hubmaier does not fit that definition because his sacramental theology understood that baptism and the Lord's Supper both acted as "vehicles or channels of divine grace,"[152] *ex opera operato.*[153] Consequently, he should not be included among the Anabaptists.[154] In fact, Hubmaier is not only atypical of Anabaptists, he "created a unique theological synthesis" among the early sixteenth-century Reformers.[155] Nam utilizes the same definition of Anabaptism as MacGregor; that is, Anabaptists reject the term sacrament in favor of ordinance, though Nam does suggest an openness to Hubmaier using the term sacrament. Brewer asserts that Hubmaier has a sacramental theology, but continues to think of the necessity of faith preceding grace, independent of the enactment of the "pledge of love." MacGregor sees Hubmaier as continuing the medieval view of a sacrament via the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux, and allows for a "real presence" of Christ in the sacrament, not in the elements of water, bread, and wine, but in the gathered believing church. Can Hub-

147. Ibid., 266.
148. Brewer, "A Response to Grace," 109–10.
149. Ibid., 88.
150. Ibid., 98.
151. MacGregor, *Central European Synthesis,* 8.
152. Ibid., 265.
153. Ibid., 256.
154. Ibid., 264.
155. Ibid., 265–66

maier be unambiguously placed among the Anabaptists? It would seem not, if the lens of sacramental theology is applied.

Two scholars independently undertook studies on the continuity of Balthasar Hubmaier with early church tradition. Antonia Lucic Gonzalez submitted her doctoral thesis in 2008, and Andrew Klager submitted his doctoral thesis in 2011. While both undertake an investigation of the relationship of Hubmaier to early church traditions, they do so from very different perspectives. Gonzalez is concerned to place Hubmaier in Heiko Oberman's schema of Tradition I and Tradition II,[156] and McGrath's Tradition 0 in which he placed all Radical Reformers, and with which Gonzalez takes issue.[157] She concludes that on his appropriation of the church fathers, creeds, and councils Hubmaier should be included with the Reformers in Oberman's Tradition I, though not in the "center" of that category, and definitely not in McGrath's modified Tradition 0.[158] Not surprisingly, Klager in his thesis, which also explores Hubmaier's interaction with the church fathers, spends considerable time differentiating his approach to the topic from that of Gonzalez. His central argument is that Hubmaeir "viewed the church fathers as co-affiliates in the one, true *ecclesia universalis* by virtue of their fidelity to Scripture and witness to the preservation of credo-baptism beyond the apostolic era."[159]

Klager argues that the influence of Erasmus is crucial in Hubmaier's use of the church fathers, especially Erasmus's understanding of the decline of the church and the *restitutio* principle.[160] Klager observes that, for Hubmaier, church fathers who wrote prior to the point when the error of infant baptism corrupted the church are seen as Hubmaier's spiritual ancestors, and their exegesis of Scripture is cited as authoritative. Those who write after that point, like Augustine, are not cited as authorities.[161] The theses of Gonzalez and Klager are complementary, but Klager's more thorough examination of the immediate context in which Hubmaier lived and wrote and his more thorough examination of Hubmaier's corpus, provides better specific data on which to base a conclusion about Hubmaier's relationship to the church fathers, creeds, and councils. Nevertheless,

156. Gonzalez, "Balthasar Hubmaier," 39. See Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 365–93; McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 96.

157. Ibid., 61–62.

158. Ibid., 307–8

159. Klager, "Hubmaier's Use of the Church Fathers," 19.

160. Ibid., 24.

161. Ibid., 27.

Klager and Gonzalez share the view that "when disputes about the correct scriptural interpretation came to an impasse" Hubmaier looked "for the way the Scriptures had traditionally been interpreted" by "trustworthy sources."[162] "This is the very move, from Scripture to a verified source of its interpretation and authoritative doctrinal content, that prompts the questioning of Hubmaier's placement on the scale of radical biblicism and his alleged radical rejection of Christian tradition."[163] Yet Gonzalez acknowledges that Hubmaier's citings of the church fathers, the creeds, and councils are predetermined: "He uses their pronouncements when they agreed with his theology and disregarded them when they did not."[164] Klager holds a similar view about Hubmaier's integrity in citing the church fathers. It would seem then that Hubmaier is not citing them as independent authorities, but as exegetes, from a period when the church was not yet corrupted by the error of infant baptism, who agreed with his exegesis of pertinent passages of Scripture.

Snyder brought to the attention of the scholarly community the role of Hubmaier's 1526 *A Christian Catechsim* in the development of Anabaptism. In his 2008 doctoral thesis, Jason Graffagnino traced the antecedents of Hubmaier's catechism to Erasmus's rediscovery of the role of prebaptism catechization in the early church and how this prebaptism catechization might find expression in the sixteenth-century church. Erasmus argued for a "rebaptism" of children after receiving catechetical instruction rather than confirmation, but Erasmus's views were rejected by Catholic scholars at the Sorbonne in 1526.[165] Graffagnino argues for Hubmaier's awareness of this view of catechism as prebaptismal instruction prior to faith, and his incorporation of this view into his own understanding of baptism in his 1526 catechism. However, this is not the only influence discovered in Hubmaier's catechism. Graffagnino identifies the catechism of the *Unitas fratrum* in Moravia as also playing a crucial part in the development of Hubmaier's catechism.[166] In turn, Hubmaier's cat-

162. Ibid., 20, cf. Gonzalez, "Balthasar Hubmaier," 29.

163. Gonzalez, "Balthasar Hubmaier," 29.

164. Ibid., 291.

165. Graffagnino, "Shaping," 54–57.

166. Ibid., 168. Graffagnino challenges Rothkegel's identification of Hubmaier's pre-baptismal catechetical practice with Latin Church Fathers, arguing it may have come from the Czech Brethren practices. He also rejects Zeman's view that there was no connection between Hubmaier's *Lehrtafel* and the *Kinderfragen* of the Czech Brethren, arguing it is plausible that Hubmaier both was aware of the document and used some of its language, concepts, and practices. "Shaping," 170. Klager is also at

echism is "mirrored" in the catechism of Leonard Scheimer,[167] whose work Graffagnino argues influenced the Hutterite education system.[168] In this work, the "multi-dimensional religious climate of Moravia," as described by Martin Rothkegel,[169] is seen as the crucial factor in the development of Hubmaier's catechism.[170] Hubmaier is characterized as an Anabaptist, with antecedents in Erasmian Christian humanism as well as the older dissenting Moravian groups that had their origins in the ecclesial revolution generated by Jan Huss in the fifteenth century.

Brian Cooper, in his 2006 doctoral dissertation, explored the possibility that the understanding of the relationship between church and state as expressed by Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Menno Simons, had strong parallels to medieval Catholic natural law theology. For him, the appeal to governments to ameliorate the plight of their Anabaptist communities based on human moral awareness is enough to demonstrate the strong parallels between these Anabaptists and natural law theology.[171] Anabaptist scholars would demure at this conclusion, not least on methodological grounds that a parallel in ideas is insufficient to argue for reclassification of Anabaptist identity, but also based on a misrepresentation of the ecclesiology of these three representatives of Anabaptism.

In all of the above scholarship, the question of biblical interpretation is often raised. Sometimes it is given significant attention, at other times it is mentioned in passing. However, the question of hermeneutics is vital to any interpretation of Anabaptism, and it is to this stream of Anabaptist research we now turn.

HERMENEUTICS

Roland Bainton's 1963 article, "The Bible in the Reformation," provides a useful introduction to the study of the question of hermeneutics in the sixteenth century. He identified the major issue of the period that divided the Protestant and Catholic groups as the question of authority. He concluded

odds with MacGregor who argues Hubmaier first published his catechism in August 1524 and used it in the instruction of children, and later revised it in Nikolsburg. MacGregor, "Sacramental Theology," 107n62.

167. Ibid., 190.

168. Ibid., 203–4.

169. Rothkegel, "Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia," 164.

170. Graffagnino, "Shaping" 2.

171. Cooper, "Human Reason or Reasonable Humanity?" 96.

that the principle of *sola scriptura* "was basic for all the Protestants," and distinguished them from Catholics.[172] Rupert E. Davies had previously extensively explored this problem of authority in 1946 with specific reference to Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. He too acknowledges that all three of these Protestant Reformers believed that "the Bible was the repository of all religious truth."[173] Both Bainton and Davies go on to show that it is not enough simply to say that the Bible is the final source and authority to which appeals are to be made in matters of faith and life. There are questions raised as to the priority of the canon of Scripture vis-a-vis the church and its tradition; and what constitutes the text of Scripture, an issue that must be determined before the source of authority can be exactly defined.[174] Davies demonstrates the problems inherent in this external objectivization of the Bible as the Word of God by citing Luther's criteria of selection, "all that proclaims Christ." By imposing this presupposition on the text of Scripture Luther effectively reduced the canon of Scripture that he considered authoritative.[175] Similarly, Davies notes that defining the text of Scripture involves issues of translation. He maintains that "every translation is a surreptitious exegesis,"[176] implying that exegesis negates Scripture as an objective source of truth and thus its authority. Davies also applies these criticisms of Luther to Zwingli and Calvin, concluding that these Protestant Reformers failed to solve the problem of authority; that is, to demonstrate that there is an "accessible source of religious truth which is wholly authoritative."[177]

What Davies hints at, became explicit in Bainton and was forcefully stated by Alister McGrath: that the Reformation principle *sola scriptura* "is rendered either meaningless or unusable without a reliable hermeneutical program."[178] It was not enough to claim that the Word of God contained all that was necessary for faith and life, the words of Scripture had to be interpreted so that people understood what it was that God was saying to them. It is with these principles and presuppositions of interpretation that investigations in the area of hermeneutics are concerned.

172. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," 4.
173. Davies, *The Problem of Authority,* 147.
174. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," 6–21.
175. Davies, *The Problem of Authority,* 56.
176. Ibid., 57.
177. Ibid., 9, 154.
178. McGrath, *Intellectual Origins,* 152.

Robert M. Grant, while recognizing that some commentators propose a distinction between interpretation and exegesis, rejects that position and treats the two as equivalent.[179] Timothy George extends the discussion beyond *sola scriptura* by addressing what is at "the heart of Reformation hermeneutics," the Reformers' understanding of the clarity of Scripture.[180] In George's opinion, the Reformers not only viewed the Scripture as clear for all who had faith in matters relating to eternal salvation, but also saw the Scripture as a book different to all others: it was "alive" and it "interpreted" the reader.[181] Hermeneutics was therefore more than the application of "sound philological rules." It also required the development of a well-ordered ministry and program of rigorous theological education for the pastors and teachers who interpreted the Scripture to the congregation through the preached Word. Only through such a trained ministry could a harmony between the inner and external Word be achieved.[182] The emphasis on the preached Word as the process whereby the Holy Spirit brings about this reconciliation of the inner and outer Word is noted as axiomatic for Zwingli.[183] When tracing the influence of the Reformation, George includes a small section on Hubmaier, in which he notes a fundamental difference in hermeneutical approach between Zwingli and Hubmaier. For Zwingli, what is not forbidden in Scripture may continue to be practiced in accordance with the long traditions of the church; for Hubmaier, what is not explicitly commanded may not be practiced.[184]

The various Magisterial Reformers were themselves very aware of the importance of hermeneutics. Heinrich Bornkamm has shown that Luther, in his 1521 work *Lovaniensis scholae sophistis redditae Lutheriana confutatio,* demonstrated the intimate link between justification, hermeneutics, and philosophical considerations.[185]

Zwingli also shows his awareness of the hermeneutical issue in his writings *On Clarity* (1522) and *Sixty–Seven Articles* (1523). W. Peter Stephens claims that the series of rules that Zwingli enunciated for the interpretation of Scripture were developed in debate with various Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist opponents. He maintains that most of the

179. Grant, *Short History,* 2–3.
180. George, *Reading Scripture,* 124.
181. Ibid., 127.
182. Ibid., 132–33.
183. Ibid., 131.
184. Ibid., 224.
185. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career,* 183–97.

developments in Zwingli's hermeneutic were present in his initial works, and that "little change" took place in these principles of interpretation.[186]

Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, was also fully aware of the importance of the hermeneutical dispute, and wrote in a letter to the pastors of Bern specifically how to deal with Anabaptists when debating with them. His method was to challenge their interpretation of Scripture and insist on the Reformed understanding and method of interpretation, using firstly the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and secondly the rule of faith and love as the fundamental principles for interpreting Scripture.[187]

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is not only his "comprehensive summary" of theology, but included his hermeneutical principles so that his purpose "to prepare and qualify students of theology for the reading of the divine Word" could also be fulfilled.[188]

The Anabaptists also became involved in trying to define their own principles of interpretation. John Wenger translated and edited an early Anabaptist tract on hermeneutics that he attributed to Michael Sattler.[189] This tract begins by proposing to explain the principles for correct interpretation of Scripture, but does this more by way of a demonstration of a method than a description of the principles or presuppositions that guide the method.

This awareness of the importance of hermeneutics in the sixteenth century was reflected in Reformation studies from the late 1940s to the end of the 1980s. Various researchers investigated the link between Luther's theology and his hermeneutic. Gerhard Ebeling's *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung* pioneered this research and is, according to James Preus, foundational in understanding Luther's new hermeneutic.[190] Ebeling identified a shift in Luther's hermeneutic from the older four senses of Scripture and the method of the scholastics, to a historico-grammatical approach. He achieves this by conflating the three spiritual senses, the allegorical, tropological, and anagogical, into one, the *sensus literalis propheticus*. This resulted in Luther arguing that exegesis of Scripture involves only grasping the literal sense, which is understood as the tropological

186. Stephens, *Theology of Huldrych Zwingli,* 59.

187. Fast and Yoder, "How to Deal with Anabaptists," 84–88.

188. Preface to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 18–19, cited in Forstmann, *Word and Spirit,* 22. Calvin's hermeneutics are not discussed at length as he played no part in the development of Hubmaier's hermeneutic.

189. Wenger, "An Early Anabaptist Tract," 26–44.

190. Preus, *From Shadow to Promise,* 148.

sense, where Christ is identified with faith.[191] McGrath does not accept the older view of the new hermeneutic being the cause of Luther's theological breakthrough, though he does concede that "Luther's hermeneutical and soteriological insights developed symbiotically, each dimension to his thought reinforcing and stimulating the other."[192]

Preus takes issue with Ebeling's view, arguing that to identify Christ and faith in the Old Testament does not adequately consider the way Luther deals with the Old Testament text. He proposes that a better understanding of Luther's hermeneutic is gained by considering how Luther developed the notion of promise. Luther broke with the older method of interpretation only when he ceased to use the tropological sense.[193] Darrell Reinke seeks to extend Preus's examination of Luther's hermeneutic by noting a move from allegory to metaphor in the way Luther used the Old Testament.[194] Siegfried Raeder has introduced the issue of Luther as translator into his discussion of Luther's hermeneutic.[195]

There have also been investigations into Luther's understanding of the term the "clarity of Scripture." Ernst Wolf has examined this topic by analyzing the debate between Luther and Erasmus on free will.[196] Erling Teigen approached the subject by analyzing the Lutheran confessions of faith.[197] Priscilla Hayden-Roy undertook a comparative study on the clarity of Scripture between Luther and Sebastian Frank.[198]

Some work was done on Zwingli's hermeneutic, though not as extensively as that done on Luther. Stephens, who undertakes an examination of Zwingli's use of the Bible, notes that the foundational work in this area was produced by Edwin Künzli in 1951 as a dissertation at Zurich University.[199] Fritz Busser noted that the lack of work on Zwingli's hermeneutic is

191. Ebeling, "The New Hermeneutic," 36–37.

192. McGrath, *Intellectual Origins,* 164.

193. Preus, "Old Testament Promissio," 161.

194. Reinke, "From Allegory to Metaphor," 338–39.

195. Raeder, "Exegetical and Hermeneutical Work," 363–406.

196. Wolf, "Uber 'Klarheit der Heiligen Schrift,'" 721–28. Hayden-Roy has also undertaken a similar discussion, comparing Luther with Sebastian Franck. Hayden-Roy, "Hermeneutica gloria," 50–67.

197. Teigen, "Clarity of Scripture," 147–66. Other works on Luther's hermeneutic include Franzmann, "Seven Theses," 337–50; Goldingay, "Luther and the Bible," 33–58; and Runia, "Hermeneutics of the Reformers," 121–52. Runia confines his comparison to Luther and Calvin.

198. Hayden-Roy, "Hermeneutica gloria."

199. Stephens, *Theology of Huldrych Zwingli,* 51n2. See also Künzli,

a "deplorable" gap in Zwinglian research. He addressed the issue in a brief article noting Zwingli's debt to Erasmus. He concludes that the detailed examination of the evidence that points to the early and sustained influence of Erasmus on Zwingli's hermeneutic gives "greater weight" to the view that Zwingli came to know the gospel independently of Luther.[200] Fulvio Ferrario has contributed to this area of research by investigating Zwinglian influences on the origins of Anabaptist hermeneutic in Zurich.[201] Christine Christ has contributed a significant article assessing the relationship between the hermeneutics of Zwingli and Erasmus in 1522. It provides an excellent foundation for further exploration in the development of Zwingli's hermeneutic in his dispute with the Anabaptists.[202]

The field of Erasmian hermeneutics has also occupied some researchers. It has received more attention than that given to Zwingli, but much less than to Luther. John W. Aldridge produced a study on this topic in 1966, which received very critical reviews.[203] John Payne, who was responsible for one of the negative reviews of Aldridge's work, presented his own brief assessment based on a wider selection of sources than those used by Aldridge. He rejects the view that Erasmus is the father of the modern historico-grammatical method of exegesis, and the view that Erasmus passed over the search for the literal sense of Scripture. He proposes an alternative view that the young Erasmus of the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1503) followed the allegorical and tropological senses more than the older Erasmus who wrote the preface to the *Novum Testamentum* (1516). In the later work, Erasmus strongly advocates the historico-grammatical approach to the interpretation of Scripture. However, following his debates with Luther in *De libero arbitrio* (1524–25), Erasmus again shifts his position. He now gives greater weight in his hermeneutic to the tropological and allegorical senses compared to the literal sense derived through

"Quellenproblem Erster Teil," 185–207; Künzli, "Quellenproblem Zweiter Teil," 253–307; Marti's response to Künzli: "Mysticher Schriftsinn," 365–74; and Künzli's response to Marti: "Antwort an Paul Marti," 375–77.

200. Busser, "Zwingli the Exegete," 192.

201. Ferrario, "L'anabattismo," 383ff. He also has a chapter on the hermeneutics of Zwingli and Hubmaier in his PhD dissertation, which was presented to The University of Zurich in January 1992. He kindly made this chapter available to the author. He is in general agreement with the analysis of the hermeneutical relationship of Hubmaier and Zwingli as presented in this book, though he restricts himself to an examination of only Hubmaier's baptismal works. His PhD was later published as *La "Sacra ancora."*

202. Christ, "Das Schriftverständnis," 117–25.

203. Aldridge, *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus.*

the historico-grammatical method of exegesis.[204] Torrance holds a similar position recognizing, as does Payne, the distinctions between body and spirit, letter and spirit, which underlie all of Erasmus's hermeneutic.[205] These works on Erasmus's hermeneutic can be supplemented by referring to two sets of collected essays, *Essays on the Works of Erasmus,* edited by Richard L. DeMolen and *Erasmus,* edited by Thomas A. Dorey.

In 1984, Willard Swartley compiled *Essays on Biblical Interpretation.* The Select Bibliography shows that there was major interest in Anabaptist hermeneutics in the 1960s. Of the twenty-five articles cited that deal with sixteenth-century Anabaptist hermeneutics, sixteen come from the 1960s. The more general treatment of the topic before the 1960s was transformed into more specific studies of individuals and particular topics within the broader framework of hermeneutics. William Klassen wrote on Pilgram Marpeck, addressing the issues of letter and spirit, and the relationship of the Old and New Covenants.[206] Henry Poettcker investigated the hermeneutic of Menno Simons.[207] Walter Klaassen wrote on Word, Spirit and Scripture, as well as a brief article on the hermeneutic of Balthasar Hubmaier.[208] Wilhelm Wiswedel wrote on the theme of the "Inner and Outer Word," which included consideration of Hans Denck as the major contributor in this area.[209] This listing of materials on Anabaptist hermeneutics should be complemented by the addition of works on the hermeneutic of Peter Riedemann by Robert C. Holland and the hermeneutic of Dirk Philips in association with the theme of ecclesiology that Douglas H. Shantz addressed in 1986.[210]

In a short article for Volume 5 of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia,* Swartley identifies a number of principles on which both Protestants and Anabaptists agreed regarding interpretation of the Scriptures. These are: the final authority of the Scriptures; an emphasis on the literal-historical method of interpretation in contrast to the allegorical methods used since

204. Payne, "Towards the Hermeneutics of Erasmus," 13–49.

205. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics of Erasmus."

206. William Klassen, "Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck." Also "Anabaptist Hermeneutics," 83–86 and *Covenant and Community.*

207. Poettcker, *Hermeneutics of Menno Simons.*

208. Walter Klaassen, "Word, Spirit, and Scripture." Also "Speaking in Simplicity" and "The Bern Debate."

209. Wiswedel, "The Inner and the Outer Word."

210. Holland, "Hermeneutics of Peter Riedemann"; Shantz, "Ecclesiological Focus." 115, 127.

the second century AD; and a christocentric emphasis.[211] He further notes that the areas of disagreement included a difference in understanding the relationship between the two Testaments; the relation of the Word and the Spirit; the inner and outer word; the role of believers in the interpretation of the Scriptures; and in his opinion "perhaps most importantly of all, in the relation of discipleship and obedience to insight and knowledge."[212] He goes on to suggest that there were "aberrations" to these stated Anabaptist hermeneutical presuppositions and principles, specifically identifying the Münster Anabaptists who did not hold to the superiority of the New Testament over the Old, and who shifted from nonviolence to violence. He attributes this shift to the eschatological views of Melchior Hofmann, which he asserts introduced a new hermeneutic.[213]

Hubmaier's place in Swartley's Anabaptist hermeneutical family is not explored to any depth. For Swartley, Hubmaier is peripheral to Anabaptist hermeneutics. Swartley identifies a primary feature of Anabaptist hermeneutical principle as "communal hermeneutics." Pilgram Marpeck and Hans Denck provide the major sources from which Swartley draws material to describe this "communal hermeneutic." Hubmaier is noted as supporting this key principle, but only his *Theses against Eck* is cited in support of this view. Marpeck's *Testamentserleutterung* is cited as providing evidence of the way Anabaptists understood the Old Testament as preparatory to the New.[214] Hans Denck is cited to support the view that Anabaptists emphasized the inner Word, the inner illumination by the Holy Spirit that enables the believer to understand the Word of God. To balance Denck's emphasis on the Holy Spirit, Swartley cites Marpeck as an example of an Anabaptist who upheld the primacy of the written Word over the Spirit. Marpeck demonstrated his position in his debate on the issue with the spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld.[215] Finally, Denck is used as the example of one who stressed obedience as a hermeneutical principle, described by Irvin B. Horst as an "epistemological principle."[216]

Research in Anabaptist hermeneutics virtually ceased in the 1990s, but was revived to some degree with Stuart Murray's 2000 publication of *Biblical Interpretation.* This work provided a general exploration of

211. Swartley, "Biblical Interpretation (Hermeneutics)," 80.
212. Ibid., 81.
213. Ibid., 82.
214. Ibid., 81.
215. Ibid.
216. Ibid.

sixteenth-century Anabaptists under what Murray identified as key themes. These key themes closely reflect the major issues current at that time in Anabaptist scholarship. We will return to Murray's work to examine where Hubmaier is located in this broad Anabaptist world of interpretation.

After Bender's attempt to define normative Anabaptism, research began that specifically focused on Hubmaier's hermeneutic. Walter Klaassen identifies Hubmaier as being like the Swiss Brethren in his general approach to the interpretation of the Bible.[217] He does acknowledge that Hubmaier differs from the Swiss Brethren in his view of the civil magistrate and that he does not make as definite distinction between the two Testaments as the Swiss Brethren.[218] Klaassen restricts his analysis to Hubmaier's works to those related to baptism. Hence it is hardly surprising that Hubmaier's method of interpretation seems very similar to that attributed to the Swiss Brethren, as they agreed with Hubmaier in his conclusions regarding baptism.

Klaassen maintained that Hubmaier and the Swiss Brethren shared a suspicion of learning that they believed was used to cloud the plain simple meaning of the Scripture.[219] Learning and knowledge of languages has a place when seeking the meaning of Scripture, but it is always supplementary to common sense (the literal sense) or natural reason.[220] This position was based on the presupposition that the Scriptures were essentially clear and understandable to even the simplest person, a position also held at various times by Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli early in the Reformation.

Of a more technical nature was the principle that a command includes the prohibition of its opposite.[221] This was a principle that Zwingli had used in debate with his Catholic opponents to reject purgatory, and which Hubmaier also adopted. It was restated by Hubmaier as "everything not expressly commanded in Scripture [is] to be regarded as forbidden."[222] Hubmaier was later to qualify this by adding that it applied to those things that were to do with the honor of God and our salvation. This emphasis on the commands of Christ also led to the adoption of the principle of

217. Walter Klaassen, "Speaking in Simplicity," 139.
218. Ibid.
219. Ibid., 142.
220. Ibid., 144–45.
221. Ibid., 145.
222. Ibid.

obedience.[223] Where Christ gives a direct command, obedience is demanded of the disciple without fear of the consequences.

Hubmaier also subscribed to the generally accepted principle of the Reformers that Scripture interprets Scripture; the clear text being used to clarify the meaning of the obscure.[224] A supplementary rule states that the text must be interpreted in its context, the preceding and following text being taken into consideration.[225]

However, it is Klaassen's contention that Hubmaier did not consistently use his principles of interpretation, despite this being a fundamental principle of his hermeneutic.[226] As evidence of Hubmaier's failure to apply his own principle of consistency, Klaassen cites Hubmaier's work *On the Sword* (1527). In this work, Hubmaier argues against the Swiss Brethren's position concerning Christian magistracy and bearing the sword. Hubmaier maintains that it is not only possible for a Christian to be a magistrate, but that it is of greater benefit to the civil order if Christians are magistrates. Klaassen argues that the difference is the result of the inconsistent application of hermeneutical principles.[227] Although Klaassen has identified the difference in theological conclusions between the Swiss Brethren and Hubmaier concerning the magistracy, he has not provided the detailed analysis to prove his thesis that the difference is due to inconsistent application of hermeneutical principles. Klaassen's conclusions have been challenged by Snyder's position that early Swiss Anabaptism up to 1527 and the publication of the *Schleitheim Articles* was not sectarian, separatist, and pacifist.[228] Snyder used Hubmaier's *A Christian Catechism* of 1526 as the identifiable core of Anabaptist theology. While Snyder does not comment directly on the issue, he clearly implies that Hubmaier consistently applied his hermeneutic throughout his career. This conclusion is based on Snyder's redefinition of the theological core of Anabaptism, and the distinction between the Swiss Anabaptists before and after the publication of the *Schleitheim Articles*.

Stuart Murray's presentation of Hubmaier within the broader setting of Anabaptist hermeneutics represents the view of those researchers

223. Ibid., 146.
224. Ibid.
225. Ibid., 417.
226. Ibid., 145
227. Ibid., 147.
228. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 109.

who continue to see Hubmaier as "atypical" of Anabaptism.[229] On the one hand, Hubmaier is presented as sharing the hermeneutic of the Swiss Anabaptists, especially his understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit to "liberate reason from darkness to light."[230] On the other hand, Hubmaier's understanding of the relationship of the Word and the Spirit is different to the Swiss Anabaptists, allowing Hubmaier to be critical of their literalism that led to legalism.[231] Hubmaier also shared with the Swiss Anabaptists a view of the simplicity of Scripture and a suspicion of theological learning,[232] and an appeal to congregational hermeneutics, where the scholar aided the congregation to understand technical details but could not override the congregation's agreed understanding.[233] Murray notes Hubmaier urged that dark texts should be read in light of clear texts of Scripture and so avoid "half-truth."[234] This is Hubmaier's "cloven-hoof" hermeneutical principle, which was not used by the Swiss Anabaptists. However, Murray's analysis of Hubmaier's hermeneutic, like Klaassen's, is not based on a thorough assessment of all of Hubmaier's works, a task beyond the scope of what Murray was seeking to achieve.

The resurgence in Hubmaier studies since 2000 has not seen extensive commentary on his hermeneutics. Kirk MacGregor traces the development of Hubmaier's hermeneutic against the backdrop of Luther's hermeneutic of "*sola scriptura* plus faithful reason,"[235] but is more interested in tracing the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux on Hubmaier's sacramental theology. Gerald Biesecker-Mast does include a useful section on Hubmaier's "cloven-hoof" hermeneutical principle, which he sees as the individual reconciling apparently contradictory passages of Scripture. However, this fails to appreciate the congregational setting of Hubmaier's hermeneutic.[236] Emir Caner represents Hubmaier as at one with those who understand the Scriptures to be "the inerrant and infallible rule of faith."[237] Hubmaier's view of Scripture is complemented by his hermeneutic that he summarized in four premises: "Scripture must be read in its plain, simple

229. Murray, *Biblical Interpretation,* 29.
230. Ibid., 57.
231. Ibid., 126.
232. Ibid., 53.
233. Ibid., 163.
234. Ibid., 60.
235. MacGregor, *Central European Synthesis*, 98–100.
236. Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword,* 116–17.
237. Caner, "Balthasar Hübmaier," 32.

context unless otherwise indicated. . . . Scripture must be compared with other texts in order to confirm beliefs. . . . Ambiguous texts must be enlightened by clearer, more understandable texts. Scripture is unchanging and eternal, but humans can err in interpretation."[238] Caner sums up Hubmaier's hermeneutic as similar to the Swiss Brethren. Hubmaier teaches that the interpretation of Scripture should take place among the gathered body of believers, that correct understanding of Scripture brings about change in behavior, and that those who perform "tricks" with Scripture can "wreak havoc on the congregation."[239] However, Caner's interpretation is based exclusively on Hubmaier's *Theses Against Eck*, which is then erroneously represented as Hubmaier's hermeneutic for all his works.

Brian Brewer is representative of a number of other Hubmaier scholars who make passing reference to Hubmaier's use of Scripture or occasionally to his hermeneutic. Brewer acknowledged the contribution Luther made to Hubmaier's appreciation of *sola scriptura,* but did not systematically explore Hubmaier's hermeneutic.[240]

In 1981, John Oyer suggested the area of hermeneutics as a topic for further research in Anabaptist studies.[241] H. Wayne Walker Pipkin in 2006 decried that "some interpreters simply write their own agenda onto Hubmaier."[242] The research that follows seeks to allow Hubmaier to speak for himself, in his own words, and within his own historical context. By using the lens of the clarity of Scripture it is hoped to clarify the relationship of Hubmaier to the various sources of potential influence on the development of his hermeneutic. It is also hoped that by using the theme of the clarity of Scripture it will be possible to better determine Hubmaier's place in the Reformation as a whole. Finally, the careful assessment of Hubmaier's hermeneutic across the whole corpus of his work will provide a detailed basis on which future comparative studies between Hubmaier and his contemporary reformers: Magisterial, Radical and Anabaptist, may be undertaken.

238. Ibid., 33.
239. Ibid.,
240. Brewer, "A Response to Grace," 24.
241. Oyer, "Topics for Research," 381.
242. Pipkin, *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr,* 32.