It is perhaps not quite appropriate to say this in the Menno Simons Lectures, but throughout the last century there has been an ongoing search among Mennonite scholars to find a new “church father” to replace him. This accounts for the greater concentration on Conrad Grebel and Michael Sattler in the early twentieth century and on Pilgram Marpeck in the late twentieth century. Since the 1970s editions of their writings have appeared in excellent English translations.

Marpeck scholarship basically began with the transcription and editing of Marpeck’s *Response (Verantwortung)*, published in 1929 by Johann Loserth, the preeminent scholar of Austrian Anabaptism, then in his early eighties. The *Response* was an extremely lengthy manuscript answering the critique of the *Admonition (Vermahnung)*, an earlier work that Marpeck had brought out in print, by the Silesian nobleman Caspar von Schwenckfeld, one of the leading lights of German Spiritualism. In awareness of Loserth’s project, Christian Hege, one of the German Mennonite editors of the first Mennonite encyclopedia, published the *Admonition* in 1925 as part of a volume marking the fourth centennial of the original Zurich baptisms. In the course of the same year, Hege discovered in the Zurich Central Library the *Explanation of the Testaments (Testamentserläuterung)*, the biblical concordance which served as the basis for the *Response*. Since Marpeck scholarship began in this way, Marpeck was originally seen as the defender of the Anabaptists, who believed in a visible church with baptism, Lord’s Supper and ban, against the Spiritualists, who doubted the value of ceremonies, especially given the quarrels raging about them in the early years of the Reformation, and believed that the true church was invisible, created by, and known only to, the Holy Spirit. The perspective on this Anabaptist-Spiritualist controversy in the aftermath of World War II was well represented by Franklin H. Littell’s *Anabaptist View of the Church* (1952). Littell regarded Spiritualism as a threat to Christianity, the source of the modernism and skepticism that bore tainted fruit in the pro-Nazi German Christian movement of the 1930s and 1940s. Anabaptism, on the other hand, was a return to the true Christianity of the apostolic church, reviving not only its doctrine, as Protestants claimed to do, but also its organizational form and its ethical practice.

This focus of Marpeck scholarship was considerably changed and broadened by two discoveries of the mid-1950s. First, two young German graduate students, J. F. Gerhard Goeters and Heinold Fast, discovered in the Bürgerbibliothek in Bern a collection of documents called the *Kunstbuch*, which contained striking letters from Pilgram Marpeck and from Cornelius Veh, a prominent elder of an Anabaptist congregation in Austerlitz, Moravia. What was disconcerting was that the letters denounced the Hutterites and the Swiss Brethren, in Veh’s expression, as “two harmful and corrupting sects.” This was no
surprise about the Hutterites, with their special emphasis on community of goods, but the Swiss Brethren did indeed present a problem. The 1950s were the years in which Harold S. Bender seemed to have established the Swiss Brethren as not only the first Anabaptists from whom all other Anabaptists descended, but as the model Anabaptists, the “normative Evangelical Anabaptists” as it was said at the time. Almost more unsettling was the discovery by an American graduate student Frank J. Wray that Marpeck’s *Admonition* was an editorial reworking of *The Confession of the Two Sacraments* (1533) written by the pastors of Anabaptist Münster–bad, revolutionary Anabaptists whom other Anabaptists and Mennonites had denounced and shunned from the sixteenth century to the present. Clearly there was more to Marpeck and his Anabaptist associates than a defense of the visible church against the Spiritualists. But was Marpeck, who denounced the Swiss Brethren and built on writings that originated in Münster, a “good Anabaptist” at all? There was already too much investment in the reputation of Marpeck the anti-Spiritualist Anabaptist for him not to be a “normative Evangelical Anabaptist,” so these other matters had to be explained away. Those explanations, and their ultimate failure, account for much of Marpeck scholarship from the mid-1950s to the present.

Pilgram Marpeck was a well to do resident of the Austrian territory of Tyrol. In the city of Rattenberg he was a member of the council, was chosen for a one-year term as mayor and, trained as a mining engineer, he served the Habsburg government as a mining magistrate. He extended a big loan to King Ferdinand in 1525, as was expected of rich supporters of the regime. However, he sympathized with evangelical preaching, and in late 1527 and early 1528 he appears to have had contact with Hans Schlaffer and Leonhard Schiemer, two followers of Hans Hut, the apocalyptic Anabaptist apostle who predicted the end of the world for Pentecost, 1528. Thus his first encounter with Anabaptism came through the mystical, apocalyptic disciples of Hut, who brought Anabaptism to the north Tyrol, rather than through George Blaurock, one of the founders of Swiss Anabaptism, who brought Anabaptism to the south Tyrol. One of Marpeck’s duties as mining magistrate was to hunt down Anabaptists. Instead, he resigned his post and left Rattenberg, apparently in order to follow the new faith himself. Like many Anabaptist refugees, he fled down the Danube to Bohemia and Moravia, territories ruled by King Ferdinand but sheltered from persecution by strong traditional constitutions that guaranteed the existence of a number of Christian denominations as the outcome of the Hussite Wars of a century earlier. These were the only lands in Western Europe where “supra-denominationalism” was constitutionally secured; indeed, in Moravia the majority of the nobility adhered to non-Catholic denominations, but toleration of peaceful religious dissenters like the Anabaptists was the rule for noble landlords, whether they were Catholic or non-Catholic. Marpeck appeared in the summer of 1528 in Krumau, a Bohemian town that had both mines and an Anabaptist congregation. Apparently he was baptized in Krumau, and shortly thereafter commissioned as a teacher in Austerlitz, Moravia. By September 1528 he had returned westward to the imperial city of Strasbourg, where he was able to resume his work as an engineer and where he represented the Anabaptism of “the church in the land of Moravia.”

When we think of Moravian Anabaptism now, the Hutterites, who eventually became the dominant Anabaptist group, come naturally to mind. Their *Great Chronicle* of course emphasizes the history of the group who compiled it, and ceases to write very much
about other Anabaptist groups in Moravia from the time of the schisms when the Hutterites broke with them. As a result, the impression was created a generation ago that the other Anabaptist groups immediately died out after the Hutterites separated from them. This misconception was dispelled first of all by the scholarship of Jarold Zeman. Balthasar Hubmaier was the first major leader of the Moravian Anabaptists from the time he came to Nikolsburg, Moravia, in June 1526, where he won the local lord, the Lutheran clergy and the German-speaking population to the baptism of adult believers. Although after about a year in Nikolsburg he was extradited by King Ferdinand, brought to Vienna and burned at the stake in March 1528, his kind of Anabaptism, rooted in the settled German population, long continued. The group he founded also, in whole or in part, adopted the practice of Sabbath observance on Saturdays, which they believed to be justified by a literal reading of the New Testament, just like the baptism of adult believers.

In 1527, shortly before Hubmaier’s arrest, the Anabaptist congregation in Nikolsburg was visited by the apocalyptic Anabaptist missionary Hans Hut. Hubmaier disapproved of Hut’s apocalyptic predictions, which he seems to have regarded as subversive, and Hut disapproved of Hubmaier’s Anabaptism because of its comfortable integration into the traditional parish structure. (Hut’s was an Anabaptism that appealed to the uprooted Anabaptist refugees streaming to Moravia to escape persecution in their Swiss and south German homelands. Hubmaier’s was more akin to a “church-type Anabaptism,” although he held to the voluntarist principle of believers’ baptism to the extent of recognizing individuals’ freedom to remain unbaptized. When the Nikolsburg territories were re-Catholicized in the Counterreformation numerous unbaptized persons were discovered.) Hubmaier had the local ruler imprison Hut, who had to escape from Nikolsburg. The dissident Anabaptists in the Nikolsburg area gathered under one of Hut’s lieutenants, the “one-eyed” Jakob Wiedemann from Memmingen, and raised various complaints against the “established” Anabaptist church of Nikolsburg. In general Swiss-south German Anabaptists fostered a high respect for the community of goods of the early New Testament church of Acts 2 and 4. Since most of the newcomers were property-less refugees, they resented the reluctance of the settled Anabaptists of Nikolsburg to open their homes and share their property. Also, they seem to have been moved by Hut’s apocalyptic expectations centered on Pentecost 1528. Anyhow, these quarrels and expectations led in spring 1528 to an expulsion by the Nikolsburg government of two hundred refugees led by Wiedemann. They established in Austerlitz a congregation committed to full community of goods. Although, of course, Pentecost 1528 passed without the realization of their apocalyptic hopes, they established a network of missionaries to the south German and Swiss homelands and became a magnet for immigrants. One of these immigrants was Pilgram Marpeck, who seems to have been commissioned as an elder of this “church in the land of Moravia” before he returned westward to Strasbourg to pursue his profession as a civil engineer.

Marpeck’s choice of Strasbourg as a destination was no accident. In the late 1520s Strasbourg had turned evangelical, but it was a remarkably tolerant place. Its government led by Jakob Sturm was wary of the increasing internal quarrels of the supporters of the Reformation, and by no means willing to defer to the claims to authority of the leading evangelical pastors, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito. Capito in particular was willing
to welcome, or at least to tolerate, a diverse group of Protestant dissenters, Caspar Schwenckfeld, Sebastian Franck, and among Anabaptists Wilhem Reublin, Michael Sattler, Melchior Hoffman and Marpeck. Two other Anabaptists who, like Marpeck, trekked first to Moravia and then to Strasbourg were Johannes Bünderlin and Christian Entfelder. Both had contact with Nikolsburg Anabaptism and Entfelder headed an Anabaptist congregation at Eibenschitz. They arrived in 1529, the year in which the Diet of Speyer pronounced the death penalty upon all Anabaptists (a measure which was not carried through to the full extent, even in Catholic jurisdictions, and was ignored in the majority of Protestant jurisdictions). In this atmosphere there arose among some of the Strasbourg dissenters a body of ideas called “Spiritualism” in modern scholarship. The idea was that merely external matters, like controverted interpretations of parts of the Bible and the practice and theory of the sacraments, were not essential to true Christianity – and they were certainly not worth dying for. Bünderlin, who was a sort of Platonist, thought the original sacraments had been an accommodation to the early apostles, who needed external signs because of their background in Judaism. Entfelder called for a temporary suspension of the sacraments (in this he resembled Schwenckfeld), pending a revelation of their higher, spiritual form and essence. It is arguable that Moravian quarrels had migrated to Strasbourg with publications by Bünderlin and Entfelder in 1530. Anyhow, in that year the presiding elder of the Austerlitz congregation, Jakob Wiedemann, made a visit to Strasbourg. In the next year, Pilgram Marpeck, perhaps as a spokesman of the Austerlitz congregation, published two works, *A Clear Refutation* and *A Clear and Useful Instruction*, refuting both the arguments of Bünderlin and Entfelder and their Spiritualist rejection of the visible church. In a third tract of 1531, *The Exposé of the Babylonian Whore*, Marpeck upheld the two major tenets of the Austerlitz brotherhood, nonresistance and community of goods. In that year Strasbourg affiliated itself with the Schmalkaldic League of Protestant princes and cities, and made at least a formal accommodation with Lutheranism in order to gain admission to this defensive alliance. In the *Exposé* Marpeck argued that the use of the sword for Christian self-defense was contrary to the spirit of Christ, that it would come to a bad end, and that it was done for the sake of property, which too was un-Christian.

The year 1531 saw the beginning of a series of schisms among the Moravian Anabaptists practicing community of goods. At this distance it is hard to see in them anything more substantial than the competing charismas of would-be leaders. Wilhelm Reublin, almost certainly one of the original Anabaptists of Zurich from January 21, 1525, and an Anabaptist leader whom Marpeck had known in Strasbourg, arrived in Austerlitz, but proved unwilling to subject himself to the authority of Jakob Wiedemann. Reublin accused Wiedemann of imperfect practice of community of goods and led a group of dissidents to establish a new congregation at Auspitz in 1531. He wrote a letter to Marpeck outlining his grievances; but Marpeck continued his affiliation with Austerlitz. The Auspitz side of the schism was endorsed by Jakob Hutter, the main Anabaptist leader in south Tyrol, but soon Reublin was exposed as a “lying Ananias” (Acts 5) who had concealed money under his mattress and was banned from the congregation. After several intermediate stages Hutter established himself as presiding elder at Auspitz in 1533.
The year of the Auspitz schism and of the publication of Marpeck’s three pamphlets was the year that he wore out his welcome in Strasbourg. Both the political leadership of Strasbourg and its leading pastors decided that the experiment with broad toleration of the late 1520s had been a failure. For one thing, hundreds of the persecuted, particularly Anabaptists, flocked to Strasbourg, and there was some fear that they were a danger to public order; secondly, establishing a presentable evangelical church order was part of Strasbourg’s incorporation into the security system of the Schmalkaldic League. Toward the end of 1531 the council decided that Marpeck, as a stubborn schismatic who would not swear required oaths or bear arms, would have to leave the town. In fact, not all oaths were against Marpeck’s principles; he had sworn the oath of citizenship on taking up residence in Strasbourg. He received the opportunity for a private disputation with Bucer, which resulted in a written text giving Marpeck’s beliefs. The big issue was infant vs. adult believers’ baptism, and behind it the relation of the Old and New Testament covenants. Bucer took the standard Reformed position, that the covenant with Abraham was continued in the covenant of Christ, and that, therefore, New Testament baptism and the Lord’s Supper were a continuance of Old Testament circumcision and Passover. Marpeck insisted on the distinction between the covenants, and, therefore, the indispensability of distinct New Testament sacraments. Leaving Strasbourg early in 1532, Marpeck moved to Appenzell in the Swiss Confederation, like Strasbourg an island of relative tolerance for Anabaptists, and a place where he could practice his engineering skills. After the experience in Strasbourg he never again confronted a government or pastors frontally, but he did continue to worship as an Anabaptist and to employ his wealth and talents to promulgate the kind of Anabaptist theology in which he believed.

Meanwhile, disaster overtook the refugee Anabaptist communities in Moravia, one and all. In 1535 the Moravian Diet acceded to the demand of King Ferdinand of Austria that Anabaptists be expelled from the province. Certainly, the notoriety of the Anabaptist regime in Münster of 1534-35 strengthened the Vienna government’s demand that Moravia abandon its traditional “supra-denominationalism.” The outcome was a general disaster: both Jakob Wiedemann and Jakob Hutter became Anabaptist martyrs. The Hutterites broke up into small groups which hid, sometimes in Moravia, sometimes in southern Bohemia or lower Austria. But, when the persecution ebbed, the Hutterites were able to resume their practice of community of goods. The other groups, expelled to Silesia or south Germany, abandoned community of goods, except for some of them who merged with the Hutterites. Until recent discoveries of archival evidence by Martin Rothkegel, scholars assumed that the Austerlitz congregation disappeared in the persecution of 1535. Now we know that, referred to as “Brethren of the Covenant” or “German Brethren” (to distinguish them from the Czech speaking Bohemian Brethren, who dated back to the era of the Hussite Wars), they survived in congregations in Austerlitz, Eibenschitz, Jamnitz, Znaim, and even Vienna, as well as some rural estates. The ideal of community of goods according to Acts 2 and 4 lost some of its luster with its concrete application in Anabaptist Münster. Now it was observed that, after they were dispersed from Jerusalem, the early Christians of the New Testament had private possessions. Anyhow, the Austerlitz Brethren developed into a community of primarily urban craftsmen, who took oaths of citizenship, sometimes held civil offices, tended to be literate and educated, ran a hospital with baths and owned several houses as communal
property. Their most prominent elder was probably Cornelius Veh. In 1541 Pilgram Marpeck traveled to Moravia in order to assist Veh in an effort at reunion with the Hutterites. In effect, the Hutterites shunned Marpeck and Veh. As the only surviving communitarian Anabaptists in Moravia, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the Hutterites surpassed the Austerlitz Brethren in numbers and wealth. Nor were the Austerlitz Brethren the only property holding Anabaptists in Moravia. There were Swiss Brethren in Moravia around Olmütz, who would have no dealings with the Austerlitzers around mid-century, complaining that they were “drinkers and lead a proud and worldly life.”

Occasionally the Austerlitz Brethren in Moravia were called “Pilgrimites.” We know that towards the end of the sixteenth century they made a careful study of Marpeck’s *Response* to Caspar Schwenckfeld and made notes on their manuscript copy. It is reasonable to regard Marpeck’s writings as an entry into the theology of this vanished Anabaptist denomination. In 1542 Marpeck published his fateful revision of the Münster pastors’ *Confession of the Two Sacraments*. He called it *Admonition*; it was an elaborated restatement of the themes that he had set out in his controversy with Bucer of ten years previously, but in stating that baptism was a “co-witness” to faith, he declined to subordinate the outer witness of water baptism to the inner witness of Spirit baptism, as most Anabaptists did, thereby asserting a kind of Anabaptist “real presence.” Later on he would do the same with the Lord’s Supper, which, although it was a created thing, was no mere symbol, or even a spiritual presence in the Zwinglian sense. For Marpeck, as for Luther (from whose *Against the Heavenly Prophets* Marpeck borrowed in his pamphlets against the Spiritualists), spirit had to be communicated through matter, because the material sacraments were an extension of the material divinity of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Although the theology of the *Admonition* was probably directed against the Reformed, of whom Marpeck had continuous experience in Strasbourg and Appenzell, the eminent Spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld thought that it was directed at him. Before 1542 was out he denounced the *Admonition* with his *Judgement*, which directly challenged Marpeck’s competence as a theologian. Marpeck and his associates devoted the rest of their writing time to the immense *Response* to Schwenckfeld, which outlined their entire theology. To undergird the *Response*, Marpeck’s associate Leupold Scharn schlager compiled the *Explanation of the Testaments*, a vast biblical concordance dedicated to showing that the Old Testament was the “shadow” pointing to the “promise” of the New Testament.

The discovery of the *Kunstbuch* has made us aware since the 1950s that in 1542 and 1543 Marpeck (as well as Cornelius Veh, presiding elder at Austerlitz) wrote some very harsh letters to a congregation of Swiss Brethren in Appenzell. Scholars such as John Yoder and Heinold Fast developed the argument that this Appenzell congregation was very atypical, a black sheep among the Swiss Brethren. The chronicle *Sabbata* detailed some outbreaks of antinomian enthusiasm among Anabaptists in St. Gall and Appenzell in the 1520s. On this basis Yoder re-treaded Luther’s hoary epithet of “Schwärmer” and declared that the Anabaptists of St. Gall and Appenzell were not genuine “Täufer” but “Schwärmer.” The issues touched in the letters were the insistence of the Swiss Brethren on petty rules of behaviour and their excessive readiness to apply the ban of excommunication. Moreover, Marpeck observed that the Swiss Brethren congregations
frequently banned their leaders, destroying congregational cohesion and authority: “It is contrary to the manner of Christ that the flock punish the shepherds rather than the shepherds pasturing the sheep.” He alluded to differences with the Swiss Brethren on the swearing of oaths; then he went on to indicate issues that really merited excommunication. Here he insisted on the traditional orthodox position that Christ was fully divine and fully human, an issue that would be richly elaborated in the writings against Schwenckfeld. It seems to me, in view of the fact that we now know that there were distinct congregations of Swiss Brethren and Austerlitz Brethren in Moravia, that it is very unconvincing to say that the polemical letters of Marpeck and Veh were directed only at an aberrant Swiss Brethren congregation in Appenzell. Rather, what we have here is a clash between Swiss Brethren and a more urban and urbane Anabaptist group with educated leadership and a more nuanced and developed theology.

In 1542 Marpeck moved to Augsburg, where by 1545 he had obtained the post of city engineer, with supervision of Augsburg’s wood and water supply, a post he held until his death in 1556. Despite changes in the Augsburg city government and modifications in its religious settlement caused by wars between the Catholic Habsburgs and Protestant princes, Marpeck remained undisturbed during these years, both in his engineering position and in the practice of his Anabaptist beliefs. He received a number of formal warnings, but so long as the meetings of the Augsburg Anabaptists were small and unobtrusive, they were tolerated by the government and, it seems, by some of the ministers. Very similar arrangements were worked out between the Austerlitz Brethren and the sympathetic council of the royal city of Znaim in Moravia. The library of the Znaim congregation contained books of Erasmus, Schwenckfeld and Sebastian Franck, which may have indicated some sympathy for the Spiritualist position that Christians need not put their lives on the line for matters that were not essential to their salvation. Some letters from Marpeck to Veh at Austerlitz, written in 1544, indicate a degree of discomfort on Marpeck’s part about an erosion of church discipline, even a creeping “antinomianism,” among the Austerlitz Brethren. It is hard to know exactly what was at issue, but Marpeck in Augsburg must have assumed a certain independence from “the church in Moravia” that was the original source of his authority. However that may be, the Austerlitz Brethren and the Marpeck brotherhood were united by a respectful deference to their local governments, and by an acceptance of low visibility as a quid pro quo for their religious freedom.

Marpeck did, however, whatever his accommodations to governing authorities, serve “the fellowship of those who have entered a covenant with God,” as the Austerlitz Brethren and their affiliates in south Germany and Switzerland called themselves. He did this as a writer, an editor and a publisher. As the case of Sebastian Franck and his chronicles makes very clear, in the early modern centuries the task of a writer, who creates texts, and that of an editor, who assembles texts originally written by others, shaded into each other, and the editor could be every bit as original as the writer. Marpeck used materials written by Martin Luther or the Anabaptist pastors of Münster, but he used such materials with originality. Like Franck, Marpeck had his own voice. This voice is a little garbled, however, not only by his editorial function, but also by his co-authors in the fellowship, Leupold Scharnschlager and perhaps others. Anyhow, scholarship now accepts that in 1531 Marpeck wrote *A Clear Refutation* (against
Bünderlin), *A Clear and Useful Instruction* (against Entfelder), and *The Exposé of the Babylonian Whore* (against the Schmalkaldic League), and had them published with Jacob Cammerlander in Strasbourg. Werner Packull suggests Sigmund Bund in Strasbourg as the publisher of the *Admonition* (1542) and *The Explanation of the Testaments* (1547), which was compiled by Scharnschlager. A second edition of the *Exposé* and a tract signed only “MS,” *How the Scriptures are to be Understood*, were published by Philip Ulhart in Augsburg in 1544. Packull suggests that “MS” most likely means “Marpeck/Scharnschlager,” rather than “Michael Sattler,” as was once thought. Packull also holds that Marpeck saw to the publication of the Seven Articles of Schleitheim (1533) and the commentary on Micah attributed to Hans Denck (1534) with Cammerlander in Strasbourg, as well as two works by Balthasar Hubmaier in 1546 with Heinrich Steiner in Augsburg. Last, Packull attributes to Marpeck the publication of Christoph Freisleben, *On the Genuine Baptism of John and the Apostles*, in 1550 with Bund in Strasbourg. This publishing of Anabaptist writings, of course, involved Marpeck in substantial outlay of time and money besides his writing and editing.

The major work of theology by Marpeck (either alone or with assistance) was the *Response* to Schwenckfeld, which remained in manuscript. Although there are many confirmations of Marpeck’s Christology scattered through his writings, the *Response* is the main basis for saying that Marpeck’s Christology stands at the centre of his theology. Caspar Schwenckfeld held to a Christology of the glorified Christ that seemed to Marpeck to undermine the significance of the incarnation. In view of Schwenckfeld’s contacts with Melchior Hoffman in Strasbourg, it seems indisputable that Hoffman’s doctrine of the heavenly flesh of Christ, which remained Dutch Mennonite orthodoxy throughout the seventeenth century, was shaped under Schwenckfeld’s influence.

According to Hoffman’s belief, the flesh of Christ descended from heaven, where it was implanted in the Virgin Mary; it received only nourishment from her but none of her substance, and was maximally disconnected from its human mother. In the view of other Anabaptists, all of whom were critical of this Melchiorite/Mennonite doctrine, the result was to deny the full humanity of Christ. Marpeck, who always emphasized the humility and tribulation of Christ’s life, suffering and death, stressed the humanity of Christ. He was entirely orthodox, however, fully accepting Christ’s divinity and the virgin birth. He believed that the untransfigured, human Christ sits at the right hand of God in heaven, and that the church is an extension of the untransfigured, human Christ, as his body. Jesus works his will from heaven through the Spirit. But “even today he works through his unglorified body (which is the church). It is the very temple of God.” This “untransfigured body (understand, his church)...is his outward work: teaching, baptism, Lord’s Supper, admonition, ban, discipline, evidence of love and service for the common good, a handclasp, improving and retaining Christ’s commands and teachings.”

Pilgram Marpeck has sometimes been styled the “ecumenical Anabaptist,” and given credit for major efforts at achieving brotherhood among the various Anabaptist/Mennonite groups. This view was strongest in the 1950s and 1960s, when scholarship was only minimally aware of the distinctions among the several members of the Anabaptist/Mennonite family. Surely Marpeck sought reunion between the Anabaptist congregations with which he was affiliated and the Hutterites and Swiss Brethren (and he would have welcomed union with the rising Mennonite fellowship in
the Netherlands and north Germany), but only on the basis of their submission to the truth that he and his brothers and sisters had perceived. That truth is relatively congenial to theologically educated twenty-first century Mennonites, but it was not a common denominator of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. It grew out of the religious experience of an untypically urban, educated and prosperous branch of the movement.

None of this is intended to disparage the argument of Arnold Snyder that there may have been influence from people in the Marpeck brotherhood, or at least people who read their publications, on manuscripts that circulated among Swiss Brethren in the last decades of the sixteenth century. One of Marpeck’s associates, Hans Buechel, took the Swiss Brethren side in the Frankental disputation of 1571 against the ministers of the Calvinist state church of the Palatinate. The Explanation of the Testaments was very likely in use among both Hutterites and Swiss Brethren. The theological world of central Europe’s Anabaptists and Spiritualists was marked not only by inter-group rivalries and excommunications but also by extensive inter-group borrowings. Marpeck, who borrowed from Martin Luther and the Münster Anabaptists (and perhaps even from Schwenckfeld prior to their estrangement), was himself surely the source of extensive borrowings.

Select Bibliography


Abstract

Pilgram Marpeck and the Austerlitz Brethren:
A “Disappeared” Anabaptist Denomination

Interest in Pilgram Marpeck, first by scholars and then by educated Mennonites and Baptists, began with modern editions of the Admonition (Vermahnung) by Christian Hege (1925) and the Response (Verantwortung) by Johann Loserth (1929); at the same time Hege discovered the Explanation of the Testaments (Testamentserläuterung), a concordance which was the foundation of the Response. This focus on Marpeck’s writings against Caspar Schwenckfeld made him appear as a defender of the visible church and sacraments against Spiritualism.

In the 1950s came further discoveries of works connected with Marpeck – the Kunstbuch, with letters by Marpeck and Cornelius Veh, an Anabaptist elder in Austerlitz, Moravia, and A Clear Refutation and A Clear and Useful Instruction, anonymous anti-Spiritualist writings published in Strasbourg in 1531. At the same time Frank Wray discovered that the Admonition (Vermahnung), published in 1542, was a revised version of The Confession of the Two Sacraments (1533), written by Bernhard Rothmann and the pastors of Anabaptist Münster. The connection with Münster and letters in the Kunstbuch attacking the Swiss Brethren raised questions about Marpeck’s inter-Anabaptist affiliations at a time when the Swiss Brethren were regarded as “normative Anabaptists.”

Pilgram Marpeck was a wealthy mining engineer in Rattenberg, Tyrol, with good connections to Tyrol’s Austrian Habsburg rulers. He sympathized with the Reformation and in 1527-28 came in contact with Hans Schlaffer and Leonhard Schiemer, followers of the apocalyptic Anabaptist Hans Hut. In 1528 he left Tyrol rather than to persecute Anabaptists, and moved to Krumau, Bohemia, a mining center. He was commissioned as an Anabaptist teacher in Austerlitz, Moravia, and in September 1528 he moved to Strasbourg, where he worked as an engineer and represented the Anabaptist “church in the land of Moravia.”

The Great Chronicle of the Hutterites gives us only a partial view of the Anabaptist movement in Moravia (as was shown by the scholarship of Jarold Zeman and Werner Packull). The first congregation in Nikolsburg, established in 1526 by Balthasar Hubmaier, continued after his martyrdom in 1528, under Sabbatarian influence. The group led by Jakob Wiedemann that split from the Nikolsburg congregation in 1528 moved to Austerlitz, where it experienced further splits, producing the Hutterite group in 1533. The major Austrian persecution of 1535 did great damage to all these Anabaptist groups, and resulted in the martyrdoms of Jakob Wiedemann and Jakob Hutter. Until 1535 all Moravian groups accepted the ideal of community of goods according to Acts 2 and 4; after 1535 only the Hutterites followed that ideal.

Werner Packull suggests that in Strasbourg Marpeck represented Jacob Wiedemann’s Austerlitz congregation with his publications. In the late 1520s and early 1530s diverse Protestant dissenters were tolerated in Strasbourg: Caspar Schwenckfeld, Sebastian Franck, Wilhelm Reublin, Michael Sattler, Melchior Hoffman as well as Marpeck. Two Anabaptists tending to turn away from external ceremonies towards Spiritualism, Johannes Bünderlin and Christian Entfelder, moved from Moravia to Strasbourg and
published their views in 1530. In 1531 Marpeck responded to them with *A Clear Refutation* and *A Clear and Useful Instruction*. Also in 1531 he published *The Exposé of the Babylonian Whore* (connected with Marpeck by Walter Klaassen), which attacked the League of Schmalkalden, a military alliance to defend Protestantism which Strasbourg joined. In the *Exposé* he advocated nonresistance and community of goods in the spirit of the Austerlitz congregation.

At the end of 1531 Marpeck had a private disputation with the Strasbourg pastor Martin Bucer. Bucer stressed the continuity between the covenant with Israel and the covenant of Christ, while Marpeck stressed the distinction between the two covenants, which corresponded with their views on infant baptism and believers’ baptism. Early in 1532 Marpeck moved to Appenzell, where he continued his work as an engineer; in 1542 he moved to Augsburg, where he was chief engineer from 1546 to his death in 1556. He maintained his Anabaptist beliefs in meetings with small groups and literary and publishing activity.

The scholarship of Martin Rothkegel has shown us that the Austerlitz Brethren survived the persecution of 1535. Called the “Brethren of the Covenant” or “German Brethren,” they abandoned community of goods, they developed into a congregation of urban craftsmen, who took oaths of citizenship, sometimes held civil offices, tended to be literate and educated. Cornelius Veh was one of their prominent elders. In 1541 Marpeck and Veh failed in an attempt at reunion with the Hutterites. In Moravia the Hutterites, the Austerlitz Brethren and the Swiss Brethren continued as distinct groups.

The *Admonition* (Vermahnung) was probably directed by Marpeck at Martin Bucer, although Caspar Schwenckfeld took it to be aimed at him. Marpeck’s statement, that baptism was a “co-witness” to faith placed the outer witness of water baptism on the same level as the inner witness of Spirit baptism. Perhaps with literary influence from Luther, he articulated a kind of Anabaptist “real presence” sacramental theology.

The *Kunstbuch* contains some very harsh letters written in 1542 and 1543 by Marpeck and Cornelius Veh to the Swiss Brethren congregation in Appenzell. In the 1950s John Yoder and Heinold Fast argued that the Appenzell congregation was a very unrepresentative Swiss Brethren congregation, and that the differences of Marpeck and that Swiss Brethren congregation should not be construed as a denominational difference. Marpeck accused the Swiss Brethren of putting too much stress on petty rules of behavior, excessive banning and insufficient deference to their leadership. In light of what we now know about Marpeck’s connection to the Austerlitz Brethren, it appears that these letters represent a real inter-Anabaptist denominational difference.

Marpeck’s work as a writer, editor and publisher blend into each other. He often expressed his own views and those of his group by creative borrowings from the writings of others: Bernhard Rothmann, Martin Luther, and perhaps Caspar Schwenckfeld. He published and re-published his own works and those of other Anabaptists with Jacob Cammerlander and Sigmund Bund, Strasbourg printers, and Philip Ulhart and Heinrich Steiner, Augsburg printers.

Schwenckfeld responded to Marpeck’s *Admonition* of 1542 with his *Judgment*, which led to the massive *Response*, in which Marpeck had the assistance of his associate Leupold Scharn schlager in compiling an extensive biblical concordance. This *Response* is particularly important, since Schwenckfeld’s stress on the divinity of Christ had strong
influence on the ideas of Melchior Hoffman, and, following him, Menno Simons. Although Marpeck’s Christology was entirely orthodox, his opposing stress on the humanity of Christ was at the core of his theology, and his ecclesiology – since he regarded the church and its practices as an extension of the untransfigured, human Christ, as his body.

There were letters from Marpeck to Veh of 1544 which show Marpeck’s concern with laxity in the Austerlitz congregation. Marpeck’s writings probably had influence on the Swiss Brethren later in the sixteenth century and his associate Hans Buechel took the Swiss Brethren side in the Frankenthal disputation against the Calvinists in 1571. Hence, not all the puzzle pieces in interpreting Marpeck’s place in the Anabaptist spectrum fit seamlessly together. Nevertheless, the recent discoveries of Martin Rothkegel about the survival and character of the Austerlitz Brethren greatly advance our understanding of Marpeck.