Foreword

I AM VERY HAPPY to commend this book to a wide readership, having seen it develop from a doctoral project under my supervision. Dr Chatfield is a reliable analyst of one of the most individual and remarkable among the radical theologians in the sixteenth-century Reformation. Balthasar Hubmaier has been unduly marginalized in the conventional narratives of the period. From Martin Luther onwards, it suited "mainstream" leaders at the time (and it has suited varied interest-groups since) to portray radicals as ill-educated fanatics, alien to the true spirit of the Reformation. As a scholarly preacher with a doctorate in theology (and indeed, a former pupil of Luther's great Catholic adversary Dr Johann Eck), Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier has been inconvenient for this narrative. Indeed, he is one of the great might-have-beens of the Reformation, with his church in Nikolsburg briefly gaining established status in that little territory, and showing how Anabaptists might have had a different future in sixteenth-century Europe. His martyrdom, and that of his devoted wife, brutally ended such a possibility. Now, in a very different Christian era, with the help of Graeme Chatfield's expert guidance, we can look at his theology of Scripture with fresh eyes, and see that one of the reasons that Hubmaier infuriated Reformers like Luther or Zwingli was that he took methods of interpreting Scripture which they themselves used, and came to very different theological conclusions from them. Yet he also struck out in his own direction, away from the conclusions that many of his radical contemporaries had drawn about biblical interpretation: their bitter disagreements remain fascinating. In an age when Western Christianity is riven by arguments about how the Bible should be interpreted, used, and applied to current society,

it is highly instructive to listen to the voice of an independent-minded and deeply learned biblical theologian from another age.

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