

Preaching Against the State:
The Persecution of the Anabaptists
as an Example for 21st Century Evangelicals

JASON G. DUESING

Provost,
Associate Professor of Historical Theology,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Packer's Dusty Discovery and the Music of the Anabaptists

During J. I. Packer's second year of undergraduate studies at Oxford, he was invited to serve as the junior librarian at the Christian Union student organization. Having been converted only a year earlier, Packer was new to the Union but, as he would soon discover, so were a recent donation of books.¹ An octogenarian clergyman had recently concluded that he could no longer make use of his library and thus gave them to the Union who, upon receipt, proceeded to pile them in the basement of their meeting hall for an unknown future. Thereafter, as is now famously told and retold, Packer discovered, as a nineteen year-old, the works of the Puritan John Owen—and the evangelical world has not been the same since. At the time of this discovery, Packer would later relate his life “was all over the place” emotionally and thus “God used [Owen] to save my sanity.” More than just sorting out Packer, his literal “recovery” of the Puritans would start a movement that not only would bring great and good revived interest in these evangelical forebears, but also would help provide an anchor to the Word of God during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s in the United Kingdom and abroad. One could argue, that had not Packer discovered that box of books, his tremendously influential and life altering works, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958) and *Knowing God* (1973), may never have appeared—not to mention the republishing of the *Works of John Owen* themselves as well as many other volumes in

¹ This essay originated first as a presentation at the Ninth annual conference hosted by the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies in Louisville, KY, September 15-16, 2015.

the Puritan canon readily available today.² Truly this is an example of one man's discarded tomes serving as another man's lifelong treasure.

While it might at first sound odd to start an essay on the persecution of the Anabaptists with a story of the 20th century rediscovery of the Puritans, the latter actually serves as a fitting metaphor for the topic I seek to address. For the Puritans, from the sixteenth century to the present, have endured misunderstanding and misinterpretation, yet when rediscovered and redeployed by earnest evangelicals over the years, have also proven to serve as timely companions and guides for the clear teaching and preaching of the Bible and the proclamation of the New Testament message of the gospel.³ Whether it was Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, or even Packer, himself, relighting the paths back to the archives containing the treasures of Puritan wisdom and help, their rediscovery across the years has proven to bolster and encourage in times of cultural and spiritual darkness. While to many, the Puritans are worthy of nothing more than an dusty pile of books in a basement corner, to many others they have, like for Packer, been used of God to provide theological clarity and life-giving gospel reorientation. Well, if the Puritans have been seen frequently as objects of discard and neglect, the Anabaptists are more often thought of as clanging nuisances of history many have sought to mute or dismiss much like most of America must treat the musical acts that frequent the end of *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon—sounds of history that are more noise than melody, more cacophony than symphony. But like the Puritans, who in many ways were made most useful for doctrinal instruction in times other than their own, the Anabaptists, as I hope to show, can serve, perhaps surprisingly, a similar function in our own day especially when we observe how and why they endured persecution in the Beatitudinal fashion (Mat 5:2-12). Indeed, what many may have sought to silence in eras past as mere

² Leland Ryken, *J.I. Packer: An Evangelical Life* (Crossway, 2015), 265-267.

³ As a helpful working definition of Puritanism, B. R. White indicated that it "seems right to define the period of true Puritanism as 1570-1640 and a Puritan as an earnest Protestant, his understanding of the Bible shaped by a theology which was broadly Calvinist in type, who, while remaining a member of the established Church of England, sought its further reformation often, though not always in the direction of Presbyterianism," in "Introduction," in *The English Puritan Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 12.

footnotes or sideshows in the history of Christianity, may well now serve well as the music the future of Christianity needs most to hear. Truly, this can serve as an example of one man's cacophony serving as another man's symphony.

In what follows, I intend to review the topic, "Preaching against the State: The Persecution of the Anabaptists as an Example for 21st Century Evangelicals" by answering the following questions. (1) Who were the Anabaptists? (2) For what were they persecuted? and, (3) Why are they of value for us today? In my answering of each of these, I seek to present selections from the lives and thoughts of a few of the key leaders of the movement.

Who Were the Anabaptists?

Definitions

In the years following Martin Luther's first strides toward reformation, the sirens of the Anabaptists concussed in strident discord to Huldreich Zwingli and the Swiss Reformer's idea of a Magisterial Reformation.⁴ What is more, most of the historical tradition that followed until the twentieth century agreed with Zwingli that the Anabaptists were disorderly radicals of extreme dissonance. Many were stamped with the label of Munster revolutionary, a mischievous sect, who many solemnly swore were up to no good. Yet, as William Estep argued, the main and most influential stream of "Anabaptism might well be, outside the Reformation itself, the most influential movement the sixteenth century spawned" for "concepts such as religious liberty and its concomitant, the separation of church and state, may be directly traced to sixteenth century Anabaptism."⁵ George Hunston Williams, noted scholar and former professor of ecclesiastical history at Harvard University, sought to recognize the Radical Reformation as a "Fourth" Reformation as distinct as "Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism" in terms of significance for the "rise of modern Christianity."⁶ Williams also provided the most extensive treatment showing that not all sixteenth

⁴ Portions of this paragraph are adapted from Jason G. Duesing, *Seven Summits in Church History* (Rainer Publishing, forthcoming).

⁵ William R. Estep, Jr., *Anabaptist Beginnings (1523-1533): A Source Book* (B. De Graaf, 1976), 2.

⁶ George H. Williams, ed., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Westminster John Knox, 1957), 19.

century Anabaptists were a part of a “program for violent destruction of Europe’s religious and social institutions.”⁷ Williams identified three groups of Anabaptists: revolutionary, contemplative, and evangelical—with the latter most theologically close to the Magisterial Reformers in terms of their doctrines of the sole authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone. In the doctrine of salvation and especially the doctrine of the church they differed, but never to the point of violence or mass social revolution. For Williams, the evangelical Anabaptists “understood that the imitation of Christ, from hazardous rebaptism at some Germanic Jordan to a martyr’s pyre, represented the fullness of the Christian way. As Christ began his public ministry at baptism, so many Evangelical Anabaptists felt compelled to imitate him in an itinerant ministry of proclaiming the gospel of repentance.”⁸ What, then, makes them radical? Though the Radical Reformation in its broadest expressions consisted of many branches, nevertheless, Williams shows that all “agreed in cutting back to that root [of faith and order and the ultimate source of divine authority among them] and in freeing the church and creed of what they regarded as suffocating growth of ecclesiastical tradition and magisterial prerogative.”⁹

Identification with the Magisterial Reformers

For the purposes of this essay, I am focusing on the evangelical stream, in part, because they remained most closely identified with the Magisterial Reformers. The early Anabaptists in Zurich were trained by Zwingli in the humanist tradition of returning to the original sources for doctrinal development.¹⁰ Through this training, many of the Evangelical

⁷ Walter Klaassen, “A Fire that Spread Anabaptist Beginnings,” in *Christian History* 5 (1985), available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1985/issue5/507.html>. See G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd edition (Truman State University Press, 2000).

⁸ Williams, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, “Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 247-248.

Anabaptists first encountered the *sola fide*,¹¹ *sola Christus*, *sola gratia* gospel and as a foundation embraced with deep devotion the concept of *sola Scriptura*.¹² Indeed, this careful study of the Bible in its original languages led several of the Anabaptists to press Zwingli for New Testament fidelity when it came to ecclesiology. Estep also documents the ways in which both Balthasar Hubmaier and Pilgram Marpeck used the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed their works.¹³ While there is not much evidence to show that the Evangelical Anabaptists used the creeds as a test of fellowship, it is abundantly evident that they shared agreement with them. In addition, all of these Anabaptists would affirm the traditional articulation of the nature of God as Trinitarian. The Evangelical Anabaptist movement did not endure long enough to establish much of a written tradition, but one gathering in 1527 did produce a confession of faith. *The Schleithem Confession* intentionally reads more like a church manual and its silence on the broader Protestant doctrines speaks to the agreement of the Anabaptists in these areas and reflects the determination only to speak to areas of disagreement, namely ecclesiology.

Differences with the Magisterial Reformers

In the doctrine of the church, the evangelical Anabaptists, as we have seen, disagreed with the Magisterial Reformers. The basis for much of this disagreement arises over the placement of what they Reformers called "the fall of the church." For the Anabaptists, they concluded and maintained that the point at which the church fell or entered into a period of sustained corruption was the point at which "church and state were united under Constantine."¹⁴ Estep explains that the Reformers by and large saw the Constantinian era "as a period of the church's triumph" and thus did not come to see the church as ever achieving a complete fall.

¹¹ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 199, explains that while the Anabaptists took issue with Luther in the way in which justification related to infant baptism, "There is no repudiation of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith, but rather a new interpretation which attempted to read into the term more biblical and ethical content than they felt Luther ever gave it, without resorting to a soteriology based on a works righteousness."

¹² Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 190.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

Rather, they focused on Papal corruption and sought to reform the existing structure from within.¹⁵

An obvious area of disagreement, of course, occurred over the doctrine of baptism. However, when the Anabaptists moved to embrace believer's baptism (not yet immersion), it was a move they felt was obligatory not because they saw baptism now as participating in the act of salvation, but rather because they saw it intrinsically linked to the establishment of a free church separate from the state. As Estep explains, "Each of the terms [they] used was intended to convey the meaning of baptism as the deliberate, voluntary act of a committed disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, baptism for the believer symbolizes his newness of life and his determination to follow Christ even unto death Without it, the visible church could not exist."¹⁶ Further, as will be seen in what follows, the Anabaptists saw the recovery of the church as intrinsically connected to the recovery of the gospel itself. Estep says, "The nature of the gospel and of man's response to it are also reasons [for rejecting the baptism of infants]. Faith, man's response to the proclaimed Word, is the foundation of the church. Only the faithful are qualified for baptism and church membership."¹⁷

Thus, it was in Zürich on January 21, 1525, the first Anabaptists left the prevalent and state-mandated tradition of infant baptism and followed their biblical convictions that true baptism should be administered solely to believers, and that such believer's baptism should function as the entrance into membership of the local church.¹⁸ Estep recounts the significance of this event.

¹⁵ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 241.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁸The Anabaptist leader, Pilgram Marpeck, articulated in light of the order given in the Great Commission that one was made a disciple (i.e. is conversion as the result of the placing of one's faith in teaching received) before receiving baptism. Combined with the statement of Jesus inaugurating the church upon the confession of Peter in Matthew 16, believer's baptism served as the public confession of faith for the believer's entrance into the local church. See Pilgram Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 227. See also Jason G. Duesing, "Pilgram Marpeck's Christian Baptism," *Faith & Mission* 23:3 (Summer 2006):3-16.

On this fateful night the concept of a Believers' Church based upon a voluntary confession of faith confirmed by the act of public baptism found concrete realization in history. Thus, from a handful of radicals in Switzerland and South Germany who preferred to call themselves Brethren in Christ, the Free Church movement sprang.¹⁹ Among these evangelical Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier emerged as the chief theologian and spokesman and thus he will serve as our first case study to explore these themes further.

Case Study: The Life of Balthasar Hubmaier (1480?-1528)

Though born into the peasant class around 1480, Hubmaier grew to be called the "Doctor of Anabaptism" in recognition of his educational attainments under the famous Roman Catholic apologist, Eck of Ingolstadt.²⁰ By the 1520s, the scholar-priest served the parish church in the town of Waldshut, on the South German border. He began there faithfully, as he had in all his other places of ministry, carrying out the Roman Catholic traditions and rituals with zeal. But unknown to many, he also studied the Scriptures. The more he studied and conversed with those participating in the Swiss Reformation, Hubmaier realized he had been preaching for some years "yet had not known the way unto eternal life." After his conversion, he took up both the preaching of the gospel and initiating reforms in his church following those in Zurich. Abandoning celibacy, he married Elizabeth Hügline, who became a sustaining and faithful compatriot. The rapid pace of change in Waldshut attracted the governing authorities and rather than harm his congregation, in late 1524, Hubmaier fled. During this time he wrote his influential pamphlet on religious liberty, *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*.

After some time passed, Hubmaier returned to Waldshut welcomed by great fanfare. He gave himself further to the study of Scripture and preaching the gospel. As a few disciples of Zwingli were separating from the Zurich reform movement over the doctrine of infant baptism in 1525, Hubmaier began questioning the doctrine's biblical

¹⁹William R. Estep, "A Believing People: Historical Background," in *The Concept of the Believers' Church: Addresses from the 1967 Louisville Conference*. Ed. James Leo Garrett, Jr. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1969), 45.

²⁰ Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (IVP Academic, 2011), 223.

foundation. On the Saturday before Easter, Hubmaier submitted to believer's baptism (by effusion not immersion) by a colleague of the former Zwinglian group. Now both Reformer and an Anabaptist, Hubmaier's days again were numbered in Waldshut and again he left. On the run toward Zurich, he was arrested by Zwingli and after considerable interrogation, Hubmaier recanted his Anabaptist convictions. After his confession, the free though humiliated Hubmaier traveled with his only companion, Elizabeth, to the more tolerant Moravia.

Regaining his courage and strength, Hubmaier took up his pen and wrote somewhere near seventeen tracts or pamphlets reasserting his Anabaptist convictions in matters relating to baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church discipline. He also published *Freedom of the Will*, which articulated his distance from the Reformed theological tradition on the doctrine of salvation. Hubmaier's theology emphasized the Christian life as one of consistent discipleship and while most evangelical Anabaptists pursued pacifism, Hubmaier argued for a place for governmental use of the "sword" and supported Christians serving in places of civil authority. The agents of King Ferdinand I apprehended Hubmaier and his wife in August 1527. Held in prison in Vienna until spring, Hubmaier endured trial and torture but refused to recant. Led to a pile of wood, the authorities rubbed gunpowder in his beard for explosive effect. As the fire was lit, he called out, "O my Heavenly Father! O my gracious God!" "His clothes were stripped from his back and he was placed in the torture rack . . . A large crowd followed the heretic to a pile of wood . . . Refusing the last rites and confession to a priest, the fire was lit . . . Hubmaier shouted, "O gracious God, forgive my sins and my great torment. O Father, I give thee thanks that thou wilt today take me out of this vale of tears. With joy I desire to die and come to thee. O Lamb, O Lamb, that takest away the sins of the world! O God, into thy hands I commit my spirit." To the people he said, "O dear brothers, if I have injured any, in word or deed, may he forgive me for the sake of my merciful God. I forgive all those that have done me harm . . . O Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit." As they rubbed sulfur and gunpowder into his beard he said, "O salt me well, salt me well." And raising his head he called out,

“O dear brothers, pray God that he will forgive me my guilt in this my death. I will die in the Christian faith.”²¹

Balthasar Hubmaier’s *Concerning Heretics* pamphlet, though written before he joined the evangelical Anabaptists, served to build a foundation upon which the Anabaptist movement later advanced their belief in the separation of the state from the church. The true “heretics” were those who “wickedly oppose the Holy Scriptures,” and these “inquisitors” condemned and executed any who chose the Bible over the church. For Hubmaier, the issue was that true faith cannot be coerced. He stated, “A Turk or a heretic is not convinced by our act, either with the sword or with fire, but only with patience and prayer.” Hubmaier defended the existence of the state to put “to death the criminals who injure the bodies of the defenseless (Romans 13:3-4),” but advocacy and enforcement of “a law to burn heretics is an invention of the devil.” In Hubmaier’s Europe, a person found to hold a view contradictory to the Roman Church was first given the opportunity to recant. However, if he persisted in his view, he was condemned by the church and then handed over to the state for execution. Hubmaier countered this practice by reminding that the sword of the church is the “Word of God,” not a physical weapon that wounds. Neither the attempt to coerce faith nor to execute those who deny the faith are functions of a New Testament church in any society. Hubmaier and his evangelical Anabaptists foresaw, beyond their own lifetimes, that the defense of every citizen’s right to pursue what they believe or do not believe only exists when the church operates independent of the state. For the Anabaptists and later evangelicals, the defense of this civil right ensures the proclamation of the gospel for all either to accept or reject freely, without coercion. Further, it prevents the state from using its sword of civil protection for matters of the soul and Spirit.

While some may still consider Balthasar Hubmaier mere dissonant noise of little value and continue to hear the Anabaptists through the overtures of Münster radicalism, a reexamination of Hubmaier can reveal a theological harmony with contemporary evangelicals—especially those rediscovering the vital doctrine of religious liberty. Such can be seen in the advice of contemporary religious

²¹ Henry Clay Vedder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (Knickerbocker, 1905), 244.

liberty advocate Russell D. Moore, “While we must engage politically to protect our inalienable religious rights and those of our neighbors, we must do so first as conservative Christians and not first as Christian conservatives. We must call the state to justice, but our ultimate concern should be for a place at the table of the marriage supper of the Lamb, not a place at a political party platform committee meeting. As we find in Paul’s discourse in 1 Timothy 2:1-10, our concern for the temporal political order is built on our much more significant concern for the gospel and the covenant community.”²²

For What Were the Anabaptists Persecuted?

Treason: Separation of Church and State

There is an episode in the great early 2000s television series, *The West Wing* that depicts the Ivy-League-PhD-President, attempting to boil down complex arguments of foreign relations and the economy into pithy 10 word statements in order to show his ability to play political-ball with his home-spun, down-to-earth, challenger for his re-election. After attempting to do such over several weeks, the president finally concludes that some things are just too complicated for 10 word statements. He says, “It is not the first 10 words that matter anyway. It’s the next 10. And the 10 after that.” Such is the case when attempting to formulate a concise answer for why it was that the Anabaptists were hunted and put to death by the hundreds and thousands. As I will attempt to explain, there were many factors, and like much of most of the history of persecution, even dating back to the death of our Lord Jesus, there are lies, misunderstandings, and overall failures to agree exactly why it is that Group A is seeking the death of Group B. However, if I were to attempt to boil it down to one word, even, that word would be treason. As Estep helpfully notes, “Any deviation from the established churches was considered a crime of treason.”²³

Further, this was complicated by the fact that the Anabaptists developed multiple enemies for their actions. Leonard Verduin describes

²² Russell D. Moore, “Conservative Christians in an Era of Christian Conservatives: Reclaiming the Struggle for Religious Liberty from Cultural Captivity,” in Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, ed. *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty* (B&H Academic, 2007), 144.

²³ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 29.

the developments among the Anabaptists as the “second front” of concern for Magisterial Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. On the one hand, the Magisterial Reformers’ first front of concern was clearly the actions and reactions of the Roman Catholics to their call for church reformation. The Magisterial Reformers desired to *reform* the Catholic Church in all areas of corruption by rightly establishing the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ by faith alone as the center of faith and practice. On the other hand, the Magisterial Reformers were concerned with the Anabaptists’ desire to move beyond church reform to complete *restoration* of the church to its New Testament origins.²⁴

By and large, the Magisterial Reformers were not looking to make many ecclesiological changes. They saw the economic and political ramifications of separating the church from the state and looked at the melding of these two under Constantine as a fit exercise for Christian civil and religious expression. Therefore, the Magisterial Reformers retained two things as a part of their ecclesiology. First, membership in the church (as well as recognition of citizenship with the state) was contingent upon one’s baptism as an infant. Second, just as the state carried the sword for the purpose of maintaining and establishing justice, so too did the church support the sword for the purpose of maintaining and establishing truth. Capital punishment was the sentence for acts or beliefs that many evangelicals today freely endorse. The Anabaptists attempted to conserve the doctrine of the believers’ church in a climate far more hostile, yet they did so not because they saw it as a gospel essential, but because they realized that the believers’ church functioned as the vehicle to protect gospel essentials.²⁵

While Western theologians today are quick to place doctrines such as ecclesiology, eschatology, and perhaps even variances of anthropology on the lowest rungs of what is essential for twenty-first century New Testament Christianity, it is a mistake to view the cultural

²⁴Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Sarasota; The Christian Hymnary Publishers, reprint 1997). This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, “Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 248-249.

²⁵ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, “Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 249.

climates of past centuries, such as the sixteenth century, as operating under the same doctrinal classifications. To be sure, in modern America where differences over the doctrine of the church do not merit the sentence of capital punishment, such issues do not seem as essential as to how one answers the contemporary evangelical question, “If you died tonight, how certain would you be that you would be in Heaven?” However, because the Anabaptists’ cultural milieu was far more complex and costly, ecclesiological distinctives became the battleground for conserving the gospel essentials.²⁶

The Anabaptists saw the marriage of church and state under Constantine as both harmful and unbiblical. One can articulate a pure gospel, as the Magisterial Reformers, did with great effect, but to do so within the confines of a corrupt and false church only convolutes the message one hopes to proclaim. In addition, by allowing and mandating individuals into the membership of the church that are not regenerate, the Magisterial Reformers left themselves open to further corruption.²⁷

For the Anabaptists, the only way to accomplish biblical purity in the Church was to separate completely from the existing institutions and establish a believers’ church. These early baptized churches no longer supported the use of the sword in church matters and refused to call for the death penalty even for those with divergent doctrinal views. Entrance into these new churches was by profession of faith (something infants could not do) in the form of believer’s baptism. Furthermore, the purity of these churches was protected by the regular practice of the ban, or church discipline, on those members who continued in unrepentant sin and thus showed themselves not to have believed what they said to have professed.²⁸

Therefore, one can see how the organization of a believers’ church was not only a radical departure from the societal status quo but also the symbol of one’s commitment to a greater ideal of church and gospel purity rooted not in the sacramental tradition but rather in the text of the Bible.²⁹

²⁶ Duesing, *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, 250.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

What the Roman Catholics and Magisterial Reformers Thought of the Anabaptists

For the sake of time, I think it helpful to recognize that the Roman Catholics of this era largely failed to understand the Anabaptists simply because they were, as Hubmaier was previously, largely “ignorant of the Bible and the true nature of the Christian faith.”³⁰ This simple yet enormous foundational difference, led to the entirety of the reasons for Roman Catholic persecution of the Anabaptists.

Regarding the Magisterial Reformers, I will give just two basic examples that center around disagreements over the doctrine of baptism. In 1527, Martin Luther was asked by two Roman Catholic priests for his thoughts on Anabaptism and his connection to them. The result was his *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528) in which he said, “the Anabaptists proceed dangerously in everything. Not only are they not sure of themselves, but also they act contrary to accepted tradition and out of their own imaginings.”³¹ John Calvin references Hubmaier throughout his treatment on baptism in the *Institutes* specifically to respond to *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* and the argument that infants are incapable of faith.³²

*Case Study: Pilgram Marpeck’s Christian Baptism*³³

This brings us to our second case study and a further treatment of the Anabaptist doctrine of baptism as a basis for persecution. Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556), although a lay-theologian, was nevertheless the number two writing theologian of the Anabaptist movement behind Hubmaier. His value to the state as a civil engineer brought him longer life and thus ample time to write and engage the defense of Anabaptist doctrines. With regard to the doctrine of baptism, Rollin Armour considers Pilgram Marpeck to have “articulated perhaps the most thoughtful interpretation of baptism among the Anabaptists.”³⁴

³⁰ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 218.

³¹ LW 40:229-262 and included in Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, eds., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Fortress, 2012), 250.

³² *Institutes* 4.16.17-23,25.

³³ This section adapted from Jason G. Duesing, “Pilgrim Marpeck’s Christian Baptism,” in *Faith & Mission* (Summer 2006), 3-16.

³⁴ Rollin Stely Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1966), 113. Research related to the writings of Pilgram Marpeck

And John Wenger concluded that Pilgram Marpeck was “loyally Biblical [*sic*]” not only in his daily life, but also his theological life, especially in the development of his theology of baptism.³⁵ In one sense, Marpeck is much like Tolkien’s Faramier, the younger, lesser known Anabaptist brother, but who, in his own way due to his outliving Hubmaier and many others, makes his mark and contributes significantly to the Anabaptist movement and its future manifestations.

By way of introduction, it is helpful to examine three of Marpeck’s summary statements concerning baptism. First, it is foundational to see that Marpeck’s understanding of baptism draws its definition from the biblical text. In the midst of a rare comment on his own testimony of conversion Marpeck states, “I have been baptized precisely because it is written that one should do so, and I have been baptized because according to the testimony of the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3, 4), it is written that our Lord Christ died for our sakes.”³⁶ Second, it is helpful to recognize that Marpeck’s understanding of baptism sees its significance even in its descriptive terminology. In response to South German Spiritualist, Casper Schwenckfeld, Marpeck asserts, “We don’t simply call it ‘water baptism’ as Schwenckfeld does, for God’s word and action precedes and accompanies it. For this reason, and not because of the element, it is called Christian baptism.”³⁷ Thus, this author will use the terminology “Christian baptism” when exploring Marpeck’s view. Finally, it is important to note that Marpeck’s understanding of baptism finds its essential nature in the role it plays as a matter of ecclesiological integrity. He summarizes, “If these three things, the true proclamation

was almost non-existent until the mid-twentieth century. Since that time, nearly all of Marpeck’s writings have been translated and published in English with the exception of his concordance, *Testamentserläuterung*.

³⁵ John C. Wenger, “The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* XII, no. 4 (1938): 205-206.

³⁶ Pilgram Marpeck, “A Clear and Useful Instruction,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 94. Also known as Marpeck’s *Klarer Unterricht*.

³⁷ Pilgram Marpeck, “Response to Casper Schwenckfeld,” in *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and his Circle*, ed. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1999), 87. Also known as Marpeck’s *Verantwortung*. Schwenckfeld, known Anabaptist critic, prompted Marpeck’s defense through his own critique of Marpeck’s *Admonition of 1542*.

of the gospel, correct baptism, and correct communion, are in doubt, there can be no true church of Christ. If one of these parts is missing, it is not possible outwardly to maintain and support a true Christian church."³⁸ Therefore, in light of Marpeck's understanding of baptism according to its biblical definition, significant terminology, and ecclesiological necessity a presentation of four descriptive statements regarding Marpeck's Christian baptism follows.

The essence of Marpeck's critique of infant baptism can be summarized by seeing the practice as a failure to follow Christ's command.³⁹ Marpeck believes that this command of Christ, found in Matthew 28, contains more than just instructions, but also a specific order for baptismal practice.⁴⁰ For Marpeck's immediate audience, this was an important point of clarification as there were many Spiritualists who claimed that with the death of the Apostles there were no longer any pertinent commands in Scripture concerning baptism.⁴¹ Thus, Marpeck

³⁸ Pilgram Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 292. Also known as Marpeck's *Vermanung* or *Taufbüchlein*.

³⁹ To clarify this connection between Christ's command and the perils of infant baptism, Marpeck states, "If people would have stayed with Christ's one simple order or command it would not have been necessary to raise so many other orders of baptism." He continues to say, "But, because of infant baptism, this command and order has been totally obscured and darkened, yes, even completely destroyed and rejected," in "The Admonition of 1542," 213.

⁴⁰ With regard to Matt 28, Marpeck states, "Christ gave the commandment to baptize only in Matthew 28," in "The Admonition of 1542," 180. In *ibid.*, 172, Marpeck states further that "it is true and correct Christian baptism only if it happens according to the command of Christ." And later, "A Christian baptism is one which is carried out according to the command and order of Christ," 185. In his "Response," Marpeck states with regard to Matt 28 that Christ "gives a whole commandment and not half a one," 139.

⁴¹ Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," 47. Bender explains that in Strasbourg at this time Marpeck faced opposition from both the Spiritualists and the Reformers. The former, led by Schwenckfeld and Bänderlin, preferred only to have "the invisible church and inward spirituality without outward forms and ceremonies." Marpeck provided the Anabaptists in their midst with "Biblical [*sic*] realism" that ensured a future for his followers as the Spiritualist philosophy did not lead to any future or "permanent 'church,'" in "Anabaptist Theologian and Civil Engineer," 246-7.

gives ample evidence for why not only are Christ's commands still applicable, but also the commands of the Apostles with regard to baptism. He states, "It will be found in Scripture that such ceremonies must remain as long as there are Christians, that is, until the end of the world, for, in His command to baptize (Matt 28), Jesus had in mind not only His present disciples but also all future disciples throughout time until the end of the world."⁴² Jesus Christ commissioned this new order and practice of Christian baptism for "not only the world of His time, but also the world which will remain and the nations which exist until the end or the last day."⁴³ This order Marpeck finds in Scripture is the *modus operandi* for the church with regard to Christian baptism.

Upon combining Matt 28 with the writings of the Apostles,⁴⁴ Marpeck distills the order of Christian baptism to teaching, faith, baptism, and entrance to the church. When discussing Peter's plea for all to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38, Marpeck explains, "Those who gladly accepted his word were baptized. There the order of God and man was observed: first teaching, then faith, and only then baptism."⁴⁵ He repeats this order in his *Admonition of 1542*, "If a man is to come in an orderly way to salvation and to the kingdom of God, he must first of necessity hear God's Word and be instructed in it. It is then the task of a man to believe the gospel, to receive willingly the knowledge of Christ, to be obedient to the truth. Only then does it follow that a man is to be baptized."⁴⁶ Entrance to the church naturally follows these three

⁴² Pilgram Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 47. Also known as Marpeck's *Clare Verantwortung*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51. Marpeck cites the following as support: Matt 24; Mark 13; Acts 2; Rom 15; Deut 31; Ps 78. He reiterates this in his "Response" as well saying, "In his baptismal commandment in Matt 28, Christ gives it not only to his present disciples but to all future disciples, i.e. those who would believe in him across time until the end of the world," 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65. Here, Marpeck surveys the various writings of the New Testament for what he terms "Apostolic Order."

⁴⁵ Marpeck, "Confession of 1532," 154.

⁴⁶ Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," 212. Also he states, "John baptized people unto repentance; they should confess their sins and improve. The apostles, however, baptized believers in the name of God or of Christ; those who were baptized turned themselves over to God and were joined to Him in Christ,

in Marpeck's view, as will be shown.

While the command to teach appears to follow the command to baptize in Matt 28, Marpeck's order sees teaching as the equivalent to "making disciples" or teaching the unbeliever the gospel of Christ. Marpeck would define the instruction to teach in the latter part of Christ's commission as something that happens to believers after they have been baptized or admitted to the church. Marpeck asserts, "First and foremost, the apostles had to teach the people with the instruction of truth so that they would be willing to come to baptism, be moved to be baptized, and then rightly allow themselves to be baptized."⁴⁷ Teaching, in the sense of leading people to Christian baptism, comes first.

Faith follows teaching in that Marpeck believes it is necessary that "whoever seeks to bind himself with God in baptism must first be a newborn spiritual man."⁴⁸ Marpeck recognizes this as a clearly articulated biblical principle and he cites the example of Christ's statement in Mark 16 as evidence, "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; whoever does not believe is condemned [Mark 16:16]; where there is no faith all teaching is of no avail and baptism is no baptism."⁴⁹ Furthermore, Marpeck points to the teaching of the Acts of the Apostles, as taught specifically by Philip in Acts 8, which led the eunuch to believe the gospel followed by his concluding that immediate baptism was an appropriate response to his new faith.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Marpeck emphasizes that baptism "springs from faith in Christ,"⁵¹ and must be "through one's own faith, and not that of another."⁵² Faith is the essential prerequisite for New Testament Christian baptism.

Only after right teaching and personal faith does Christian baptism follow. The fourth section below will outline Marpeck's understanding of the meaning and significance of the practice as a

whom the confessed by faith in the gospel, and according to whose standard they were to conduct themselves," *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁹ Marpeck, "Confession of 1532," 111.

⁵⁰ Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," 65-66. Marpeck states clearly that "faith always precedes baptism."

⁵¹ Marpeck, "Confession of 1532," 110.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 153.

witness, but it is helpful here to state that Marpeck clearly saw Christian baptism as an external act. The internal baptism is that work done by the Spirit at conversion and is also the result of faith. But it is the external and outward act that serves as the expression of Christian baptism.⁵³ It is also helpful to note that by 1542 when Marpeck wrote his *Admonition* he was not precise as to the mode of baptism. He states, "To baptize means the same as to immerse in water or dip in water, and baptism is the same as immersion or sprinkling with water."⁵⁴ In addition to this ambiguous commentary on the physical practice of Christian baptism, Marpeck provides in his *Response* a sample confession for use by the baptismal candidate,⁵⁵ and also explains that Christian baptism is a singular event without need of repetition.⁵⁶

Entrance into membership of the local church is the final stage of the baptismal order. Ironically, this is one point of common agreement between Marpeck and those who advocate infant baptism.⁵⁷ All agree that "this is the common function of baptism in the church."⁵⁸ For Marpeck, it one's public identification with Christ's death and

⁵³ Marpeck states, "Whoever has been inwardly baptized, with belief and the Spirit of Christ in his heart, will not despise the eternal baptism and the Lord's Supper which are performed according to Christian, apostolic order," in "A Clear Refutation," 65. Also, he says, "Likewise, it is a portal of entrance into the holy communion or church of Christ," in "The Admonition of 1542," 186.

⁵⁴ Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," 172.

⁵⁵ Marpeck writes, "Baptism is an externally offered and inwardly given truth. Before it is given, the candidate says as follows: 'The Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished in me what he offered me. I attest to this gift before God and those who offered it to me, as he already attested to it in me. They ask me if I have received it and if I desire from the witness of baptism.' This kind of form is intended to make clear that the whole transaction has to do with an offer and the reception of that offer," in "Response," 79.

⁵⁶ In contrast to the repetitive nature of the practice of the Lord's Supper, Marpeck explains, "There is one difference between outer baptism and Lord's Supper as they were instituted by Christ. The believer needs outer baptism only once, namely, his entry into Christendom or into becoming a Christian," in "Response," 107.

⁵⁷ Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," 258-260. It is implicit in Marpeck's discussion of the two kinds of infant baptism that both the Roman Catholics and the Reformers both intend to admit those newly baptized into the church.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 294. See also 199-201, 214.

resurrection that show one's willingness to identify with the local assembly. While commenting on Jesus' ecclesiological declaration in response to Peter's confession of faith and its relationship to baptism (Matt 16:13-20), Marpeck writes that "before such individual and true confession has been made, no one may truly be called a member of the community of the church of Christ, a member of the church, for upon this foundation, upon the confession of the faith of Peter, the Lord built His church. Thus, baptism is a door, an entrance into this church."⁵⁹ It is this confessional nature of Christian baptism that serves as the entrance requirement to the body of the church.⁶⁰

However, while the baptismal order ends there, the effects of Christian baptism have only begun, or as Marpeck says, only after Christian baptism does "the school of Christ really begin for the first time."⁶¹ As Estep helpfully concludes, "Like spokes on a wheel, the Anabaptist views of the Scriptures, discipleship, and the visible church find their hub in baptism. Baptism was thus the most effective single distinguishing mark of the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement."⁶²

Why are the Anabaptists of Value for Us Today?

What I Am Not Saying

When attempting to connect the value of the Anabaptists to the present, there are a few things I am not trying to say. First, the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century are helpful lenses through which to find instruction and encouragement, but cannot serve as the *de facto* path for church structure and interaction with the civil and popular culture of the twenty-first century. Nor am I saying that those of us in the Baptist tradition should expend effort to build or rebuild a case for some kind of historical connectedness from Augusta in 1845 to Zurich in 1525. The pursuit of such historical veracity is the stuff of novelty and misses the greater value of a more rooted connectedness shared in the common use of and commitment to the veracity of the Bible. Rather, contemporary Baptists, and truly all free-church evangelicals, share an indebtedness to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁶⁰ Marpeck states, "Holy baptism is the second thing with which the church is built. It is the entrance and the gate to the holy church. According to God's order, nobody is allowed to enter the church except through baptism," *ibid.*, 294.

⁶¹ Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," 76.

⁶² Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*. 235.

the Anabaptists for the ecclesiological principles they pioneered and founded on New Testament truth. Herein lies the basis of a connection to them.

What I Am Saying

What I am saying, therefore, is that the Evangelical Anabaptists can and should serve as helpful models for contemporary evangelicals in a number of areas. As we have seen, in Switzerland and South Germany in 1525 the distance between believer's baptism, the believers' church, the gospel, and death was short. The Anabaptists lived in a state-church environment that did not tolerate those who advocated and advanced biblically-driven ecclesiological absolutes. The price to be paid for defending biblical church distinctives in this climate was more often than not the ultimate price.⁶³

However, it is my conclusion that the Anabaptists were not fanatics so preoccupied with their specific preferences that they no longer saw the forest for the tree in front of them. They did not represent the type of Christian who is so enamored with his peculiar theological eccentricities that he alienates himself and thereby ruins his gospel witness. Furthermore, Anabaptists were not experimenters in the *avant-garde* simply going against the grain to stir up trouble or draw attention to themselves. Rather, these believers were standing under the conviction of what they perceived to be the biblical means for protecting gospel essentials: the preservation and right articulation of the gospel can only be accomplished through the preservation and right articulation of the church.⁶⁴

A church comprised of an unregenerate membership several generations removed will no longer care about proclaiming such essentials the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the way to salvation much less the subjects discussed in this volume. One only has to look at the results of the Half-way Covenant among New England Puritans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or mainline Protestantism's

⁶³ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, "Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches" in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 248.

⁶⁴ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, "Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches" in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 250.

increasing indifference to the gospel in the twentieth century to see the effects of the failure to maintain a pure church. The gospel ministry of John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield strengthened and established various denominations, but the churches within these groups failed to use the vehicle of the believers' church consistently to deliver a pure gospel message to the future generations of saints. Thus, is it right to call them martyrs? For what exactly did they understand themselves to die?⁶⁵

In what I follows, drawing from what I have already presented, I put forward three ways in which the Anabaptist testimony functions as a model by explicating their conclusions with biblical reflection.

Models of Endurance

The Anabaptists can serve as model for how to endure and face suffering and persecution especially when such comes due to misunderstanding of one's beliefs or through blatant injustice. This can be seen in the many recorded accounts of Anabaptist deaths and executions in *The Martyr's Mirror*. Timothy George explains that "Second only to the Bible, the single most important document of Anabaptist piety was *The Bloody Theater or Martyr's Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus Their Saviour*. This remarkable book, first published in Dutch in 1660 is comparable to John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of the Christian Martyrs* in the Puritan tradition."⁶⁶

Paul's second letter to Timothy is believed to be Paul's last. While personalized to Timothy and his work in Ephesus, clearly the teaching of the letter was intended for more readers.⁶⁷ At the time of his writing, Paul was in prison likely facing execution, and because of this, as Calvin notes, "all that we read here ... ought to be viewed by us as written not with ink but with Paul's own blood" for what he was suffering and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, revised edition (B&H Academic, 2013), 316.

⁶⁷ This section taken from Jason G. Duesing, "How Should the Christian Live?" in Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker, eds., *The Gospel and Same-Sex Marriage* (B&H, 2016).

sacrificing.⁶⁸ If you were in prison and facing death, what would your final written letter contain? Aside from the important statements and sentiments made to family and friends, what would be your core aims? As 2 Timothy marks the last words of Paul written from death row, he is using his final letter to strengthen and provide hope for others. Specifically, in the case of Timothy, he is pleading with him.

From his reminder in 2 Tim 1:7 that God did not give Timothy a “spirit of fear” to the command in 1:8 for Timothy not to be “ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner,” we get the picture that Timothy has lost his focus to some degree. Like Peter who, after seeing the wind while walking on the water toward Jesus, began to sink (Matt 14:30), so Timothy seems to be sinking. When Paul uses the word “ashamed” it could be that he has in mind the words of Jesus in Mark 8:38 “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed.”⁶⁹ Therefore, he pleads with Timothy not to be ashamed of two primary things.

First, Timothy should not be ashamed of “the testimony about our Lord.” Very simply, Paul is saying, “Timothy, regardless of what comes, what happens to me, whatever the authorities do to you or the church, do not be ashamed of the Gospel.” What a wonderful definition of the Gospel is found in this phrase, “the testimony about our Lord.” Second, Timothy should not be ashamed of Paul while he is in prison. But note whose prisoner. Paul states he is the prisoner not of Rome, but of “our Lord.” Paul is in prison per the assignment and plans of Christ. Here Paul is reminding Timothy that no matter what happens in the world, Jesus Christ is still in control of all things and is holding all things together (Col 1:17). This is no Stoic philosopher or the equivalent of a hunkered-down 21st century American Evangelical seeking to endure the inevitable. This is a confident, hope-filled Christian, clothed in the armor of God (Eph 6).

Next, Paul pleads with Timothy to “share in suffering for the Gospel.” The pioneering New Testament scholar, A. T. Robertson,

⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 179.

⁶⁹ Such is the suggestion of A. T. Robertson in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament: The Epistles of Paul*, Vol. 4. (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 612.

believed that Paul coined the Greek word behind this phrase to convey joint suffering for the Gospel with both Jesus and Paul. By this Paul reminds Timothy that whatever may come, he is not alone and is not the first to endure the pressures brought by a culture oppose to biblical truth. Further, in 1:16, Paul upholds the legacy of Onesiphorus as an example of this shared suffering. Onesiphorus, perhaps having died in this quest, was not ashamed of Paul or the Gospel, and sought to find Paul “earnestly” so he could refresh him in his labors. This example is in contrast to the two others Paul mentions in 1:15 who were ashamed and who “turned away” from Paul. But the virtue here is not in which individual was stronger or was made of sterner stuff. Paul underscores in 1:8 that suffering done rightly is suffering done “by the power of God.” That is, according to the power of God and the strength he provides. This is not suffering by grit. This is not Stoicism. Paul wanted Timothy to share in suffering that was beyond his strength so he could rely on God’s power. Timothy was weakening, but God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

How do we share in suffering? How should the Christian live when faced with opposition to his stand for truth? Practically, the advice of Paul here encourages the Christian to prepare now to suffer, to expect hardship and a culture of opposition to come, so when it arrives you will not be ashamed and not rely on your own Stoic attempts at self-reliance. Further, Paul’s admonition encourages the Christian to stand with those who are already suffering. In 21st century American culture, the Christian should not sit idly by while his brothers and sisters in other states or cities are undergoing challenges for their articulation of what the Bible teaches about marriage. If our conviction is that God, through his word, is clear on these matters, then we should not be ashamed to stand with those who believe the same and are now suffering for it. Yes, it may attract similar consequences for us, but that is not a reason for us to be ashamed or timid. Yet, as Paul states, such efforts to support like-minded believers should only be done by the power of God and in the Spirit of Christ, which means speaking the truth, yes, but doing so in love (Eph 4:15).

Models of Free Churches

Just as the Anabaptists’ relentless reliance on the Great Commission as a foundational text for their doctrine of the church, later

Baptists also would draw from this text for helping clarify a free church ecclesiology.⁷⁰ Again, though no historical tie can be nor need be drawn from the radicals in South Germany to Southern Baptists in America, there is a shared biblical connection. For example, one of the founding professors and later president of this seminary, John Broadus, in the late nineteenth century, focused on the Great Commission in his sermon, entitled “The Duty of Baptists to Teach their Distinctive Views,” to explain that the commands of Christ, given to the disciples, consisted of both “the internal and the external elements of Christian piety.”⁷¹ The internal elements, Broadus explains, are more crucial to the Christian faith as they relate to individuals and their relationship to their Creator. However, Broadus clarifies that any primacy given to the internal elements does not mean that the external elements have little value or lack importance. Broadus reasons that if Christ and his apostles gave commands relating to external elements such as the “constitution and government” of churches, then it “cannot be healthy if they are disregarded.”⁷²

In fact, both internal and external elements are intrinsic in the prerequisite command of Matthew 28:19. First, Jesus exhorts the disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” This mandate speaks of the ultimately internal act of Holy Spirit regeneration that produces a fruit-bearing disciple. As Broadus states, the internal aspect of these commands does take priority. When one of the criminals crucified alongside Jesus asked in faith, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus replied, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:42-43). In this exchange, Jesus’ affirmation came in response to the outward expression of the internal work in the heart of the criminal. Due to the nature of the circumstances, discussion of Jesus’ external commands related to baptism or church order were not as important as the criminal’s life after death. This is not to say such commands have no importance, but rather, simply, that they are less important than the internal commands which address the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk. 10:25).

⁷⁰ This section is adapted from Jason G. Duesing, “The Duty of Baptists to Teach their Distinctive Views” in *Upon this Rock* (B&H Academic, 2010), 4-10

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*

When Paul writes his magisterial chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he reminds the believers that what he delivered to them “first” was the gospel, namely that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Paul clearly wrote to them about many other vital items of an external nature for the local church, but the first instructions he relayed to the Corinthians were of an internal and more important nature. The priority of the internal teachings of Christianity appear in Paul’s letter to the Galatians as well. His expressed concern for believers who were deserting the faith did not revolve around their quibbling over the external teachings related to local church order. Rather, Paul intervenes as a result of the believers entertaining a “different gospel,” that is a different teaching of an internal nature than the one Jesus provided (Gal. 1). For those altering the internal message, Paul renders them “accursed” (Gk. *anathema*), a term he does not employ, for example, when speaking of divisions within the church at Corinth over external matters related to church leaders and baptism (1 Cor. 1:10-17). The internal commands of the New Testament that speak of the reconciliation of lost and rebellious men and women to a holy and wise God through only faith expressed in the work of God’s Son bearing the punishment on behalf of humanity are clearly the first commands that the churches should carry forth in obedience to Matthew 28:20.

Second, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus instructs the disciples to baptize the new disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Here, the command to baptize marks an external component in the commission. The external commands are not as important, as they do not directly convey the power to make one “wise for salvation” (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15). However, the external commands are vital for healthy Christian living, preserving the internal message for future generations, and therefore should not be discarded. When Peter “lifted up his voice” and addressed the mocking and perplexed crowd who did not know how to make sense of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, he proclaimed “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). In response to Peter’s wielding multiple Old Testament texts as a sharp, two-edged sword, the crowd was “cut to the heart” (Gk. *katenuḡēsan*) and asked, “What shall we do?” Peter responded first with the primary internal command, “repent,” signaling

the need for both confession of sin and faith expressed in belief. Peter's entrance into his proclamation ministry follows the example of Jesus himself, who began his public ministry saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). Peter continues, however, and quickly articulates the external command for the hearers to "be baptized" (Acts 2:38), thus practicing the entire commission of Jesus, with both internal and external in view. As with Matthew 28:19-20, the order prescribed by Peter, first internal then external, shows the importance of one over the other, but it does not negate the essential function of both types of commands. To have eternal life, the soon-to-be disciple must repent and believe (internal). To function as an obedient disciple, professing his faith in the context of a local church community, the new disciple must be baptized (external).

The order and connection between the two commands appears also in the encounter the deacon, Philip, has with the Ethiopian court official in Acts 8. After following the instructions of an angel of the Lord go to "the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza," Philip discovers the Ethiopian reading aloud Isaiah 53 and asks, "Do you understand what you are reading?" From the top of his chariot, the Ethiopian responds, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" and invites Philip to sit with him. As they travel together, Philip proceeds to explain from the Scripture that Jesus is the sheep that "was led to the slaughter" in Isaiah 53, and the account in Acts relates that Philip, "beginning with this Scripture," told the Ethiopian of the internal message regarding eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. However, Philip appears also to have communicated some of the external commands as well, for when the Ethiopian's chariot came near a body of water, he said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" How would the Ethiopian have known of his need for baptism after he confessed his faith in Jesus if Philip had not already taught him of this external command? The baptism of the Ethiopian reinforces the notion that the external commands given in the New Testament, while not primary, are nonetheless important and should be incorporated properly into any presentation of the "good news about Jesus."

Throughout the New Testament, the local church functions as a repository not only to receive and transmit the internal message of the gospel to the current generation, but also to preserve that message for future generations. As a result, the external commands given for the

purposes of ordering and governing the church are essential for this task, even though they are not as important as the internal message. When Paul writes to Timothy to instruct him in “how one ought to behave in the household of God,” Paul describes the local church as the “pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The idea of the local church functioning as a pillar (Gk. *stulos*) and a buttress (Gk. *hedraiōma*) creates a picture of an intentionally designed (i.e. ordered) structure that, through its strength, has been prepared both to uphold (i.e. present or proclaim) an object as well as protect (i.e. preserve) an object. Jesus’ promise in Matthew 16:18 that “the gates of hell will not prevail against” the church, reinforces the idea that the local church has been given as an indestructible fortress of strength held together by Jesus Christ himself (Col.1:17).

As a result, Jesus and his apostles have given commands of an external nature that must be taught and implemented. But for what end? The object given to the local church to uphold and protect is the “truth.” The “truth” is the message of eternal life – the substance of the internal commands of Christ (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25). The New Testament teaches that this “truth” was, and is, to be handed over or delivered from one generation to the next through the local church. Luke speaks of this at the beginning of his Gospel when writing to assure Theophilus of the certainty of the things he had been taught. Luke states that he has written an “orderly account” of the things that “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” had “delivered” (Gk. *paredosan*) to Luke and the other apostles (Lk. 1:1-4). Likewise, Paul instructs Timothy and the Ephesian Church to “guard the good deposit” (Gk. *parathēkēn*), a reference to the entire message of the gospel he had taught and given to them. In a broad sense, the purpose of all of Paul’s letters is to deliver the “truth” not only to his immediate recipients, but also to all who will read his letters and implement the commands in local churches (Col. 4:16). Jude reinforces the notion that the “truth” is the object the local church exists to proclaim and protect. In Jude 3, he explains that “the faith,” or the gospel message of eternal life, has been delivered (Gk. *paradotheisē*) to the saints. That is to say, the internal command of salvation through Jesus Christ has been handed down to Christians who live out the Christian life in local churches. Jude states that this delivering was done “once for all” (Gk. *hapax*), referencing the complete and final nature of the message rather than communicating

that the message had no further need of transmission. Therefore, the local church, the “pillar and buttress of truth” exists to “guard the good deposit” and “deliver” it to future generations. The New Testament commands that speak of the “truth” are primary. However, the external commands that speak clearly to the order, practice, and health of the local church, while secondary, should not receive treatment as unessential. Instead, the local church also has a duty to carry forth and teach these commands in obedience to Matthew 28:20.

Conclusion: Bach and the Beatitudes

When I was a child, I would have rejected the thought that classical music, much less the works of J. S. Bach, would one day appeal to me. That style of music, that my own children today refer to as the “kind without words,” was not a welcome companion. In fact, if presented with the option at that age, to listen to Bach or nothing at all, I would have elected silence every time. As I aged, however, something changed. Over time, the more I learned and read, the more I was taught how to appreciate the genius of Bach’s work, the more it grew on me and my mind and appreciation for that music shifted to the degree that nearly all my years of advanced academic study requiring work into the later hours of night have found Bach there with me as a helpful companion. In short, what was once mere noise I rejected, now has become my preference.

My aim in this essay was to show how the Anabaptists of history, often rejected and marginalized as they preached against the State, can actually serve as a helpful tool and example for evangelicals as they navigate the contemporary issues of ecclesiological challenge and the present and future troubles of persecution. For, with increasing frequency, Christians today are aware of the words of Christ when he spoke of sending the Apostles out “as sheep in the midst of wolves” in regard to persecution (Matthew 10:16 ESV). May we look then to the persecution of the Anabaptists in the spirit of the Beatitudes, causing us to “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:2-12 ESV). Given that and other realities, I am encouraged by Timothy George’s reminder in his *Theology of the Reformers*, where he concludes and affirms that “Only in recent years have the radical reformers begun to emerge from the shadow of opprobrium cast over them by their sixteenth-

century opponents The Radical Reformation, then, was not merely a 'wing,' a side effect that revealed a more extreme form of the Reformation; instead it was instead a movement that gave birth to a new form of Christian faith and life."⁷³ In short, what many for years have found cacophonous noise, now might just sound symphonious.

⁷³ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 267-269.