

Erasmus of Rotterdam's Influence upon
Anabaptism: The Case of Balthasar Hubmaier

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ABSTRACT

Erasmus of Rotterdam's Influence upon Anabaptism: The Case of Balthasar Hubmaier

Reformation historians have long debated the question of Erasmus' influence upon Anabaptism. Research, however, has paid insufficient attention to Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528), the earliest Anabaptist theologian, and no one has attempted a substantial analysis of Erasmus' influence on him with attention to the problem of influence.

Hubmaier's formal theological training and popularity as a preacher made contact possible with humanists and Erasmus. Evidence from his Waldshut pastorate indicates a rejection of scholasticism in favour of humanism and special esteem for Erasmus. He met Erasmus in Basel in 1522 at a decisive point of his religious conversion and referred to him in his later writings, indicating knowledge of his major works. Hubmaier was clearly in a position to be influenced by Erasmus.

Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* (1522) attracted contemporary criticism and modern speculation for its supposed Anabaptist tendencies. In an attempt to determine Erasmian influence, this study compares Erasmus' and Hubmaier's

interpretations of important passages in Matthew and places them within the context of key patristic, medieval, and sixteenth-century commentators. Erasmus' exegesis of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) stresses pre-baptismal instruction in ways uncommon in the exegetical tradition and Hubmaier employed the same interpretation to oppose infant baptism. Unlike most commentators, Erasmus interpreted the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43) as promoting the toleration of heretics and the same argument formed the basis of Hubmaier's *On Heretics* (1524). Erasmus' interpretation of the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:15-20; 18:15-20) deemphasized the primacy of Peter, connected the keys with Christian initiation, and laicized the process of excommunication, but Hubmaier underscored other aspects of the passage.

Comparative exegesis suggests Erasmus influenced Hubmaier's interpretation of the Great Commission and the parable of the tares, but not his view of the keys of the Kingdom. Erasmus was not an Anabaptist, nor was he responsible for Anabaptism, but the evidence highlights the potentially radical ramifications of his biblical exegesis and raises again the issue of reception as important to a full appreciation of his legacy. Recourse to Erasmus' exegesis could illumine other aspects of Hubmaier's thought and help explain elements of Anabaptism.

DEDICATION

This influence study often caused me to think about those individuals who shaped my own thought and life. Many of them embodied the characteristics of the quintessential Christian scholar. As Erasmus would say, “in their lives piety and erudition vied in a virtually equal match,” and it is to them that I dedicate this dissertation.

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I would like to express gratitude to my parents, Joe and Becky Williamson, who sacrificed so that I could attend college. That first taste of higher learning sparked in me a desire for knowledge that eventually led me to where I am today.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION	1
Historiography.....	1
Methodology	11
CHAPTER TWO - CONTACT BETWEEN HUBMAIER AND ERASMUS	25
Biographical Outline.....	26
Hubmaier and Humanism	36
Conclusion	62
CHAPTER THREE - ERASMUS AND HUBMAIER ON THE GREAT COMMISSION	64
Erasmus and the Great Commission	66
Hubmaier and the Great Commission.....	89
Contemporaries on the Great Commission	106
Conclusion	111
CHAPTER FOUR - ERASMUS AND HUBMAIER ON THE PARABLE OF THE TARES	113
The Exegetical Tradition and the Parable of the Tares	115
Erasmus and the Parable of the Tares	121
Hubmaier and the Parable of the Tares.....	138
Contemporaries on the Parable of the Tares	156
CHAPTER FIVE - ERASMUS AND HUBMAIER ON THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM	165
The Exegetical Tradition and the Keys to the Kingdom	168
Erasmus and the Keys to the Kingdom.....	174
Hubmaier and the Keys to the Kingdom	194
Contemporaries and the Keys to the Kingdom	211
Conclusion	217

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION.....	219
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	232
Primary Sources	232
Secondary Sources.....	234

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Allen *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*. Ed. P.S. Allen, H.M. Allen, and H.W. Garrod. 12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906-58.
- ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. 1885-96. Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1978-79.
- ARG *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*
- ASD *Opera omnia Des. Erasmi Roterodami*. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1969-.
- CCSL *Corpus christianorum, series latina*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954-.
- CEBR *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*. Ed. P.G. Bietenholz and T.B. Deutscher. 3 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985-7.
- CWE *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974-.
- ERSY *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*.
- Gloss *Biblia sacra cum Glossa ordinaria...Et Postilla Nicolai Lyrani, Additionibus Pauli Burgensis, ac Matthiae Thoringi replicis, ab infinitas mendis purgatis: in commodioremque ordinem digestis*, 6 vols. Paris: 1545-1603. [refers to the interlinear or marginal gloss]
- HS *Balthasar Hubmaier Schriften*. Ed. G. Westin and T. Bergsten. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962.
- Holborn *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus: Ausgewählte Werke*. Ed. A. and H. Holborn. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1933.

- LB *Des. Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia*. Ed. J. Leclerc. 10 vols. Leiden: 1703-6.
- LW *Luther's Works, American Edition*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, vols. 1-30; Helmut T. Lehman, vols. 31-55. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86.
- MQR *Mennonite Quarterly Review*
- NdL Biblia sacra cum Glossa ordinaria...Et Postilla Nicolai Lyrani, Additionibus Pauli Burgensis, ac Matthiae Thoringi replicis, ab infinitas mendis purgatis: in commodioremque ordinem digestis, 6 vols. Paris: 1545-1603. [refers to Nicholas' notes]
- NPNF *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff ed al. 2 series (14 vols. each). 1887-94. Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1952-56.
- PL *Patrologia latina*. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris: 1844-64.
- PY *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. Trans. and Ed. H.W. Pipkin and J.H. Yoder. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989.
- RSV Bible, Revised Standard Version
- RQ *Renaissance Quarterly*

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Historiography

Did Erasmus influence Anabaptism? This question is not new; it has elicited a variety of responses ever since the sixteenth century when some of Erasmus' own contemporaries linked him with Anabaptism. Protestant opponents, such as Luther could describe Erasmus as – among other things – an Anabaptist, and Catholic opponents, like Noël Bédá, claimed that elements of his writings encouraged Anabaptism.¹ Modern scholars renewed the question in the early twentieth century when prominent historians strongly hinted that a spiritual kinship existed between Erasmus and the Anabaptists. Walther Köhler provocatively labeled Erasmus as the “spiritual father of the sixteenth century radicals.”² Johan Huizinga, in his well-known biography of Erasmus, came to a very similar conclusion: “There was a group among the reformed to whom Erasmus in his heart of hearts was more nearly akin than to the Lutherans or

¹ For Luther's association of Erasmus with Anabaptism, see Allen Ep. 2936: 388. For Bédá's critique of the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, see LB 9:445B-F, 459A-F, 483D – 484C, 557D – 560C.

² Cited in Marc Lienhard, “Die Radikalen des 16. Jahrhunderts und Erasmus,” in *Erasmianism: Idea and Reality*, ed. M.E.H.N. Mout, H. Smolinsky, and J. Trapman (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1997), 91.

Zwinglians with their rigid dogmatism: the Anabaptists.”³ The renewal of the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism coincided with the flourishing of North American research in Anabaptist history, especially among Mennonite scholars. One of the most respected of these, Harold Bender, considered the question of Erasmus’ influence in his seminal study of Conrad Grebel. He arrived at a generally negative conclusion because in his opinion the former embraced pacifism as an outgrowth of his humanist inclinations whereas the latter adopted it as a biblical mandate.⁴

The trend in Anabaptist scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s, however, pointed away from Bender’s negative assessment and increasingly granted a place for Erasmus in the intellectual origins of Anabaptism. Robert Kreider and Heinhold Fast studied the thought of several important early Anabaptist leaders and found that, to varying degrees, they were acquainted with the important humanists, including Erasmus, concluding that the early Anabaptists appreciated the general humanist emphasis on Scripture and moral development. The important differences between Erasmus and the Anabaptists, however, were viewed as greater than the similarities and this conclusion softened the quality of

³Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Phaidon Publishing, Inc., 1952), 177.

⁴ Harold Bender, *Conrad Grebel, c. 1498-1526, the Founder of the Swiss Brethren Sometimes called Anabaptists* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1950), 65, 200.

that Erasmian influence.⁵ Thor Hall focused specifically on the doctrine of free will in the theology of Hans Denck and Balthasar Hubmaier and concluded in favour of Erasmian influence.⁶

A year later, Hans Hillerbrand's seminal study on Anabaptist origins identified Erasmus as a significant contributor, alongside Luther and Zwingli, to the early development of the movement. He argued that "the parallels between Erasmus and Anabaptism are striking and cannot be overlooked" and that "evidence concerning the connection between Erasmus and the Anabaptists can be marshaled without difficulty." Owing to the parallels between Erasmus and Anabaptists on pacifism, ethics, the Sermon on the Mount, baptism, communion, and freedom of the will, Hillerbrand proceeded to rank Erasmus as one of the influences on early Anabaptism. His study, which assumed that theological similarities pointed to Anabaptist dependence upon Erasmus, became the point of departure for most subsequent research into the question and highlighted the importance of the *Paraphrase on Matthew* (1522) as a potential source of Erasmian influence upon Anabaptism.⁷ In his inaugural address to the University of Amsterdam upon assuming a chair in Anabaptist history, I.B. Horst

⁵ Robert Kreider, "Anabaptism and Humanism: An Inquiry into the Relationship of Humanism to the Evangelical Anabaptists," *MQR* 26 (1952): 140; Heinhold Fast, "The Dependence of the First Anabaptists on Luther, Erasmus, and Zwingli," *MQR* 30 (1956): 104-119, esp. 109-111 who came to similar conclusions.

⁶ Thor Hall, "Possibilities of Erasmian Influence on Denck and Hubmaier in their Views on the Freedom of the Will," *MQR* 35 (1961): 149-170.

⁷ Hans Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Another Look," *ARG* 53 (1962): 152-80 at 157-58.

highlighted the connection between Erasmus and Anabaptism. In general terms, Horst called attention to Erasmus' early positive statements about the Anabaptists and asserted that the humanist's emphasis upon internal spirituality and a non-hierarchical definition of the Church found expression in Anabaptism. Horst suggested it was no coincidence that the Anabaptists had fared better in regions of Europe where Erasmianism had been strongest.⁸

Roland Bainton raised the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism in his biography of Erasmus by asserting that they shared a common spirit. Specifically, Bainton highlighted Erasmus' preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* as evidence of Anabaptist sympathies and made the bold statement that Erasmus could be considered "the only Anabaptist in the sixteenth century" since his preface called for a second baptism of sorts, albeit a spiritual one.⁹

In the early 1970s, several studies appeared on the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism, most importantly Kenneth R. Davis' research into the origins of Anabaptist asceticism. Davis elaborated on Hillerbrand's article by providing an "organized assessment of the nature, extent and significance of Erasmus' theological contribution to Anabaptism" and arguing that "the basic seeds for most of the distinctive Anabaptist positions - even the pattern of ideas - are contained in pre-1525 Erasmian thought and through him were available to the

⁸ Irvin B. Horst, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists and the Problem of Religious Unity* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink en Zoon, 1967), 1-32.

⁹ Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 261-262.

Anabaptists.” Following an extensive examination of over fifteen parallels, including lay asceticism, progressive revelation, ethical dualism, and the doctrine of the believers’ church, Davis concluded that, “the probability is heightened that the Anabaptists are best understood, apart from their own creativity, as a radicalization and Protestantization not of the Magisterial Reformation but of an earlier lay-oriented, ascetic vision of reformation - and that Erasmus is the principal mediator of these views to Anabaptism.” Davis’ research constitutes the most comprehensive attempt at addressing the question of Erasmus’ influence upon Anabaptism.¹⁰ In a more narrowly focused work, Edward K. Burger concentrated exclusively on the issue of free will in the thought of four Anabaptist leaders: Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Denck, Melchior Hoffman, and Bernhard Rothman. His systematic delineation of parallels between their arguments for free will and Erasmus’ treatise built upon the work of Thor Hall and provided more evidence that Erasmus was a source of influence for Anabaptist belief in free will.¹¹

The 1970s also witnessed a major shift in Anabaptist scholarship that necessarily shaped subsequent research in the field. The consensus about Anabaptist origins among leading historians had been that the movement,

¹⁰ Kenneth R. Davis, “Erasmus as Progenitor of Anabaptist Theology and Piety,” *MQR* 47 (1973): 163-178, quotes from 163 and 178; see also, Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 266-348 where Davis provides the bulk of his evidence for Erasmian mediation of the *Devotio Moderna* to Anabaptism.

¹¹ Edward K. Burger, “Erasmus and the Anabaptists” (Phd Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1977).

emerging first in Zurich, was the culmination of the reform ideas of Luther and Zwingli. In this view, Anabaptism, defined by the *Schleitheim Confession* (1527), originated in Switzerland and then spread to other regions of Europe. Historians, such as James Stayer, successfully challenged this monogenesis consensus, maintaining that it was demonstrably incorrect, especially on the issue of church and state. Instead, polygenesis historians argued there were not one, but three different geographical origins of Anabaptism: Swiss, South German/Austrian, and North German/Dutch. This corrective to the issue of Anabaptist origins subsequently has become the consensus in Anabaptist scholarship, and most histories of Anabaptism avoid all-encompassing explanations of the origins of the movement.¹²

Most studies on the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism since the polygenesis shift have concentrated on Erasmus' relationship to specific individuals. In the 1980s, the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism attracted the attention of other, non-Anabaptist, historians. In a study of Menno Simons' references to Erasmus, Cornelis Augustijn argued that the prominent Anabaptist's style and theological method indicated that he had read Erasmus

¹² The classic essay is James Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: the Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins" *MQR* 49 (1975): 83-121; on the historiography of Anabaptism, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 397-408 and John D. Roth, "Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation," *Church History* 71 (2002): 523-35.

and derived many of his theological ideas from him.¹³ Léon Halkin specifically addressed the supposedly Anabaptist elements of Erasmus' preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* and subsequent criticism of it by his Catholic opponents. Ultimately, he concluded that Erasmus' opponents misrepresented the humanist's intentions and there was no basis for the claim that Erasmus supported re-baptism.¹⁴

Dale Schrag's systematic study compared the pacifism of Erasmus and Conrad Grebel, the leader of the Swiss Brethren, arguing that Erasmus' and Grebel's views were sufficiently similar to warrant a closer scrutiny of the *possibility* of influence. Schrag did not claim Erasmus as the source of Swiss pacifism, only that Grebel's view was more Erasmian than Bender had previously supposed.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Douglas Shantz examined the intellectual background of Valentin Crautwald, a Silesian Anabaptist leader, and concluded that Erasmus was important for elements of his pedagogical and theological convictions.¹⁶ Peter Bietenholz examined the way Sebastian Franck, the well-

¹³Cornelius Augustijn, *Erasmus: Der Humanist als Theologe und Kirchenreformer* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 325-53. This portion of his book is an expanded version of Augustijn, "Erasmus and Menno Simons," *MQR* 60 (1986): 497-508.

¹⁴ Leon-E. Halkin, "Érasme et l'Anabaptisme," in *Bibliotheca Dissidentium, Scripta et Studia* 1 (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1983), 61-77; Halkin's essential point is restated in *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, trans. John Tonkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 163-167.

¹⁵ Dale Schrag, "Erasmian and Grebelian Pacifism: Consistency or Contradiction?" *MQR* 62 (1988): 431-454.

¹⁶ Douglas H. Shantz, *Crautwald and Erasmus. A Study in Humanism and Radical Reform in Sixteenth Century Silesia* (Baden-Baden: Bouxwiller, 1992).

known Anabaptist polemicist, used Erasmus' writings in justification of his own particular emphases. At times, Franck utilized Erasmus in ways indicating influence and at other times in ways suggesting distortion.¹⁷ Most recently, Wolfgang Breul-Kunkel confirmed that Melchior Rinck, a Hessian Anabaptist leader, had received a good humanist education that greatly affected his Anabaptist career. Consequently, "the career of Melchior Rinck demonstrates also that the old question about the connection of the Anabaptist movement and humanism demands further investigation."¹⁸

Some studies have continued to address the question in terms of Erasmus and the larger Anabaptist movement. Marc Lienhard's comprehensive survey of the literature on Erasmus and the Radical Reformers recommended concentrating on affinities between Erasmus and specific radicals on shared "mentalities". He identified two related perspectives that assist in discerning the Erasmianism of the Radicals: "first, the claim that a way of life [*das Leben*], and not doctrine, is decisive for a Christian's existence; second, the fostering of the emancipation and the piety of the laity."¹⁹ Abraham Friesen's recent book was a broadly conceived attempt to advocate Erasmian influence as a major factor in the origins of Anabaptism. In *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great*

¹⁷ Peter Bietenholz, "How Sebastian Franck Taught Erasmus to Speak with his Radical Voice," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 62 (2000): 233-248.

¹⁸ Wolfgang Breul-Kunkel, "Vom Humanismus zum Täuferum: Das Studium des Hessischen Täuferführers Melchior Rinck," *ARG* 93 (2002): 26-42, 42 (quote).

¹⁹ Lienhard, "Die Radikalen des 16. Jahrhunderts und Erasmus," 103-104, 103 (quote).

Commission (1998) Friesen maintained that Erasmus' interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20, as discussed in the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, its preface, and the *Paraphrase on Acts* (1524) became the primary basis for the Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism. Friesen traced the single theme of the Great Commission in the Church Fathers, Erasmus, and various Anabaptist writers in an attempt to demonstrate a verifiable link between Erasmus and Anabaptism.²⁰

While probing the question of Erasmus' influence on Anabaptism constitutes a valid enterprise, its appeal has been limited. In the first place, many studies that have compared Erasmus and Anabaptism have been highly suspicious of humanism, seeing it as an anthropocentric philosophy that endangered the foundations of the Christian faith. These studies tended to view Erasmus as a proto-Enlightenment rationalist and, consequently, were disinclined to pursue the question of his influence upon the deeply religious Anabaptists, known for discipleship and often martyred for their convictions. The distance between Erasmus and the Anabaptist movement seemed simply too great, and this discouraged further investigation into intellectual influence.²¹ Since the mid-twentieth century, however, Erasmus scholarship came to view his devout and sincere Christianity as essential to his character and work. According to this new consensus, Erasmus' faith was the primary lens through which his

²⁰ Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

²¹ See Schrag, "Erasmian and Grebelian Pacifism," 432-34, 438-39 for a discussion of the "anti-humanist" bent that permeated the approach to Erasmus and Anabaptism.

writings should be evaluated. Erasmus was now viewed as a sincere Christian whose emphasis upon piety and biblical theology was inextricably tied to his vision of reforming Christendom.²² Since, in light of this interpretation, Erasmus no longer poses a threat to Anabaptist religiosity, research can explore further the possibilities of specific Erasmian influence on Anabaptism.

Second, studies on Erasmus and Anabaptism had limited cogency because they rarely attended to what intellectual historians have called “the problem of influence,” a series of potential pitfalls that surround any attempt to prove intellectual influence. This lacuna is common to most of the literature on Erasmus’ general influence in the sixteenth century.²³ Hans Hillerbrand’s important article formed the conceptual basis for most later studies of Erasmus and the Anabaptists and, although he implicitly acknowledged the problem, he showed a lack of interest in the means by which influence was achieved. Hillerbrand carefully demonstrated similarities between Erasmus and the Anabaptists on several important issues but cautioned that “One must be careful here lest the denial of *direct* Erasmian influence lead to a denial of *any* Erasmian influence altogether. As long as the fact of an influence can be clearly

²² Bruce Mansfield, *Erasmus in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 43-52, 85, 148.

²³ See Cornelis Augustijn, “Verba valent usu: Was ist Erasmianismus?,” in *Erasmianism: Idea and Reality*, 5-14 for a discussion about the various uses of the term “Erasmianism.”

demonstrated, the ‘how’ becomes an academic question.”²⁴ But the question of “how” is important to proving influence, for similarity alone does not provide enough evidence to support a claim of influence. Since most subsequent studies have not addressed the critical issues pertaining to the problem of influence, the cogency of their arguments has been limited.²⁵ Without clearly addressing the fundamental problem of influence, further studies on Erasmus’ influence must necessarily remain less than convincing. What is needed in the scholarship on the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism is a method that can make more certain claims of influence and views the hypothesis of Erasmian influence as genuinely viable.

Methodology

My dissertation contributes to the scholarly debate about Erasmus’ influence upon Anabaptism by narrowing the focus on Balthasar Hubmaier, a pivotal yet infrequently studied Anabaptist leader, and employing a methodology of comparative exegesis that attends to the problem of influence. In doing so, I intend to make a more satisfying case for the influence of Erasmus upon the early Anabaptist movement.

²⁴ Hans Hillerbrand, “The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Another Look,” 157-161.

²⁵ The exception is Schrag, “Erasmian and Grebellian Pacifism,” 431-454, whose awareness of the problem caused him to refrain from a claim of influence.

Hubmaier's importance to early Anabaptism was tremendous, but modern historians have paid him comparatively little attention. Arnold Snyder, a leading Anabaptist historian, maintained that "Hubmaier has been unfairly marginalized in Mennonite histories primarily because he was not a pacifist. Oddly enough, polygenesis historians, focusing as they do on the 'sword' as a central issue, also tend to marginalize Hubmaier as an atypical Anabaptist. In fact, Hubmaier probably did more to define an early theological core of Anabaptist teaching than did any one else."²⁶ Part of his importance is due to his unique position in early Anabaptism. He was "the only figure of his generation with university credentials, the only one with extensive public activity before joining the Reformation, the most skilled in popular expository writing."²⁷ Hubmaier's significance was not lost on his contemporary Protestant opponents who recognized the great danger of his writings. Zwingli designated him "the greatest, and certainly the most arrogant of the Anabaptists," and Oecolampadius labeled him the "Patron of the Anabaptists." Bullinger called him "the head and the foremost in the sect of the Anabaptists" and the sixteenth-century chronicler of the Swiss town of St. Gall recorded that he was an "Arch-Anabaptist."²⁸ Hubmaier's Catholic opponents also considered him notorious. Johann Eck believed that he had "founded the

²⁶Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 63-64, n. 13.

²⁷H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, ed., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 13.

²⁸Cited in Torsten Bergsten, "Einleitung A. Historischer Teil," *HS* 9-11. Zwingli: "catabaptistarum nunc aut summum aut certe arrogantissimum"; Oecolampadius: "Patron der Wiedertäufer"; Bullinger: "das Haupt und den fürnehmsten in der Sekte der Wiedertäufer"; Chronicler of St. Gall: "Erwiedertäufer".

sect of the Anabaptists” and that he was the “author of this depraved sect.”²⁹

Johann Fabri, Hubmaier’s final interrogator, considered him “the principal author of the Anabaptists in our age.”³⁰ Erasmus himself knew of Hubmaier’s career and referred to him in passing as the “Doctor of Anabaptism.”³¹

Scholarship on Hubmaier has been scarce, but historians examining his intellectual background have considered Erasmus’ influence along two lines of inquiry: (1) his view of free will and (2) his conversion to the Reformation. The dispute over free will was a major point of disagreement between Luther and Erasmus that indicated an insurmountable breach between the two men.

Hubmaier never explicitly mentioned Erasmus’ *On the Freedom of the Will*, but historians agree he was deeply indebted to Erasmus’ treatise and probably copied large portions of it directly into his own study of the same title.

Hubmaier’s authoritative modern biographer, Torsten Bergsten, argued that Hubmaier had utilized Erasmus and suggested that that fact illustrated Erasmus’ lasting effect on Hubmaier’s theology.³² Burger’s study also conclusively

²⁹ Cited in Werner Packull, “Balthasar Hubmaier’s Gift to John Eck, July 18, 1516,” *MQR* 63 (1989): 430. Johann Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces Against Luther and other Enemies of the Church*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 209: “Baldasar iste primo factus Luderanus, deinde Zwinglianus, postremo fundavit sectam parabaptistarum”;

³⁰ Johann Fabri: “Anabaptistarum nostri seculi primus Author” (*HS* 9).

³¹ *Declarationes ad Censuras Facultatis Theologiae Parisiensis* (1532), LB 9:871E.

³² Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Seine Stellung zu Reformation und Täuferum, 1521-1528* (Kassel: J.G. Oncken Verlag, 1961); Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, ed. William R. Estep, trans. Irwin Barnes and William R. Estep (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 352-53. Unless noted, references to Bergsten are to the English translation.

demonstrated that Hubmaier's use of *On the Freedom of the Will* was extensive both in terms of style and content and even Robert Moore, whose argument points toward nominalism as the primary factor for Hubmaier's anthropology, concedes that he knew Erasmus' treatise very well.³³

Historians have also considered the place of Erasmus in Hubmaier's conversion to the Reformation during 1521-1523. Early twentieth-century scholarship downplayed the value of the scarce epistolary evidence from the period for its relevance to the theme of Erasmian influence,³⁴ but Bergsten highlighted the role of humanism as a stepping stone between the traditional Church and the Reformation. Most subsequent studies generally have conceded that humanism played some part in his move from the traditional Church to the Reformation.³⁵ Bergsten, however, qualified Hubmaier's debt to humanism: "In his own religious pilgrimage, humanism left a lasting impression upon his life and thought...Yet one cannot call Hubmaier a humanist in the strict sense of the term after he became an evangelical. His gifts had fitted him more for the pulpit than

³³ Burger, *Erasmus and the Anabaptists*, 54-75; Moore, "Catholic Teacher and Anabaptist Pupil," 72-74.

³⁴ For example, see Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier, The Leader of the Anabaptists* (London: Putnam's Sons, 1905; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1971), 53-57, who largely ignores the letters; Carl D. Sachsse, *Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe* (Berlin, 1914; reprint, Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1973), 130-133 who suggests Erasmus placed doubts in the mind of Hubmaier about the Church but little more (p. 132).

³⁵ See Jarold Knox Zeman, *The Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia: A Study of Origins and Contacts* (The Hague: Mouton Press, 1969), 126; Christof Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis. Balthasar Hubmaiers Lehre zwischen traditioneller und reformatorischer Theologie* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 7-11; Burger, *Erasmus and the Anabaptists*, 46-52; Eddie Mabry, *Balthasar Hubmaier's Doctrine of the Church* (New York: University of America Press, 1994), 22-30.

the lectern.”³⁶ Bergsten’s view implies a fundamental discontinuity between humanists and reformers. Lewis Spitz, however, argued persuasively that humanism and the Reformation were not antithetical to one another, but entirely complementary. In fact, he pointed out that “without the humanists and without humanism there would not have been a Reformation such as we know from history and from our own experience.” Luther may have made a sharp break with humanism as his reform theology matured, but this was not the case for most humanists who joined the Protestant movement and helped shape it with tools and concepts formulated within the intellectual milieu of humanism.³⁷ Bergsten’s assumptions about the incompatibility of humanism and the Reformation may have prevented him and other scholars from exploring fully the potential of Erasmus’ influence upon Hubmaier’s theology even after becoming a Reformer.³⁸

Beyond the issues of free will and the conversion to the Reformation, relatively few studies of Hubmaier’s theology have explored the possibilities of

³⁶ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 74-75.

³⁷ Lewis Spitz, “Humanism and the Protestant Reformation,” in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 3:380-411, 382 (quote).

³⁸ Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*; “Anfänge und Aspekte der Theologie Hubmaiers,” in *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism*, ed. Marc Lienhard (The Hague: Martinus Hijhoff, 1977), 148-168, suggests humanist influence merely “called him to the sources and also provide them for him.” Mabry, *Balthasar Hubmaier’s Doctrine of the Church*, 22-30, seems to reject the idea of Erasmian influence based on a misunderstanding of humanism: “If this is, indeed, true, [that humanism was important to Hubmaier’s thought] then either Hubmaier was not really an Anabaptist leader, or his early interest in humanism stemmed only indirectly from Erasmus.”

Erasmian influence. In the most complete modern treatment of Hubmaier's theology, Christof Windhorst concludes that, owing to his traditionalism, Hubmaier may be called a "Reformed Catholic." Although Windhorst points out Hubmaier's Erasmian concept of free will and speculates about Erasmus' influence on Hubmaier's "spiritualism" and anthropology, he emphasized Luther's influence and the traditional elements of Hubmaier's theology. Consequently, Windhorst presents only a cursory examination of the evidence for Erasmus' influence on anything other than free will.³⁹ Carl Leth's study of Hubmaier's view of the keys of the kingdom mentions the possibility of Erasmus' influence but makes only tentative suggestions and calls for further research on the topic. Davis and Friesen only briefly consider the connection between Hubmaier and Erasmus without making conclusive statements about influence.⁴⁰

Despite these studies and Hubmaier's importance to the early Anabaptist movement, no one has yet undertaken a substantial examination of the evidence for Erasmus' influence upon Hubmaier. This lacuna is unfortunate because more evidence exists for Erasmus' direct influence upon Hubmaier than for most of the other early Anabaptist leaders. Hubmaier moved in the humanist circles of southern Germany where he met Erasmus, he referred to Erasmus positively in

³⁹ Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*; Windhorst, "Anfänge und Aspekte der Theologie Hubmaiers," 168.

⁴⁰ For example, see Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, 288; Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, 38, 53, 60-1; Carl M. Leth, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Catholic Exegesis," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 111-112, 115-116.

private correspondence, and he cited Erasmus in his theological treatises. Consequently, a study of Erasmus' influence upon Hubmaier offers the potential for results that would prove relevant to the broader question of Erasmian impact on Anabaptism.

To answer satisfactorily the question of Erasmus' influence on Hubmaier one must employ a method that attends to the difficulties inherent in proving influence. As a branch of the historical discipline, intellectual history has always attempted to explain the development of ideas by pursuing their possible influences. Taking into account perceived stylistic or substantial allusions, echoes, or citations, the historian of ideas identifies the sources of influence for a particular thinker in the works of predecessors. Since the 1960s, scholars have called attention to the problems intrinsic to the influence model and challenged historians of ideas to sharpen the language and methods employed in the pursuit of intellectual influences so as to avoid unsubstantiated claims at the expense of responsible historical scholarship. In particular, Quentin Skinner argued that scholars using the influence model often failed to demonstrate genuine similarity among thinkers and neglected to eliminate other possible sources for influence. He contended that explanations of historical ideas using the influence model were unconvincing and frequently flawed.⁴¹

⁴¹ Philip P. Wiener, "Some Problems and Methods in the History of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961): 537; Quentin Skinner, "The Limits of Historical Explanation," *Philosophy* 41 (1966): 199-215; Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969), 3-53.

The critique of the influence model led some historians to shy away from it. Francis Oakley, however, recently chided historians for unduly neglecting the idea of influence. He argued that the concept of influence was so integral to the historical discipline that even those who had explicitly rejected it ultimately could not escape its allure; instead, they simply employed synonyms such as “usage” or placed the word within quotation marks. He also pointed out that Skinner himself, the main antagonist of the influence model in intellectual history, had employed it repeatedly and effectively in his groundbreaking study, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978).⁴² Oakley, therefore, persuasively contended that the critiques of the influence concept should not cause historians to abandon the search for intellectual influences, but simply should serve to heighten their “methodological self-consciousness.” After all, since in English the word “influence” carries a causal connotation, to abandon it would be to strike at the very heart of the historical discipline. Poor historical research should neither negate the entire discipline of history nor discourage historians from pursuing intellectual influences as helpful for explaining the past. For, “however sloppily the influence concept may conceivably have been invoked in the past, it has (as it always has had) an important and probably indispensable role to play in the history of ideas. It should be permitted to play it.”⁴³

⁴² Francis Oakley, *Politics and Eternity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 147, 186-187.

⁴³ Oakley, *Politics and Eternity*, 147, 186-187.

Conscious of the problems inherent in proving influence, my study employs precise terminology and explicitly attends to the necessary conditions of influence. For, without “precise definitions and specifications of causal conditions” historians, Philip Wiener warns, will be highly susceptible to the logical fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.⁴⁴ There are various kinds of influence (direct, indirect, positive, negative) and kinds of influence media (personal, literary). In my study, unless otherwise noted, “influence” refers to positive and direct influence, “positive” indicating Hubmaier agrees with and appropriates an Erasmian idea, and “direct” signifying he encountered the idea through personal contact with Erasmus or by reading his scholarly writings. Influence studies often fail to consider the prerequisite conditions of influence, the three essential conditions that must be met in order to sustain a claim of intellectual influence. The first condition is the requirement of contact, for it must be demonstrated that influence was in fact possible due to personal or literary contact.⁴⁵ To prove Erasmus influenced Balthasar Hubmaier, contact must have been at least possible and verifiable. Chapter 2 examines Hubmaier’s personal and professional background and the evidence of personal and literary contact with Erasmus. The condition of contact provides the simple, yet indispensable, foundation upon which any case for intellectual influence must be built and has

⁴⁴ Augustijn, “Verba valent usu: was ist Erasmianismus?,” 14; Philip P. Wiener, “Some Problems and Methods in the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961): 537.

⁴⁵ Göran Hermeren, *Influence in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 156-76.

proven useful in other studies of Erasmus' influence. Evidence of contact itself often can prove crucial to a claim of influence.⁴⁶

The second condition of influence is similarity. Beginning with a "striking similarity" or an echo or a perceived allusion, scholars then propose and pursue the hypothesis of influence.⁴⁷ Discerning and evaluating similarities and differences between particular thinkers is an accepted method for tracing Erasmus' influence upon other Reformers such as Bucer, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Melancthon,⁴⁸ and it has also been the strong suit in studies of Erasmus and Anabaptism, especially by Hillerbrand and Davis.

Recently historians, following the long-established practice of theologians and biblical scholars, have begun to view the history of scriptural interpretation as a vital tool for understanding historical developments within Christianity.⁴⁹ Comparative exegesis is particularly useful for the task of proving Erasmus'

⁴⁶ For example, see John C. Olin, "Erasmus and Saint Ignatius Loyola," in *Six Essays on Erasmus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 75-92.

⁴⁷ Hermeren, *Influence in Art and Literature*, 196-200, 260-261.

⁴⁸ For representative examples, see: A.H.T. Levi, "Erasmus, the Early Jesuits and the Classics," in *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 1500-1700*, ed. R.R. Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 223-238; Friedhelm Krüger, "Bucer and Erasmus," *MQR* 68 (1994): 11-23; John Payne, "Erasmus's Influence on Zwingli and Bullinger in the Exegesis of Matthew 11:28-30," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 61-81; James Estes, "Erasmus, Melancthon, and the Office of Christian Magistrate," *ERSY* 18 (1998): 21-39.

⁴⁹ See Karlfried Froehlich, "Church History and the Bible," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 1-15, whose seminal essay summed up this approach. See also David Kling, *The Bible in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-11.

influence on Hubmaier primarily because of the latter's rigid biblicism. More than most of his contemporaries, Hubmaier sought to construct his theology exclusively upon Scripture with little or no recourse to traditional theological opinion. Consequently, probable sources for his theology are scriptural expositions or commentaries, such as Erasmus' *Annotations* and *Paraphrases on the New Testament*.

My study concentrates on Erasmus' and Hubmaier's exegesis of three particular passages from the Gospel of Matthew. Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* functions as a fundamental source in this study because his contemporaries as well as modern historians have drawn attention to the supposed Anabaptist motifs in it, albeit without fully exploring the evidence.⁵⁰ Since Hubmaier referred directly to Erasmus' *Annotations* and *Paraphrase on Matthew*, they constitute excellent probable sources for influence. Chapter 3 examines the interpretation of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), a passage crucial for Anabaptist arguments against infant baptism. Abraham Friesen's recent study on the passage has provoked particular interest in the topic among Erasmus scholars and Anabaptist historians alike. Chapter 4 explores the interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13: 24-30, 36-43), important to the issue of religious toleration. Since Anabaptist historiography and research on toleration have generally neglected Hubmaier's view of toleration, it warrants closer scrutiny. Chapter 5 addresses the interpretation of the keys of

⁵⁰ Cf. Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Another Look," 157-161.

the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:13-20; 18:15-20), essential for ecclesiological issues such as excommunication, a topic central to Anabaptist theology. Since each passage was vital to some component of Hubmaier's theology, demonstrating Erasmian influence would be significant for helping to explain the complexities of Hubmaier's thought.

The third condition of influence is source probability. Assuming the conditions of contact and similarity have been satisfied, it is still necessary to determine the probability of whether or not the similarities were in fact due to Erasmus' influence as opposed to another source.⁵¹ The tendency to ignore the condition of source probability is a weakness of the previous scholarship on Erasmus and the Anabaptists, and consequently, the many identified similarities have not supplied convincing proof of Erasmus' influence. John Payne's study of Erasmus' influence on Zwingli and Bullinger provides an example of an influence study that was able to make valid claims of Erasmian influence by attending successfully to the issue of source probability. Payne examined the exegetical tradition of Matthew 11:28-30 as well as contemporary interpreters so as to argue that Erasmus was the most probable source of influence for Zwingli and Bullinger's exegesis of the passage.⁵²

⁵¹ See Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 26-27, for his discussion of the need to eliminate other possible sources of influence.

⁵² Payne, "Erasmus's Influence on Zwingli and Bullinger," 61-81.

I adopt a similar methodology by providing a brief overview of the exegetical tradition for each of the Matthew passages and placing the various interpretations within the context of Hubmaier's sixteenth-century contemporaries. While it is not possible to examine exhaustively the entire range of patristic and medieval and contemporary interpretations of the given New Testament passages, samples from the exegetical tradition will provide sufficient historical context for the evaluation of Erasmus and Hubmaier. The degree of similarity between Erasmus and Hubmaier becomes apparent and provides an adequate basis for making a more reasonable claim of influence.

My research yields the following results. First, the evidence of contact presented in Chapter 2 clearly indicates that Hubmaier was in a position to have been influenced by Erasmus and in fact adopted his emphasis upon scripture as the purest source of theology. Second, the evidence of comparative exegesis yields a mixed result. Chapter 3 provides evidence that Erasmus influenced Hubmaier's exegesis of the Great Commission, primarily concerning the necessity of pre-baptismal catechesis. Erasmus' influence on Hubmaier's exegesis was important because it helped Hubmaier accept an Anabaptist conclusion on baptism. Chapter 4 demonstrates that Erasmus is the probable source for Hubmaier's exegesis of the parable of the tares, especially regarding his identification of the servants of the passage as the inquisitors. Erasmus' influence was significant because it provided the biblical support for his view of toleration. Chapter 5 suggests Erasmus did not significantly influence Hubmaier's

interpretation of the keys of the kingdom. Despite similar exegesis on portions of the passage, important differences in emphasis make it unlikely that Erasmus influenced Hubmaier's interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO - CONTACT BETWEEN HUBMAIER AND ERASMUS

The first task of this influence study is to present evidence of contact between Hubmaier and Erasmus that can substantiate the feasibility of the influence hypothesis. Hubmaier's university training and association with Johann Eck placed him in proximity to the humanism that pervaded the universities of southern Germany and afforded him linguistic tools for biblical study. Correspondence from 1521-1522 reveals Hubmaier as alienated from scholastic theology and devoted to Erasmian humanism. He wrote to important humanists and engaged with the biblical scholarship of Erasmus, Melanchthon, Luther, and Oecolampadius. Hubmaier visited Basel in the spring of 1522 and discussed theological matters with Erasmus during a personal meeting with him that was significant for his religious development. Later literary evidence that includes explicit references to Erasmus and extensive borrowing from *On the Freedom of the Will* (1524) confirms Hubmaier continued to read Erasmus' religious writings after becoming a reformer and an Anabaptist. The evidence of contact suggests that exegetical similarities between Erasmus and Hubmaier possibly could be attributed to Erasmian influence.

Biographical Outline

Balthasar Hubmaier was born in the early to mid-1480s in the small town of Friedburg, outside Augsburg.⁵³ Details of Hubmaier's early life are scarce. Evidently his parents were not poor, since they secured for him a place at the cathedral school of Augsburg where he began his early education. He entered the University of Freiburg in 1503 as a clerical student from Augsburg and after completing the basic course of study, he enrolled in theology under Eck, who played a major role both in Hubmaier's intellectual development and in the ensuing polemics of the Reformation. Owing to financial difficulties in 1507, Hubmaier briefly interrupted his studies with a one-year stint as the schoolteacher for the city of Schaffhausen, a city on the Rhine approximately 100 kilometers southeast of Freiburg on the Rhine, but then returned to his studies at Freiburg. In 1512, Hubmaier followed Eck to the University of Ingolstadt, where he received his doctorate in theology and accepted an appointment as professor of theology at the university. In addition to teaching, while in Ingolstadt Hubmaier preached at the Church of St. Mary and served as pro-rector for the university. However, he left Ingolstadt in January 1516 for Regensburg to assume the influential position of cathedral preacher.

⁵³ This section follows the account of Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, supplemented by material from Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier* and Christof Windhorst, "Balthasar Hubmaier: Professor, Preacher, Politician," *Profiles of Radical Reformers*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1982), 144-57.

At Regensburg, Hubmaier soon became the popular leader of the longstanding anti-Jewish movement in the city. His campaign against the imperially protected Jews of Regensburg was so vitriolic that he was forced to defend himself against charges of sedition before an Imperial diet in the city in the summer of 1518. By early 1519, however, largely due to Hubmaier's preaching, the Jewish community was driven out of Regensburg and its synagogue destroyed. In its place the city built the new chapel of the Beautiful Mary, whose widely publicized miracles soon attracted pilgrims from all over Germany, encouraged by Hubmaier's passionate sermons extolling the shrine's spiritual benefits. When the pilgrimages peaked in 1520, Hubmaier's fame had reached its zenith and he was a well-known figure throughout the southern regions of the Holy Roman Empire.

Despite his popular and profitable position at the chapel of the Beautiful Mary, Hubmaier abruptly left Regensburg in early 1521 and began preaching at the Church of St. Mary in the tiny provincial town of Waldshut on the frontier lands of Habsburg Austria. His motives for leaving the prestigious post at Regensburg for the backwater of Waldshut are unclear, but the increasing excesses of the pilgrims, a fear of the approaching plague, and conflict with city officials over his compensation were possible contributing factors. In the little town of Waldshut, between 1521 and 1523, Hubmaier changed from a popular parish preacher into a respected evangelical Reformer with close collegial ties to Zwingli and Oecolampadius. He briefly resumed his former position in

Regensburg in the late fall of 1522, but he abruptly broke his contract there and returned to Waldshut a few months later; his religious transformation evidently had rendered his participation in the pilgrimage trade impossible.

The content of his Waldshut sermons and association with Swiss Reformers in the spring of 1523 implied his conversion, but Hubmaier's participation in the October 1523 disputation at Zurich was an explicit declaration for the Reformation. There he denied the doctrine of transubstantiation and the sacrificial interpretation of the Mass, condemned the production and use of religious images, and sided with Zwingli's reform movement. Upon returning to Waldshut he began openly to preach a message of reform and quickly converted the town council, which tenaciously defended him despite demands for his arrest by Austrian authorities. Until the fall of 1524, Hubmaier's reformation had proceeded along the same lines as Zurich's, but his alignment with the Grebel circle indicated that his inclinations were more extreme than Zwingli's. By early 1525, Hubmaier had stopped baptizing infants and was gradually moving toward Anabaptism. Eventually, after months of deliberation, he was re-baptized on 15 April 1525 by exiled Swiss Anabaptists. Subsequently more than 300 of Hubmaier's parishioners in Waldshut followed his example, and his theological training and literary eloquence quickly propelled him into a prominent position in the burgeoning Anabaptist movement.

Anabaptist reform in Waldshut coincided with the German Peasants' War, and Hubmaier and the town council supported and aided the peasant cause.

During 1525, with the endorsement of the Waldshut town council, Hubmaier continued reforming measures in the town and organized and fortified it for the inevitable Habsburg siege. During the first stages of the hostilities, due to the apparent alliance with Zurich and Austrian preoccupation with peasant forces in the countryside, no military campaign was directed against Waldshut; yet, by the fall of 1525, with the defeat of the regional peasant forces and Hubmaier's alienation from one-time sympathizers (Oecolampadius and Zwingli), he was ill and unable to delay the certain defeat of the town. Eventually, Hubmaier and his wife, whom he had married the previous January, fled Waldshut in December 1525, and Habsburg troops soon occupied the town. Hubmaier originally intended to go to Basel, but the route was blocked by Austrian troops forcing him to enter Zurich, where he spent four traumatic months. After initially finding refuge with friends, he was arrested by city officials. Although at first, after pressure by Zwingli and others, he agreed to renounce publicly his Anabaptist beliefs, Hubmaier reaffirmed his view of baptism in an outburst that so enraged Zwingli that he consented to his torture. In April 1526 after making good on his promise to disavow Anabaptism at several churches, Hubmaier and his wife departed Zurich. Within a short time he had renounced his recantation and again promoted Anabaptist doctrines.

In July 1526, Hubmaier arrived in the Moravian town of Nicolsburg, a region that had already embraced Zwinglian-style reforms but proved more tolerant of religious dissent than other regions of the Empire. Within months,

Hubmaier's skill as a charismatic leader and reformer helped create in the city a thriving Anabaptist movement of more than 2,000. As news of this phenomenon spread, Anabaptist refugees from other regions flocked to the relative safety of Nicolsburg, largely under the protection of Prince Leonhard von Liechtenstein, himself an Anabaptist convert. Due to the rapid growth of the Anabaptist congregation, Hubmaier turned his attention to theological and pastoral issues, resulting in seminal treatises on ecclesiology, anthropology, and sacramental theology. Toward the end of Hubmaier's year-long stay in Nicolsburg, a major dispute arose involving Hans Hut, a successful Anabaptist missionary who advocated absolute pacifism framed within an apocalyptic worldview. Hubmaier responded to Hut in a series of tracts that maintained a positive role for the state in the reform of the Church and allowed for Christian involvement in just warfare. Hut converted many to his position and the dispute threatened to destroy Hubmaier's magisterial Anabaptist reform in Nicolsburg.

Hubmaier's politico-theological works eschewed rebellion, but King Ferdinand of Austria initiated an investigation into his alleged seditious activity dating to the Peasants' War. On Ferdinand's order, Hubmaier and his wife were arrested in the summer of 1527 and taken to Kreuzenstein castle near Vienna for interrogation and eventual punishment. Despite a spirited defense that emphasized the orthodox elements of his theology (belief in free will, Mary's perpetual virginity, etc.), Hubmaier's adherence to essential Anabaptist beliefs

sealed his fate, and he was judged a rebellious heretic and burned at the stake on 10 March 1528. His wife was condemned and drowned three days later.

Formal Education

Academic credentials distinguished Hubmaier from other early Anabaptists, but the sources reveal little specific information about his formal education. Besides the University of Freiburg matriculation record of 1 May 1503, the only explicit information about Hubmaier's education is from a speech by Eck made at his nomination for the doctorate in 1512. In it Eck provides a glimpse at his early promise as a scholar and accomplishments as a preacher:

Our licentiate here has applied himself wholeheartedly to his task. Having been well grounded in the fundamentals of grammar and elementary studies during his youth, he entered the University of Freiburg. There, under my direction, he drank of the wellsprings of philosophy, not only deeply but judiciously. He always followed the lectures and took careful notes of everything – a diligent reader, a frequent auditor, and a sedulous retainer of whatever he heard. And so he won the Master's cap *summa cum laude*. Though many wanted to persuade him to pursue medicine, he preferred to accompany and embrace that holiest of mistresses, theology, saying to himself: "I have chosen her and picked her out, and I shall make her dwell in the tabernacle of my mind."

Even though straightened circumstances at home hindered him to such an extent that he had to leave the temple of learning and teach school at Schaffhausen, still, when opportunity presented itself, he returned to his accustomed studies and once more began to struggle in our company. How much he has achieved his learned lectures bear witness, as do his sermons of great benefit to the

people, and the other scholastic exercises more than amply demonstrate.⁵⁴

Although this kind of commendation was customary and probably includes stock phrases, it helps illuminate the otherwise murky picture of Hubmaier's university education. Eck depicts Hubmaier as a diligent pupil, who zealously pursued his education and energetically engaged in activities typical for advanced students such as repeating lectures. This may have been an expected role for Hubmaier, who began his studies late and who naturally had the respect of younger students. After returning from his teaching post in Schaffhausen, Hubmaier evidently involved himself in "scholastic exercises." Eck's reference may refer to a 1508 disputation in Freiburg over the issue of the proper number of feast days in the Christian calendar. This is the sole event from Hubmaier's early education that he later mentioned.⁵⁵

While at Freiburg and Ingolstadt, Hubmaier fostered relationships with individuals who later played important roles in the debate over the Reformation. In Freiburg, he befriended Johann Fabri, the canon lawyer who studied briefly under Zasius. Fabri considered himself a humanist and initially expressed strong sympathies for the Reformation while serving as the Vicar-General and later Suffragan Bishop of Constance. Those sympathies, however, evaporated in 1521

⁵⁴ Quoted in Burger, *Erasmus and the Anabaptists*, 44.

⁵⁵ In his *Apology* (1528), referring to his belief about the limitation of the number of feast days, Hubmaier writes "...but there should not be so many, as I publicly argued, twenty years ago at Freiburg in Breisgau, the thesis *de non multiplicandis festis* (that feast days are not to be multiplied)" (PY 552; HS 483).

after Luther's condemnation, and Fabri began writing against the Reformers. Later, as advisor to Ferdinand of Austria he played a critical role in Hubmaier's demise. Fabri interrogated Hubmaier and wrote the official account of his lapse into heresy and revolutionary activity.⁵⁶ The most important relationship Hubmaier cultivated during his academic training was with his mentor, Johann Eck. Walter Moore, Jr has emphasized the closeness between Hubmaier and Eck, suggesting that even after their falling out over the Reformation in 1524, Hubmaier's theology continued to be shaped by the nominalism he learned from Eck. In 1516, Hubmaier displayed his devotion to him in verse, praising his erudition and importance to Germany's fame. That same year Eck stayed with Hubmaier briefly in Regensburg on his way to Vienna and received from Hubmaier a copy Platina's *History of the Popes* (Paris, 1505) as a token of appreciation.⁵⁷

Hubmaier's education consisted of the standard curriculum of the late medieval German university,⁵⁸ a bachelor's degree focusing almost exclusively on the *trivium* and the Master of Arts' degree centering on natural philosophy and the *quadrivium*. Although humanists succeeded in substantially altering the

⁵⁶ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 50; Denis R. Janz, "Johannes Fabri," in *CEBR* 2:5-8.

⁵⁷ Walter L. Moore, "Catholic Teacher and Anabaptist Pupil: The Relationship between John Eck and Balthasar Hubmaier," *ARG* 72 (1981): 74-75, 77. The poem is cited in Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 29; Packull, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Gift to John Eck, July 18, 1516," 428-432; Erwin Iserloh, *Johannes Eck (1486-1543): Scholastiker Humanist Kontroverstheologe* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1985), 13, identified Hubmaier as one of Eck's most important students.

⁵⁸ See Sachsse, D. *Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe*, 117-24, for Hubmaier's education.

liberal arts curriculum, especially regarding dialectic, the traditional programme continued to dominate well into the sixteenth century.⁵⁹ Evidently Hubmaier studied both Hebrew and Greek, but it is difficult to determine the extent of his language training because he did not display it often in his publications. He deliberately promoted and utilized an egalitarian hermeneutic that drew attention to the “clear and plain sense of Scripture” and eschewed linguistic argumentation.⁶⁰

Hubmaier’s theological training was thoroughly scholastic and, according to his own admission, devoid of serious study of the Bible. Later, as an Anabaptist leader, he confessed: “God knows I am not lying, that I became a doctor in the Holy Scriptures (as this sophistry was called), and still did not understand the Christian articles contained here in this booklet [*A Christian Catechism*]. Yes, and at that time I had never read a Gospel, or an epistle by Paul from beginning to end.” Instead, he taught “Thomas, Scotus, Gabriel, Occam, decree, decretals, legends of the saints and other scholastics. These were previously our hellish scriptures.”⁶¹ His comments are not simply the hyperbole of a disillusioned theologian, for the humanist critique of scholasticism

⁵⁹ Charles G. Nauert, Jr., “Humanist Infiltration into the Academic World: Some Studies of Northern Universities,” *RQ* 43 (1990): 800-801.

⁶⁰ See *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 99,142; HS 120, 157). In other places, however, he argues his point on the original Greek (PY 172, 229-230; HS 169, 211-212). Hubmaier displays some knowledge of Hebrew and Greek in *On the Freedom of the Will* (PY 429-430; HS 382-383).

⁶¹ *A Christian Catechism* (PY 343; HS 309).

rested on similar assumptions about the neglect of a literary, contextual, and pastoral reading of Scripture in the schools. Erasmus himself complained that theology students obtained a bachelor's degree without ever having read the gospel or Pauline epistles.⁶²

Hubmaier's account likely constitutes a fair description of the standard scholastic approach to theology at the universities in the early sixteenth century and his "hellish scriptures" were the mainstays of late medieval scholastic theology. In particular, as Eck's student, Hubmaier was acquainted with the two dominant philosophical schools of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, since both were represented adequately in the faculty of the University of Freiburg in the early 1500s. Although he incorporated elements from various intellectual traditions, Eck was firmly entrenched in the latter, a theological standpoint absorbed by Hubmaier. Steinmetz and Moore have both argued that nominalism continued to affect the way Hubmaier framed his theology well after he broke ranks with his mentor on the fundamental question of the Reformation, particularly regarding free will.⁶³

⁶² *Ratio Verae Theologiae*, Holborn, 299.

⁶³ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 49, 51; David C. Steinmetz, "Scholasticism and Radical Reform: Nominalist Motifs in the Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier," *MQR* 45 (1971): 123-144; Moore, "Catholic Teacher and Anabaptist Pupil," 78-94; Iserloh, *Johannes Eck*, 7-17; see Terrence Heath, "Logical Grammar, Grammatical Logic, and Humanism in Three German Universities," *Studies in the Renaissance* 18 (1971): 9-64, esp. 54-64 for the discussion of Eck's use of humanist resources for "revivifying" the traditional arts curriculum.

Hubmaier and Humanism

Prior to his move to Waldshut in January 1521 there is little evidence of Hubmaier's contact with humanism and his initial response to it is unclear. Given his admiration for Eck, Hubmaier's attitude toward humanism would have likely mirrored that of his teacher as long as he was under his tutelage, but that is a matter of debate. Terrence Heath argued that Eck's interest in humanism was largely pragmatic and that he primarily appreciated it for the linguistic and pedagogical advances it offered the Arts curriculum.⁶⁴ Iserloh, however, pointed out that the humanist reforms made under his leadership in the university curriculum and the fact that many humanists initially counted him as one of their own suggest Eck was more of a humanist than some scholars have thought.⁶⁵ The extent of Eck's humanism may be unclear, but his well-known criticism of Erasmus' *Annotations to the New Testament* (1516) indicates his attitude toward its application to theology. Eck argued that several of Erasmus' annotations undermined confidence in the trustworthiness of the evangelists and their facility in Greek and that Erasmus' preference for Jerome over Augustine was unwarranted.⁶⁶ Eck's visit to Hubmaier in Regensburg in July 1516 occurred only a few months after the publication of Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum* and it

⁶⁴ Heath, "Logical Grammar, Grammatical Logic, and Humanism in Three German Universities," 54-64.

⁶⁵Iserloh, *Johannes Eck*, 18-20.

⁶⁶Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and his Catholic Critics*, 2 vols (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers, 1989), 1:47-8; See also Denis R. Janz, "Johann Maier of Eck," in *CEBR* 1:417.

is possible that this landmark work of humanist biblical scholarship would have been one of the topics of discussion between the two friends.⁶⁷ It is reasonable to conclude that initially Hubmaier probably would have been skeptical about humanist principles applied to theology.

The next stage of Hubmaier's career, however, offers clear evidence of his shifting intellectual penchant in the direction of humanism. At the end of his first tenure at the chapel of Beautiful Mary in Regensburg in late 1520, Hubmaier grew disillusioned with his role as pilgrim preacher. Something had altered his thinking and Bergsten suggests this was his early encounter with humanism and Luther's thought: "While Hubmaier was not outwardly concerned with the Reformation, one cannot exclude the possibility that he was already beginning to interest himself in Luther's teachings, even in Regensburg." After examining evidence from the Waldshut period, Bergsten states: "It is now clear from the sources that Hubmaier began to concern himself in Regensburg with the evangelical theology awakened by Erasmus, and that Luther played a decisive role in his conversion to the evangelical faith."⁶⁸

The sources for Bergsten's conclusions are three extant letters dating from the first stage of Hubmaier's pastorate at Waldshut (early 1521- fall 1522). Hubmaier worked in Waldshut as a priest, faithful to the sacramental system of

⁶⁷ Packull, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Gift to John Eck," 428-431 suggests the two men would have discussed Eck's upcoming disputation topic (usury); the same could be said for Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum*.

⁶⁸ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 65-66, 74.

the medieval Church, and these letters reveal that internally a conversion toward the Reformation was taking place. Hubmaier made important contacts with south German humanists while still en route to Waldshut as he stopped over in Ulm and befriended Wolfgang Rychard, a physician and humanist Reformer in the city. The correspondence from the Waldshut period in part signaled Hubmaier's attempts to maintain and cultivate humanist contacts established at Ulm.⁶⁹ It consists of (1) a short note in early 1521 to Beatus Rhenanus (1485-1547), the Basel humanist and textual critic; (2) an introductory letter of 26 October 1521 to Johannes Sapidus (1490-1561), rector of the Latin school of Schlettstadt and prominent Alsatian humanist; and (3) a letter of 23 June 1522 addressed to the Schaffhausen physician and humanist Johannes Adelphi (1485-1523). Since these letters constitute the primary evidence of Hubmaier's contact with humanism and Erasmus during this period, they warrant close scrutiny.

Hubmaier forged ties with humanists in Ulm and acquired books there that supported the cause of Luther. In early 1521, he sent one of these acquisitions, a first edition of Oecolampadius' *Iudicium de doctore Martino Luthero* (1520), to Beatus Rhenanus as a gift. Eventually Rhenanus became a great classical scholar and historian in his own right, but his early renown was due to a close relationship with Erasmus who befriended him upon his arrival in Basel in 1514. Rhenanus was a great admirer of Erasmus and edited almost everything he published at the Froben press. Erasmus praised and commended Rhenanus to

⁶⁹ Ibid. 71-72.

bishops and princes; Rhenanus memorialized Erasmus in a stained glass window in the parish church of Schlettstadt and composed the first *vita* after his death. At the time of Hubmaier's gift and note to him in 1521, Rhenanus was preparing the first edition of Tertullian's works, a project that coincided with his repudiation of scholasticism and support for Luther's reforms.⁷⁰

Hubmaier's short inscription on the inside cover of the book reads:

Balthasar Pacimontanus to his friend Beatus Rhenanus. He sends this golden nugget quite late, who was unable to send it more quickly. Most learned Rhenanus, I am sending the opinion of the highly learned Oecolampadius now because I could not send it any sooner. For it has not been in the hands of the lord Vicar of Constance. But I brought it back with me from those days in Ulm. Farewell. Yours most faithfully, Balthasar.⁷¹

The passing message provides only a few clues as to Hubmaier's state of mind. First, the tone suggests he already knew Rhenanus. He probably made his acquaintance in Ulm through Wolfgang Rychard, who was publicly siding with Luther. A subsequent letter between Hubmaier and Rychard includes references to several other humanists in the city, revealing that his stopover there was very

⁷⁰John F. D'Amico, *Theory and Practice in Renaissance Textual Criticism: Beatus Rhenanus Between Conjecture and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 47-55, 66-67. For the role of Tertullian in Rhenanus' thought and his status as Erasmus' "alter ego," see John F. D'Amico, "Beatus Rhenanus, Tertullian and the Reformation: a Humanist's Critique of Scholasticism," *ARG* 71 (1980): 37-63.

⁷¹*Briefwechsel des Beatus Rhenanus*, ed. Adalbert Horawitz and Karl Hartfelder (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 263: "Beato Rhenano suo Baldasar Pacimontanus [Latin for "Friedberger"]. Hanc chrysin mittit satis sero, qui citius mittere nequibat. S. doctissime Rhenane. Hic mitto perdocti Oecolampadii iudicium, quod citius id mittere haud potui. Nam id in manibus domini vicarii Constantiensis non fuit. Verum id rursus diebus illis ex Ulma mecum advexi. Vale. Tuissimus Baldasar."

productive in establishing humanist networks. Rhenanus was likely one of the contacts made at Ulm.⁷² The note confirms that Hubmaier was moving in the direction of the Reformation, since Oecolampadius' tract, which he labels a "golden nugget," refers to Luther's theology as the "true gospel."⁷³ The significance of the inscription and the gift is twofold: Hubmaier was both maintaining a relationship with an individual who was "the most faithful of Erasmus' associates,"⁷⁴ and he had already (by early 1521) formed a favourable assessment of Luther's ideas and sought to spread them to like-minded friends.

The letter to Johannes Sapidus⁷⁵ plainly demonstrates Hubmaier's embrace of humanism. His acquaintance with Rhenanus may have sparked Hubmaier's correspondence with Sapidus, rector of the grammar school of Schlettstadt, Rhenanus' *alma mater*. Due to Sapidus' leadership, it had recently undergone a major humanist curricular transformation and was flourishing with around 900 students. The school was also the city's most famous organization and served as a model of pre-university humanist education.⁷⁶ By writing to the Schlettstadt humanist, Hubmaier increased his familiarity with Erasmus' circle of friends, for Sapidus had escorted Erasmus from Schlettstadt to Basel in 1514

⁷² Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 71-72.

⁷³ Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*, 8.

⁷⁴ D'Amico, "Beatus Rhenanus, Tertullian and the Reformation," 38.

⁷⁵ Letter to Sapidus (26 October 1521) in Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, ed. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Vol. VII. *Elsass, I. Teil: Stadt Strassburg 1522-1532* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1959), 40-42; abbreviated as Letter to Sapidus.

⁷⁶ D'Amico, *Theory and Practice*, 40-43.

and maintained a friendship with him for many years. Eventually Sapidus left Schlettstadt for Strasbourg due to his support for the Reformation, but at the time of Hubmaier's letter he was at the height of his career and close to Erasmus.⁷⁷

Hubmaier's missive to Sapidus had at least two distinct purposes, the first of which was to enroll his nephew as a student at Sapidus' Latin school. He offered to pay for any required books, but recommended modest poverty for his nephew, "lest he arrange a nest among the stars" and become spoiled. Hubmaier insists that the young man specifically read several of Erasmus' works: "Therefore, make sure most learned man, that he in no way neglects the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus, his *compendium*, and the reading of Terence, by which you will be doing me a great favor."⁷⁸ The isolation of Waldshut limited Hubmaier's personal contact with humanists, but evidently he acquired a taste for Erasmus. By the time Hubmaier wrote to Sapidus in the fall of 1521, Erasmus had published *Paraphrases* on all the epistles of the New Testament which were meant to accompany the reading of the Greek New Testament. The *Paraphrases* on the Gospels appeared in print between 1522 and 1524.⁷⁹ Erasmus first published the *Ratio seu compendium verae theologiae* (*Method of a True*

⁷⁷ Miriam U. Chrisman, "Johannes Sapidus," in *CEBR* 3:195-6.

⁷⁸ Letter to Sapidus, 41: "Faxis itaque, doctissime vir, quo paraphrases Erasmicas, compendium illius ejusdem et Terentianam lectionem haud negligat, in quo facies mihi rem omnium grattissimam."

⁷⁹ John B. Payne, Albert Rabil, Jr, and Warren S. Smith, Jr, "The *Paraphrases of Erasmus*: Origin and Character," in *CWE* 42: xi-xix; R.A.B. Mynors, "The Publication of the Latin *Paraphrases*," in *CWE* 42: xx-xxix.

Theology) in 1518 as an independent treatise, but in 1519 he reprinted it as a preface to the revised edition of the *Novum Testamentum*. In the *Ratio*, Erasmus summarizes the humanist theological method, stressing the need for learned and pious theologians, trilingual education, and exegetical precision. The *Ratio* challenges scholasticism's exclusive claim on theology, contending that its central method, answering interlocking "questions," was a barren form of theological enquiry that paled in comparison to the approach of the Church Fathers. Essentially, the *Ratio* constituted a spiritual humanist alternative to the theological method advocated by the schools.⁸⁰ The only modern works that Hubmaier insisted his nephew read were the works of Erasmus, and one of them explicitly undermined the educational foundations of his own theological training. Hubmaier's recommendation of the *Ratio* and the *Paraphrases* indicates a major intellectual shift had taken place in his thought.

The second and more important purpose of Hubmaier's letter is to establish a friendship with Sapidus and make known his humanist sympathies. The letter begins in praise of his erudition, the fame of which compelled Hubmaier to send his nephew to him in the first place and expressly indicates he has intentionally rejected scholasticism and desired to align himself with those devoted to humanist biblical methodology. Urging Sapidus to write to him and

⁸⁰ Léon E. Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, trans. John Tonkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 128, 319 n.15. For an overview of the *Ratio*'s content, see Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 32-39.

alleviate his scholarly isolation in Waldshut, Hubmaier assured him of his own commitment to humanism:

Even though I am not able to be in the register of the learned, nevertheless, I revere, honour, and respect from the depths of my heart the graduates and candidates, not of quaestiology but of purer theology, and especially those who have drunk from the sources of Pauline divine wisdom.⁸¹

Hubmaier's reference to *quaestilogia*, or scholasticism, stands in opposition to the biblical theology of the humanists. Hubmaier's characterization of scholasticism echoes themes in the *Ratio*, where Erasmus also denigrates it as preoccupied with little questions (*quaestiunculae*) that only lead to more questions, not spiritual fruit.⁸² In the conclusion of the *Ratio* Erasmus succinctly provides an alternative to the scholastic method: "But if one desires to be trained more for piety than for disputation, then let him immediately and above all be versed in the sources, and be versed in those writers who have drunk closely from the sources."⁸³ Erasmus' reference primarily is to the inspired authors of Scripture, but Hubmaier utilizes similar language to describe contemporaries imbibing Pauline theology rather than mastering the opinions of the scholastic

⁸¹Letter to Sapidus, 41-42: "Et licet in albo doctorum non sim, candidioris tamen, non quaestilogiae, sed theologiae alumnos et candidatos ex cordis meditullio colo, veneror et observo, et inprimis hos qui Paulinae theosophiae fontes imbiberunt."

⁸²Holborn, 297: "Quid autem necesse est ad omnes omnium quaestiunculas certa respondere theologum? Quarum neque numerus est ullus neque modus neque finis, dum hydrae in morem pro una recisa sescentae repululant."

⁸³Holborn, 304-305: "At si quis magis cupit instructus esse ad pietatem quam ad disputationem, statim ac potissimum versetur in fontibus, versetur in his scriptoribus, qui proxime biberunt de fontibus."

doctors. Given Hubmaier's recommendation of Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament*, which by 1521 encompassed primarily the Pauline epistles, and his commendation of the *Ratio*, it is clear Hubmaier had humanists, and especially Erasmus, in mind when he declared his allegiance to "those who have drunk from the sources of Pauline divine wisdom."⁸⁴ From the Letter to Sapidus it is likely that intense study of the Bible characterized Hubmaier's pastoral work in Waldshut, and that Erasmus served as one of his principal exegetical guides.

The letter closes with a candid expression of his desire to enter Sapidus' circle: "And so, let this be the measure and gist of this little letter: that you should count me among the number of your friends, more correctly, one of your disciples (if the former is presumptuous), which I have already made myself."⁸⁵ As a token of the anticipated friendship, he included with the letter a gift of the recently published edition of two Roman satirists, Juvenal and Persius.⁸⁶ The letter also confirms that Hubmaier's conversion to humanism coincided with a growing sympathy for Luther and that he was willing to criticize the pope. Hubmaier appended to the letter a story circulating in humanist circles that compared the friendship between Herod and Pilate in their conspiracy to crucify Jesus with the

⁸⁴ Letter to Sapidus, 42. Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 72, briefly notes that Hubmaier primarily refers to Erasmus with this phrase.

⁸⁵ Letter to Sapidus, 42: "Hic itaque esto jam epistolii modus atque summa, ut me intra numerum amicorum tuorum censeas, immo discipulorum, si illud nimis est, quem ego jam meum feci."

⁸⁶ Letter to Sapidus., 42, note 7. The edition of Juvenal and Persius either was published in 1519 or early 1521.

friendship between Emperor Charles V and Pope Leo X in their attempt to quash Luther.⁸⁷ Hubmaier's inclusion of the anecdote suggests that at a time when humanists were taking sides in the debate, he was leaning heavily toward Luther. The letter represents a crucial moment in Hubmaier's theological development since, as Bergsten notes, in it he "confesses that he has embraced the humanist ideal."⁸⁸

Hubmaier continued to "embrace the humanist ideal" into the spring of 1522, as seen by the letter to Johannes Adelphi.⁸⁹ Adelphi, a prominent physician in Schaffhausen and early advocate of Luther, apparently was also a friend of Erasmus who had translated some of his books into German. In 1521, Adelphi himself had visited Basel and reported to others that "all the scholars are Lutherans."⁹⁰ Hubmaier's letter reveals he had been diligently studying the Bible and developing personal connections by traveling to Basel, one of the centres of humanist activity. As he begins, Hubmaier apologized for neglecting his friend and related his current course of study:

The reason I have not sent you any letters for a long time, most learned Doctor, is that I have been greatly occupied by both domestic and literary matters. First of all, I am now wrestling with Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, having already finished the letter

⁸⁷ Letter to Sapidus, 42.

⁸⁸Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 73.

⁸⁹The Letter to Adelphi (June 23, 1522) is printed in Gustav Veesenmeyer, *Über Balthasar Hubmaier, einen der berühmtesten Wiedertäufer zur Zeit der Reformation. Kirchenhistorisches Archiv* 4 (Halle: Renger, 1826), 232-234, hereafter cited as Letter to Adelphi.

⁹⁰ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 73.

to the Romans. Concerning that matter, make sure that the *Collectanea* of Doctor Matthew Beyer, all of which he collected from Philip, reach me, by which I may be relieved in [my] work.⁹¹

Bergsten has identified the *collectanea* as the handwritten notes taken by Beyer at Philip Melanchthon's lectures in Wittenburg during 1521/1522, which did not appear in print until November 1522.⁹² At the end of the letter, Hubmaier indicates he owned two books by Luther, commenting, "I have the books of Luther, *sub utraque specie* and *de Coena*. I would like your opinion on the little book *sub utraque*."⁹³ The first, *sub utraque specie*, was probably *Von beider Gestalt des Sakraments zu nehmen* (April 1522) and the second, *de Coena*, may be *Ein Sermon von dem Neuen Testament, das ist von der heiligen Messe* (1520). Since both deal with the Lord's Supper, and the former was published only two months earlier, the reference indicates Hubmaier was keeping abreast of scriptural commentaries and actively engaging with the ideas of the Reformers on controversial topics.⁹⁴ A point particularly important to the issue of Erasmus'

⁹¹ Letter to Adelphi, 232-233: "Quod iam multo tempore nihil dederim ad Te litterarum, nimiae occupationes tum domesticae, tum etiam litterariae in causa fuerunt, doctissime Doctor, idque in primis, quod in Epistola Pauli ad Corinthios scripta nunc sudo, absoluta ea, quae est ad Romanos. Ea de re, ut collectanea D. Matthaei Beyr, quae a Philippo collegit omnia, cures, ut ad me veniant, quibus relever in labore."

⁹² Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Seine Stellung zu Reformation und Täuferum, 1521-1528*, 101, n.37 This work could not be Melanchthon's printed commentary on Paul's epistles because it did not appear until November 1522, five months after Hubmaier's letter.

⁹³ Letter to Adelphi 234: "Libellos Lutheri sub utraque specie et de Coena habeo. Judicium Tuum de libello sub utraque specia exopto a Te."

⁹⁴ See Windhorst, "Täuferisches Taufverständnis," 9, for a discussion of the identity of these works. Hubmaier cited the latter in *Old and New Teachers on Believers' Baptism* (PY 256; HS 233).

influence is that Hubmaier actively sought the opinion of respected humanist reformers, such as Melancthon and Adelphi, for his understanding of Scripture. It is probable, therefore, that Hubmaier also consulted Erasmus' *Paraphrases* for his study of the Pauline corpus.

The most important element of the letter to Adelphi is Hubmaier's description of his journey to Freiburg and Basel in April or May 1522. In his account of the trip, Hubmaier provides informative statements about his personal contacts with Basel humanists and evidence of his theological transformation:

But perhaps you are wondering what I did in Freiburg and Basel not long ago? Listen to a brief account. I came down to Basel, where I met Busch, a truly learned man, and Glarean. I also paid my respects to Erasmus. With him I discussed many points about purgatory and especially these two phrases from John 1 [13]: "Neither from the will of the flesh nor from the will of man." For a considerable time, Erasmus held back on the subject of purgatory, but, after a while, producing a scholarly response, he hastened on to many other and varied topics at that. Erasmus speaks freely, but writes precisely. But I will speak with you about those things. I came also to Freiburg...then, while journeying back to Basel, I rejoined my best friends from Basel. We discussed many things on the journey, both learned and profound. I was not able to chat much with Pellican, who returned late from his chapter. In truth, he lost many brothers in the meantime; the Johannites, Augustinians, and the remainder are suffering the same fate.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Letter to Adelphi, 233: "Sed forte quaeris, quid Friburgi et Basileae egerim diebus exactis? Accipe paucis. Descendi Basileam, ubi Buschium accessi, hominem vere doctum, et Glareanum, item Erasmum salutavi. Multa cum illo de Purgatorio contuli, ac super iis duobus passibus Iohannis I., "Neque ex voluntate carnis neque ex voluntate viri". Erasmus aliquandiu de Purgatorio continuit [sic] se, sed tandem umbratilem adducens responsionem, ad multa alia et varia quidem properavit. Libere loquitur Erasmus, sed anguste scribit. Sed de iis tecum. Veni et in Friburgum ... Dein rursus in Basileam migrans optimos comites meos Basileenses et ego recomitatus sum. Tractavimus multa in itinere et docta et profunda. Cum Pellicano non multa nugatus

Hubmaier claims to have met Hermann Busch (d. 1534), the professor of poetry whose defense of humanism, *Vallum Humanitatis* (1518), and advocacy on behalf of Johannes Reuchlin, earned him the respect of intellectuals throughout Germany, including Erasmus. Busch visited Basel in the spring of 1522 and demonstrated support for the Reformation, arguing against Luther's opponents and breaking the Lenten fast. At the time, the two were close friends, and it was Erasmus who apologized to the Bishop of Basel for Busch's offense. Hubmaier's mention of Busch confirms the general reliability of his report, since Busch was only briefly in Basel in the spring of 1522, and indicates he had contact with and showed respect for a well-known humanist who was also an early supporter of Luther.⁹⁶

Another individual Hubmaier encountered in Basel was the Swiss humanist Henry Glarean (1488-1563), who, like Sapidus, was an educator who promoted humane letters. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Erasmus' theological publications, yet, unlike Busch, he refused to join the Reformers.⁹⁷ Hubmaier also mentions Conrad Pellican (1478-1556), a member of Erasmus' inner circle who served as the warden of the Franciscan monastery in Basel and lectured in theology at the university. Pellican's expertise in Hebrew

sum, qui tarde rediit ex capitulo suo. Verum multos interim fratres amisit, hoc idem patiuntur Johannitae, Augustiniani et reliqui."

⁹⁶ Guenther, "Hermannus Buschius," in *CEBR* 1: 233-234. Busch left Basel in late May, 1522, making it possible to accurately date Hubmaier's trip to Basel.

⁹⁷ Fritz Büsser, "Henricus Glareanus," in *CEBR* 2:105-108.

distinguished him among the humanists, and he had promoted the ideas of the Reformation from within his monastery until he eventually went to Zurich. He openly acknowledged his debt to Erasmus even after their personal estrangement in 1525 and their differences over the Reformation.⁹⁸ Although Hubmaier's discussion with Pellican was brief, he conversed with him enough to learn that the monasteries of the region were in trouble, and many nuns of Basel were abandoning the religious for the married life.⁹⁹ Since Hubmaier was already a famous figure in his own right, writing a private letter to a trusted friend, there is no reason to question the basic veracity of the account. It is difficult to know the full extent of his relationship with the Basel humanists, but at the very least it is clear he was actively engaging with influential members of Erasmus' inner circle, people he referred to as "my best friends from Basel." Hubmaier did not meet Oecolampadius on that trip, but his later correspondence with him indicates he maintained contact with the Basel circle for several years afterward.¹⁰⁰

Léon Halkin describes the encounter between Hubmaier and Erasmus as "worth its weight in gold," for "in it we see the two men face to face, Bible in hand, taking each other's measure in a courteous discussion."¹⁰¹ As we know, Hubmaier was already an admirer of Erasmus' biblical scholarship, including the

⁹⁸ Paul L. Nyhus, "Caspar Schatzgeyer and Conrad Pellican: The Triumph of Dissension in the Early Sixteenth Century," *ARG* 61(1970): 179-204; also, Hans R. Guggisberg, "Conradus Pellicanus of Rouffach," in *CEBR* 3: 65-66.

⁹⁹ Letter to Adelphi, 233-234.

¹⁰⁰ *Letter to Oecolampadius* (PY 67-72).

¹⁰¹ Halkin, *Erasmus*, 166.

Paraphrases and the *Ratio*, but here he offered his reaction to the man himself. Hubmaier presents Erasmus as a very cautious and shrewd intellectual, who realizes the controversial consequences of his ideas and guards his published statements accordingly.

Hubmaier indicates that the conversation ranged over many topics, but he specifically mentions a discussion of purgatory and one particular verse from the prologue to the Gospel of John. Based on Erasmus' comments on this passage in the *Annotations* and the *Paraphrase on John* published early in 1523, as well as Hubmaier's interpretation of the text, the conversation probably revolved around the question of free will. The "children of God," "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."¹⁰² Erasmus' annotation observes the fact that the words blood, flesh, and man are synonyms standing in contrast to God. The *Paraphrase on John* emphasizes the difference between the first birth (natural) that leads to death because of sin, and the second birth (spiritual) that leads to life because of Christ.¹⁰³ Both Hubmaier and Erasmus published important treatises on free will but the passage is not important to Erasmus' treatise. However, the verse does play a role in Hubmaier's argument for free will; therefore, it is likely that Hubmaier and Erasmus discussed free will with reference to John 1:13.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Jn. 1:13 (RSV).

¹⁰³ *Annotations*, LB 6:340E; *Paraphrase on John*, LB 7:503D-E.

¹⁰⁴ *On the Freedom of the Will* (PY 431; HS 383).

The doctrine of purgatory was so intricately related to the fundamental issues that sparked the Reformation,¹⁰⁵ that it comes as no surprise that a discussion of it arose during a meeting of reform-minded individuals in the spring of 1522. Hubmaier suggests that at the outset Erasmus was unwilling to speak on the topic, but he provides no clear explanation for the humanist's reticence. The content of Erasmus' eventual "scholarly response" (*umbratilis responsio*) probably mirrored his most pertinent discussion of the topic in his *Annotations* on 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, the text that, according to Jacques Le Goff, "played a crucial role in the development of Purgatory in the Middle Ages."¹⁰⁶ The gist of Erasmus' extensive note on that passage is clear: Despite the use of the text since the time of Augustine to support the doctrine of purgatory, that was not the interpretation of most of the Church Fathers. Jerome, Origen, Ambrose, Theophylact, and Chrysostom were interested in other matters and consequently made no mention of it in their comments on that passage. Erasmus' paraphrase indicates that he followed their lead and interpreted the "fire" of the verse as the trials and tribulations of life, which, when endured, revealed a genuine faith.¹⁰⁷ This does not mean Erasmus rejected the doctrine, but it does suggest his

¹⁰⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, vol. 4: *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 136-38.

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 43; also Josef Finkenzeller, "Purgatory," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* 3:363.

¹⁰⁷ *Annotations on 1 Corinthians* LB 6: 671B - 672E; *Paraphrase on 1 Corinthians* LB 7: 868A-E.

acceptance of it was not based on its biblical support, and this may have come up in the interview with Hubmaier.

Following directly upon the mention of purgatory, Hubmaier provides an intriguing and puzzling assessment of Erasmus: “Erasmus speaks freely, but writes precisely (*Libere loquitur Erasmus, sed anguste scribit*).” This description of the humanist fascinated Halkin, who suggested it was inspired by Hubmaier’s reading of the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* (1522) that some contemporaries and modern scholars have argued was an endorsement of something resembling rebaptism.¹⁰⁸ Halkin believed that Hubmaier may have had the preface in mind because “this text has everything to fascinate a dissident, but without giving him full satisfaction” and “if the ‘doctor of Anabaptism’ had read this preface he would have found it worth while, but insufficient.”¹⁰⁹ The preface arguably could have bolstered Anabaptist arguments against infant baptism, but there is nothing in Hubmaier’s description that indicates baptism or the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* had ever been discussed. Additionally, Halkin’s interpretation appears to rest on the assumption that Hubmaier had read the preface *as a religious dissident* by June 1522 when he wrote to Adelphi. But at this point in his career and theological development, Hubmaier was not even a Reformer let alone a dissident who was seriously

¹⁰⁸ Roland Bainton, “The Paraphrases of Erasmus,” *ARG* 57 (1966): 73-74; Kenneth R. Davis, “Erasmus as Progenitor of Anabaptist Theology and Piety,” *MQR* 47 (1973): 174; Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, 34-35.

¹⁰⁹Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, 166.

questioning infant baptism. Hubmaier was sympathetic to Luther's theology and critical of the medieval Church, but it would be over a year before he began to express doubts about the validity of infant baptism.¹¹⁰ Hubmaier may have obtained his copy of the *Paraphrase on Matthew* on the trip to Basel, and he may have been provoked by it to think about the issue of baptism, but he could hardly have been disappointed with it by June 1522 for "not going far enough."

Vedder suggests that the phrase "Erasmus speaks freely, but writes precisely" represented disapproval of Erasmus;¹¹¹ however, nothing in the letter suggests displeasure. Hubmaier went on to report about other enjoyable elements of the trip and in his later writings he cited Erasmus positively and recommended his books. The most likely interpretation of Hubmaier's judgment of Erasmus is that he was surprised or even cautiously satisfied. The phrase is a candid assessment of the humanist that calls attention to the contrast between Erasmus the careful writer, who keeps "within narrow limits" (*anguste*), and Erasmus the conversationalist, who is willing, when pressed, to speak openly (*libere*) about things that he would likely never put into print. Erika Rummel has argued that in the dangerous political climate of the early Reformation Erasmus became particularly adept at concealing his true opinions through the use of

¹¹⁰ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 80. There is no solid evidence Hubmaier had questioned infant baptism prior to May 1523. See the notes of his interrogation in Zurich (PY 162-63; HS 194-95); the *Paraphrase on Matthew* had first appeared in March 1522 in Basel. Mynors, "The Publication of the Latin *Paraphrases*," in CWE 42: xxiii-xxiv.

¹¹¹ Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 54. His only comment: "He was not at all pleased with Erasmus."

creative literary devices. Erasmus exercised great caution, or precision, in print because he was “willing to publish, but not to perish.”¹¹² It could be argued, however, that in the relative safety of his Basel circle of friends, and those like Hubmaier, who were welcomed into its fellowship, Erasmus was more willing to offer forthright opinions on controversial matters of faith and doctrine, sometimes with conclusions at variance with traditional church teaching. Carl Sachsse rightly understands this dynamic as determinative for the meaning of Hubmaier’s description, writing “evidently Erasmus had given him an answer that deviated from the faith of the Catholic Church” and that this opinion likely would not have been explicit in Erasmus’ “precise” statements in print.¹¹³ Hubmaier implies that he had discovered something significant about Erasmus, namely that his published works were to be viewed as the conservative Erasmus and that his real opinions on many matters were more radical than what he was willing to convey in print. This discovery was important enough to Hubmaier that he follows up the description with a promise that he would explain in more detail his meaning to his Lutheran friend Adelphi when he next visited Schaffhausen.

If this reading of Hubmaier’s assessment is correct, the future Anabaptist leader’s meeting with him in Basel was significant in two ways. First, Hubmaier might have left armed with an interpretational key to Erasmus’ publications, not regarding a particular issue or doctrine, but instead for the general way he

¹¹² Erika Rummel, “Erasmus and the Art of Communication,” in *Erasmianism: Idea and Reality*, 27-28.

¹¹³ Sachsse, D. *Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe*, 132.

understood everything the humanist published. He may have felt he could now read between the lines and grasp what Erasmus really believed about the subject at hand. Referring to Erasmus' personal interaction with young idealistic scholars, Tracy has pointed out that "words spoken in the quiet of his Basel rooms resounded like a thunderclap" on the southern Germany religious landscape.¹¹⁴ Friends and colleagues in Basel were privy to forthright and lively discussions of contemporary issues and in at least one case, divulging or misrepresenting their religiously sensitive content led to a falling out between Erasmus and one of his friends, Conrad Pellican.¹¹⁵ Reform-minded individuals who did not share Erasmus' commitment to the *consensus ecclesiae* could have found in such discussions support for the views of Luther or Oecolampadius, and this principle was likely at work in Hubmaier's brief encounter with Erasmus.

Second, Hubmaier's meeting with Erasmus came at a crucial time in the former's religious development. Hubmaier was not yet a dissident or a Reformer in the spring of 1522, but he was in the throes of a personal and theological transformation. Writing to the Regensburg city council in March 1524, Hubmaier related that he had been busy over the past few years making up for his lack of biblical training, admitting that only "within the last two years had Christ begun to be formed in my inner self." Summarizing Hubmaier's development as of June of 1522, Windhorst concludes, "it is evident that he was strongly influenced by

¹¹⁴ James Tracy, "Erasmus becomes a German," *RQ* 21 (1968): 286.

¹¹⁵ Guggisberg, "Conradus Pellicanus of Rouffach," *CEBR* 3:65-66.

humanism, turning towards the study of the Pauline letters, and also facing the Reformation desires of Luther with an open mind, all the while on the outside carrying out the duties of a Roman priest.”¹¹⁶ The only considerable evidence for his theological development during this period are the letters discussed above, the most substantial of which details the meeting with Erasmus and his assessment of the humanist. The letter to Adelphi helps us to understand the nature of Hubmaier’s transformation from a scholastic theologian to a reform-minded humanist. At the very least it can be said that his theological conversation with Erasmus revealed to him another side of Erasmus, one that was more open to the ideas of the Reformation than he previously had supposed and this revelation may have encouraged him to read Erasmus’ religious writings through new and more Protestant lenses.

Hubmaier completed his move toward the Reformation later that year during his second term as pilgrimage preacher in Regensburg in the winter of 1522-23. In December 1522, he signed a contract to renew his preaching duties in the city for a year, an arrangement that the city council hoped would revive the lagging pilgrimage movement.¹¹⁷ While in Regensburg, Hubmaier associated with a group of Lutheran-leaning artisans who continued to attend Catholic Mass, yet also met in homes for evangelical services, and it was during this period that he finally resolved to side with the Reformation. After only six weeks into his

¹¹⁶ Windhorst, *Täuferisches Täuferverständnis*, 10.

¹¹⁷ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 76.

second contract at Regensburg, he left the city for Waldshut, apparently because he was not able to fulfill his responsibilities to the city and its pilgrimage industry. His new religious orientation would not allow it. Returning to Waldshut put him in close proximity to Zurich, which in January 1523 had held its first disputation, which resolutely set it on a course for Reformation. By 19 April 1523, when he preached an inflammatory sermon labeling priests “murderers of men’s souls and priests of Satan,” Hubmaier embarked on his reforming career and actively began to associate himself with Zwingli and Zurich.¹¹⁸ The letters from the first Waldshut period of Hubmaier’s career support the conclusion that his theological development and eventual migration into the reforming camp coincided directly with his contact with the humanists of southern Germany, particularly Erasmus.

Hubmaier’s theological publications also provide evidence of his contact with Erasmus, whose name appears seven times in four separate contexts in Hubmaier’s more than twenty reforming treatises.¹¹⁹ The first citation of Erasmus is found in *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (1525) in the context of the baptism of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:16-34). In this story, the jailer and his household are baptized after being told by Paul to “believe in the Lord Jesus.” In an attempt to prove faith must come before baptism, Hubmaier quotes the story and adds a brief commentary: “Pay attention here to the old translations of Aldus

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 76-77.

¹¹⁹ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 132; HS 148); *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book* (PY 228; HS 209); *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism* (PY 255-256; HS 233, 249; two editions, two citations of his name); *On Infant Baptism Against Oecolampad* (PY 291-2; HS 267).

and Erasmus.”¹²⁰ The *Aldine Bible* (1518) was not a translation but the first printed edition of the *entire* Bible in Greek; it included a reprint of Erasmus’ *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), errors and all.¹²¹ In referring to Erasmus, Hubmaier appears to be discouraging his readers from using the Vulgate in preference for Erasmus’ fresh Latin translation.

Since Erasmus made few changes to the Vulgate text on other parts of the story, the critical passage must be Acts 16:34. The Vulgate reads: “and when he [the jailer] had brought them to his home, he set the table for them and rejoiced (*laetatus*) with his whole house (*cum omni domo sua*), believing in God (*credens Deo*).” Erasmus’ translation alters several words, and one revision changes the final sense: “and when he [the jailer] had brought them to his home, he set the table for them and rejoiced exceedingly (*exultavit*) with his entire (*universa*) household because it had come to faith in God (*quod credidisset Deo*).”¹²² Erasmus’ translation intensifies the nature of the “rejoicing” and clarifies the temporal relationship between faith and baptism. The upshot is that Hubmaier calls the reader’s attention to Erasmus’ translation because it highlights that the jailer had come to faith prior to baptism. The point could be obtained from the

¹²⁰ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 132; HS 148).

¹²¹ Bruce Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 3d ed (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 103, and Paul J. Angerhofer, *In aedibus Aldi: the Legacy of Aldus Manutius and his Press* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1995), 26.

¹²² Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), Facsimile Reprint with introduction by Heinz Holeczek (Stuttgart-Bad: Frommann-Holzboog, 1986), 290. Hereafter cited as *Novum Instrumentum* (1516).

context, even in the Vulgate, but Hubmaier emphasizes it in support of his argument concerning the proper order of salvation.

Hubmaier appreciated Erasmus' Latin translation, but he does not follow his lead completely, as seen in his German translation of the passage. It reads: "Then he brought them into his house, set them at a table, and rejoiced with all his household that *he* had come to faith in God."¹²³ Erasmus believes the adverb πανοικεῖ (entire house) more appropriately refers to the participial phrase beginning with πεπιστευκῶς (had believed).¹²⁴ Therefore, he advises that a proper translation of the last phrase would specify that the entire household had believed; hence "*it* had come to faith in God." Hubmaier ignores this advice and instead specifies that at this place the text refers to the jailer, and not his entire household. This exegetical departure demonstrates a critical engagement with Erasmus' biblical scholarship.

Hubmaier's second reference to Erasmus concerns the interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission, and related baptismal texts in Acts. In *Old and New Teachers on Believer's Baptism* (1526), Hubmaier quotes several lines from Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* and the closely related Pentecost sermon of Peter in the *Paraphrase on Acts* in support of his position. For

¹²³ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 132; HS 148). The critical phrase is: "dass er an Gott gläubig worden war." The emphasis is mine.

¹²⁴ *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), 392. "Cum omni domo sua. πανοικεῖ (graecum adverbium tribus circumlocutus est dictionibus. Est autem commodius ut πανοικεῖ referatur ad participium proxime sequens πεπιστευκῶς."

Hubmaier, Erasmus' emphasis upon pre-baptismal catechesis constituted an implicit denial of infant baptism.¹²⁵ In connection with Matthew 28:19-20, Hubmaier cites Erasmus' interpretation of Peter's Pentecost sermon, which the humanist explicitly linked with Jesus' Great Commission. Hubmaier concludes with a simple exhortation: "Consider him also, dear reader, on the eighth chapter of Acts and many other places." Hubmaier has in mind in Acts 8 either the story of Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25) or the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40).¹²⁶ Although Erasmus never opposed infant baptism in his *Paraphrases on the New Testament*, or anywhere else, Hubmaier interprets his affirmation of pre-baptismal instruction as an implicit denial of the practice.

Hubmaier's other citations of Erasmus directly relate to his understanding of the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. In the *Dialogue with Zwingli's Baptism Book* (1525), Hubmaier discredits infant baptism by arguing that the Trinitarian formula used in its administration derives from Matthew 28:19, but yet "these words still do not apply to young children, also according to the understanding of Jerome, Erasmus, and Zwingli, yea, the old and new teachers."¹²⁷ Later, in *On Infant Baptism Against Oecolampadius* (1527), Hubmaier repeats themes found elsewhere, including another reference to Erasmus. Noting that Christ blessed,

¹²⁵ *Old and New Teachers on Baptism* (PY 255-256; HS 233); *Paraphrase on Matthew*, LB 7: 146B; *Paraphrase on Acts*, LB 7: 674 (CWE 50: 24).

¹²⁶ *Old and New Teachers on Baptism* (PY 256; HS 233). *Paraphrase on Acts* (LB 7: 697; CWE 50: 62-63).

¹²⁷ *Dialogue with Zwingli's Baptism Book* (PY 227; HS 209).

loved, and embraced children prior to their baptism, Hubmaier asks: "Then, what need do they have of baptism, since the general institution of water baptism does not apply to them also, according to the understanding of Origen, Basil the Great, Athanasius, Tertullian, Jerome, Erasmus, and Zwingli? I want to let their books be my witnesses." Since all these authorities appear in *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism* - in this particular order - his reference to Erasmus is probably to the interpretation of Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2.¹²⁸

Hubmaier's explicit references to Erasmus reveal that he knew the *Paraphrase on Matthew* and the *Paraphrase on Acts*, could cite them with accuracy, approved of Erasmus' textual criticism and translation of the New Testament, and recommended him to his readers. The favourable citations of Erasmus indicate that in the debate over infant baptism Hubmaier considered Erasmus an exegetical ally and cited him as such.

Hubmaier's extensive use of Erasmus' *On the Freedom of the Will* (1524) in his own treatise of the same title, constitutes further evidence of his contact with Erasmus' work. In 1527, Hubmaier published two books on the freedom of the will and in them he aligned himself with Erasmus. Hubmaier never explicitly referred to Erasmus' treatise, but scholars agree that he was deeply indebted to him, despite some variations from the humanist's argument.¹²⁹ Burger's study of

¹²⁸ *On Infant Baptism Against Oecolampadius* (PY 291-292; HS 267).

¹²⁹ Thor Hall, "Possibilities of Erasmian Influence on Denck and Hubmaier in Their Views on the Freedom of the Will," *MQR* 30 (1961): 149-170; Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*,

Erasmus and Anabaptism conclusively demonstrated that Hubmaier's use of *On the Freedom of the Will* was extensive both in terms of style and content. Robert Moore also acknowledges that the Anabaptist theologian knew Erasmus' treatise very well.¹³⁰ Hubmaier's citations of Erasmus are relatively sparse and do not provide a very clear picture as to the extent to which Erasmus had influenced his thought. They do, however, complement the epistolary evidence by confirming that he continued to utilize Erasmus' writings long after his conversion to the Reformation and to Anabaptism.

Conclusion

The evidence of Hubmaier's contact with humanism and Erasmus renders feasible the hypothesis of Erasmus' influence. Hubmaier's first pastorate in Waldshut marked his decisive reorientation towards humanism and the Reformation and the available evidence supports several facts. First, Hubmaier sought out and maintained relationships with the well-known humanists, Rhenanus, Sapidus, Adelphi, and Rychard. Second, he studied the works of Reformers and humanists such as Melanchthon, Oecolampadius, Luther, and Erasmus. Third, he specifically praised and recommended Erasmus' theological works, explicitly renounced scholasticism, and declared himself a devotee of biblical humanism. Fourth, he made personal contact with distinguished

352-58; Burger, *Erasmus and the Anabaptists*, 54-75; Moore, "Catholic Teacher and Anabaptist Pupil," 69-74.

¹³⁰ Burger, *Erasmus and the Anabaptists*, 54-75; Moore, "Catholic Teacher and Anabaptist Pupil," 72-74.

humanist scholars in Basel, including Busch, Glarean, Pellican, and Erasmus himself. Fifth, he formulated a personal assessment of Erasmus that may have prompted a radical interpretation of the humanist's religious publications.

Hubmaier approvingly cited Erasmus' work in his Anabaptist publications and viewed his scholarship and certain interpretations of Scripture as supporting elements of his theology. Explicit references from both the letters and Hubmaier's published writings indicate he knew and used Erasmus' New Testament, *Annotations*, *Paraphrases*, *Ratio verae theologiae*. His own treatise on free will reveals substantial knowledge of Erasmus' *On the Freedom of the Will*. The case for *contact* with Erasmus is compelling. He was clearly in a position to be influenced by Erasmus' work and ideas. He explicitly identified himself as a humanist and a devotee of Erasmus, and actively cultivated relationships with those in his circle of friends. Comparative exegesis rests upon solid evidence of Hubmaier's contact with Erasmus. There can be no question that Hubmaier knew Erasmus' work, appreciated his thought, and admired his method.

CHAPTER THREE - ERASMUS AND HUBMAIER ON THE GREAT COMMISSION

The end of the Gospel of Matthew, known as the Great Commission, relates Christ's final instructions to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."¹³¹ Despite its brevity, the passage has been particularly important because it touches on critical elements of Christian theology. From an early period, it was important for the sacrament of baptism, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the missiological impulse of Christianity.¹³² In the sixteenth century, Anabaptists relied heavily on the Great Commission as a proof text for their rejection of infant baptism, as indicated by its repeated presence in the records of heresy trials. Franklin Littell noted that: "No words of the Master were given more serious attention by His Anabaptist followers than His final command." Recently, Abraham Friesen reiterated that point, observing that Matthew 28:19-20 "became the *locus classicus* for the Anabaptist argument in favor of believer's baptism."¹³³ More precisely, it was a

¹³¹ Matt. 28:19-20 (RSV).

¹³² W.H.C Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 126-131.

¹³³ Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Theology of Missions," *MQR* 21 (1949):12; Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, 54-57.

particular interpretation of the Great Commission that was important to the Anabaptists, one that understood the word order as theologically crucial for believers' baptism.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the similarities between Erasmus' and Hubmaier's exegesis of Matthew 28:19-20 and to argue that they constitute evidence of influence. Erasmus' interpretation of the Great Commission in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* and auxiliary texts emphasized the literal word order of the passage in ways that highlighted the necessity of pre-baptismal and post-baptismal catechesis. Erasmus also underscored repentance and commitment to discipleship as prerequisites for baptismal candidates, conditions inapplicable to small children. Other interpreters had reached similar exegetical conclusions about word order, but none had emphasized Erasmus' particular concern for catechesis and personal faith. Hubmaier's exegesis is fundamentally similar to Erasmus'. He insisted that the structure of the verse indicated the proper order of salvation, and consequently viewed pre-baptismal instruction and repentance as prerequisites for baptism. He accurately quoted Erasmus' interpretation and explicitly claimed that his exegesis militated against infant baptism. Zwingli's and Luther's interpretations differed fundamentally from Erasmus', indicating that they were not potential sources for Hubmaier's interpretation. The evidence suggests Erasmus' exegesis of the Great Commission influenced Hubmaier's own reading of that passage and that it had important ramifications for his opposition to infant baptism. Erasmus

accepted infant baptism not because it had a clear scriptural basis, but because it was a longstanding and approved practice of the Church. Hubmaier's theology of reform, however, forced him to reject practices with no explicit biblical sanction, and since the *locus classicus* for baptism applied only to adults, he concluded that infant baptism was another unhealthy accretion of the medieval Church that needed to be eliminated.

Erasmus and the Great Commission

Erasmus provided illuminating exegetical remarks on many difficult texts of the New Testament in the *Annotations*, but his comments on the Great Commission are very short and unrevealing,¹³⁴ and his Latin translation varies insignificantly from the Vulgate:

Vulgate	Erasmus' Translation ¹³⁵
¹⁹ Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes: baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti: ²⁰ docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis: et ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus, usque ad consummationem saeculi.	¹⁹ Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine patris, & filii, & spiritus sancti. ²⁰ Docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque praecepi vobis. Et ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi.

¹³⁴ ASD VI-5: 348. Erasmus' annotations simply remark on the absence of "therefore" (*i.e.* *οὕτως; ergo*) in the Greek manuscripts and speculate as to why Origen and Chrysostom, two outstanding Greek exegetes, failed to write commentaries on the last chapter of Matthew when they had expounded other sections of the gospel. By the final edition Erasmus concludes that the last two homilies on Matthew by Chrysostom had probably been destroyed.

¹³⁵ LB 6: 147C, 148C.

Despite the dearth of information in the *Annotations*, Erasmus does provide a full interpretation of the Great Commission in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* (1522), which appears to be organized around three participial phrases: (1) *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes*, (2) *baptizantes eum in nomine Patris, Filii, & Spiritus Sancti*, and (3) *docentes eos servare omnia quaecunque praecepi vobis*. The first section of the paraphrase is based on the phrase *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes*, and serves as an introduction to the entire paraphrase; there Erasmus addresses the manner of the disciples' proselytizing and the content of the preaching. Jesus commands his disciples to claim the world for him not through military conquest, but by his own distinctive tactics, employed in his earthly ministry: holy teaching, gospel-shaped life, overflowing kindness, and longsuffering. Then, Erasmus stresses Jesus' instructions on the geographical direction of proselytizing, first in Judaea, then the neighboring regions, and finally the entire world. He ends the introduction by clarifying that his disciples were to teach the nations about his identity and his offer of salvation.¹³⁶

Erasmus organizes the message of the apostles, the essential truths of Christianity, around the persons of the Trinity. Potential converts must recognize the Father's omnipotence, eternal wisdom, kind benevolence, and status as both the source and object of all blessing and praise. They must learn about the Son's divine mission, virgin birth, unjust and atoning death, resurrection and ascension, and his heavenly philosophy. In contrast to the soteriological quality of his first

¹³⁶ LB 7: 145B.

coming into the world, Erasmus emphasizes the juridical and punitive nature of Christ's second coming, when all receive rewards commensurate with their deeds. The disciples were to remember that the Holy Spirit's primary work is to comfort, teach, strengthen, and unite believers until Christ's return. Erasmus' Jesus stresses the unifying role of the Holy Spirit, who "binds together" (*conglutinare*) those who had publicly declared a heartfelt faith; rejecting the Holy Spirit's unifying work is dangerous, since forgiveness of sins is only available provided individuals not "separate themselves from the alliance and companionship of the saints." Finally, Erasmus' Jesus instructs his disciples to assure potential converts that following him would not produce material gain or the easy life, but would result in their own resurrection and glorification when he returns to his loyal servants.¹³⁷ Erasmus' interpretation of the phrase *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes* highlights the non-coercive nature of the disciples' "going out" and clarifies what was to be taught the world prior to baptism, essentially the content of the Apostles' Creed.

The second section takes its cue from the phrase *baptizantes eum in nomine Patris, Filii, & Spiritus Sancti* and is critical for the discussion of Erasmus and Anabaptism. Erasmus' Jesus then tells the disciples what to do with those who accept the message:

When you have taught them these things, if they believe what you have taught, if they have repented of their prior lives, and if they are

¹³⁷ LB 7: 145C-146A.

prepared to embrace the doctrine of the Gospel, then immerse them in water, in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, so that by this holy symbol they may be confident they are freed from the filth of all their sins by the gracious benefit of my death, and are now admitted into the number of the children of God.¹³⁸

In Erasmus' paraphrase of the verse, Jesus explicitly charges the disciples to administer baptism only to those who understood their teaching and appreciated the implications of that teaching for their conduct. The three conditional clauses leading up to the command to baptize make the point clear: baptism was the culmination of a conversion process involving teaching and the volitional response of baptismal candidates. The first clause requires belief in the doctrines contained in the Apostles' Creed (*si crediderint quae docuistis*); the second clause emphasizes a consciousness of sin and repentance (*si poenituerit vitae prioris*); the third part refers to the determination to embrace gospel teaching (*si parati fuerint amplecti doctrinam Evangelicam*). When the belief is evident, repentance forthcoming, and commitment is manifest, then (*tum*) the converts are baptized into the name of the three divine persons and receive confidence of salvation. Erasmus concludes the section by assuring the newly baptized that their baptism was sufficient for salvation and there was no need to

¹³⁸ LB 7: 146A-B: "Haec ubi illos docueritis, si crediderint quae docuistis, si poenituerit vitae prioris, si parati fuerint amplecti doctrinam Evangelicam, tum tingite illos aqua, in nomine Patris, & Filii, & Spiritus Sancti, ut hoc sacro symbolo confidant sese liberatos ab omnium peccatorum suorum sordibus gratuito beneficio mortis meae, iamque cooptatos in numerum filiorum Dei."

be “burdened by Mosaic or human ceremonies,” which can add nothing to the simple and easily obtainable washing of baptism.¹³⁹

The final section of the paraphrase expounds the phrase *docentes eos servare omnia quaecunque praecepi vobis* and addresses the nature of and need for post-baptismal teaching, or what was termed *mystagogia* in the early Church. Erasmus’ Jesus corrects those who suppose that salvation had been obtained simply through baptism and profession of faith. On the contrary, after baptism converts must again be instructed (*rursus docendi sunt*), but the content shifts away from the basics of the Apostles’ Creed to matters pertaining specifically to piety, spiritual growth, and endurance: “again there must be teaching, by which means they will be able to preserve innocence and by which methods they may be able to go forward to the perfection of Gospel piety.”¹⁴⁰

In this sense, baptism functions as a hinge between rudimentary teaching and mature instruction, both of which were necessary but differed in purpose, content, and chronological relationship to baptism. Erasmus clarifies that post-baptismal instruction was not simply about moral conduct but included everything he had taught his disciples. Particularly, Erasmus indicates that two concepts would dominate the post-baptismal instruction: preservation of innocence and progress toward perfection. Erasmus is probably alluding to the same kind of

¹³⁹ LB 7: 146B: “Sufficiat hoc symbolum omnibus ad Evangelii professionem transeuntibus, quod ubivis facile est parabile.”

¹⁴⁰ LB 7: 146B-C: “rursus docendi sunt, quibus modis tueri possint innocentiam, quibus rationibus progredi queant ad perfectionem Euangelicae pietatis.”

education that forms the central themes of the *Enchiridion* (1503), one of his most popular treatises on spiritual growth. In that work he advocates attention to *pietas*, “a life lived wholly in the love of Christ,” and constant spiritual advancement from an emphasis upon visible things, to a concentration on the invisible – spiritual - things.¹⁴¹ Erasmus clarifies that post-baptismal teaching was not primarily about physical rituals: “I have not, however, prescribed to you the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law, which now like a shadow ought to disappear in the light of gospel truth, nor the petty decrees of the Pharisees, but those things which alone produce true innocence and piety, and alone will make you dear to God and truly happy.”¹⁴² Erasmus intended to point out that Jesus’ commands were not at all equivalent to the rites of Judaism and the embellishments of Christian ritual that had accrued since the first century. Erasmus had made that very same point more explicitly a few years earlier in his extended annotation on the “easy yoke” of Matthew 11:28-30.¹⁴³

Erasmus’ paraphrase on the passage concludes with another exhortation to the apostles about the mode of their teaching. They are not to instruct with words alone, but by the example of their lives, as Jesus himself had done.

¹⁴¹ James McConica, *Erasmus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 49-62, 51 (quote).

¹⁴² LB 7: 146C: “Non autem praescripsi vobis Mosaicae Legis ceremonias, quas iam velut umbras ad lucem Euangelicae veritatis evanescere oportet, non Pharisaeicas constitutiunculas, sed ea quae sola praestant veram innocentiam ac pietatem, quaeque sola vos Deo caros reddant, vereque felices.”

¹⁴³ LB 6: 63-65. See Payne, “Erasmus’s Influence on Zwingli and Bullinger,” 63-70 for analysis of this annotation and Erasmus’ denunciation of ritual accretions.

Erasmus' Jesus warns the apostles to be ready for stiff opposition from a world that rails against his teaching, since "my spirit does not agree with the spirit of this world, and my whole teaching fights with the feelings of those who love the things of this world." When the world persecutes them, however, they are to stand firm, knowing he had promised to be with them until he returns to reward their fidelity. The prize is eternal: "then having put aside mortality, you will be entirely with me, sharers in my Father's kingdom, which will have no end."¹⁴⁴

Erasmus' interpretation of the Great Commission depends on the fundamental exegetical conclusion that Jesus' final instructions to his apostles involved three distinct commands: (1) to teach (make disciples of) the nations, (2) to baptize those who believe and repent of sin (3) to continue instructing the new converts. Erasmus' exegetical decision to explain the passage by following its literal word order is significant because the grammar of the text does not require such an interpretation. Erasmus makes no significant comment on the passage in his *Annotations*, but as one of the premier Greek scholars of the day, he was probably aware of other interpretations allowed by the grammar. Erasmus interpreted the text in terms of three distinct commands, but many modern New Testament scholars read the text quite differently, emphasizing one primary command: "to make disciples." In this interpretation, the whole phrase is governed by the aorist active imperative verb "make disciples"(μαθητεύσατε),

¹⁴⁴ LB 7: 146D-E: "tūm vos quoque deposita mortalitate, toti mecum eritis, consortes regni paterni, cuius nullus erit finis."

aided and explained by the three dependent participles “going” (πορευθέντες), “baptizing” (βαπτίζοντες), and “teaching” (διδάσκοντες) which specify how the main command is to be carried out, but do not constitute separate events or commands.¹⁴⁵ The point is not to denigrate Erasmus’ exegesis in light of modern scholarship, but simply to observe that another stimulus must have compelled him to explain Jesus’ final instructions in terms of three distinct commands and two distinct kinds of teaching.

That stimulus was likely Erasmus’ commitment to the revival of Christianity through continued instruction in - and prolonged exposure to - the “philosophy of Christ.”¹⁴⁶ The appearance of two words for “teach” in the Great Commission afforded Erasmus the opportunity to underscore the need for Christians to be thoroughly instructed in their faith and increasing in Christ-like piety, things that characterized the early Church. According to John Payne, Erasmus found in Matthew 28:19-20 the biblical basis for catechesis,¹⁴⁷ the rigorous pre-baptismal instruction of converts. As early as the second century, formal periods of catechesis were required of those seeking entrance into the Church, and the

¹⁴⁵ For example, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 748-749; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 718-719; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 886-887.

¹⁴⁶ See McConica, *Erasmus*, 45-62 for a concise explanation of the concept in Erasmus’ thought, particularly in his *Paraclesis*, *Enchiridion*, and *Ratio*.

¹⁴⁷ John B. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1970), 171.

great influx of new converts in the fourth century led to the composition of important catechetical works. Due to the dominance of infant baptism, however, pre-baptismal catechesis had largely died out as a regular characteristic of Church life by the sixth century.¹⁴⁸ Erasmus' stress upon pre-baptismal catechesis is striking, for it was practically irrelevant in the world of the sixteenth-century Christendom, suggesting his determination to change the nature of religious education.

Erasmus' preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*¹⁴⁹ indicates he saw the revival of ancient catechesis as an antidote to moral and spiritual degeneracy of the Church. Throughout the preface, Erasmus complains bitterly about the ignorance of Christians concerning the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, a problem he lays squarely at the feet of the clergy, who had largely neglected their responsibilities to teach. But that situation could change, if only bishops would implement something approximating the early Church's catechesis. Erasmus recommends a programme that would adequately navigate the tension between infant baptism and scriptural injunctions for pre-baptismal catechesis. He proposes that during adolescence, children would undergo instruction that,

¹⁴⁸ See Robert M. Grant, "Development of the Christian Catechumenate," in *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 32-49.

¹⁴⁹ *Des. Erasmus Roterodamus pio lectori* (14 January 1522), LB 7:**. The preface may be found in the non-paginated section marked with **; see *Praise of Folly and other Writings*, trans. Robert Adams (New York: Norton, 1989), 127-141, esp. 135-7. The text is misidentified in *Praise of Folly and Other Writings* as "another Introduction to the New Testament."

among other things, explained the meaning and significance of their baptism, and be asked whether they agree with the promises made for them by their godparents. Erasmus urges a public service to commemorate the fact: "If they respond with an affirmation, let that profession be renewed publicly, while gathered together with their peers, and that in solemn ceremonies - appropriate, chaste, serious, and splendid – whatever suits that profession which nothing can surpass in holiness."¹⁵⁰ He goes on to point out that similar ceremonies are held to honor the admission of novices into monastic orders of human origin. Why not hold such a ceremony to commemorate an individual's entrance into an order of divine origin? If this is done, he envisions a joyous scene:

But how truly magnificent this spectacle would be: to hear the voices of so many young people dedicating themselves to Jesus Christ, so many new recruits swearing their loyalty to him, renouncing this world, which is completely saturated in wickedness, and renouncing and hissing at Satan with all his pomps, pleasures, and worldly works; to see new Christs, wearing on their brows the sign of their commander; to see a flock of candidates advancing from the sacred bath; to hear the sound of the awaiting crowd applauding and wishing well the young soldiers of Christ.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ LB 7:**3b: "Si respondeant se ratum habere, tum publice renovetur ea professio, simul congregatis aequalibus, idque ceremoniis gravibus, aptis, castis, seriis, ac magnificis: quaeque deceant eam professionem, qua nulla potest esse sanctor."

¹⁵¹ LB 7:**3b: "Quam vero magnificum esset hoc spectaculum, audire vocem tot juvenum sese Jesu Christo dedicantium, tot tironum in illius verba jurantium, abrenuntiantium huic mundo, qui totus in malitia positus est: abjurantium & exsibilantium Satanam cum omnibus pompis, voluptatibus & operibus ipsius? Videre Christos novos, Imperatoris sui signum gestantes in frontibus? Videre gregem candidatorum prodeuntem a sacro lavacro? Audire vocem reliquae multitudinis acclamantis beneque ominantis Christi tironibus?"

Erasmus placed much hope in what this catechetical programme could accomplish, supposing that if the ceremony “is carried out as it ought to be, either I am mistaken, or we will have somewhat more genuine Christians than we do now.”¹⁵² Erasmus expected and addressed the potential criticisms that the ceremony constituted a “rebaptism” and would undoubtedly produce a two-tiered system of Christians, since some youths would fail to affirm their faith, thereby disrupting the unity of Christendom. He addressed the former briefly by stressing that the adolescents would be carefully instructed that the ceremony did not repeat their baptisms, but only ratified them. As to the latter criticism, Erasmus recommended that youths refusing to affirm their baptismal pledge simply were to receive even more instruction in the faith. Particularly, they should be exposed to good preaching and books on the philosophy of Christ; in the meantime, they should not be punished, but only denied the sacraments until they could agree with the faith of the Church.¹⁵³ Despite his attempt at defusing the criticisms, opponents censored Erasmus’ proposal as arrogant, divisive, and defaming of the sacrament of baptism; he was forced to defend it more than five times between 1526 and 1532 against various critics, particularly Noël Béda, the syndic of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris.¹⁵⁴ Erasmus insisted that through the ceremony he had desired only to recapture the spirit of ancient pre-

¹⁵²LB 7:**3b: “Hac si fierent, quemadmodum oportet, aut ego fallor, aut haberemus aliquanto sinceriores Christianos, quam habemus.”

¹⁵³ LB 7:**3b.

¹⁵⁴ Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics*, 2:33-43, esp. 40-41; for Erasmus’ various responses, see LB 9: 445C-F, 459, 484B-C, 557-563B, 1062A-C, 820A-822E.

baptismal catechism, not to repeat the baptism itself and he defended his pedagogical approach to recalcitrant youths as more in keeping with Christ than the coercive tactics of the inquisition.¹⁵⁵

The proposal of the preface, with its catechetical emphasis and vision of a voluntary Church, reveals the salient features of Erasmus' interpretation of the Great Commission, as well as his attempt to navigate a tension in his theology of baptism. Payne suggests the preface brings to light two of Erasmus' central concerns for Church reform:

Erasmus thus wishes to have a voluntary church without the Anabaptist consequences of a denial of the validity of the first baptism and of a divided Christendom. He is saved from the former by the belief that baptism is indeed valid for youths until they reach maturity but requires in adults supplementation by the inward appropriation in faith and life of the grace of the sacrament.¹⁵⁶

Erasmus' programme for reinvigorating Christendom without dividing the Church soon became irrelevant, since his proposal was rejected by Catholics and the Reformation tore apart the unity of the West. His creative proposal was too little, too late. Regardless of its merits, the battles between scholastics and humanists and the burgeoning strife of the Reformation cast a shadow over any suggestions that resembled religious innovation. And his proposal was an innovation. There is little indication that Erasmus hoped simply to reform confirmation, the sacrament conferring the gift of the Holy Spirit upon Christian

¹⁵⁵ Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments*, 174.

¹⁵⁶ Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments*, 173.

youth that slowly developed in the early Middle Ages.¹⁵⁷ Erasmus' proposal was very different from confirmation as it was practiced in the early sixteenth century; at that time confirmation usually occurred around the age of seven and did not involve instruction.¹⁵⁸ Erasmus may have thought the practice of confirmation needed reforming, but that was not the purpose of his proposal of the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*.

Erasmus expresses his concern for catechesis in two other places where he expounds Matthew 28:19-20. The first text appears in the *Paraphrase on Acts 2* (1524), and was highlighted by Abraham Friesen, who specifically called attention to the way Erasmus referred to the Great Commission. He argues that Erasmus' catechetical interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 derived from his belief that Acts was an accurate account of the early Church's implementation of the Great Commission:

Erasmus's elaboration of Christ's Great Commission appears to have been based, at least in part, on his conviction that the apostles had, in their earliest sermons, sought to put into practice what Christ had commanded them in this his last will and testament. For in virtually every passage in the Acts of the Apostles that deals with baptism, Erasmus proceeded to set the sermon or event into the context of the Great Commission.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments*, 174.

¹⁵⁸ J.D.C Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London: SPCK, 1965), 137-140.

¹⁵⁹ Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, 51

Since many Anabaptists related the Great Commission to the book of Acts, Friesen attempts to prove Erasmus had done the same, thus providing concrete evidence of his influence upon Anabaptism. The evidence from the *Paraphrase on Acts*, however, does not support this aspect of Friesen's argument, since Erasmus makes no explicit reference to the Great Commission in his version of the baptismal accounts of the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25), Paul (Acts 9:18; 22:16), Lydia (Acts 16:15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33), or Crispus (Acts 18:8).¹⁶⁰ Three other baptismal passages contain allusions to the passage but do not constitute evidence of his "placing the passages" into the context of the Great Commission.¹⁶¹ Yet, as Thomas Scheck points out, even if Friesen could demonstrate Erasmus had placed the Acts conversions into the context of the Great Commission, it would still not constitute evidence of a "unique" reading of Matthew 28:19, but a quite natural one.¹⁶²

Friesen is right, however, to call attention to Erasmus' use of the Great Commission in his paraphrase on Acts 2 because Erasmus exploited the story as

¹⁶⁰ CWE 50: 57-59; CWE 50: 102; CWE 50: 102; CWE 50: 65, 131;

¹⁶¹ Erasmus' redaction of the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8) explains in detail what a convert ought to be taught prior to baptism, but does not place it in the context of the Great Commission. The impetus for the Eunuch's extended catechesis likely derives from the story itself (CWE 50:61-63); Erasmus does not connect the story of Cornelius' conversion (Acts 10) with the Great Commission (CWE 50: 74-75); The baptism of John's disciples (Acts 19) merely utilizes the Trinitarian baptismal formula because these disciples were ignorant of "a Holy Spirit" (CWE 50: 116).

¹⁶² Thomas Scheck, review of *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, by Abraham Friesen, *ERSY* 20 (2000): 82-87.

an opportunity to discuss catechesis in reference to Matthew 28:19-20. Alluding to Peter's Pentecost sermon, Erasmus comments:

What is thus far handed down is the milk of teaching; one must progress to solid food. Evangelical pastors ought to have both kinds of food prepared, for the Lord has given them this commission: *Go, teach all nations, baptizing them, teaching them to keep whatever I have commanded you.* Teach those who are to be baptized the rudiments of the gospel philosophy; unless one believes these he will in vain be baptized with water. Teach those who have been baptized to live according to my teaching and always to progress to more perfect things.¹⁶³

The distinction between pre- and post-baptismal catechesis is evident in this passage since Erasmus essentially reproduces his paraphrase on Matthew 28:19-20a, and adds a brief, but significant, explanation of its meaning. Pre-baptismal teaching is alternatively called the milk (*lac*) and the rudiments (*rudimenta*), while post-baptismal instruction is identified as the solid food (*solidum cibum*) and more perfect things (*perfectiora*), an interpretation corresponding directly with the original paraphrase. In the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, the three conditional clauses preceding the command to baptize imply that the efficacy of baptism depends upon the faith, repentance, and conscious

¹⁶³LB 7:674A: "Quod hactenus traditum est doctrinae lac est, proficiendum est ad solidum cibum. Utrunque cibum debent habere paratum Evangelici Pastores. Sic enim mandarant illis Dominus: Ite docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos, docentes eos servare quaecunque praecepi vobis. Docete baptizandos Evangelicae Philosophiae rudimenta, quibus nisi quis crediderit, frustra tingitur aqua. Docete baptizatos, ut iuxta doctrinam meam viventes, semper ad perfectiora proficiant" [translation from CWE 50:24].

will of the convert.¹⁶⁴ In the *Paraphrase on Acts*, however, implication gives way to the unequivocal declaration that unless one believes the basic elements of gospel philosophy, the baptism is invalid (*frustra tingitur aqua*). This statement confirms the emphasis in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* and highlights the importance of personal appropriation of faith for Erasmus. Taken at face value, some readers, like Hubmaier, reasonably could have viewed the phrase as a tacit denial of infant baptism.

Erasmus did, however, accept the validity of infant baptism, but only on the basis of the Church's authority. Modern scholarship has underscored the importance of Erasmus' complex view of the *consensus fidelium* as an important factor in the formulation of his theology. According to this concept, Christ ensured the truthfulness of the Church's teachings by bringing about consensus among Christians on various practices and beliefs, even if those beliefs have no explicit scriptural basis.¹⁶⁵

This principle emerges explicitly in Erasmus' comments on baptism in the *Exposition on Psalm 85* (1528), another text in which he pressed Matthew 28:19-20 into support for his views on catechesis. Erasmus' Psalm commentaries, which represent his sole foray into Old Testament exegesis, were published

¹⁶⁴ LB 7:146B: "si crediderint quae docuistis, si poenituerit vitae prioris, si parati fuerint amplecti doctrinam Evangelicam, tum tingite illos aqua...."

¹⁶⁵ The seminal essay is McConica, "Erasmus and the Grammar of Consent," in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, 2 vols., ed. J. Coppens (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 2:77-99.

between 1515 and 1536 and represent his mature thought.¹⁶⁶ Erasmus wrote the *Exposition on Psalm 85* at the height of the aggressive rhetoric of the early Reformation, when Protestants distrusted him for his vacillation and Catholics criticized his subversive tendencies. He used various titles for his commentaries, and his choice of “homiletic exposition,” or sermon, in part was due to the homiletical interests of the intended recipient. He also desired to write a “spiritual exhortation” rather than a critical commentary, because it allowed optimal flexibility for making spiritual applications and observations.¹⁶⁷

Erasmus’ citation of the Great Commission stems from his meditation on Psalm 85:8: “There is none like you among the gods, oh Lord,” which somehow sparked his comment on the multifaceted nature of Christian instruction to which he draws the reader’s attention. He explains that salvation progresses through four distinct steps, the first of which consists of a recognition of God as creator, ruler, and judge of everything in existence. Once these truths are accepted, one enters another step involving catechism, baptism and the “public declaration of the Christian soldier.” Erasmus insists there are two distinct kinds of teaching in the second step of salvation. The first precedes baptism and is meant for catechumens since it is more elementary (*simplicior*) and involves “certain mysteries of Christian philosophy.” The second follows baptism and is more complete (*perfectior*), particularly because it concerns instruction in the Christian

¹⁶⁶ Dominic Baker-Smith, introduction to *Exposition on the Psalms*, *CWE* 63: xiii, xvii.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii.

“way of living” (*vivendi ratio*).¹⁶⁸ Erasmus observes that Christianity has something for everyone, no matter what stage of development: “For mother Church has its own milk with which she nurses infants, and she also has solid food with which she now feeds the mature in Christ.”¹⁶⁹

Erasmus clarifies that the twofold schema for teaching derived from the Great Commission:

It might be a dream of my own imagination, except that the Gospel of Matthew openly declares this: “Therefore, go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all the things that I have commanded you.” Did you not hear the twofold teaching, one before baptism, another after baptism, which he mentions on the subject of keeping his commandments?¹⁷⁰

In the *Paraphrases*, Erasmus does not qualify his interpretation of the Great Commission, insisting that candidates must learn and embrace the rudiments of the faith prior to baptism. By 1528, however, when he wrote the *Exposition on Psalm 85* he was fully aware of Anabaptism, and this may have led him to explain his insistence upon catechesis in a way that removed any doubts about his view of infant baptism and Matthew 28:19-20. He observes:

¹⁶⁸ ASD V-3: 389.

¹⁶⁹ ASD V-3: 388-389: “Habet enim mater ecclesia lac suum quo refocillat infantes, habet et solidum cibum quo pascit iam grandes in Christo.”

¹⁷⁰ ASD V-3: 389: “Sit ingenii mei somnium, nisi palam indicat hoc Evangelium Matthaei: ‘Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, & Filii, & Spiritus sancti. Docentes eos servare omnia quaecunque mandavi vobis.’ An non auditis geminam doctrinam, unam ante baptismum, alteram post baptismum, quae de servandis mandatis meminit?”

There is no doubt that the Gospel here speaks about adults. But now, since on the ancient authority of the Church infants are baptized – who are able to be baptized, yet not able to be taught - at least after baptism they would learn those things which it is an outrage for a Christian person not to know.¹⁷¹

Erasmus demonstrates his exegetical convictions about the passage's original intent as well as his view of the Church's authority. His theological commitment to the consensus of the Church, not its scriptural basis, caused Erasmus to accept infant baptism as valid. But that baptism was not effective for adults. As John Payne noted: "Without denying the validity of infant baptism, Erasmus makes its effectiveness for adults contingent upon the personal consciousness of the meaning of the sacrament and the personal acceptance of its obligation."¹⁷² A situation in which the Church made no provisions for teaching adults the rudiments of the faith was more than a regrettable oversight, but an outrage (*nefas*) that imperiled souls.

Erasmus consistently based his interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 on the conviction that the literal word order (*docete...baptizantes...docentes*) was theologically significant and was the divinely ordained basis for catechesis. Perhaps due to Anabaptist claims, Erasmus inserted in the *Exposition on Psalm 85* a short affirmation of infant baptism, but the passing affirmation lends support

¹⁷¹ ASD V-3: 389: "Ne dubium est quin de adultis loquatur Evangelium. Nunc vero quoniam ex prisca ecclesiae autoritate baptizantur infantes, qui tingi possunt, doceri nondum possunt, utinam saltem post baptismum ea discant quae nefas est hominem christianum nescire."

¹⁷² Payne, *Erasmus, His Theology of the Sacraments*, 178.

to John Payne's suggestion that infant baptism was "an embarrassing fragment of his baptismal theology which is not easily reconciled with the other elements and which he integrated not intrinsically but rather primarily on the basis of the authority of the church."¹⁷³ Erasmus' proposal for a baptismal reaffirmation ceremony may have represented his attempt at integrating the "embarrassing fragment" of infant baptism into his theology of discipleship. Erasmus may not have greatly valued infant baptism, but he certainly was not willing to cause division, let alone spark a debate, over an issue long settled by the consensus of the Church.

Erasmus' exegesis was not novel. As with all of his religious works, the style of the *Paraphrases* is distinctly humanist, but the substance reflects medieval, and more often patristic, antecedents.¹⁷⁴ The important exegetical thrust of Erasmus' interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 rests upon a history of interpretation extending back at least to Jerome (d. 420), the great polyglot scholar of Late Antiquity, in his *Commentary on Matthew*.¹⁷⁵ Jerome's commentary was often repeated in the exegetical tradition, and his brief comments warrant full citation:

¹⁷³ Payne, *Erasmus, His Theology of the Sacraments*, 177-178. Payne points out that Erasmus' view of original sin (children not accountable for it) and the necessity of personal appropriation of faith all militated against infant baptism.

¹⁷⁴Erika Rummel, translator's note to *Paraphrase on Mark*, CWE 49: xii; see also Jan den Boeft, "Erasmus and the Church Fathers," in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, 2 vols., ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 2:537-572.

¹⁷⁵Jerome's extensive use of Origen (d. 264) might suggest the interpretation had even earlier roots. See J.N.D Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1975), 142-148, 222-225.

[19] “Go therefore, teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” First, they teach all the nations, then they baptize with water those who have been taught. For, it cannot happen that the body receives the sacrament of baptism unless the soul has first taken up the truth of the faith. But they are baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so that as there is one divinity, there should be one gift. For the Trinity is the name of the one God. [20] “Teaching them to obey everything whatsoever I commanded you.” The order is important: He commanded the apostles to first teach all the nations, then baptize with the sacrament of the faith, and after faith and baptism, admonish those things which ought to be observed. And lest we suppose the things commanded to be insignificant or few, he adds: “Everything whatsoever I commanded you,” so that whoever has believed, who has been baptized in the Trinity, should do everything that has been commanded.¹⁷⁶

Jerome’s exegesis of the passage draws attention to the proper order of Christian initiation: teaching, baptizing, and more teaching. Jerome does not indicate the nature of the instruction, but presumably pre-baptismal teaching would instruct the nations (*gentes*) in the basics of monotheism and other items that would make sense of the rite of baptism. For post-baptismal teaching, Jerome provides only slightly more information; the Church Father points out that post-baptismal teaching should simply include everything Jesus ever taught, specifically the content of the Gospels. On the fundamental exegetical issues,

¹⁷⁶CCSL 77:282-83: [19] “Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes: baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti.’ Primum docent omnes gentes, deinde doctas intingunt aqua. Non enim potest fieri ut corpus baptismi recipiat sacramentum, nisi ante anima fidei susceperit veritatem. Baptizantur autem in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti, ut quorum una est divinitas, una sit largitio: nomenque Trinitatis, unus Deus est. [20] ‘Docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis.’ Ordo praecipuus. Iussit Apostolis ut primum docerent universas gentes, deinde fidei tingerent sacramento, et post fidem ac baptismum quae essent observanda praeciperent. Ac ne putemus levia esse quae iussa sunt et pauca, addidit: *Omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis*: ut qui crediderint, qui in Trinitate fuerint baptizati, omnia faciant quae praecepta sunt.”

Erasmus' interpretation is identical to that of Jerome, particularly the interpretational value he placed on the word order. Erasmus' paraphrase amplifies, clarifies, and expands upon Jerome's interpretation, but he maintained the same essential exegesis as the Church Father whom he admired.¹⁷⁷

Other commentators emphasized additional elements of the passage. Particularly, the heated Christological disputes of late Antiquity rendered the Great Commission, with its clear reference to the Trinity, a major battle-ground between Arians and supporters of the Nicene formula.¹⁷⁸ Augustine and Hilary, for example, interpreted the passage primarily as a proof-text for the Trinity,¹⁷⁹ and Aquinas' *Catena* confirms that Trinitarian orthodoxy was the dominant concern of medieval exegetes.¹⁸⁰ Jerome's interpretation, however, retained a place among commentators, as indicated by the *Glossa Ordinaria*¹⁸¹ and the

¹⁷⁷ See John C. Olin, "Erasmus and St. Jerome: The Close Bond and its Significance," *ERSY 7* (1987): 33-43.

¹⁷⁸ See Charles S. Kraszewski, *The Gospel of Matthew with Patristic Commentaries* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1999), 377-82; Rowan Williams, "Baptism and the Arian Controversy," in *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel Williams (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 149-180, esp. 161-170.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine, *Collatio cum Maximo Arianorum Episcopo* PL 42:733-34, 781-82; Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* CSEL 52:38-43.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels*, trans. and ed. John Henry Cardinal Newman (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841; reprint, London: St. Austin Press, 1997), 988-89.

¹⁸¹ *Gloss. Matt. 28:19*: "Congruo ordo. Primo enim docendus est auditor. Deinde fide sacramentis imbuendus, tunc ad servanda mandata instruendus. Quia nisi prius anima fidem recipiat, non est dandus baptismus, nec valet mundari, si post non insistat bonis operibus." See E. Ann Matter, "The Church Fathers and the *Glossa Ordinaria*," in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, 1:83-111, esp. 83-86 for the nature and purpose of the *Glossa Ordinaria*.

notes (*postillae*) of Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349). Nicholas, perhaps the most significant late medieval scriptural exegete, adopted Jerome's exegesis yet indicated specifically the word order meant that catechesis for adults had to precede baptism.¹⁸²

In the history of interpretation, commentators viewed Matthew 28:19-20 as fundamentally concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity and with teaching the faith. Erasmus' interpretation is rooted in the latter emphasis. Given his reverence for Jerome's biblical scholarship and personal attraction to his merging of scholarship and personal piety,¹⁸³ similarities in their scriptural exegesis are unsurprising. Jerome probably provided Erasmus with the fundamental exegetical conclusions for the text, but his own interpretation was unique in the emphasis he places on each of the constitutive elements of the passage. Jerome, for example, states that the "it cannot happen that the body receives the sacrament of baptism unless the soul has first taken up the truth of the faith," but Erasmus proceeds to identify in detail what is to be taught prior to baptism, namely the essentials of the Apostles' Creed.

¹⁸² *NdL* Matt. 28:19: "Praeposuit, docete, quia catechismus debet praecedere baptismum: unde adulti prius debent instrui de his quae pertinent ad fidem quae baptizent." See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 46-56 for Nicholas' importance; see Philip D.W. Krey and Lesley Smith, introduction to *Nicholas of Lyra: The Senses of Scripture*, ed. Philip D.W. Krey and Lesley Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1-18 for the complex textual and publication history of Nicholas' notes on the Bible.

¹⁸³Olin, "Erasmus and St. Jerome," 33-43.

Erasmus' interpretation moreover is uncommon in the history of interpretation for its stress upon personal appropriation of the faith as a requirement for baptism. Matthew 28:19-20 taught that only those who understood the faith, repented of sin, and eagerly embraced the *philosophia Christi* were candidates for baptism. Commentators did not discuss repentance in connection with the Great Commission, as does Erasmus. Another difference between the exegetical tradition and Erasmus is the quality of the post-baptismal teaching. Jerome and others call for post-baptismal instruction in "all of Jesus' commandments," but Erasmus clarifies that the content of that teaching involves more than good works, and definitely not the meaningless rituals accrued since the time of the early Church. Instead, the newly baptized were to be taught strategies for maintaining innocence and advancing toward the "perfection of Gospel piety." The essential interpretation of the Great Commission had antecedents in the exegetical tradition, but Erasmus' retelling of it added emphases and concerns that rendered the final interpretation wholly his own.

Hubmaier and the Great Commission

Balthasar Hubmaier's interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 reveals several prominent features of his biblical hermeneutic. Most Anabaptists maintained the common Protestant commitment to *sola scriptura* but surpassed others in their strict application of the principle. Their viewpoint is more aptly described as *nuda*

scriptura.¹⁸⁴ Hubmaier believed that Christians should only accept practices and beliefs explicitly sanctioned by Scripture. Strict adherence to that principle was the only sure way of purifying the Church, and he reiterated the point often in his controversy with Zwingli over infant baptism: “If it does not say anywhere in Scripture that one should baptize children, then one should not baptize them, for this is in vain.”¹⁸⁵ Hubmaier defended his strict hermeneutic on the basis of Scripture, jurisprudence, and common sense,¹⁸⁶ and although he did make a positive case for believer’s baptism, the absence of explicitly scriptural authority for infant baptism was crucial to his argument against it.

Hubmaier’s method of biblical interpretation also stressed a belief in Scripture’s perspicuity, and he often stated that the “correct, plain, simple” meaning of Scripture was understandable for those who approached it with sincerity. Honest Christians would be “sitting with Mary at the feet of the Lord, opening the Bible with a prayerful spirit, searching the Scriptures...to see whether

¹⁸⁴ The designation belongs to Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 81; see Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2000), for the most recent study of Anabaptist scriptural interpretation.

¹⁸⁵ *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book*, 1526 (PY, 184; HS, 178-179).

¹⁸⁶ *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book* (PY 184; HS 178-179). Citing Matthew 15:15, Hubmaier brings the text to bear on hermeneutics and says, “you must point out clearly the institution of infant baptism in the Scriptures, or it must be uprooted.” He also cited the legal dictum, *Affirmanti incumbit probatio* (the burden of proof lies with those who affirm). In another work, he makes the same point: “Whatever Christ has not commanded in those things which concern the honor of God and salvation is already forbidden.” *Old and New Teachers On Believer’s Baptism* (PY 248; HS 229).

things are so.”¹⁸⁷ Hubmaier believed that ultimately the Holy Spirit would enable relatively simple people to understand the deep truths of the Bible, sort out thorny exegetical problems, and bring all sincere Reformers into concord on the meaning of disputed passages.¹⁸⁸ Hubmaier attended to historical context, grammar, and history,¹⁸⁹ but generally avoided overly complex grammatical points in favor of “clear and simple arguments” from Scripture, so as not to surrender the Bible to the polyglot elite. He believed the interpretation of Scripture belonged to all, not just those with a trilingual education.¹⁹⁰

Hubmaier’s interpretational principles led him to concentrate on the literal sense of Scripture, and that focus dominates his treatment of Matthew 28:19-20. The passage was extremely important for his view of baptism. In a private letter to Oecolampadius, written several months before he became an Anabaptist, he revealed to his friend and Basel Reformer that his opposition to infant baptism stemmed from the words of Jesus in the Great Commission.¹⁹¹ In three of his foremost baptismal writings, Hubmaier cites the passage and the Marcan parallel

¹⁸⁷ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 112-13; HS 133); quote from *Theses against Eck* (PY 53; HS 88); for more on this principle see Leth, “Hubmaier’s ‘Catholic’ Exegesis” 105-107.

¹⁸⁸ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1256-57.

¹⁸⁹ Leth, “Hubmaier’s ‘Catholic’ Exegesis,” 105-107. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1257 points out that the “sober” Anabaptist exegetes, including Hubmaier, were very cautious of “erratic literalism” in biblical interpretation.

¹⁹⁰ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 142; HS 157);

¹⁹¹ *Letter to Oecolampadius* (PY 69-70); see John H. Yoder, “Balthasar Hubmaier and the Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism,” *MQR* 33 (1959): 8 for a discussion of the importance of Matthew 28:19-20 to Hubmaier, and Oecolampadius’ immediate response to the letter.

(Mark 16:16) more than thirty times. Often he assumes the meaning is obvious, providing “clear” or “plain” or “explicit” evidence that the Church should baptize only those who respond to the gospel in faith.¹⁹² Hubmaier indicates twice that he viewed Matthew 28:19-20 as an impregnable argument against infant baptism. Having quoted the passage, he makes a brief assessment of its import: “That is as solid as a wall.” Later, he again employs the analogy but adds a classical reference: “His Word, Matt. 28 and Mark 16, stands firm as a Greek marble wall” (*stat vest wie ein Marpesische maur*).¹⁹³ The Great Commission, clearly, was crucial for Hubmaier’s theology of baptism for he believed it to be the Achilles’ heel of the doctrine of infant baptism.

Hubmaier stressed the Great Commission for two main reasons: it related Christ’s establishment of the sacrament of baptism, and it displayed an order of salvation that precluded infant baptism. That Christ initiated baptism at Matthew 28:19-20 had been the traditional view, but it took on special meaning for Hubmaier because Zwingli’s rejection of Anabaptist claims relied partially on the contention that John’s baptism and Christian baptism were virtually identical.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 104, 114-115, 120, 121, 122, 125, 129, 130, 142); *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book* (PY 179, 188, 189, 191, 198-202, 205, 207, 211, 222, 223, 224, 225, 228); *Old and New Teachers On Believer’s Baptism* (PY 247, 249, 250, 253, 255, 261).

¹⁹³ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 129; HS 146); *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book* (PY 198; HS 189).

¹⁹⁴ David Steinmetz, “The Baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus in Huldrych Zwingli, Balthasar Hubmaier and Late Medieval Theology,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Christian History: Essays Presented to George H. Williams on the occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. F.F. Church and Timothy George (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 169-181.

Hubmaier disagreed with infant baptism because it was so unlike the baptism instituted by Christ himself in the Great Commission. He believed his main treatise on baptism, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, to be a defense of the “true baptism according to the institution of Christ,” leading toward a restoration of it “on the authority of the command of Christ.”¹⁹⁵ Three of Hubmaier’s ten arguments advocating rebaptism in *On Christian Baptism* (1525) rest upon Christ’s personal institution of baptism in the Great Commission. The point is essential because Hubmaier alleged that neglect of the biblical forms and meaning of baptism was an affront to the power and dignity of Christ, who commanded baptism immediately after receiving authority over all things (Matt. 28:18). Since baptism was an institution of Christ himself, Hubmaier disagreed strongly with his Protestant colleagues, such as Oecolampadius, who considered infant baptism an issue over which the Church should not divide.¹⁹⁶ Hubmaier alleged the mode and proper administration of baptism was not a light matter: “Christ did not use such precious words [the Trinitarian formula] in vain as something which we might do or leave undone.”¹⁹⁷

The cornerstone of Hubmaier’s rejection of infant baptism, however, was not its lack of dominical institution, but its incompatibility with the divinely

¹⁹⁵ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 97-98; HS 119-120). Numerous other references use similar language in this treatise [PY 118 (HS 137), 119 (HS 138), 121-122 (HS 140), 125 (HS 143), 129 (HS 146), 145 (HS 160); they are repeated in the *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism book* (PY 198-213; HS 188-199).

¹⁹⁶ H. Wayne Pipkin, “The Baptismal Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier,” 49.

¹⁹⁷ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 121-122; HS 140).

ordained pattern of conversion indicated in the Great Commission. In his attempt to discredit infant baptism, Hubmaier heavily relies upon the same exegetical conclusions as Erasmus: the literal word order is significant to the proper interpretation of the passage. Hubmaier organized his argument in *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* around the fundamental point that the New Testament presented a discernible pattern of conversion involving preaching, faith, baptism, and good works. He summarized the schema at the beginning of the chapter on “The Baptism of Christ,” where he calls the reader’s attention to the order of conversion in the earliest church:

Here once again I would like to ask you, dear reader, in the following passages on the baptism of Christ to observe the following order, both in regard to the words and the meaning: (1) word, (2) hearing, (3) faith, (4) baptism, (5) work. From this sequence you can certainly fathom whether one should baptize infants.¹⁹⁸

Hubmaier proceeds to highlight important scriptural passages in which he sees this sequence repeated.¹⁹⁹ His simple approach is to quote the biblical text, accompanied with interpretational marginalia and interlinear signifiers, often letters or numbers, and make very brief comments on the implications of the verse to the practice of baptism. This approach makes it difficult to evaluate his

¹⁹⁸*On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 129; HS 146). See also *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 114-118; HS 134-137) where Hubmaier cites the Great Commission concerning the sequence of the Apostles’ preaching: “From these words one understands clearly and certainly that this sending of the apostles consists of three points or commands: First, preaching; second, faith; and third, outward baptism.”

¹⁹⁹ Matt. 28:18ff, Mark 16:15ff, Acts 2:36, 8:4ff, 10:44ff, 16:13ff, 18:8ff, 19:1ff, I Cor. 1:13ff, I Pet. 3:20ff, Heb. 10:22f (verse numbers assigned by the editors of Pipkin-Yoder).

theology and although well organized, his writings on baptism usually involve stringing verses together, with his own brief comments interspersed throughout.

The first passage he cites as evidence for the order of conversion is the Great Commission:

“All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go forth and (a) teach all (b) peoples and (c) baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them (d) to observe everything that I have commanded you.” This and no other one [sic] is the water baptism I find in Scripture which the apostles administered. Now infants cannot be taught beforehand, therefore they should not be baptized with this baptism. That is solid as a wall.²⁰⁰

Hubmaier had already instructed the reader to look for the sequence of conversion, but he makes the point explicit by adding letters of the alphabet before each step in the conversion process. The marginal notes clarify that “(a) teach all” refers to the *word*, “(b) peoples and” refers to faith, “(c) baptize...and teach them” refers to *baptism*, and “(d) to observe...” refers to *work*. Simply put, preaching and faith must precede baptism, followed by good deeds. This method of guiding the reader through the proper interpretation of the passage relies upon the assumption that theological meaning was bound up in the literal word order of the passage, a conclusion Hubmaier did not seriously question. For him the word order corresponds directly to the chronological order of conversion and that to follow the precise order would ensure that one was practicing “the water baptism ...which the apostles administered.” Hubmaier’s approach was known in

²⁰⁰ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 129; HS 146). The interpretational aids (a...b...c...d) are part of Hubmaier’s text.

the exegetical tradition and therefore one cannot accept Williams' assertion that Hubmaier's interpretation of the text went "beyond all Medieval precedent [and] fixed the sequence as teaching (preaching), faith, baptism."²⁰¹ In fact, this interpretation was precisely the interpretation of Erasmus and others before him. Indeed, the way Hubmaier brought the exegesis to bear specifically on the issue of infant baptism certainly surpassed all medieval precedents, but the basic exegetical conclusion concerning the significance of word order was known and adopted by Erasmus.

Wayne Pipkin pointed out that the order of conversion was important to Hubmaier for two basic reasons. Obviously, preaching had to precede baptism so as to teach people the doctrines of the Christian faith, but it also had to produce repentance. For Hubmaier, biblical faith was not merely intellectual acquiescence to Christian doctrines, but belief combined with a sincere desire to turn away from sin, i.e. repentance. By emphasizing the importance of faith *and* repentance as prerequisites for baptism, Hubmaier strengthened his argument against his opponents because, although some thought infants were capable of a kind of incipient faith, no one suggested they were capable of repentance.²⁰² Hubmaier viewed baptism as a personal pledge of discipleship to God and the Church, an enrolling in the Christian community; by including repentance and a volitional response into his definition of faith, he removed the sacrament far

²⁰¹ Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 441.

²⁰² Pipkin, "The Baptismal Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier," 39-40.

beyond the capabilities of children. Hubmaier succinctly stated his entire view of baptism and his exegetical approach to the Great Commission in *A Christian Catechism* (1526). There he declared that Matthew 28:19-20 and the Marcan parallel clearly revealed the inadequacies of infant baptism and the urgency of rebaptism, that is, “true baptism.” Using the catechetical dialogue, Hubmaier writes:

Leonhart: If only believers are to be baptized who publicly confess with their mouth, as Christ instituted water baptism for believers alone, Matt. 28; Mark 16, must we submit to rebaptism? What seems right to you?

Hans: Our approving, supposing, and thinking are of no importance; we must ask advice of the mouth of the Lord who said: Go therefore and teach all nations and baptize them; he who believes and is baptized will be saved. Since Christ commanded his disciples to preach and baptize, that very command orders us to hear the preaching and to be baptized. For whoever then loosens one of the least of these commandments shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 5:19; James 2. But now water baptism is a very earnest command; it has been proclaimed to be performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If we accept this baptism, even though we were one hundred years old, it would still not be a rebaptism, because infant baptism is no baptism and is unworthy of being called baptism. For the infant knows neither good nor evil and cannot consent or vow either to the church or to God.²⁰³

For Hubmaier, the natural reading of the Great Commission was in terms of two distinct commands, to be observed in the proper order. First, teach and then baptize those who believed the teaching and were personally willing to accept baptism. Infants simply could not meet the requirements for baptism

²⁰³ *A Christian Catechism* (PY 350; HS 314).

specified by Hubmaier: personal belief in the truths of the faith, an awareness of good and evil and sin, and public commitment to the Christian community. Hubmaier's theology of baptism was not exclusively concerned with a convert's mastery of doctrine, but was equally insistent upon the convert's pledge to Christ and the Church made prior to baptism. Interpreters in the exegetical tradition did not make this connection, but Erasmus does. All the constituent elements of Erasmus' proposal in the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* are present in Hubmaier's conception of baptism: statement of faith, repentance, and acceptance by the Christian community. The only difference between Hubmaier's conception of baptism and Erasmus' reaffirmation ceremony is the physical act of baptism.

It is probable that Hubmaier read the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* sometime during his research into discipleship and the relationship between catechesis and baptism. When he composed *Old and New Teachers on Believer's Baptism* (1526) Hubmaier failed to mention Erasmus' preface, but he did cite Erasmus' interpretation of the Great Commission. *Old and New Teachers* was an attempt to demonstrate that believer's baptism was not only within the bounds of orthodoxy, but that it represented the practice of the early Church, and that some of his own contemporaries held views that logically precluded infant baptism. Scholars have examined the treatise for evidence of

the influences upon Hubmaier's thought, but Erasmus has received very little attention.²⁰⁴

Hubmaier begins the discussion of contemporary authorities by appealing to Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew*.

He recounts all the articles of faith as they are contained in the Apostles' Creed, and adds these words: "After you have taught the people these things and they believe what you have taught them, have repented of their prior life, and are ready henceforth to walk according to evangelical doctrine, then immerse them in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Here Erasmus publicly points out that baptism was instituted by Christ for those instructed in faith and not for young children.²⁰⁵

Old and New Teachers contains many inaccuracies, distortions, and misrepresentations of the sources,²⁰⁶ but Hubmaier fairly represents Erasmus' paraphrase on Matthew 28:19-20. He correctly notes that Erasmus specifically identified the content of catechetical instruction as the Apostles' Creed and quotes the *Paraphrase on Matthew* accurately at the point most critical to the

²⁰⁴ Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism*, 49-52; Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*, 108-112; Pipkin, "The Baptismal Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier," 48-50; Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, 53.

²⁰⁵ *Old and New Teachers on Believer's Baptism* (PY 255; HS 233): "Erasmus von Roterodam vber das 28. c. Mat. vom Tauff. Erzelet er all Artickel des glaubens, wie sy in Symbolo Apostolorum begriffen sind, vnnd füret darauff ein dise wort: Nach dem jr die völker dise ding geleert habent, vnnd sy glaubent, was jr sy geleert, habent rew des vorgehenden lebenns vnnd sind berayt fürhin zů wandelen nach Euangelischer leer, demnach tunckent sy in das wasser in dem namen des Vaters vnd Suns vnd heyiligen Geysts. Hie zaigt Erasmus offenlich an, das der Tauff für die vnderrichten im glauben vnd nit für die iungen khindlen von Christo eingesetzt ist."

²⁰⁶ Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism*, 50-52 demonstrates that this work contains several factual errors and misrepresentations; Pipkin, "The Baptismal Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier," 48, n. 51 observes that Hubmaier's misreading of Luther caused him to cite a point at variance with his own theology.

Anabaptist case. Hubmaier's explicit claim is not that Erasmus disagreed with infant baptism, but that he had publicly, in print, announced in this passage that Christ had instituted baptism for catechized adults and not for infants. Erasmus' later statements in the *Exposition on Psalm 85* (1528) that Jesus gave the command of Matthew 28:19 for adults and not infants proved Hubmaier's deduction to be correct. Erasmus' acceptance of infant baptism was not based on Scripture, but upon the authority of the Church.

Hubmaier's certainty about the implications of Erasmus' paraphrase on the Great Commission was enforced by his reading of the *Paraphrase on Acts*. Hubmaier cited Erasmus on that passage as well:

He writes further on the second chapter of Acts: "The Lord commanded the evangelical shepherds: Go forth and teach all peoples, baptize them, teach them to hold all things which I have commanded you." Teach those who are to be baptized the basic elements of evangelical wisdom. Unless one believes the same, then he is immersed in water in vain. Consider him also, dear reader, on the eighth chapter of Acts and many other places.²⁰⁷

Hubmaier's quotation of the *Paraphrase on Acts* is mostly accurate, but his slight alteration of the text suggests he needed Erasmus only as a witness for the necessity of catechesis and not for post-baptismal instruction. Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Acts* (2:42) begins with the reference to two different types of

²⁰⁷ *Old and New Teachers on Believer's Baptism* (PY 255; HS 233). "Weyter schreibt er vber das ander capitel der geschichten: Der herr hat also beuolhen den Euangelischen hirtten: Geend hin vnd leerend alle völker, tauffent sy, leerent sy halten alle ding, die ich euch gebotten hab. Leerend die da sollent getaufft werden, die vorgründe Euangelischer weysshayt. Es sey den sach, das ainer den selben glaub, wirdt er vergebennlich eintunckt in das wasser. Bsihe [sic] in auch, lieber lesener, vber das 8. c. der Geschichten vnd an ander mer orten."

food, pointing out that pre-baptismal preaching had been the “milk” but that after baptism it was essential to “proceed to solid food.” He then proceeds to cite the Great Commission.²⁰⁸ Hubmaier, however, collapses the first two sentences and comes straight to the reference to the Great Commission as requiring teaching prior to baptism. Erasmus refers to catechesis in this passage primarily out of concern for post-baptismal teaching after the mass baptisms recorded in the previous verse.²⁰⁹ Erasmus’ essential point, that the second kind of teaching must focus on advancement in faith, comes after the section quoted by Hubmaier.²¹⁰ Hubmaier’s main interest in his baptismal writings, however, was pre-baptismal instruction, and for that reason he cut short the quote from Erasmus’ paraphrase after it had served his purposes.

Hubmaier also was particularly interested in a phrase from Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Acts* that highlighted the subjective element of the sacrament and tied its efficacy to faith. Erasmus had indicated that baptism apart from faith was a vain act,²¹¹ and Hubmaier seized upon this phrase through the use of a marginal note, a technique he used to highlight important phrases as well as

²⁰⁸LB 7:674A: “Quod hactenus traditum est doctrinae lac est, proficiendum est ad solidum cibum. Utrunque cibum debent habere paratum Euangelici Pastores. Sic enim mandarat illis Dominus: Ite ...”

²⁰⁹ The marginal note in the critical edition of *Hubmaier Schriften* misidentifies his reference to Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Acts* as pertaining to chapter 2:38 rather than to chapter 2:42 (HS 233). The error is carried over into the English translation as well (PY 255). Hubmaier’s original marginal note simply reads “Act. 2.”

²¹⁰LB 7:674A: “Docete baptizatos, ut iuxta doctrinam meam viventes, semper ad perfectiora proficiant.”

²¹¹ *Paraphrase on Acts* LB 7: 674A. “quibus nisi crediderit, frustra tingitur aqua.”

remind the reader of the way the specific text contributed to the whole argument of the treatise. The only non-textual marginal note for the quote of Erasmus is juxtaposed with *frustra tingitur aqua* and reads, “ineffectual water” (*Ein vergeblich wasser*).²¹² The inefficacy of infant baptism was a crucial theological point for Hubmaier because it sheltered him from the charge of rebaptism since, in his eyes, infant baptism was “unworthy of being called baptism.”²¹³ Elsewhere, Hubmaier employed language similar to Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Acts* by stating infant baptism was worthless: “If it does not say anywhere in Scripture that one should baptize children, then one should not baptize them, for this is in vain.”²¹⁴ Erasmus’ statement was, in fact, extraordinary in the absolute way he linked the efficacy of baptism to the faith of the baptismal candidate. Few interpreters in the exegetical tradition used such strong language to empty baptism of its force apart from catechesis and faith. Jerome merely states that baptism should not occur prior to faith, but Erasmus regards baptism without faith as ineffectual.²¹⁵ Again, the preface to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* highlights Erasmus’ view that a failure to ratify one’s baptismal vow denuded the spiritual benefits of the original

²¹² *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism* (HS 233; PY 256).

²¹³ *A Christian Catechism* (PY 350; HS 314). See also *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 121; HS 140) where Hubmaier explicitly asserts that “infant baptism is no baptism.”

²¹⁴ *Dialogue with Zwingli’s Baptism Book* (PY 184; HS 178-179).

²¹⁵ CCSL 77: 282-283: “For the body cannot receive the sacrament of baptism unless the soul has first recognized the truth of the faith.” Yet, see Hrabanus Maurus, *Commentarius in Matthaem*, PL 107: 1152D – 1153B, who comes the closest to Erasmus by contending that baptism is ineffectual for those ignorant of the faith and negligent of post-baptismal works; See also *Gloss Matt. 28:19* for the latter point.

baptism.²¹⁶ For Hubmaier, Erasmus' phrase, intended to augment the need for catechesis, supported his contention that baptism was originally intended for adults and that the efficacy of the sacrament was linked to the faith of the baptismal candidate. Apart from it, as with infants, baptism was a useless rite bearing no resemblance to Christ's original intentions.

Hubmaier clearly considered Erasmus' religious publications as valuable to his argument against infant baptism and his concluding remarks urge the reader to explore Erasmus' writings further: "Consider him also, dear reader, on the eighth chapter of Acts and many other places." Hubmaier was probably referring to the conversion of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 where the only requirement for baptism is whole-hearted belief,²¹⁷ but his reference to "many other places" is ambiguous. Regardless of whether Hubmaier intends for his reader to check all the baptismal passages in the *Paraphrase on Acts* or in all of the *Paraphrases*, the essential point remains that Hubmaier is confident Erasmus' writings were valuable for the Anabaptist argument against infant baptism.

Hubmaier's *Old and New Teachers* demonstrates his knowledge and use of Erasmus' paraphrase on Matthew 28:19, but it also reveals his awareness of other exegetes whose interpretations supported his view of baptism. It is more likely, however, that Erasmus' influence was more significant than the other

²¹⁶ Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments*, 178.

²¹⁷CWE 50: 62-63.

sources in *Old and New Teachers*. First of all, Hubmaier cites only four authorities for his exegesis of the Great Commission: Basil the Great, Jerome, Theophylact, and Erasmus.²¹⁸ Each is called as a witness to the catechetical interpretation of the passage, but Erasmus' is the most complete. Hubmaier often made many mistakes in citing his sources, but his handling of Erasmus was reasonably accurate. Considering Hubmaier's contact with Erasmus, his writings, and esteem for him, it is more likely that he, and not one of the others, was a more substantial exegetical influence. Second, Hubmaier's work on *Old and New Teachers* was primarily in response to criticism of his baptismal views as his opponents increasingly cited the Church Fathers against him. This led Hubmaier to comb patristic and medieval sources for evidence supporting his already formulated conclusion against infant baptism.²¹⁹ His citation of the Church Fathers stemmed from his desire to use them in support of his beliefs, but his established interaction with Erasmus and his writings occurred just prior to the period when he evidently began to form his conclusion about infant baptism between May 1523 and January 1525. The point is that Hubmaier had revered Erasmus' exegesis since as early as 1521 and, although he may have consulted the Church Fathers in his early examination of the question of infant baptism, it is even more likely that Hubmaier was consulting Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* on that same issue. Finally, if Hubmaier had consulted

²¹⁸ *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism* (PY 250-56; HS 230-33).

²¹⁹ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 280-84.

the Church Fathers during this period, indeed he would have discovered the essential catechetical interpretation based on the word order, but in consulting Erasmus, however, he would have found that argument and more: great detail on the content of catechetical instruction, an emphasis upon repentance, and an unequivocal declaration that baptism's efficacy depended upon the faith of the baptismal candidate. For these reasons, it is more likely that Erasmus, and not one of the other exegetical authorities, made a more substantial contribution to Hubmaier's interpretation of the Great Commission.

Hubmaier's exegesis of the Great Commission is essentially the same as Erasmus'. In their approach, the word order is paramount for determining the chronological relationship between catechesis and baptism. Erasmus, as Hubmaier, stressed the importance of pre-baptismal catechesis and the necessity of repentance based on this passage of Scripture, and both saw Matthew 28:19-20 as only relevant to believing adults. The only significant difference between the two is that Hubmaier does not emphasize post-baptismal catechesis in his interpretation, but instead refers to "obedience." Hubmaier's primary intent in his baptismal writings was to demonstrate the need for pre-baptismal teaching. Elaborating on post-baptismal instruction did little to further his argument. Hubmaier did care about post-baptismal instruction, as indicated by his pastoral treatises. The lack of focus on continual teaching should not obscure the obvious affinity between Erasmus' and Hubmaier's exegesis of the Great Commission.

Contemporaries on the Great Commission

Hubmaier agrees with Erasmus on the Great Commission, but his interpretation bears little resemblance to prominent non-Anabaptist exegetes, such as Zwingli and Luther. Zwingli knew the Anabaptists better than anyone, and his attacks on their baptismal beliefs specifically addressed the interpretation of the Great Commission, and particularly Hubmaier's treatise on baptism.²²⁰ Zwingli eventually came to justify infant baptism with an elaborate conception of covenant theology which equated Old Testament circumcision with Christian baptism,²²¹ but in the conflicts with the Anabaptists he countered their arguments against infant baptism by criticizing their interpretation of particular passages. Zwingli specifically censured Hubmaier's interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20, particularly for assigning theological significance to the word order. Although in May 1523 Zwingli may have expressed doubts about infant baptism based on this passage,²²² by the time he set out to write against the Anabaptists he explicitly faulted their interpretation of the Great Commission as too literal. He argued that instead of finding meaning in the word order, one should view "make disciples" as the main command and "baptize" and "teach" as requisite corollaries for carrying out the main directive. Christ had commanded the apostles primarily

²²⁰ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 263-265; Yoder, "Balthasar Hubmaier and the Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," 149.

²²¹ Scott A. Gillies, "Zwingli and the Origin of the Reformed Covenant, 1524-7," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 21-50.

²²² See Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 80; *Dialogue with Zwingli's Baptism Book* (PY 194-95; HS 186-87).

to preach to all nations, and in the process, they would baptize and teach. In this sense, Zwingli suggested that if one maintained that the literal word order of the text carried theological significance, it would actually support infant baptism.²²³ Zwingli strengthened his point with a grammatical observation, contending the participle “baptizing them” was independent of the command to “teach all nations” that preceded it. Furthermore, he held that the lack of an explicit connecting word, such as “and,” between these two phrases indicated that Christ “was not laying any conscious stress upon the order.”²²⁴ The word order was irrelevant. Zwingli’s rebuttal of the Anabaptist argument also involved comments on the dangers of literalism in biblical interpretation. He affirms: “I do not place too great importance upon the literal wording. We are to study the literal sense, but with moderation. We must not allow the letter to kill us, for the letter of the Gospel kills no less surely than the letter of the Law.”²²⁵ While the Zurich Reformer employed an exegetical distinction that Erasmus generally would have praised,²²⁶ he was evidently unaware that Erasmus himself also saw an important theological principle at work in the literal word order of the passage and interpreted it accordingly.

²²³ *Of Baptism in Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 141-142, hereafter cited as *Of Baptism*.

²²⁴ *Of Baptism*, 141-42.

²²⁵ *Of Baptism*, 142.

²²⁶ See Payne, “Toward the Hermeneutics of Erasmus,” 26-47, for a discussion of Erasmus’ attitude toward both the literal and spiritual exegesis of scriptural texts.

Hubmaier's response to these criticisms, which appears in *Dialogue with Zwingli's Baptism Book*, a work largely written late in 1525 in Waldshut but published in 1526 in Nicolsburg, is short and repetitive. Regarding Matthew 28:19, Hubmaier simply reaffirms his position that the word order of the text indicates that instruction and personal faith must precede baptism, suggesting that Zwingli's refusal to concede defeat on infant baptism was due to his stubbornness.²²⁷ Hubmaier failed to provide a comprehensive rebuttal of Zwingli's central criticism that the emphasis upon word order was an excessively literal interpretation unwarranted by the text. He believed that the importance of the word order would be self-evident to most sincere and unbiased interpreters. There are practically no similarities between Hubmaier and Zwingli in the critical elements of the exegesis of the Great Commission.

Hubmaier greatly respected Luther as the initiator of the Reformation, but the Wittenberg Reformer could not have influenced Hubmaier's interpretation of the Great Commission because his approach was entirely different. Luther cited the passage in support of a variety of traditional theological themes, but nowhere did he fully discuss its proper interpretation. Outside his specific treatment of Matthew 28:19-20 in the context of Anabaptism, Luther cites the text in support of

²²⁷ *Dialogue with Zwingli's Baptism Book* (PY 198-202; HS 188-191): "You do violence and are unjust to the Scriptures...I will let every Christian assembly judge for itself...Ah, what a childish counterargument...If you understand it otherwise, then you are purposely speaking obscurely so that you will not be understood."

the doctrine of the Trinity, the trans-national nature of Christianity, the office of preaching, and the power of the sacrament.²²⁸

In the early years of the Anabaptist movement, Luther's knowledge of the radicals' theology was limited. By the year of Hubmaier's death, however, he understood enough about Anabaptism to write *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528), his sole treatise on the issue at the heart of the Anabaptist movement. In it, Luther did not provide a detailed explanation of the relevance of the Great Commission to the debate over baptism, but where the text is mentioned, he specifically emphasized verse 19 regarding the conversion of all nations. He notes:

But he has commanded us to baptize all Gentiles, none excepted...Now children constitute a great part of the heathen...So it seems that just as Christ commanded us to teach and baptize all heathen, without exception, so the apostles did, and baptized all who were in the household.²²⁹

Whereas Hubmaier's and Erasmus' interpretation placed emphasis upon the literal word order of "teach," "baptize," "teach," Luther accentuated the literal meaning of the word "all," to include children. In contrast to Erasmus, who accepted infant baptism as an ancient tradition of the Church with only tenuous

²²⁸Trinity: *Psalms 45* (LW 12: 288); Universality of Christianity: *Psalms 45* (LW 13: 271-2), *Zachariah* (LW 20: 338), *Galatians* (LW 26: 101), *I Timothy* (LW 28: 263); Preaching Office: *Psalms 82* (LW 13: 49); Marburg Colloquy (LW 38: 213); Efficacy of Baptism: Marburg Colloquy (LW 38: 27, 57, 198-199), *Genesis* (LW 6: 128); *Against Hans Wurst* (LW 41: 196), *Avoiding Doctrines of Men* (LW 35: 148), *Defense of Infant Baptism* (LW 54: 74).

²²⁹*Concerning Rebaptism* (LW 40: 245, 252); see also his defense of infant baptism in the Table Talk where he asserts that children were encompassed in the Great Commission (LW 38:113).

scriptural support, Luther argued that the Great Commission called for the baptism of infants and that consequently the practice originated with Christ himself.²³⁰

Luther's most substantial treatment of the word-order-based argument concerned the simplified version of the Great Commission contained in the Gospel of Mark (16:16), which reads, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Yet, rather than deal with the exegetical question, Luther instead faulted the Anabaptist viewpoint theologically on at least four different grounds. He criticized their presumption to know when and how a person actually obtained faith. For him, personal faith, as opposed to the faith provided through the grace of God, was fleeting, depending upon the strength of the believer. It could not possibly be the basis for one's salvation. In the same way, if Anabaptists wanted to insist upon genuine faith prior to baptism, they would need the ability to discern the heart, something reserved only for God. In addition, linking baptism with personal faith made faith a work rather than a gift of God as an expression of his grace and compassion, and finally, if baptism depended on personal faith, Luther argued multiple baptisms would be necessary throughout the life of the believer. According to him, the relationship between baptism and faith was ultimately inconsequential.²³¹

²³⁰Paul H. Zeitlow, "Martin Luther's Arguments for Infant Baptism," *Concordia Journal* 20 (1994): 147-71.

²³¹ *Concerning Rebaptism* (LW 40: 239-241). On this point, see also McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 97-101.

Luther's entire theology of justification stood in opposition to Anabaptist claims, and he rejected any interpretation of Scripture that attributed the efficacy of a sacrament to human work. Following Augustine, Luther agreed that baptism brought about the blessings of God, regardless of the work or character of the baptizer or the baptized, because God had ordained that when the Word of Christ was combined with water, a valid baptism occurred.²³² Luther also found the Anabaptist interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20 to be arrogant; to read the Great Commission in a way that demanded teaching before and after baptism amounted to "measuring the Word of God" and was unworthy of serious consideration.²³³ With this terminology Luther appears to equate wrangling about the baptism of infants with a failure to implement Christ's command, rather than with a legitimate attempt to understand what exactly Christ meant by the Great Commission. Luther's exegesis could not have possibly influenced Hubmaier's interpretation.

Conclusion

On the fundamental exegetical issues, clear affinities exist between the interpretation of Erasmus and Hubmaier on Matthew 28:19-20. Both understood the literal word order to be theologically significant, maintaining that Christ had required his apostles first to teach converts, baptize them, and then teach them again. This interpretation was known in the exegetical tradition but in the early

²³² *Word and Sacrament* (LW 38: 198-120).

²³³ *Sermons on the Gospel of John* (LW 23: 79-80).

sixteenth century, the most important Protestant contemporaries of Hubmaier, Zwingli and Luther, did not interpret the Great Commission as requiring catechesis, but instead specifically condemned that exegesis as flawed. Erasmus' distinction between the quality and content of pre-baptismal catechesis and post-baptismal instruction stands out in the history of interpretation, as does his insistence upon repentance for baptismal candidates. Viewed in light of Erasmus' innovative proposal of the *Preface* to the *Paraphrase on Matthew* which sought to incorporate these emphases within the ecclesial context of infant baptism, it is clear that he understood baptism as the culmination of a process of instruction and the symbolic personal acceptance of the Christian faith.

Erasmus and Hubmaier shared the same concerns for personal appropriation of faith and agreed in their interpretation of Matthew 28:19-20. In light of Hubmaier's esteem for Erasmus, his quotation from the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, and the interpretation's uniqueness among contemporaries, Erasmus ought to be considered the primary influence for Hubmaier's understanding of the Great Commission. Erasmus' interpretation alone, however, was not enough to cause Hubmaier to reach an Anabaptist conclusion. Only when it was combined with the latter's strict view of *nuda scriptura* did Erasmus' exegesis undermine the practice of infant baptism for Hubmaier. Erasmus explicitly rejected Hubmaier's theological conclusion about infant baptism, but he could not have disagreed with its exegetical basis, for it was his own.

CHAPTER FOUR - ERASMUS AND HUBMAIER ON THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

In Matthew 13:24-30, the parable of the tares, Jesus tells a story that interpreters often cited in debates about the moral and theological purity of the Christian Church.²³⁴ Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a field in which good seed is sown but soon is infested with tares, that is, weeds. Hired workers ask to uproot the wild plants, but the landowner says to leave them alone until harvest time when they will be separated from the wheat and burned. At the request of his disciples, Jesus provides a rare explanation of this parable by associating the field with the world, identifying the individual characters of the story (God, the devil, children of God and of the devil, angels), and equating harvest time with judgment day (Matthew 13:36-43). With the establishment of Christianity in the fourth century, the parable of the tares assumed a special place in the increasingly critical discussion of how to deal with heretics, or “tares,” in a Christian society. Although church-sanctioned persecution of heretics is traceable to that period, the use of the death penalty for heresy was very rare prior to the mid-thirteenth century. By that time, due to the rise of popular heresy, burning heretics became a commonly accepted practice that enjoyed

²³⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 79.

nearly universal legal and theological support throughout Western Europe.²³⁵

Despite that development, for some interpreters the parable of the tares with Jesus' command to "let them grow together" served as the proof text for religious toleration. According to Roland Bainton, whose seminal essay remains the most comprehensive treatment of the topic, theologians emphasizing tolerance "repeat[ed] the text with monotonous iteration," indicating that Matthew 13:24-30 served as a major obstacle to the theological justification of killing heretics; therefore, an exegete's interpretation of it largely revealed his general attitude toward religious toleration.²³⁶

Although the literature on toleration often overlooks his contribution, Balthasar Hubmaier was the first sixteenth-century Reformer to compose an entire treatise calling for toleration of heretics,²³⁷ a position based largely upon his interpretation of this parable. The importance of Matthew 13:24-30 for Erasmus' stance toward the Reformation is so well-known that one modern

²³⁵ See Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 1 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1955), 1:213-232. Although dated, Lea's work remains the broadest treatment. For modern historiography on the inquisition, see Richard Kieckhefer, "The Office of the Inquisition and Medieval Heresy: The Transition from Personal to Institutional Jurisdiction," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46 (1995): 36-61, and Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3d ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 194-207.

²³⁶ Roland Bainton, "The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century," *Church History* 1 (1932): 67. See also Bainton, "Religious Liberty and the Parable of the Tares," *Collected Papers in Church History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 1:95-121, where he reiterated the essential argument of his earlier article.

²³⁷ For example, see G.R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 152, who writes: "Toleration is largely a creation of the seventeenth century, although there is a remarkable early tract by Sebastian Castellio written 1554."

biographer entitled the chapter on Erasmian toleration simply as “The Parable of the Tares.”²³⁸ The similarities between Hubmaier’s use of the passage in *On Heretics* (1524) and Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Matthew* are striking. Specifically, Hubmaier appropriated Erasmus’ explicit and hermeneutically unnecessary identification of the servants of the parable with inquisitors and embraced his absolute toleration of heretics. Although Erasmus’ subsequent statements on the parable negated the unconditional nature of that toleration, they appeared only after Hubmaier had formulated his view of heretics. The interpretation adopted by Erasmus and Hubmaier was known in the exegetical tradition, specifically in Jerome and Chrysostom. Luther interpreted the parable of the tares as an argument for toleration, but only after Hubmaier had written *On Heretics*. Since no other early contemporary commentators advocated toleration based on the parable of the tares, Hubmaier’s attitude toward heretics can and should be attributed to Erasmian influence.

The Exegetical Tradition and the Parable of the Tares

Since pre-Constantinian Christians did not have any political influence and often were themselves persecuted, for them the question of coercing heretics was moot. Yet from the fourth to the sixteenth century, eliminating heretics with the state’s power was a very real possibility, and periodically interpreters had to address one simple question arising from the parable: “What should be done

²³⁸ See James D. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 163.

with the tares?" Essentially, Augustine, Jerome, and Chrysostom produced three interpretations of the passage that informed the work of later exegetes. Augustine's interpretation arose from the multifarious theological, pastoral, and political milieu of early fifth-century North Africa. According to Peter Brown, Augustine's attitude toward religious coercion was highly complex and did not depend upon the interpretation of one New Testament text, such as Luke 14:23, but largely grew out of an assimilation of precedent-setting Old Testament passages requiring austere measures against idolaters.²³⁹ Augustine's viewpoint derived from his opposition to Manichean dualism, his conflict with the schismatic Donatists, and his generation's new-found belief in the use of imperial power to support the Church.²⁴⁰ Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the tares pointed in two directions. On the one hand, he could cite the text against his schismatic opponents, such as the Donatists, as an argument for remaining within a Church that doubtlessly contained bad Christians, that is, tares. On the other hand, Augustine could also call for the expulsion of immoral Christians from the Church in certain circumstances, based on the parable. Jesus' command to "let them grow together" only applied in certain situations and not when "the wheat is firmly established, that is, when the offense is public and universally

²³⁹ Luke 14:23, with its reference to compelling guests to attend a banquet (*compelle intrare*), was used as justification for coercing the Donatists. Epistle 93 (PNF I:394, 395).

²⁴⁰ Peter Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude Toward Religious Coercion," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964): 107-116; See also W.H.C Frend, *The Donatist Church: a Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; reprint, 1972), 227-243.

condemned, bereft of defenders or at least of any who would secede.” In that case, “then the severity of discipline must not sleep.”²⁴¹ The point is that Christ’s command for tolerating tares was only applicable in cases where uprooting them would result in significant damage to good Christians. Augustine’s interpretation was set in the context of moral offenses and not heresy. His advocacy of imperial force against the Donatists, however, and his attenuation of the tolerant impulse of the parable of the tares enabled later theologians to take his interpretational principles and apply them directly to the issue of persecuting heretics. The Augustinian tradition of interpreting the passage, then, only demanded tolerance of heretics when their destruction would do more harm than good.

Jerome’s interpretation of the parable in his *Commentary on Matthew* was more tolerant, particularly since he explicitly distinguished between heretics and bad Christians. The parable of the tares does not apply to the latter, who must be expelled from the Church, but it does apply to the former, who are allowed to remain. Jerome’s reasoning is simply that rash punishment of heretics was imprudent because with time and instruction today’s heretic could be tomorrow’s defender of orthodoxy. He adds that heretical belief is often difficult to discern and that God alone could fairly judge unclear cases of heresy: “The Lord warns us, therefore, against carrying out a sentence quickly, when the case is ambiguous; but let us reserve the final decision to God the judge so that when

²⁴¹ Cited in Bainton, “Parable of the Tares,” 70.

the day of judgment comes, he might cast out from the company of the saints, not a suspected criminal, but one that it clearly guilty.”²⁴² The importance of Jerome’s interpretation lies in the fact that although it strongly leans toward moderation regarding heretics, his opposition to *quick* judgments in *ambiguous* cases attenuated that toleration and created a loophole that potentially allowed for persecuting heretics, albeit only with due process. If the heresy is unmistakable and prosecuted with patience, Jerome’s interpretation might imply heretics could be uprooted.²⁴³ That is not to say that Jerome himself advocated persecution of heretics even under these circumstances,²⁴⁴ but later theologians inclined toward religious coercion would not find in Jerome an absolute prohibition for the death penalty for heretics, but an exhortation to prudence and patience.

Chrysostom’s interpretation of the parable broached the issue of the death penalty for heretics, a punishment he explicitly opposed. He comments: “He [Christ] did not therefore forbid our checking heretics, and stopping their mouths, and taking away their freedom of speech, and breaking up their assemblies and

²⁴² CCSL 77: 112: “Praemonet ergo Dominus ne ubi quid ambiguum est cito sententiam proferamus, sed Deo iudici terminum reservemus ut, cum dies iudicii venerit, ille non suspicionem criminis sed manifestum reatum de sanctorum coetu eiciat.”

²⁴³Bainton, “Parable of the Tares,” 72.

²⁴⁴ Jerome would have agreed with the majority of Christians who a few years earlier in 383 were outraged at the anomalous execution of Priscillian in Gaul, who had been accused of Manicheism. The accusing clergy who advocated the death penalty were themselves excommunicated. See R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 12-13.

confederacies, but our killing and slaying them.”²⁴⁵ The Greek Father directly addressed a sensitive issue for the late fourth century Church: what should one do with heretics and pagans in light of the newly formed alliance between Church and state? He raised this question while expounding the parable of the tares and concluded that the text rendered the killing of heretics an option irreconcilable with Christ’s meaning. The parable did not, however, prohibit the legal and physical harassment of heretics, and this was the precise policy adopted by Theodosius shortly after becoming emperor in 379.²⁴⁶ Thus Chrysostom affirmed the Theodosian initiatives against heretics while concurrently upholding what appeared to be the tolerant intention of the parable. His support for the non-lethal suppression of heretics indicates he did not maintain an absolute view of religious freedom, but he did condemn the killing of heretics in absolute terms.

Early medieval exegetes generally repeated the tolerant interpretations of the Church Fathers, but in the late eleventh century heresies increasingly began to threaten the stability of the Church in the West, and sporadic executions ensued. By the thirteenth century, the idea that drastic measures were necessary to stem the rising tide of heresy resulted in the demand to treat heresy as a capital crime. As indicated by Aquinas’ collection of patristic authorities on the text, by that century a consensus had emerged that essentially ignored the

²⁴⁵ *Homily 46* (PNF 10: 288-89).

²⁴⁶ Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 369-70. For a full discussion of Theodosius’ programme against heresy, see Steven Williams and Gerard Friell, *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 47-60, 119-133.

tolerant interpretations of Jerome and Chrysostom.²⁴⁷ On the eve of the Reformation, the accepted interpretation of the parable was that it presented no real barrier to killing heretics. Nicholas of Lyra's remarks succinctly illustrate the point:

From this it is clear that the Lord did not want heretics to be permitted to live absolutely, but only in cases when they can not be separated from the faithful without danger to the faithful. And this occurs for two reasons: First, when they are not clearly recognized nor clearly distinguished from the faithful, and second, when they have so many defenders that to proceed against them, a greater danger to the Church is likely to be feared, that is, as in schism or the murder of the faithful by the supporters of the heretics. In that case, then, they should be tolerated to avoid greater danger. But, where those dangers do not arise, they should be separated from the Church and handed over to secular justice, so that they might be eliminated by death, lest through them the whole body of the Church be corrupted.²⁴⁸

Lyra's comment is important because it accurately represents all the salient features of the late medieval interpretation: difficulty in discernment, avoiding a greater harm to the wheat, and insistence that Christ's words were not absolute. Lyra provides a clear point of departure for an analysis of Erasmus' interpretation of the parable in the *Paraphrase on Matthew*.

²⁴⁷ Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 14-40, 99-114; Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 494-502, 508-11.

²⁴⁸ *NdL Matt. 13:29*. "Ex quo patet, qua dominus non vult hereticos permitti vivere absolute, sed in casu tantum si quando non possunt separari ab fidelibus sine periculo fidelium: Et hoc contingit duplici causa. Una, quando non bene cognoscuntur, nec bene distinguuntur ab fidelibus. Alia quando habent tantos defensores, quod si contra eos procedatur, maius periculum in ecclesia probabiliter timetur, ut schismatis vel interfectionis fidelium ab fautoribus hereticorum: tunc enim permittendi sunt propter maius periculum evitandum: ubi autem non occurrerunt ista pericula, sunt separandi ab ecclesia & iusticiae seculari relinquendi, ut exterminentur per mortem, ne per eos totum corpus ecclesiae corrumpatur."

Erasmus and the Parable of the Tares

Erasmus' interpretation, in effect, turned the medieval interpretation of the passage on its head and rejected it as both unnatural and unfaithful to Christ's intentions. Medieval exegetes were concerned mainly with the welfare of the wheat and advocated killing heretics to protect good Christians, but Erasmus was solicitous for both the wheat *and* tares who could be converted with teaching. Medieval exegetes argued that the Church militant ought to struggle against heresy with lethal force, but Erasmus left judgment to God alone. While the medieval interpretation allowed for toleration only in certain circumstances to avoid a greater evil, Erasmus' interpretation unequivocally rejected the killing of heretics. Essentially, Erasmus prefers the older, patristic, reading of Jerome and Chrysostom to that of his immediate exegetical predecessors.

Although several scholars have noted the importance of the parable of the tares for Erasmus' attitude toward religious tolerance,²⁴⁹ his interpretation of the passage has not been examined in any great detail. Its features appear in two sections of the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, the prefatory material, based on Matthew 13:24, and the considerable explication of Matthew 13:40-42. To begin,

²⁴⁹ Bainton, "The Parable of the Tares," 82-85; Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, trans. T.L. Westow (New York: Associated Press, 1960), 1:122-123; Heinz Oelrich, "Zum Toleranzbegriff des späten Erasmus von Rotterdam," in *Festgabe für Ernst Walter Zeeden*, ed. Horst Rabe, Hansgeorg Molitor, and Hans-Christoph Rublack (Münster: Aschendorff, 1976): 249-251; Manfred Hoffmann, "Erasmus and Religious Toleration," *ERSY* 2 (1981): 106; Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 177-178; Tracy, *Erasmus*, 163-174; Istvan Pieter Bejczy, "Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997): 376-378.

Erasmus describes the parable as a story designed to warn of a plague that threatened the health of the Christian Church: a premature separation of the wheat (orthodox) from the tares (heretics). Translating agrarian metaphors into theological categories, Erasmus completes the introduction by explicitly describing the pestilential activity as the work of Satan through various agents:

That plague is when Satan is not able to smother Gospel teaching with dull and tedious ideas, with the disturbances of persecutions, nor with concern for wealth, honor, and similar things by which human life is distracted, he tries to overwhelm the seed of heavenly teaching through false apostles, impious bishops, and heretics, who pervert heavenly doctrine according to their own evil desires with deceitful interpretation and mixing in truths with falsehoods, sincere things with corruptions.²⁵⁰

Erasmus indicates that Satan attempts to destroy God's "field" in two primary ways, the first of which is by promoting dissension, persecution, and worldliness among the Christian community. Satan's second tactic is to utilize human agents disguised as emissaries of God who contaminate the doctrine of the Church from within. An unholy trinity of "false apostles, impious bishops, and heretics" spreads the bad seed and itself constitutes the tares of the field. Erasmus defines a heretic as one who distorts Scripture for his own purposes, a traditional charge leveled against false teachers as early as the New

²⁵⁰LB 7: 79D: "Ea pestis est, cum Satanas, qui nec volaticis & oscitantibus cogitationibus, nec persecutionum tumultibus, nec curis opum, honorum, similibusque rerum, quibus humana vita distinetur, potuit obruere semen Evangelicae doctrinae, per Pseudapostolos, ac impios Episcopos, Haereticosque, coelestem doctrinam ad suas cupiditates malas, interpretatione subdola detorquentes, ac vera falsis, sincera vitiosis admiscentes, conatur inficere."

Testament.²⁵¹ Erasmus identified the misuse of Scripture as a primary means by which Satan attempted to corrupt the Church. He believed heretics usually adhere to certain tenets of orthodoxy, thus disguising the falsehood of their doctrine. In short, Erasmus' introduction to the parable sounds an ominous and traditional warning to the Church that Satan attempts to destroy it through human agents who distort Scripture and mix in truth with falsehood.

Erasmus' paraphrase on Jesus' explanation of the parable of the tares included several departures from the exegetical tradition. Generally, the imprecise nature of parables gave exegetes a wide berth for exposition of the text, but Matthew 13:24-30 is one of the only passages in the Gospels where Jesus explained point by point his intended meaning, thereby limiting the range of interpretational possibilities. For most of the pericope, Erasmus stays close to the text of Matthew. The man sowing good seed is the "heavenly Father;" the field is the world, "not only Judea;" the wheat consists of those born of the good seed; the tares are those born of the bad seed; the enemy who sowed the bad seed represents the devil. Erasmus explains that the wheat are "those who by instruction in the Gospel show themselves worthy of the kingdom of heaven, responding in their life and deeds to their profession" and conversely that "those

²⁵¹ 2 Peter 3:15-16 RSV: "So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."

who had been mixed in from bad seed are the evil tares, the perverse who do not sincerely profess the Gospel teaching.”²⁵²

The significant element of Erasmus’ identification of the wheat and the tares is evident when compared with Jerome’s interpretation. In the Church Father’s view, toleration of heretics is prudent since often it is hard to tell the difference between their beliefs and that of the orthodox. Erasmus, however, suggests there is little difficulty in discerning both the wheat and the tares, for just as the probity of the stalks of wheat is demonstrable through their confession of faith, example, and positive response to Gospel teaching, so also is the hypocrisy of the tares evident through their rejection of Gospel teaching. Erasmus’ belief that Jesus taught that the wheat and tares were readily distinguishable eliminated an important objection to the tolerant implications of the parable. For, if Jesus envisioned no trouble in distinguishing wheat and tares and *then* proceeded to advocate leaving them alone, this solidified the absolute nature of his teaching. For Erasmus, the passage was not a warning against hastily judging ambiguous cases of heresy but a call to allow the coexistence of manifest heretics with the faithful Christians

Erasmus’ great departure from the text of Matthew and the supreme indicator of his chief interest appears in his paraphrase on verses 39-40.

According to Matthew, Jesus explicitly provides the identity of only the enemy

²⁵²LB 7: 80D: “sunt ii, qui ex institutione Evangelica sese dignos praebent regno caelorum, professioni suae vita factisque respondententes. His admixta ex malo semine, mala zizania, sunt improbi, qui non sincere profitentur Evangelicam doctrinam.”

(the devil), the harvest (end of the world), and the harvesters (angels), but he ignores the servants of the master. Erasmus' paraphrase, however, not only identifies the servants, but singles them out for chastisement:

The servants who want to collect the tares before it is time are those who suppose that false apostles and arch-heretics ought to be uprooted out of [our] midst by sword and death, when the paterfamilias does not want them to be killed, but to be tolerated, if by chance, they might recover their senses, and be turned from tares into wheat.²⁵³

Erasmus' revision of the text of Matthew at this point is the most provocative element of his paraphrase on the parable. By designating the servants as those intent on killing religious deviants, either false prophets or heretics, it is clear he sought to undermine heretic hunting. He set himself directly in opposition to the commonly accepted practice of burning heretics, and according to one scholar, with this paraphrase his "critique of the inquisition is scathing."²⁵⁴ In one complex sentence, Erasmus swept away the rationale of those who earnestly attempted to be "servants" of the master, but in reality acted in direct opposition to his will. Instead of providing a necessary, albeit unfortunate, service to the Church, the inquisitors and their supporters found themselves described in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* as the overly zealous and misguided servants who usurped the prerogative of the angelic harvesters at the

²⁵³LB 7: 80E: "Servi qui volunt ante tempus colligere zizania, sunt ii, qui Pseudapostolos & Haeresiarchas gladiis ac mortibus existimant e medio tollendos, cum paterfamilias nolit eos existinguere, sed tolerari, si forte resipiscant, & e zizaniis vertantur in triticum."

²⁵⁴Oelrich, "Zum Toleranzbegriff des späten Erasmus von Rotterdam," 251.

end of time. Erasmus' view contradicted the consensus of the late medieval Church, which understood the execution of heretics as so vital to its existence that opposition to the policy was itself considered heretical; the Church believed it had both the right and the obligation to uproot and exterminate heretics for its own preservation and the salvation of souls.²⁵⁵ Erasmus disagreed.

Erasmus' interpretation of the parable is significant as well because it portrayed the primary objective of Christ in the parable as the conversion of the tares. While most interpreters saw Jesus' main fear as the unwitting destruction of the good wheat, Erasmus' interpretation emphasized the hope that tares could with time become wheat; therefore Christ did not want them destroyed. Erasmus agreed with Jerome that today's tare is tomorrow's wheat and consequently, through his paraphrase, he underscored toleration. But Erasmus revealed another reason for advising toleration in this context by playing on the verbs *tolerare* and *tollere*. He comments: "In the meantime, therefore, the mingling of the bad with the good must be permitted, since they are tolerated with less damage than if they are torn up."²⁵⁶ Here Erasman toleration partially resonated with the medieval argument that in certain cases, such as with Jews and prostitutes, toleration of a lesser evil was morally necessary.²⁵⁷ Yet Erasmus

²⁵⁵ See Lea, *Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, 1:220-226 and Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 99-114, for a discussion of the Church's heightened defensiveness of its policy of inquisition in the late Middle Ages.

²⁵⁶ LB 7: 80F: "Interim igitur mali bonis admixti ferendi sunt, quando minore pernicie tolerantur, quam tollerentur."

²⁵⁷ See Bejczy, "Tolerantia," 365-384, esp. 370-376.

surpasses accepted opinion by requiring the toleration of heretics who, in the view of all medieval theorists, could not be tolerated under normal circumstances. Erasmus is more worried about the damage done to the Church by killing heretics than the harm inflicted upon it by enduring them. For him, toleration not only would lead to the conversion of many heretics but also would reduce the greater harm to Christian society caused by the inquisition.

Additionally, in his paraphrase Erasmus gave full attention to the eschatological weight of the parable. Toleration was advisable and rational when viewed in light of God's final judgment of the heretics at the time of harvest. When unconverted heretics are allowed to live by Christian authorities, justice is not thwarted, only delayed: "If they do not come to their senses, they are set aside for their Judge, to whom they will eventually pay the penalty."²⁵⁸ Erasmus' interpretation is even more intriguing because he reserved solely to God the task of punishing heretics, even while conceding they would in fact harm the good wheat. Toward the end of the parable (v. 42) he explicitly acknowledged that fact, but found solace in a sobering vision of heretics separated from the Church and languishing in eternal torment. Christ, the "Son of man and judge of all,"

will gather together all of those individuals who while living among the virtuous preferred to be irksome rather than become better through contact with them, and he will surrender them to the fire of hell. There, for momentary and false pleasures, they will be afflicted with unending punishments, having been cleared away

²⁵⁸LB 7: 80E: "Quod si non respiscant, serventur suo Judici, cui poenas dabunt aliquando."

from the threshing floor of the Church and cast into the abyss of hell, that is, into the kingdom of their father, where from the wretched he exacts weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, since repentance is already too late and useless.²⁵⁹

While the reference to hell derives from Matthew, interpreters had not portrayed its gruesome reality so as to promote toleration, but its converse. For Erasmus, eternal punishment was clear evidence of the need to leave the ultimate judgment of heretics to God who would punish them with ferocity unmatched by the human executioner. As he indicated in another context, the parable means that until judgment day God tolerates an “evangelical crop mingled with tares and wheat,” and that perfect peace in the Church only comes at the end of time.²⁶⁰

A final important aspect of Erasmus’ interpretation is its complete lack of equivocation on the question of tolerating heretics. Most scholars agree that when he wrote that “the master does not want them to be killed, but to be tolerated,” Erasmus unambiguously denied the right of the Church, and secular magistrates acting on its behalf, to execute heretics.²⁶¹ Although Jerome’s

²⁵⁹LB 7: 80F - 81A: “Sed quicumque viventes inter bonos malverint illis esse molesti, quam eorum consuetudine fieri meliores, separatos ab aliis congregabit, ac tradet illos incendio gehennae. Ibi pro momentaneis falsisque voluptatibus supplicii nunquam finiendis afficientur, submoti ex area Ecclesiae, & coniecti in specum tartareum, hoc est, in regnum patris sui: ubi sera jam & inutilis poenitentia fletum, ejulatum, ac dentium stridorem extorquebit a miseris.”

²⁶⁰ *Commentarius in Psalmum II* (1522), ASD V-2: 145.

²⁶¹ See Bainton, “Parable of the Tares,” 82-83, and Oelrich, “Zum Toleranzbegriff des späten Erasmus von Rotterdam,” 249; See also, Bejczy, “*Tolerantia*,” 376-377, who points out that Erasmus’ interpretation of the parable of the tares “can be qualified as genuinely tolerant, and indeed as a departure from medieval rigidity.”

tolerant interpretation arguably contains elements of equivocation, Erasmus' paraphrase completely rules out lethal punishment of heretics because Jesus had "clearly and unmistakably" commanded that they not be killed.²⁶² Erasmus' interpretation is straightforward and uninterested in the nuances of meaning and the theological consequences of toleration that occupied most other interpreters. For example, he does not consider whether Jesus cared more for the wheat or the tares, whether one could uproot tares when the damage was minimal to the wheat, or whether his interpretation contradicted the Pauline injunction for excommunication (1 Cor. 5:1-13). His interpretation unmistakably called for absolute toleration because Christ did not want heretics destroyed until the harvest. The contradiction between Erasmus' understanding of the parable and the Church's longstanding practice of executing intransigent heretics was evident to his contemporaries. Several critics, such as Noël Béda, the Paris Faculty of Theology, and a group of Spanish monks, cited his paraphrase on Matthew 13:24-30 as evidence of unorthodox convictions.²⁶³

Unquestionably, Erasmus' treatment of the parable of the tares in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* called for complete toleration of heretics. Yet, as important as that text is, if one consults it alone, Erasmus' view of the treatment

²⁶²See Oelrich, "Zum Toleranzbegriff des späten Erasmus von Rotterdam," 249, who writes: "Nach Erasmus – und das ist das Entscheidende für ihn - verbietet Jesus ganz deutlich und unmissverständlich, das Unkraut auszureissen und zu verbrennen, d.h. Häretiker zu töten"

²⁶³ *Supputatio Errorum N. Beddae* (1527), LB 9: 580C – 583F; *Declarationes ad Censuras Facultatis Theologiae Parisiensis* (1532), LB 9: 904F- 906D; *Adversus Monachos Quosdam Hispanos* (1529), LB 9: 1054B-1060F.

of heretics is incomplete. Subsequent to the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, the humanist addressed the issue of heretics and modified elements of his interpretation of the parable that diluted its absolute thrust. In an insightful study, István Bejczy concluded that “Erasmus’s overall position with regard to heresy, then, was rather traditional,” and was fairly consistent with medieval theories of tolerance. While he is effective at elucidating the medieval context of Erasmus’ thought on toleration, Bejczy treats the paraphrase on the parable of the tares as an exception to Erasmus’ “medieval viewpoint,” when in fact it was the central biblical text for his understanding of toleration. The treatises Bejczy cites most frequently, such as the rejoinders to Bédac and the Paris theologians, were mainly written in *response* to their criticisms of the interpretation of the parable in the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. Bejczy’s conclusion that “Erasmus was usually no less intransigent than medieval theologians”²⁶⁴ rests largely on Erasmus’ statement in the *Life of Jerome* that “in the matter of heresy tolerance is a wrong, not a virtue.” Yet in that passage Erasmus was not referring to the Church’s duty to advocate the killing of heretics, but to the responsibility of a scholar to respond vigorously to accusations of heresy, as Jerome did against Rufinus.²⁶⁵ Erasmus’ clarifications added a nuance to his view of heretics that removed absolute tolerance as a viable option; but to contend his convictions were ultimately no different than his medieval predecessors is untenable.

²⁶⁴ Bejczy, “*Tolerantia*,” 376-378, quote on pg. 377.

²⁶⁵ *CWE* 61: 44.

A précis of Erasmus' response to critics on the topic of toleration in the 1520s appears in *Contra Pseudevangelicos* (1530), written in reply to a tract by Gerard Geldenhouwer. The prominent humanist-turned-Lutheran recently had written a treatise in which he cited Erasmus approvingly as an advocate of tolerating heretics. Due to the rapid spread of Anabaptism since 1525, the charge was especially disconcerting to Erasmus,²⁶⁶ and his response was a denial of Geldenhouwer's claims. Setting the record straight, Erasmus maintained that his views had never changed and that anyone who had read his responses to previous critics would not have thought otherwise. His main point is simply that a strict distinction ought to be made between heresy and rejection of scholastic speculation, and between the role of clerics and princes in the punishment of heretics. Churchmen should be ready to heal, not destroy, as demonstrated by Christ, the Apostles, and the Church Fathers, who, contrary to his contemporaries, interceded with secular princes to save the lives of condemned heretics. Concerning the parable of the tares, he comments:

I admit that the prince "does not bear the sword in vain,"(Rom. 13:1) but certainly it is for theologians and bishops to teach, to persuade, to heal: to teach the erring, to persuade the defiant, to heal the deceived. And what the parable of the Lord advises in the matter of not uprooting the tares applies either to the very origins of the early Church, or to the apostolic men, who had received no

²⁶⁶ Cornelis Augustijn, introduction to *Contra Pseudevangelicos* ASD IX-1:265-281, esp. 267-274. For Geldenhouwer's view on toleration see, Cornelis Augustijn, "Gerard Geldenhouwer und die religiöse Toleranz," *ARG* 69 (1978): 132-156.

sword other than the sword of the Gospel, “which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).²⁶⁷

What is clear from this quote is that Erasmus primarily intended in his paraphrase to criticize Church officials who did not adhere to their primary duties. Invoking the example of the apostles, who occupied themselves with spiritual matters, Erasmus calls for theologians and bishops “to teach, to persuade, to heal.” Erasmus implies that if the inquisitors spent the same amount of time teaching the people as they did pursuing heretics, they would have more success in destroying heresy. What is not clear is the meaning of his reference to the early Church. On the face of it, Erasmus seems to confine the prohibition against killing heretics to a time when it had no political power. The logical extension would be that with the Constantinian shift and the change in the Church’s relationship to secular power, Jesus’ warning against destroying heretics before judgment day had become irrelevant. The alliance between Church and state, a topic Erasmus nowhere fully discussed,²⁶⁸ would have then affected the meaning and application of the parable. But that explanation is unlikely because it was this very interpretation of the parable that Erasmus had explicitly rejected in an earlier defense of his paraphrase.

²⁶⁷ ASD IX-1: 287-288: “Princeps ‘non sine causa gladium portat,’ fateor, at certe theologorum et episcoporum est docere, arguere, mederi: docere errantes, arguere feroces, mederi deceptis. Et quod Domini parabola admonuit de non tollendis zizaniis, vel ad illa rudis ecclesiae primordia vel ad apostolicos viros pertinet, quibus non est traditus gladius nisi gladius evangelicus ‘quod est verbum Dei’”.

²⁶⁸ James M. Estes, “*Officium principis christiani*: Erasmus and the Origins of the Protestant State Church,” *ARG* 83 (1992): 50.

The Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris had faulted the humanist essentially for not accepting the medieval interpretation, that is, that Jesus' parable only concerned the early Church and that its prohibition against killing heretics was only germane in cases when their destruction would hurt good Christians. Since the Paris theologians also criticized him for arrogantly offering novel interpretations of Scripture in the persona of Christ and the Apostles, Erasmus responded by saying his paraphrase had remained very faithful to the text. If he had followed the medieval interpretation, clearly he would have been altering Christ's meaning, particularly regarding the application of the text only to the period of the early Church. Christ specifically *had* placed a temporal end to the toleration of the tares, but it was the *consummatio seculi*, not the fourth century.²⁶⁹ In *Contra Pseudevangelicos*, therefore, Erasmus probably referred to the parable as pertaining "either to the very origins of the early Church, or to the apostolic men," because he considered both interpretations as viable possibilities. In light of his previous statements on that interpretation, however, his strong preference was probably that the clergy in every epoch ought to follow the example of the early Church by teaching heretics, but not killing them.

²⁶⁹ *Declarationes Ad Censuras Facultatis Theologiae Parisiensis* LB 9: 905A – 905F: "Cuiusmodi Paraphrastes fuissem, si cum Christus dicat zizaniā relinquendam usque ad messem, hoc est, ipso interprete, usque ad consummationem seculi, ego vel sub Christi, vel sub Evangelistae persona exposuissem, usque ad annos quadringentos, cum iam auctis Ecclesiae rebus tutum erit illos occidere. Dominus ipse praescrisit tempus, usque ad consummationem seculi."

Erasmus rejected the clergy's advocacy of killing heretics, but he accepted the right of magistrates to crush heresy that expressed itself in public disorder. James Estes has convincingly argued that Erasmus viewed the ideal relationship between Church and state as "so intimate that the distinction between the priest and prince, church and state, sacred and profane all but disappears." Both prince and priest serve the common good, and Erasmus did not attribute to the former a secular role that was autonomous from the realm of Christian piety, as did Luther. Although the two fulfill different functions, they do not conflict with one another; both have the common goal of promoting public and private tranquility and, according to Estes, this cooperative and close relationship between Church and state amounted to the absorption of the former into the latter.²⁷⁰ Erasmus argued against the clergy's involvement in killing heretics, but that does not mean he thought the secular magistrate could not act against them in certain situations:

Again, it is heresy to hold fast to an obvious blasphemy, to deny, for example, Christ's divine nature, or to claim that the Scriptures lie; it is heresy by means of witchcraft and through tumult and sedition to strive for wealth, political power, and the disorder of human affairs. Indeed, in this situation will we bind the sword to the prince? Although one may not kill heretics, certainly it is first lawful and then necessary for the protection of the state to kill blasphemers and rebels. Therefore, just as they sin who drag men to the fire for any kind of error, so too do they sin who think that the secular magistrate does not have the right to kill any heretics.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Estes, "*Officium principis christiani*," 61-62.

²⁷¹ ASD IX-1: 288: "Rursus est haeresis quae manifestam habet blasphemiam, veluti quae Christo detrahit naturam divinam, quae divinos libros insimulat mendacii, est quae

Erasmus defines heresy first as erroneous beliefs about essential truths, such as the divinity of Christ and biblical inspiration, but then, curiously he expands it to include activity most commonly associated with political subversion rather than theological error. Erasmus offers a definition of heresy that conflates two categories of deviant behavior and promotes a response to it that inescapably suggests a contradiction. On the one hand, he does not allow for the killing of heretics (*ut non liceat occidere haereticos*), but on the other hand he affirms that it is right to kill blasphemers and rebels (*certe blasphemos et seditiosos tum fas est*). Erasmus wants to hold onto tolerance for heretics without denying the magistrate the right to punish enemies of the state. In this sense, then the tolerance mandated by Erasmus' interpretation of the parable of the tares applies to the former, but not to the latter. A primary function of the state is the preservation of public peace, and when heresy converged with communal discord, Erasmus clearly states that princes were to punish it severely. He adds that dealing with thieves and pirates leniently would be a vice, not a virtue, since they threaten the public good.²⁷² By affirming the traditional role of the secular magistrate, Erasmus may have allayed fears that his interpretation would lead to a breakdown in law and order, but he did little,

maliciosis artibus, per tumultus ac seditiones tendit ad opes, ad regnum, ad rerum humanarum confusionem. An hic alligabimus principi gladium? Ut non liceat occidere haereticos, certe blasphemos et seditiosos tum fas est, tum ad tuendam rempublicam necessarium. Itaque ut peccant qui ob quemuis errorem pertrahunt homines ad ignem, ita peccant qui in nullos haereticos arbitrantur prophano magistratui ius esse occidendi.”

²⁷²ASD IX-1: 288-289.

however, to explain whether civil authority, as God's instrument, should kill heretics whose only crime was persisting in false beliefs.

Previously, in response to Noël Bédæ in the *Supputatio* (1527), Erasmus strongly implied there was a great difference between violent and non-violent heretics, and they should not be treated alike: "Neither did he [Augustine] disapprove if God stirred up the minds of princes to coerce those who disturb the tranquility of the Church. But who heard that orthodox bishops had incited kings to slaughter heretics who were nothing other than heretics?"²⁷³ The statement suggests the Church Fathers had not advocated the destruction of peaceful heretics and neither should contemporary churchmen, and that apparently was Erasmus' meaning in *Contra Pseudevangelicos*.²⁷⁴ Given Erasmus' view concerning the very close relationship between the Church and state, if he believed anyone had the right to kill peaceful heretics, he would certainly have granted it to the Christian magistrate. But he did not. Instead, he hints that non-violent heretics were to be left alone. Faith in the sixteenth century, however, was a very public matter and it was commonly held that deviant religious belief would ultimately express itself in public discord. Erasmus' distinction between heresy that results in violence and peaceful heresy, therefore, was largely a

²⁷³*Supputatio Errorum N. Beddæ* LB 9: 581A: "Nec damnat si Deus concitet animos Principum ad coercendos eos qui turbant Ecclesiae tranquillitatem. Sed quis unquam audivit orthodoxos Episcopos concitasse Reges ad trucidandos haereticos, qui nihil aliud essent quam haeretici?"

²⁷⁴See *Contra Pseudevangelicos* ASD IX-1: 288, where Erasmus complains of having to repeat himself what he had already made clear in the *Supputatio* on the definition of heresy.

distinction without a difference. Even then, from the available evidence it is probable that Erasmus believed secular princes, concerned solely for orthodoxy, had no theoretical right to execute heretics who neither were seditious and blasphemous nor disrupted the public peace.

Erasmus' explanations of his original paraphrase on Matthew 13:24-30 did little to elucidate his viewpoint, and one can agree with Bainton that his various responses comprised a "disconcerting combination of slashing and hedging."²⁷⁵ The only concrete thing to be said about Erasmus' subsequent statements on the parable is that his position of tolerating heretics was not as absolute as in the *Paraphrase on Matthew*. His views on tolerance involved a nuanced understanding of the different, yet complementary, functions of Church leaders and the secular princes, as well as a definition of heresy complicated by an association with violence and public disorder. Yet for the purpose of this study the humanist's later statements on the parable are relatively unimportant. By the time Erasmus moderated his position in response to his critics, Hubmaier had already penned his major treatise on the toleration of heretics. Erasmus' interpretation of the parable, with its absolute rejection of the death penalty for heretics, had already entered the stream of exegetical and interpretational possibilities for Hubmaier, who was already interpreting Scripture in light of Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament*. Consequently, the only Erasmanian interpretation of the parable of the tares known to him in 1524 was that of the

²⁷⁵ Bainton, "The Parable of the Tares," 83.

Paraphrase on Matthew, and its unmistakable emphasis was the absolute toleration of heretics.

Hubmaier and the Parable of the Tares

A comparison of Erasmus' and Hubmaier's interpretation of the parable of the tares reveals several important similarities that heighten the probability of Erasmian influence. Both viewed the passage as more concerned with the destruction of the tares than with the harm done to the wheat and emphasized the eschatological component of the text as a reason for toleration; both interpreted the master's servants as inquisitors and considered the parable as an absolute prohibition against killing heretics. The short treatise, *On Heretics and those who Burn Them*,²⁷⁶ was the earliest Reformation treatise devoted to toleration and the only place where Balthasar Hubmaier expounded the parable of the tares. The tract has received some scholarly attention,²⁷⁷ but no one has explored the possibility of Erasmian influence for Hubmaier's view of heretics.

²⁷⁶*Von Ketzern und ihren Verbrennern* (1524) (PY 58-66; HS 96-100). The treatise is abbreviated as *On Heretics*. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from Pipkin-Yoder (PY).

²⁷⁷W.R. Estep, "Von Ketzern und iren Verbrennern: A Sixteenth Century Tract on Religious Liberty," *MQR* 43 (1969): 271-282; Hans Schwarz, "Balthasar Hubmaier – Toleranz in einer intoleranten Zeit," in *Reformation und Reichsstadt: Protestantisches Leben in Regensburg*, ed. Hans Schwarz (Regensburg: Universitätsverlag, 1994), 89-99. *On Heretics* is discussed briefly in Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 1:205-207, and mentioned in Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake. Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 83, and in Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 3d ed., 343-344. The modern literature on the theme of Reformation tolerance generally ignores Hubmaier. Notice its conspicuous omission from the essays on toleration in Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner, eds., *Toleration and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Hubmaier wrote *On Heretics* in the context of a tense political standoff. In December 1523, a Habsburg commission arrived in Waldshut and charged him with violating the imperial mandate against the “Lutheran sect,” preaching a false Gospel, and claiming to speak for the imperial cities on the Rhine at the Zurich disputation in the fall of 1523. Although the Waldshut city council staunchly defended Hubmaier, in August 1524 he took refuge in the Benedictine Abbey of Schaffhausen inside the Swiss Confederation. Hubmaier appealed to the Schaffhausen city council three times in his own defense and there formulated clearly his conception of religious toleration built upon a sharp distinction between the secular and spiritual realms.²⁷⁸

On Heretics was published in Constance in September 1524 and dedicated to Antonin Pirata, Vicar General of the Dominican province of Upper Germany, who had initiated the accusations of heresy against Lutheran sympathizers in that city. Hubmaier had assembled scriptural texts on toleration “for the pleasure of Brother Antonin, Vicar at Constantz, the select sentinel without a trumpet,” a dedication that indicated his work would challenge a practice long associated with the Dominicans.²⁷⁹ In 1232, Pope Gregory IX offered the services of the Dominicans to the Archbishop of Tarragona for uprooting the Cathars, a precedent for subsequent attempts at crushing heresy.

²⁷⁸ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 124-41.

²⁷⁹ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 124-29. Quote from *On Heretics* (PY 59; HS 96). A disputation between Pirata and leading reformers was aborted in August 1524 because the Vicar was rumoured to be afraid of his opponents. The rumour explains Hubmaier’s sarcastic reference to Antonin as a “sentinel without a trumpet.”

Consequently, by the early sixteenth century, that religious order was inextricably associated with the inquisition.²⁸⁰ In the heart of the tract, Hubmaier returns to the theme, asserting: “The entire Dominican order...has fallen away from Gospel teaching even more miserably in that it is thus far only from that order that the heretical inquisitors have come.”²⁸¹ Hubmaier’s dedicatory gibe, therefore, was more than an attack on a faint-hearted Dominican friar, but signaled his intent to undermine the biblical basis of the inquisition.

Hubmaier’s treatise is concise, consisting of thirty-six short articles that erratically address three primary issues: the proper definition of a heretic, the appropriate Christian response to heretics, and the role of the state regarding heretics. Hubmaier’s first article offers a very broad and traditional definition: “Heretics are those who wantonly resist the Holy Scripture. The first of them was the devil, who spoke to Eve: ‘By no means will you die.’ Together with his followers.” Recalling the story of the fall of man, Hubmaier contends that the first sin resulted from the devil’s simple reversal of God’s word concerning the forbidden fruit; therefore, anyone who *inverts* the clear message of God is worthy of the designation “heretic.” The second article takes up a similar theme and expands the definition to include those medieval theologians who *misinterpret* Scripture: “Likewise are those persons heretics who blind the Scripture, and who exposit it otherwise than the Holy Spirit demands, such as [interpreting] ‘a wife’

²⁸⁰ Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 76, 129.

²⁸¹ *On Heretics* (PY 62-63; HS 98).

as a prebend, 'pasturing' as ruling, 'a stone' as the rock, 'church' as Rome, who proclaim this everywhere and force us to believe such nonsense."²⁸² Hubmaier's point is that deliberate misinterpretation of Scripture to justify one's practices is heretical, and his examples impugn scriptural manipulation in support of priestly celibacy, the Church's political power, and papal supremacy.

Another important element of Hubmaier's view of heretics involved their attitude toward correction. In one of the petitions to the Schaffhausen council, Hubmaier defined heretics as *obdurate* advocates of false belief:

If my teaching has been false and erroneous, I call and appeal to all Christian believers that they produce evidence of the evil and lead me again to the right path with the word of God and show me the real Jacob's ladder that I may together with them ascend to heaven on it. For I may be wrong, I am human, but a heretic I cannot be, because I am begging for instruction.²⁸³

Hubmaier sought correction of his supposed errors; therefore, he could not possibly be a heretic. Error was common to all humans at one level or another, but heresy involved error compounded by a desire to remain in it. Both Erasmus and Hubmaier repeated the traditional definition of a heretic traceable to the inquisitorial handbooks of the thirteenth century. These texts identify a heretic as one who, for example, errs "in the exposition of Sacred Scripture," "interprets Scripture differently from the sense of the Holy Spirit," and who

²⁸² *On Heretics* (PY 59-60, 62; HS 96, 98).

²⁸³ *The Third Appeal to the Honorable Council of Schaffhausen* (PY 45-46; HS 82-83).

“remain[s] obstinate in error.”²⁸⁴ Hubmaier uses the traditional definition of heresy but turns it on the medieval Church, arguing that by definition it had itself followed the path of the devil in inverting the word of God and lapsed into heresy. He explicitly labeled Dominican inquisitors as heretics because they disregarded Christ’s teaching about tolerating heretics.²⁸⁵

Hubmaier’s tract also addresses the proper approach to heresy, arguing the Church ought to defeat it through proactive scriptural instruction, persuasion, and prayer. In the third and fourth articles, Hubmaier writes: “Those who are such [heretics] should be overcome with holy instruction, not contentiously but gently, even though the Holy Scripture also includes wrath. But the wrath of Scripture is truly a spiritual flame and a loving zeal, which burns only with the Word of God.”²⁸⁶ Hubmaier also advocates a peaceful approach to heretics based on a realistic attitude to conversion. Pointing to the example of Christ, who did not come to “slaughter, kill, burn,” he contends that patient prayer was the greatest tool for converting heretics. For, “a Turk or a heretic cannot be overcome by our doing neither by sword nor by fire, but alone with patience and supplication, whereby we patiently await divine judgment.”²⁸⁷ The central argument of *On Heretics* is that heretics should never be executed, a point repeated frequently in the tract, even in the concluding line: “Now it appears to

²⁸⁴ Peters, *Inquisition*, 62-63.

²⁸⁵ *On Heretics* (PY 62; HS 98).

²⁸⁶ *On Heretics* (PY 60; HS 96).

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, (PY 62; HS 98).

anyone, even to a blind person, that the law for the burning of heretics is an invention of the devil."²⁸⁸ Beyond teaching, persuasion, and prayer the Church has no divine mandate or right to use lethal coercion against heretics.

On Heretics addresses the critical distinction between the differing responsibilities of Church and state in punishing heretics. Hubmaier repudiates the idea that the Church retained its spiritual purity by handing over heretics to the state for punishment. With one pithy remark, he discards centuries of finely tuned distinctions between the roles of both institutions in the suppression of heresy: "Nor is it an excuse for them (as they babble) that they turn the godless over to the secular authority, for whoever in this way turns someone over is even more guilty of sin. John 19:11."²⁸⁹ Hubmaier refers to the procedure whereby the inquisitors handed over intransigent heretics to the secular magistrates for punishment, a process often invested with symbolic actions emphasizing the distinction between the spiritual and temporal offices. Sometimes the rituals included dramatized pleas for mercy by the clergy, but these were widely understood as formalities.²⁹⁰ Hubmaier rejects the idea that giving heretics over to secular authorities exculpated inquisitors from guilt by referring to the trial of Christ. Jesus indicated that Pilate's culpability paled in comparison to the religious authorities who delivered him to the state; therefore, Hubmaier equates

²⁸⁸ *On Heretics* (PY 66; HS 100).

²⁸⁹ *On Heretics* (PY 63; HS 98). The scriptural reference is part of Hubmaier's text.

²⁹⁰ Lea, *Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, 1:534-37.

the inquisitor's involvement in punishing heretics to the betrayal of Christ by Judas and the Jewish leadership. Hubmaier's point is very clear: although the secular magistrate ignites the fire, the Church was responsible for the death of heretics and this was forbidden by Christ.

In the process of differentiating between the roles of the Church and the state, Hubmaier introduced a sharp distinction between two categories of religious deviants, the godless and the evildoers. The former refers to various kinds of unbelievers, including atheists, heretics, and Turks, whom Christians oppose only through spiritual means.²⁹¹ Employing Pauline imagery, Hubmaier argues: "Every Christian has a sword against the godless, namely the Word of God (Eph. 6:17), but not a sword against the evildoers."²⁹² Hubmaier urges active struggle against false religious ideas, but the field upon which Christians wage that battle is confined to the realm of scriptural persuasion. The state has no place in killing the godless. Hubmaier nevertheless upholds the right of the state to judge and execute evildoers. He affirms: "It is fitting that secular authority puts to death the wicked (Rom. 13:4) who cause bodily harm to the defenseless."²⁹³ Citing the classic New Testament verse on secular power,

²⁹¹ Estep, "Von Ketzer," 280, renders *gotsfeind* as "atheist," a translation preferable to "enemy of God" (fn. i.e. Satan) in Pipken-Yoder. The context of Article 22 concerns the contrast between the evildoer, punishable by secular authority and the "atheist," who is harmless in the realm in which the state has responsibility.

²⁹² *On Heretics* (PY 63; HS 98). Ephesians 6:17 (RSV): "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

²⁹³ *On Heretics* (PY 63; HS 98).

Hubmaier upholds the state's duty to punish physical but not spiritual crimes. Just as the Church has no right to punish evildoers, the state has no responsibility or right to punish the godless. The Church, with its peculiar methods and punishments, disciplines them because their crime is ultimately against God and should not be left to the power of the sword. Hubmaier's dichotomy between the godless and evildoers corresponds roughly with Erasmus' distinction between simple heretics and heretics involved in public discord. Although he fails to address the issue explicitly, Hubmaier's position logically could include the death penalty for heretics whose false ideas led them into rebellion. In his system, the state could rightly punish them as evildoers, but not as heretics.

On Heretics provides a glimpse of Hubmaier's nascent concept of the state, fully expressed later in *On the Sword* (1527).²⁹⁴ While Hubmaier was more tolerant than his contemporaries, his stark distinction between Church and state and his opposition to killing heretics did not amount to an absolute understanding of religious freedom. William Estep claimed that for Hubmaier, matters of faith were "of no concern to the state" and that he advocated the "neutrality of the state in religious matters."²⁹⁵ Hubmaier, however, does not call for the state's indifference toward matters of faith; his comments in *On Heretics* specifically refer to the death penalty for heretics and he does not address the positive role

²⁹⁴ Schwarz, "Balthasar Hubmaier – Toleranz in einer intoleranten Zeit," 95

²⁹⁵ Estep, "Von Ketzer," 281.

of the state in Christian society. In fact, his appeal to the Schaffhausen city council itself evinces his assumption that the secular power had some role in the reform of the Church. His reforming programme in Waldshut and Nicolsburg suggest that he believed the state could actively contribute to the reform of the Church along the lines of Zwingli.²⁹⁶ Opposition to the state's execution of heretics was a major departure from accepted practice, but it did not resemble the modern West's view of religious liberty and the state's non-involvement in religious affairs.

Central to Hubmaier's argument against killing heretics was the parable of the tares. His justification for toleration did not stem from a concern for freedom of conscience, or from a commitment to religious pluralism, but from a conviction that executing heretics disregarded the explicit command of Jesus. Hanz Schwarz confirms this point:

The most important idea of the thirty-six articles of this tract is that heretics should be won over by the word of God and not with fire and sword, since Christ ordered that the weeds should be allowed to grow with the wheat until the harvest. The persecutor of heretics acts against the command of Christ and is therefore himself the worst kind of heretic.²⁹⁷

Hubmaier mentions the parable of the tares in only articles six through thirteen, but the many allusions to it in the treatise confirm Schwarz' assessment that clearly, it was his proof text for toleration. His essential exegetical conclusion

²⁹⁶ James Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 104-106.

²⁹⁷ Schwarz, "Balthasar Hubmaier – Toleranz in einer intoleranten Zeit," 92.

about the parable was that of Erasmus: Jesus obviously had heretics in mind when he commanded they be tolerated and allowed to exist alongside the orthodox. He views all equivocation on this point to be unfaithful rationalization and a twisting of Scripture, itself a characteristic of a heretic. In addition to the exegesis of the passage, the toleration of heretics dovetailed nicely with other elements of Hubmaier's theology: his view of Scripture, his ecclesiology, and his eschatology. They were all essential factors in making the parable of the tares his proof text for tolerance.

Hubmaier's view of Scripture led him to tolerate heretics largely out of obedience to the command of Christ. Stuart Murray noted that a common thread to Anabaptist interpretation of Scripture was the "Hermeneutics of Obedience." This hermeneutic stemmed from a conviction that theologians too often placed too much emphasis upon the theoretical understanding of Scripture and neglected its practical application.²⁹⁸ Hubmaier demonstrated his commitment to such a hermeneutic in his treatise on toleration. As indicated in his dedication to Pirata, his tract was not a complex theology of tolerance, but a creative arrangement of biblical texts calling for toleration, and Hubmaier believed that the Church should obey the prohibition against killing heretics out of deference to the clear and direct command of Christ. He begins the section on the parable with a sweeping condemnation of the legal basis for the practice, asserting: "The Law which condemns heretics to fire is based on Zion in blood and Jerusalem in

²⁹⁸Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*, 186-205.

wickedness.”²⁹⁹ It is unclear whether Hubmaier has in mind a specific piece of imperial legislation, such as the *Tiroler Malefizordnung* (1499) or the *Laibach Malefizordnung* (1514) which specified death by fire for heretics,³⁰⁰ or the general practice of the Church since the thirteenth century.³⁰¹ He claims that this law is founded upon “blood” and “wickedness,” an allusion to Micah 3:10.³⁰² Just as the prophet indicts the leaders of Israel for disregarding the commandments concerning social justice in the Mosaic law, so does Hubmaier condemn the execution of heretics as unjust. Instead of killing them, the Church should submit to Christ’s clear command, even if it seemed to conflict with tradition, common sense, and the Old Testament precedents.³⁰³

Concluding his comments on the parable, he writes: “It follows now that the inquisitors are the greatest heretics of all, because counter to the teaching and example of Jesus they condemn heretics to the fire; and before it is time they pull up the wheat together with the tares.”³⁰⁴ Hubmaier here applies his definition of a heretic stated at the beginning of the tract as an individual who inverts the

²⁹⁹ *On Heretics* (PY 60; HS 97).

³⁰⁰ See Ernst C. Hellbling, “Die Delikte gegen die Religion auf Grund der österreichischen Landesordnungen und der CCC,” *Österreichisches Archiv für Kirchenrecht* 33 (1983): 3-14, esp. 4, 7-8.

³⁰¹ See Bernard Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1981), 49-59, for a discussion of the punishments for heresy.

³⁰² *On Heretics* (PY 60, fn. 8; HS 97). Micah 3:9-10 (RSV): “Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong.”

³⁰³ *On Heretics* (PY 60, fn. 8; HS 97).

³⁰⁴ *On Heretics* (PY 62; HS 98).

meaning of Scripture or distorts its meaning for his own purposes. In his view, simple logic confirms the heretical status of the inquisitors. Heresy is the inverting of Scripture; Christ commanded heretics be tolerated; inquisitors taught and practiced the opposite; therefore, inquisitors were heretics. Hubmaier's reference to the premature pulling up of tares made it clear that the command of Christ inverted by inquisitors was "Let them grow together" (Matthew 13:29). He treats the issue of burning heretics as straightforward: one either obeys Christ's command of tolerance, or one rejects it and becomes an opponent of Christ and a heretic. Hubmaier does not comprehensively respond to the medieval interpretations that explained away the tolerant implications of the parable because he believed the meaning and application of the parable to be beyond question. The real issue for Hubmaier was obedience, not interpretation.

Hubmaier's view, however, did not suggest that the Church should completely concede the field to heretics, but instead, he argued, it should vigorously attempt to convert them peacefully: "The result of these words will not be negligence but a struggle as we combat without interruption, not against human beings, but against their godless teachings."³⁰⁵ The Church should oppose heresy and heretics, but only through spiritual warfare, using the weapons of Scripture, reason, and persuasion because Christ had forbidden the use of the sword. Hubmaier's view of Scripture meant strict adherence to the letter and spirit of the parable of the tares, a view that required tolerating heretics.

³⁰⁵ *On Heretics* (PY 61; HS 97).

A hermeneutic of obedience contributed substantially to his view of heretics, but Hubmaier also evinces an ecclesiological rationale for toleration. For him, heretics ironically play a positive role in God's plan for the Church, a point he broaches with an opaque description in article seven of heretics taking hapless followers with them into error. Such an argument was used by inquisitors to justify exterminating heretics, but Hubmaier reverses the point and notes that the reality of the "blind leading the blind" was an unfortunate necessity. He notes: "This is just what Christ intended when he said, 'Let both grow up together until the harvest, lest in gathering the tares you tear up the wheat together with it' (Matthew 13:29-30). 'There must be divisions so that the trustworthy among you may be manifest' (1 Corinthians 11: 19)."³⁰⁶ Hubmaier couples Paul's reference to Corinthian factions with the parable to explain why heretics were to be left alive. Essentially, they have a legitimate purpose in the economy of salvation because they help identify who is and who is not a true Christian. Unlike Jerome, who emphasized the difficulty of distinguishing the wheat from the tares as the reason for toleration, Hubmaier, as Erasmus, implied that heretics were identifiable and that toleration was not based on ambiguity, lack of information, or even theological subtleties. The point is that leaving them among the wheat enabled the Church to discern better the legitimacy of its own faith. Hubmaier's initial citation of the parable simply utilizes the first phrase, "Let both grow up together," and does not address the issue of the wheat destroyed in

³⁰⁶ *On Heretics* (PY 61; HS 97).

the process of tearing up the weeds, as did most other interpreters. Instead, his purpose is to argue that the divinely ordained mingling of heretics with the orthodox served a purpose for Christianity that was thwarted by their execution.

Hubmaier's justification for toleration also grew out of his eschatology. The destruction of heretics is the function of God alone, who at the end of the age would judge them. With characteristic terseness, Hubmaier comments that heretics, "even though they resist, are not to be destroyed until Christ will say to the reapers: 'Gather the tares first and bind them in bundles to be burned.'" ³⁰⁷ Similarly, as noted, article thirteen includes a resounding condemnation of the inquisitors who kill heretics "and before it is time they pull up the wheat together with the tares."³⁰⁸ Both passages clarify that Hubmaier based his toleration on an eschatological vision of God's perfect judgment. Condemning heretics was a task reserved for God because only he could be sure that, in the process of eradicating heretics, the true believers would be unharmed. Earlier in *On Heretics*, Hubmaier cited the command to let the wheat and tares grow together for the salutary function of the tares, but later he expressed concern for the wheat harmed during a premature separation of it from the tares. He was particularly concerned about the Church's condemnation of wheat, like himself, that had been unfairly labeled a tare. The burning of "genuine proclaimers of the Word of God" was a great travesty for Hubmaier, and for that reason Christ

³⁰⁷ *On Heretics* (PY 61; HS 97).

³⁰⁸ *On Heretics* (PY 62; HS 98).

forbade the extermination of heretics. Patience, prayer, and teaching form the correct approach to the heretic, but only if viewed within the larger eschatological vision of God's future judgment.

A final aspect of Hubmaier's interpretation of the parable is that he identifies the "sleeping people" of Matthew 13:25 with bishops and argues that the spread of heresy and division was due to negligent shepherds. In article eleven he writes: "Negligent bishops are to blame that there are divisions. 'For while people were sleeping, the enemies came' (Matthew 13:25)." The theme of slumbering leaders carries on into article twelve as Hubmaier cites passages from Proverbs and Psalms on the virtues of wakefulness.³⁰⁹ Later, in articles 26 and 27, Hubmaier returns to the theme of bishops and identifies their failure to ward off heresy as primarily a failure to teach the common people the Gospel:

But since not everyone has been taught the Gospel, bishops are no less at fault than the common people: the latter in that they have not taken care to have a better shepherd, the former in that they have not fulfilled their function. When one blind person leads another, they both fall into the pit together according to the righteous judgment of God (Matthew 15:14).³¹⁰

Hubmaier's contention that heresy arose primarily from the neglect of the preaching and teaching of bishops was a maxim accepted since the time of Jerome, and had been officially acknowledged as a cause of heresy by the

³⁰⁹ *On Heretics* (PY 61; HS 97).

³¹⁰ *On Heretics* (PY 64; HS 99).

provincial council of Avignon (1209) and the Fourth Lateran council (1215).³¹¹ But this point took on greater importance for Hubmaier because in his view, teaching was the Church's *sole* weapon against heresy. The Church's reliance upon the state's coercive power, which formed the backbone of the inquisition, relegated good teaching to secondary importance. For that reason Hubmaier opposed force in religious matters because it perpetuated the ignorance of the people who could always be forced to submit if the Church failed to teach good doctrine persuasively and persistently. Even if bishops did preach and teach the common people, Hubmaier believed it would be of no profit because the shepherds themselves did not know the truth but were steeped in doctrines contrary to the word of God. For him, bishops were the "blind leading the blind" destined to fall into the pit along with their unfortunate flocks, a point that Hubmaier implies heightened the people's responsibility to choose good shepherds.³¹²

Hubmaier's interpretation of the parable of the tares falls squarely in the tolerant tradition adopted by Erasmus in his *Paraphrase on Matthew*. Hubmaier identifies the tares of the parable with heretics, calls for absolute toleration based on adherence to Christ's command, views heretics as unwittingly performing a valuable service to the Church, and emphasizes that their punishment was God's

³¹¹ Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, 1:23-24.

³¹²This point is interesting since Hubmaier probably lent literary support to the "Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasants" (Feb. 1525). The first article demanded the right of congregations to choose their own shepherds. See Michael Baylor, ed. *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 231.

sole eschatological prerogative. Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* and Hubmaier's *On Heretics* were penned under different circumstances and with different goals. The former was written in the relative safety of a scholar's study in Basel as an aid to expository preaching, the latter was composed under the duress of impending arrest in the refuge of Schaffhausen as a tract designed solely to challenge a universal assumption. Consequently, with respect to particular elements of the interpretation of the parable of the tares, differences between Erasmus and Hubmaier are unsurprising. There are, however, significant similarities, and Hubmaier and Erasmus agree in their interpretation on the essential components of the passage.

Erasmus and Hubmaier understood Jesus' parable as concerned primarily with avoiding the destruction of heretics, who could become wheat with time and teaching. Hubmaier stressed the theme more vigorously, due to his personal situation, but Erasmus also formulated his opposition to killing heretics hoping that they might be converted. This interpretation was known among the Church Fathers, specifically Jerome, but had been neglected by subsequent interpreters. Their concern had been with the spiritual welfare of orthodox believers if heretics were allowed to remain in their midst. Hubmaier and Erasmus exhibited confidence in the power of teaching, not the sword, as a tool for converting heretics, and this confidence apparently overshadowed the concern for the wheat.

The eschatological element was important to both Erasmus' and Hubmaier's interpretation of the parable. God's ultimate judgment of the tares made it possible to endure the dangers posed by heretics, a point that was vividly made in Erasmus' description of hell's torments awaiting the tares and Hubmaier's warning against the premature harvest of the tares. For them, the reality of God's sole, perfect, and fitting judgment of heretics was a strong argument for toleration. Erasmus and Hubmaier both identified components of the parable with contemporary sixteenth-century issues and individuals. Both interpreters defined heresy traditionally as the twisting and manipulation of Scripture, and both associated heresy with bad bishops who either fail to teach the people the truth or by their impiety actually become agents of Satan in spreading false teaching, also a time-honored theme. The greatest similarity lies in Erasmus' and Hubmaier's identification of the characters of the parable, especially the servants who before the proper time desire to uproot the tares and cleanse the master's field. Hubmaier explicitly identified them as inquisitors; it is clear that Erasmus also branded contemporary advocates of killing heretics as the zealous servants of the parable. Erasmus went far beyond a literal reading of Matthew to attack indirectly inquisitors as the fanatical field hands of the parable and the point would have been evident to Hubmaier.

A final important similarity between Erasmus and Hubmaier is that both interpreted Jesus' parable as an absolute prohibition of the death penalty for heretics. In contrast to most of the exegetical tradition, the two argued that the

Church should tolerate the existence of heretics, and do nothing more than teach them. Erasmus' later clarifications modified the absolute nature of that toleration when heresy combined with sedition, but the *Paraphrase on Matthew* bears witness to a view of tolerance not witnessed in a well-known exegete since Chrysostom. Hubmaier and Erasmus also agreed on the ultimate reason for such an unqualified interpretation: Christ had specifically commanded that heretics not be killed. Killing them not only destroyed the chance of repentance and usurped God's right to judgment, but it also directly violated an unmistakable decree of Christ.

Contemporaries on the Parable of the Tares

The similarities between Hubmaier and Erasmus are all the more striking when compared with the attitude of their contemporaries, the majority of whom stood in continuity with medieval intolerance as indicated by the some 3,000 executions for heresy occurring from 1520 to 1565.³¹³ Although they disagreed on the specific definition of heresy, Protestant and Catholic luminaries such as More, Eck, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, and Melanchthon agreed that it had to be destroyed because of the great potential harm to Christian society. According to Brad Gregory, during the Reformation "the very notion of tolerating deliberate heterodoxy was abhorrent. It was tantamount to letting dangerous people

³¹³ For data on executions, see William Monter, "Heresy Executions in Reformation Europe, 1520-1565," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, 48-64.

seduce others to damnation, sully God's honor, and subvert the social fabric—surely no victimless crime.”³¹⁴

Contemporaries of Erasmus and Hubmaier generally agreed that heretics could not be tolerated, but their interpretations of the parable of the tares varied. Johann Eck, in his *Enchiridion of Commonplaces* (1525) represents the common attitude stemming from the medieval interpretation. In the *Enchiridion*, he utilized biblical, patristic, and evidence from canon law to argue heretics ought to be destroyed by fire, as were deviants in the Old Testament and criminals in the pagan and Christian Roman Empire. Eck acknowledged that in the early Church the apostles did not envision killing heretics, but with Constantine’s conversion, the Church readily and appropriately employed his power for its benefit. For Eck and most in his generation, heresy was one egregious crime among others that had to be eradicated: “Forgers of money or other malefactors are justly sentenced to death by secular princes. Why not heretics, forgers of holy Scripture?” In each section of his book, Eck formulates “objections of the heretics” and responds with the orthodox position, and in the process, he mentioned the parable of the tares as one of those objections. In reply, he simply repeats the Augustinian interpretation that the command for toleration did not apply if the tares could be uprooted without damage to the wheat. Since Eck mentions Hubmaier later in the *Enchiridion*, it is possible he had *On Heretics* in

³¹⁴ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 90.

mind when he counters the objection to killing heretics based on the parable of the tares.³¹⁵

Zwingli's attitude toward religious toleration was shaped by his belief in the integral relationship between the Church and the state in Zurich, a conviction that grew out of his original vision of a *respublica christiana*. The city council was important to Zwingli, who progressively advocated increasing its responsibilities in the reforming of Zurich. As the Reformation proceeded and came into conflict with Catholic and Anabaptist opponents, increasingly the council's role was to curb religious dissent: suppressing images (1524), outlawing the Mass (1525), instituting obligatory baptism of infants (1525), and the death penalty for rebaptizing (1526). In his correspondence with Reformers in Constance, Zwingli suggested that if they could gain a majority in the city's senate, they would have a biblical mandate to abolish the Mass as a form of idolatry, and he even advocated violence against bishops who stood in the way.³¹⁶ In principle Zwingli did not believe in coercion in religious matters, since people could not be converted through force. Obviously, Christian magistrates could not tolerate cases of direct public opposition to the Bible, but when possible, non-coercive methods of conversion were preferable. Zwingli's statements on toleration, however, related solely to the mandated territories where Protestant and Catholic cantons shared the administration; in those situations, he advocated toleration

³¹⁵ *Enchiridion of Commonplaces*, 178-185, 182 (quote). Eck mentions Hubmaier on page 209.

³¹⁶ Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 1:309-12.

only until preaching had converted the majority to the reformed faith and they could implement the reform of the entire society. Toleration was a temporary and pragmatic solution, not a matter of first choice.³¹⁷ Faith could not be coerced but that did not mean a truly Christian canton had to allow religious practices that offended God and led people into false beliefs. All the elements of the later solution of making the magistrate the final arbiter of confessional allegiances were in place in Zwingli's Zurich, and the extent to which that solution could allow for toleration, was the extent of Zwingli's toleration. Religious tolerance in Zurich would come in the late sixteenth-century, and even then, only after intolerance had proved unworkable.³¹⁸

Zwingli's interpretation of the parable of the tares appears to have played no role in his attitude toward heresy or toleration. In fact, he failed to see a connection between the parable and heresy. In *Archeteles: Reply to the Bishop's Admonition* (August 1522), Zwingli's first exchange with the Bishop of Constance over reform in Zurich, he stated that the bishop had misinterpreted the passage. The tares of the passage are not "different kinds of teaching" but rather "different kinds of men, of whom some have not cast off all shame as not to shrink from sinning openly...not of a heinous character, but as such as human life can scarcely be gone through without." Tares are "certain usual and common place shortcomings" of the average Christian, not the "pernicious teachings

³¹⁷ Potter, *Zwingli*, 348.

³¹⁸ Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 1:312-318; Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, "Parität, Neutralität und Toleranz," *Zwingliana* 15 (1982): 632-49.

inconsistent with God's Word." The former should be tolerated due to the weaknesses of human nature, but the latter must be uprooted.³¹⁹

Zwingli cited the parable of the tares in *A Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525) as supportive of his Eucharistic theology, noting that Jesus' interpretation of it ("the field *is* the world") bolstered his argument that often in Scripture the verb "to be" simply signifies something rather than indicates literal equivalence.³²⁰ In his *Refutation of the Tricks of the Catabaptists* (1527), Zwingli also employed the parable of the tares as a proof text against the Anabaptists, whom he repeatedly chastised for supposing themselves too pure to remain in fellowship with his reformed community. Instead, the parable meant that Anabaptists ought to remain within a Church comprised of good and bad Christians, all the while maintaining unity until the *parousia*: "He [Christ] had also commanded us to let the tares grow with the grain until the day of harvest, but we hoped boldly more would return daily to a sound mind who now had it not. If this should not be, yet the pious might ever live among the impious."³²¹ As Augustine did against the Donatists, Zwingli cited the parable of the tares against purists who would rather meet in their tiny conventicles of "true Christians" than in

³¹⁹ *The Latin Works and Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli*, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson [New York: Putnam's Sons, 1912; reprint *Ulrich Zwingli: Early Writings* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1987)], 220-22, 221 (quotes).

³²⁰ *The Latin Works and Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli*, Vol. 3, trans. and ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson & Clarence Nevin Heller [(Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1929; reprint *Commentary on True and False Religion* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981)], 225. Hereafter cited as *Commentary on True and False Religion*.

³²¹ *Ulrich Zwingli. Selected Works*, ed. S.M Jackson, trans. H. Preble and G. W. Wilmore (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 135.

Zurich's state Church. In his view, Jesus' parable called for toleration of Church members beset with everyday sins, but it did not require tolerating heretics in the Christian republic. Zwingli's interpretation of the parable of the tares in no way resembles that of Hubmaier.

Hubmaier's view of heretics, however, strongly approximates Luther's early position on heretics. W.D.J Cargill Thompson argued that a fundamental tension existed in Luther's thought on toleration and that it was shaped largely by the practical circumstances of his career that rendered religious toleration unfeasible. Luther's early policy toward heretics was a "position of remarkable tolerance,"³²² but it gradually evolved into a stance indistinguishable from his contemporaries who had few qualms about killing them. His position *vis à vis* heretics shifted dramatically as his thought matured and as new circumstances presented challenges to his reform movement. Critical to his evolving viewpoint was the distinction between private belief and blasphemy. The former could not be punished by the state because it was entirely internal, but the latter must be punished by the state because it involved a public affront to the true Christian faith; therefore, it harmed society at large. From 1524 onward, however, Luther gradually expanded the definition of blasphemy to include eventually any public espousal of doctrines he opposed. Specifically, he came to view one of the important practices of the traditional Church, the private Mass, as a blasphemous

³²² W.D.J Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton, UK: The Harvester Press, 1984), 155.

insult to Christ's original sacrifice on the cross. As blasphemy, therefore, it was something that the state could suppress without crossing the boundaries between its power and the Church's authority.³²³

Luther's fundamental expression of his view of the state's limited powers regarding matters of faith appears in *On Temporal Authority* (1523). He argued that the state's authority and power extended only to external things and did not concern internal matters such as private belief. On the specific issue of heresy, Luther stressed unequivocally: "Heresy can never be resisted by force. One will have to tackle the problem in some other way, for heresy must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword." For "heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water. God's Word alone avails here."³²⁴ Luther proceeds to explain that preaching, teaching, and reason, can only succeed in countering heresy, and attacking it with force simply gives it new vigor. Essentially, Luther's primary argument is that killing heretics plainly does not work. He writes: "My friend, if you wish to drive out heresy, you must find some way to tear it first of all from the heart and completely turn men's wills away from it. With force you will not stop it, but only strengthen it."³²⁵

³²³ Thompson, *Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 159. See also Hoffmann, "Reformation and Toleration," 85-123.

³²⁴ *On Temporal Authority*, (LW 45: 114).

³²⁵ *On Temporal Authority*, (LW 45: 115).

Luther employs surprisingly little scriptural support for his opinion (two Pauline references and one to Isaiah)³²⁶ and instead focuses on theological and rational arguments against killing heretics. Since secular authority can only deal with external matters, and faith is internal, obviously princes have no jurisdiction over heresy, and even if they did, it would not succeed in destroying it. Although Luther came to the same conclusions as Hubmaier on the issue of executing heretics, there is no evidence that the parable of the tares played any role in his *earliest* advocacy of tolerating heretics. In a sermon of February 1525, however, Luther does make a case for toleration based on the interpretation of the parable. Luther's use of the parable in this sermon approaches an absolute statement of toleration toward heretics and fundamentally agrees with Hubmaier and Erasmus on the major exegetical points. He argues that coercive methods cannot deal effectively with heretics and clearly associates the inquisitors with the servants who suppose they are doing God's will. As with Hubmaier, Luther fulminates against the inquisitors, whom he labels heretics, because they often burned saints in their zeal to destroy heretics and he appears to take an absolute position against their destruction.³²⁷ Despite the similarities, it is not possible that Luther's sermon of February 1525 could have influenced Hubmaier's views; the latter had published his treatise *On Heretics* five months previously.

³²⁶ 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:12; Is. 11:4.

³²⁷ Manfred Hoffmann, "Reformation and Toleration," in *Martin Luther and the Modern Mind*, ed. Manfred Hoffmann (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 1985), 92-93; Bainton, "Parable of the Tares," 80.

Luther might have influenced Hubmaier's view of toleration, yet there are two important reasons why Erasmus is the more likely source of influence. First, there is no evidence that Hubmaier had read Luther's *On Temporal Authority*, and Hubmaier's fundamentally different conception of the Christian magistrate³²⁸ suggests that, even if he had read it, he was not convinced by its central argument. Hubmaier had read Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew*. The second and most important reason to prefer Erasmian to Lutheran influence on Hubmaier's view of heretics is that the latter had no place for the parable of the tares in *On Temporal Authority*, yet that passage loomed large in Hubmaier's rationale and was a vital scriptural support for his attitude toward toleration. If in fact Hubmaier had encountered the idea of toleration in Luther's work, he would have looked elsewhere for biblical guidance. Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* would have provided that guidance more than Luther.

³²⁸ Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 142-44.

CHAPTER FIVE - ERASMUS AND HUBMAIER ON THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

A pivotal point in the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew occurs in chapter 16, where Jesus asked the disciples for their understanding of his identity:

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ (RSV).

Since late antiquity interpreters have wrestled with the implications of this passage for chief elements of Christian theology, polity, and ecclesiology. It was particularly relevant to the question of the authority of the pope, and according to David Kling, "no other passage in the Bible has been the focus of so much controversy." Specifically, he observes that the words promising the keys in it "have been the source of scholarly debate, dogmatic pronouncements, and enduring acrimonious divisions among Christians for centuries."³²⁹ The import of the "keys" passage emerges again when Christ uses the identical language of "binding and loosing" in the context of resolving communal strife in Matthew 18:

³²⁹ David W. Kling, *The Bible in History: How the Texts have Shaped the Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 47.

¹⁵ If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (RSV)

In the history of Christianity this passage was the main text for the practice of excommunication, the medieval Church's ultimate expression of spiritual and legal power.³³⁰ Taken together, Matthew 16:15-20 (esp. 18-19) and 18:15-20 (esp. 18), are the primary biblical sources for the discussion of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the power to "bind and loose."

The interpretation of the keys has been important in the scholarly debate over Erasmus and Anabaptism. Roland Bainton's essay on Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament* in the 1960s highlighted many supposedly subversive elements of Erasmus' exegesis, including his interpretation of the keys of the kingdom. Subsequently, historians interested in the question of Erasmus and Anabaptism have cited Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* as possible evidence of influence, yet no one has conducted a thorough study

³³⁰ Elisabeth Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 5.

comparing Erasmus' and Hubmaier's interpretations.³³¹ The consensus of Anabaptist scholarship suggests that, despite their diversity, all Anabaptists insisted that the restoration of a visible Church of saints required the renewal of Church discipline in the form of the ban.³³² Balthasar Hubmaier made a considerable contribution to the Anabaptist understanding of the ban, for, although others had addressed the topic earlier, his treatises, *On Fraternal Admonition* (1526) and *On the Ban* (1527), made him the "legitimate spokesman concerning early Anabaptist discipline" and his "terminology and interpretations recur virtually unchanged" in subsequent Anabaptist debates.³³³ Hubmaier's view of the ban rested heavily on his interpretation of the passages in Matthew on the keys of the kingdom.

There are significant similarities between Erasmus' and Hubmaier's interpretation of the keys of the kingdom. Specifically, Erasmus and Hubmaier agree in their interpretation of the "rock" of Matthew 16:18 as Peter's profession of faith; both discuss the loosing power of the keys in terms of the initial forgiveness of sins obtained at baptism; and they both acknowledge the laity's rightful possession of the keys for fraternal correction and excommunication. When considered against the contemporary exegetical landscape, Erasmus and

³³¹ Bainton, "Paraphrases of Erasmus," 72-73; Davis, "Erasmus as Progenitor of Anabaptist Theology and Piety," 172; Leth, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Catholic Exegesis," 111-17.

³³² C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 96-97.

³³³ Kenneth R. Davis, "No Discipline, No Church: Anabaptist Contribution to the Reformed Tradition," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13 (1982): 46.

Hubmaier stand alone in their agreement, suggesting the former had to some extent influenced the latter's interpretation. However, the significant discontinuity in their emphases upon the "binding" component of the keys suggests that Erasmus' influence was not great and that other factors may have played a more vital role in shaping Hubmaier's theology of the keys.

The Exegetical Tradition and the Keys to the Kingdom

The most important single exegetical issue of Matthew 16:18 was the identification of the "rock" upon which Jesus says he will build his Church. Scholars examining the exegetical tradition have identified three primary interpretations.³³⁴ The first interpretation built upon the idea that Peter represented a type, that is, a model for every Christian. He is the paradigm of faith, the first true and genuine Christian because of his confession of faith. When Peter said "You are the Christ, the son of the living God," he spoke *pro omnibus*, for all the apostles, but also for all Christians who made the same confession, who correctly could be described as *petrae*. The recognition of Jesus' divine sonship, therefore, was the basis for the Church's existence. Jerome and Chrysostom maintained this interpretation and it became the standard

³³⁴ The analysis of the exegetical tradition relies on Ulrich Luz, "The Primacy Text (Mt. 16:18)," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 12 (1991): 41-55, and Karlfried Froehlich, "St. Peter, Papal Primacy, and the Exegetical Tradition, 1150-1300," in *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities, 1150-1300*, ed. Christopher Ryan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1989), 3-43.

interpretation in the East, but other prominent exegetes, such as Ambrose and Hilary in the West, could also employ it in their interpretations of Matthew.

A second popular interpretation in the western Church was that of Augustine, who pressed the text into the service of his Christocentric ecclesiology. Utilizing allegory and sharply distinguishing between the naming of Peter and the “foundation” of the Church, Augustine contended that the rock of the passage was Christ himself, not Peter’s confession. The Christological interpretation gave precedence to other New Testament passages such as 1 Corinthians 10:4, where Paul succinctly states that “the rock was Christ.” Advocates of this approach often viewed any Old Testament references to rock as prefigurations of Christ. Despite a firm attachment to the Christological interpretation, medieval exegetes could also refer to the “two foundations” of the Church, Christ and the apostles.

The third interpretation understood the rock of the passage as the literal Peter and his successors, the bishops of Rome. This, the papal interpretation, is traceable to the mid-third century when Pope Stephen I (d. 252) modified Cyprian’s interpretation that Peter represented all the bishops by applying it exclusively to the Bishop of Rome and his successors.³³⁵ The first expression of the classic papal interpretation of Matthew 16:18, however, was that of Pope Leo I (d. 461), who emphasized the authority implicit in the naming of Peter and its

³³⁵ Luz, “The Primacy Text,” 51.

perpetuity. Christ's promise that the gates of hell would not overcome the Church was based on the fact that he intended to fortify and maintain Peter's faith continuously in his Roman successors and it was to them that he gave the authority of the keys. The papal interpretation was almost non-existent in medieval Scripture commentaries, even among promoters of papal supremacy. Yet, with the advocacy of Innocent III (d. 1216) and the advent of a more literal approach to Scripture in the late Middle Ages, more exegetes began to see that reading as a viable complement to the dominant Christological interpretation.³³⁶

The exegetical tradition on Matthew 18:15-20 primarily addressed three issues. Exegetes explored the nature of the fraternal correction in verses 15-17, and generally, the Church Fathers such as Augustine, Jerome, and Chrysostom, enjoined Christians to admonish erring individuals by following the sequence of the text: first in private, then with a few witnesses, finally with the entire congregation. Ideally, the erring Christian would be reconciled before the matter had to be made public to the Church, which was the last and most drastic step.³³⁷ Despite the rise of private confession and absolution in the early Middle Ages, interpreters continued to point out that Jesus envisioned fraternal correction to be a beneficial practice for dealing with discord within the Church. It still played a

³³⁶ Froehlich, "St. Peter, Papal Primacy," 3-43, esp. 40-43.

³³⁷ Augustine, *Sermon* 82.7, NPNF 1 6:357-362, esp. 359; Jerome, *Commentarium in Mattheum*, CCSL 77:161-163; Chrysostom, *Homily* 60, NPNF 1 10:354-57, esp. 355.

role in the interpretation of the passage long after it had become practically irrelevant.³³⁸

Since Matthew 18:18 formed the scriptural basis for excommunication, exegetes always addressed the proper treatment of excommunicates. Most interpreters refrained from specifics but instead reminded readers that the punishment was primarily medicinal and, therefore, excommunicates were not to be hated or despised, just shunned and prayed for. Excommunicated Christians were given the same respect as outsiders, yet were refused table fellowship.³³⁹ Excommunication in the early Church involved social and ritual ostracism, especially in relation to the Eucharist.³⁴⁰ The history of the development of excommunication in the Middle Ages is complex because it was integrally related to contemporaneous developments such as the emergence of Christendom and the rise of private confession and penance. Private penance was not a feature of the early Church; persistent sinners were dealt with publicly through excommunication and received back into the Church only after a period of rigorous public penance. Following the influx of large numbers of converts in the fourth century, excommunication was increasingly reserved for serious sins, and

³³⁸ *NdL* Matt. 18:15. Nicholas viewed fraternal correction for secret sins as a means of preserving *fama*.

³³⁹ Again, see Augustine, *Sermon* 82.7, NPNF 1 6:357-362; Jerome, *Commentarium in Mattheum*, CCSL 77: 161-163; Chrysostom, *Homily* 60, NPNF 1 10:354-57, esp. 355.

³⁴⁰ Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N.E. Nagel (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 84-108, esp. 94-98.

private confession and lesser forms of penance for the minor offenses.³⁴¹ Until the Gregorian reforms of the late eleventh century, excommunication continued to be medicinal, but it increasingly became the Church's ultimate tool to enforce uniformity. Thus, excommunication became a very serious criminal punishment that effectively ostracized one from Christian society and often carried major legal, political, and financial consequences. By the high Middle Ages, fine distinctions in canon law were made to clarify the exact meaning and implications of excommunication, including the differences between major and minor excommunication, the transferability of the contagion of excommunication, and the mode of excommunication.³⁴² Despite the increasingly legal character of excommunication, the interpretation of Matthew 18:18 changed very little throughout the complex evolution of the practice and exegetes could still follow the patristic precedent of directly linking personal fraternal correction with eventual excommunication.³⁴³

Another issue raised by exegetes was the nature of the binding and loosing in verses 18-20. The most obvious agreement among patristic exegetes was that the effectiveness of the earthly binding of sins was contingent upon

³⁴¹ Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages*, 11-12.

³⁴² Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages*, 1-15; F. Donald Logan, "Excommunication," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 4:536-538; Jean Runzo, "Communal Discipline in the Early Anabaptist Communities of Switzerland, South and Central Germany, Austria, and Moravia, 1525-1550," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978), 5-12.

³⁴³ See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, trans. by Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 455. See also *NdL* Matt. 18:15-17.

correct motives, procedure, and harmony. Christ's statements were designed to provide confidence that God would "ratify" the Church's decisions, making it binding also in heaven. The Church Fathers generally granted the power of binding and loosing to the congregation, not just to the leadership. Chrysostom draws special attention to this point, arguing that the individual who had been wronged and initiated the sequence of correction would personally do the binding, with the agreement of at least two other virtuous congregants. Finally, they were quick to note that the penalty of excommunication was medicinal and at best would result in the reconciliation of the excommunicate to the Church. The excommunicate was to be treated as an outsider, but not hated, since even pagans were encouraged to repent and receive salvation.³⁴⁴ Throughout the Middle Ages, exegetes continued to affirm that excommunication was therapeutic, and medieval canonists did not suggest excommunicates were *in fact* expelled from the kingdom, but only *declared* expelled from the kingdom. Mistakes in jurisdiction or judgment could have rendered the decision of the Church incorrect, and God alone would have to decide the eternal fate of the excommunicate.³⁴⁵

In the high Middle Ages, the power of the keys was primarily understood as the power of excommunication and reconciliation. In the discussion of the keys, exegetes noted their plural nature and usually differentiated between the

³⁴⁴ Augustine, *Sermon* 82.7, NPNF 1 6:357-362, esp. 359; Jerome, *Commentarium in Mattheum*, CCSL 77: 161-163; Chrysostom, *Homily* 60, NPNF 1 10:355.

³⁴⁵ Logan, "Excommunication," 537.

first key, *clavis scientiae*, which involved the power to discern the spiritual status of an individual, and the second key, *clavis potestatis*, which was the power to excommunicate or assess penance for sin. Eventually, most commentators abandoned the idea of two keys and simply referred to one key as containing the dual power of absolving and binding sins.³⁴⁶

By the early sixteenth century, interpreters agreed that the power of the keys, based on Matthew 16:19, was primarily the power of excommunication and priestly absolution. Although not all exegetes explicitly referred to the keys, they also saw in Matthew 18:18 the same powers. To whom these powers were given, especially in Matthew 16:19, remained debatable, but increasingly interpreters began to accept the papal interpretation that afforded the Bishop of Rome and his successors the exclusive power of the keys.

Erasmus and the Keys to the Kingdom

The difficulties of comparing Erasmus' and Hubmaier's interpretations of the keys of the kingdom are further complicated by their differing styles. The former addressed the passages in a systematic way in his biblical works while the latter approached them sporadically throughout his pastoral writings. The following analysis of Erasmus and Hubmaier on the keys proceeds heuristically

³⁴⁶ Froehlich, "St. Peter, Papal Primacy, and the Exegetical Tradition," 14-16. Bede was the first interpreter to link Mathew 16 and 18 and to discuss the plural nature of the keys. For examples of the emphasis upon absolution and excommunication see Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 635. See also *NdL* Matt. 16:19: "Istae claves non sunt materiales sed potestas duplex. Una est potestas discernendi peccatum a non peccato...alia clavis est potestas admittendi ad regnu, vel excludendi."

by asking two important questions raised in the exegetical tradition: *What is the power of the keys?* and *Who possesses the keys?* Examining Erasmus' and Hubmaier's answers to these questions provides an adequate basis for comparison of their interpretations of Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 18:18-20.

What is the power of the Keys?

For Erasmus, the dual power of the keys was directly related to the use of the phrase "binding and loosing" in both Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. In the former passage, he stressed "loosing," the power of initiating individuals into the kingdom of God and undoing bonds of sin, while in the latter text he highlighted "binding," that is, withholding forgiveness of sins through the act of severing individuals from the communion of the Church. Erasmus' paraphrase on Matthew 16:19 begins with a clarification that "the heavenly kingdom is the Church whereas the devil's kingdom is the world." Erasmus' Jesus assures Peter that an intimate relationship existed between the Church on earth and its heavenly counterpart "upon which it ultimately depends." The close relationship between the two entities is essential to understanding the power of the keys since spiritual separation between the Church militant and the Church triumphant greatly limited the power of the former. Assuming the correct relationship between the two, the earthly Church's actions have concrete eternal consequences.

The first and most important power of the keys was to open the gates of heaven to sinners, bound by sin and cut off from salvation, a point he made clearly in his paraphrase of Matthew 16:19. Erasmus' Jesus explains to Peter the power of the keys:

Accordingly he who until now has been bound by sins belongs to the realm of hell, nor can he enter the kingdom of heaven. He will enter, however, if having professed in your presence what you profess, he is freed from his sins through baptism. And so, with you leading and you opening the doors, he will enter into the heavenly kingdom. The special power to forgive sins is mine. But I will bestow this power on you in some measure in order that what you, having received my keys, will loose on earth among men, should be loosed in heaven with God. On the other hand, whatever you will bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. For God will confirm your judgment which proceeded from his own Spirit.³⁴⁷

Most patristic and medieval interpreters stressed the "binding" component of verse 19, commenting on the Church's power to withhold forgiveness from intransigent sinners. Erasmus, however, did not emphasize the binding but the loosing aspect of the keys. In addition, he does not refer to the forgiveness offered in absolution after confession, but the forgiveness obtained in the initial conversion to the Christian faith. For Erasmus, the power of the keys in this passage was primarily about opening the gates of heaven by professing Jesus'

³⁴⁷ LB 7: 93B: "Proinde qui peccatis adhuc obstrictus est, ad regnum pertinet inferorum, nec potest ingredi in regnum coelorum. Ingredietur autem si apud te professus quod tu profiteris, per baptismum solvatur ab peccatis: atque ita te duce, teque fores referante, ingredietur regnum coelorum. Haec me peculiaris est potestas, condonare peccata: sed hanc potestatem tibi quadantenus impartiam, ut quod tu meis clavibus acceptis solveris super terram apud homines, solutum sit et in coelis apud Deum. Contra quod tu in terris alligaris, alligatum sit et in coelis. Comprobabit enim Deus tuum iudicium, ab ipsius Spiritu profectum."

messianic and divine identity to a world “bound” by sin, evidently through the preaching of the Gospel message. With reference to baptism, the unrepeatable sacrament of initiation, it is clear that Erasmus envisioned a different kind of loosing than his exegetical predecessors, one that originally freed individuals from a bondage to sin.³⁴⁸ While some interpreters, such as Nicholas of Lyra, noted that the power to admit to the kingdom was implicit in this text, linking baptism to the keys of the kingdom was uncommon in the exegetical tradition.³⁴⁹ Erasmus does not in this passage envision believer’s baptism upon the baptizand’s profession of faith,³⁵⁰ but he does interpret the power of the keys as, in part, the general power to carry out the Church’s primary mission, making Christ and his salvation known to the world and opening the doors to God’s kingdom through baptism.

Erasmus presents Jesus as having reserved for himself the actual power of forgiveness. The power of the keys is not absolute; Jesus promised it only “in some measure (*quadantenus*),” indicating the wielder of the keys was not a plenipotentiary, but an ambassador whose decisions were contingent upon final

³⁴⁸ See Erasmus’ paraphrase on John 20:23, which traditionally had been viewed as John’s account of the reception of the keys after the resurrection. CWE 46: 219 (LB 7: 644D-E): “having bestowed the Spirit he added the authority to forgive sins for all the people who would be joined to him through proclamation of the gospel and baptism (*qui per Evangelicam professionem ac baptismum sibi iungerentur*), and who through penitence for their former life would truly repent.”

³⁴⁹ *NdL* Matt. 16:19. See also Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 584-88, who indicates that those patristic sources did not refer to baptism in connection with Matthew 16:19.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Leth, “Balthasar Hubmaier’s ‘Catholic’ Exegesis,” 111, who cites Erasmus’ interpretation of the keys as supporting believers baptism.

approval by a more powerful ruler. Although the phrase could be viewed as a statement of fact, viewing it as a conditional sentence makes better sense of Erasmus' assertion that Jesus alone retained the power of forgiveness. In that way, then, the meaning of the last phrase is simply, "God will approve your judgment *if* it has proceeded from his Spirit." The logical extension is that unspiritual judgments would have no effect in heaven, a common point made in the exegetical tradition.

The second power of the keys corresponds to "binding," or excommunication. Erasmus makes a brief reference to the excommunicatory power of the keys in his paraphrase on Matthew 16:19, but it receives full attention in his paraphrase of Matthew 18:18-19. That Erasmus intimately connects the two texts is clear in his paraphrase on Matthew 18:19, where, after an extended explanation of the source and quality of the Church's power to excommunicate, he explicitly connects the keys of the kingdom with Peter's earlier confession of faith: "Without a doubt, these are the keys I will give to Peter for acknowledging me openly. And whatever is bound on earth will also be bound in heaven, and whatever is loosed on earth will also be loosed in heaven."³⁵¹ Paraphrasing Matthew 16, Erasmus emphasizes the initiatory purpose of the keys and makes only a slight allusion to excommunication, but

³⁵¹ LB 7: 101A: "Hae nimirum sunt claves, quas Petro me profitenti daturus sum: quibus quod ligatum fuerit in terris, ligatum erit et in coelis: et quod solutum fuerit in terris, solutum erit et in coelis."

here he stresses the binding aspect of the keys and makes no mention of its initiatory function.

Erasmus' reference to the second power of the keys as the power of excommunication comes after a lengthy discussion of fraternal correction as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. In that section of the paraphrase, Erasmus recounts the three fold process of correction by adding his characteristic emphases upon patience, charity, and sincerity. The erring brother is first to be admonished in private, with "the most gentle remedy," so as to salvage his pride and settle the matter with minimal damage by making a simple appeal to brotherly love. Then, if "the injury is graver than this most simple cure is able to remedy," one should still not resort to the extreme penalty, but involve one or more mediators, thereby introducing shame as a motivating factor for reconciliation. Finally, as a last resort, after earlier attempts have failed, Jesus enjoins making public the sin to the community of believers:

And if he is so stubborn that he is influenced by neither shame nor fear of judgment, refer the matter to the assembly, so that either by the consensus of the multitude or by the authority of those in charge of the multitude, he might be corrected. But if he is so incurable that he cannot be corrected either by private and brotherly rebuke, or by joint knowledge and agreement of two or three, or by the shame of having the offense revealed publicly, or by the authority of the leadership, abandon him to his own disease. Let him be cut off from intimate companionship and be considered as a pagan or a tax collector.³⁵²

³⁵² LB 7: 100B: "Quod si tam est intractabilis, ut nec pudore, nec metu iudicii commoveatur, rem defer ad congregationem, ut vel multitudinis consensu, vel eorum auctoritate, qui multitudini praesunt, emendetur. Quod si usque adeo est insanabilis, ut

In keeping with the traditional exegesis, Erasmus emphasizes the twofold purposes of excommunication as curative and defensive. Yet he surpasses his predecessors in the emphasis on the medicinal motif. Throughout he remains faithful to his introductory comments that he was preparing to describe a *medicandi modus*, repeatedly referring to the sin of the offender as disease (*morbum, contagio*), the acts of correction in terms of a cure (*blandum remedium* or *extrema remedia*), and the receptive sinner as curable (*sanabilis*).³⁵³ Clearly, Erasmus views the act of correction in Matthew 18, and even the process of excommunication, as the tools of a doctor who attempts to heal a patient fallen victim to a spiritual disease. Part of the power of the keys, then, is the potential for restoring Christians to lives of holiness. Excommunication served not only to help the sinner, who out of fear of shunning repents of his sin, but also to maintain the moral quality of the Christian community.

By the twelfth century, canonists had distinguished between the Church's judicial and penitential forums. The latter involved the sacrament of penance and included private confession and priestly absolution, regulating a person's status before God. The former involved excommunication, which either could be minor, involving no legal ramifications, or could be major, involving the full biblical and legal exclusionary repercussions. Typically, private sins were dealt with in the

nec secreta fraternaue correptione, nec duorum aut trium conscientia consensusque, nec prolati criminis pudore, nec primorum auctoritate corrigatur, illum suo morbo relinquito. Amputetur ab familiari consortio, nec alio loco habeatur, quam si sit Ethnicus, aut publicanus.”

³⁵³ LB 7: 99F, 100A-C.

penitential forum, whereas public sins were handled in the judicial forum.³⁵⁴

Erasmus does not explicitly address the nature of the sin that sparks the process of brotherly correction, but whatever its character, the refusal of the erring person to repent during the private phase of the correction indicates a lack of shame and a certain contumacy indicating the presence of contagion that must be publicly excised.³⁵⁵ The result is that the same brother who “committed something against you worthy of censure,” who ideally could be reconciled through an amicable and private rebuke, for the same sin, could eventually be removed from the “intimate companionship” of the congregation.³⁵⁶

Erasmus understood the procedure of Matthew 18 as the primary way the Church dealt with most sins within its ranks, including heresy. In his interpretation of the parable of the tares, Erasmus demanded toleration of heretics and forbade their execution. Erasmus is saved from inconsistency between that interpretation and his insistence upon expelling people from the Church in Matthew 18:15-20 because one could remove a heretic or blatant sinner from the Church without advocating their execution. Expelling a person from the Church, or “binding” their sins, had serious ramifications that made the Church’s sole weapon of correction something to be feared, yet allowed for

³⁵⁴ Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages*, 35-36.

³⁵⁵ LB 7: 100C: “Sit haec inter vos atrocissima poena, quae tamen non in aliud adhibetur, nisi ut aut pudore respiscat frater, dum se videt ab omnibus vitari, aut certe ne gregi admixtus alio inficiat suo contagio.”

³⁵⁶ LB 7: 99F: “Si quid admiserit in te frater tuus, quod sit animadversione dignum.” LB 7: 100B: “Amputetur a familiari consortio.”

healing. Human courts, which put to death criminal offenders, did not allow for repentance and often erred by condemning innocents and releasing the guilty.

But the Church's mode of punishment is both just and harsh:

Although that condemnation proceeds slowly toward punishment, however it is most severe for this reason, because having been condemned, unless he repents, eternal punishment remains, a punishment which he can on no account escape. Sometimes God acquits the person whom Caesar condemns, and often God condemns the person whom the prince acquits.³⁵⁷

Erasmus' understanding of this passage encompassed all kinds of sins, both moral and theological, and saw the various stages of the correction process as the best remedy for the problem of sin in the Christian community. Erasmus' idea of excommunication appears to correspond closely with major excommunication, which entailed the full religious and social ostracizing of the excommunicate; yet, Erasmus' view that excommunication resulted from sinful behavior differed from the practice of major excommunication, which by the high Middle Ages "had only an artificial link to sin."³⁵⁸

Erasmus' understanding of excommunication resonated somewhat with medieval canonists who argued that its power was provisional in nature and contingent upon proper administration. Having again reminded the apostles that the primary purpose of the sentence of excommunication was salvation not

³⁵⁷ LB 7: 100C-D: "At ista condemnatio quanquam lente procedit ad supplicium, tamen hoc nomine est severissima, quod damnatum, nisi respiscat, manet aeterna poena, quam nulla ratione poterit effugere. Quem Caesar damnat, nonnunquam absolvit Deus: et quem absolvit Princeps, aliquoties damnat Deus."

³⁵⁸ Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages*, 36.

destruction, Erasmus' Jesus assures them that God will "approve your judgment" and then explains the reason:

In fact he who does not seek vengeance but the correction of his brother; who is prepared to forgive the offense committed against himself; who is concerned about the salvation of his brother; who, although having been harmed himself, comes immediately to the sick person to heal him; who, despite repeated rebuffs, still does not abandon efforts to bring about a cure; who does not trust his own judgment but consults several other opinions not to punish but to heal - his considered opinion, because it arises from a mind guided by the Gospel, God will uphold and never rescind, unless the guilty person admits his crime.³⁵⁹

Stacking condition upon condition and reaffirming the proper manner of dealing with the offending brother, Erasmus essentially asserts that the exceptional power promised by Jesus was only eternally effective if carried out with the purest of motives and through the purest procedure. In this way, Erasmus can at the same time affirm the biblical teaching concerning the actual power of the Church over the eternal destiny of sinners, while allowing for God to overrule the decisions of a Church often plagued with corruption.

Further on, Erasmus makes the point explicit, arguing that a decision made by the consensus of sincere minds was in fact the judgment of God, not of human beings: "And if you should with a human spirit condemn anyone, it is in

³⁵⁹ LB 7: 100E: "Etenim qui non quaerit ultionem, sed correctionem fratris, qui paratus est admissam in se iniuriam remittere, qui sollicitus est de salute fratris, qui ad aegrotum ipse laesus ultro venit, ut illi medeatur: qui semel atque iterum repulsus, tamen non desistit a medicando: qui non fidit suo iudicio, sed unum atque alterum adhibet, non ad vindictam, sed ad medelam: huius sententiam, quoniam proficiscitur ab animo Evangelico, Deus approbabit, nec unquam rescindet, nisi damnatus damnarit quod admisit."

fact a human judgment, not God's, and the individual who by your decision has been expelled from your fellowship is not immediately cut off from the fellowship of heaven. Therefore the power of your authority lies in the promptings of the heart, which God alone discerns."³⁶⁰ The reason the Church's excommunication is eternally effective, is that its rightly guided decisions are in fact those of God himself, who ratifies the decision of the Church as an act of agreement with his own judgment. Someone may be expelled from the fellowship of the Church, but that does not mean he is *de facto* excluded from heaven, an opinion long accepted in canonical discussions of excommunication. There appears to be very little unique about Erasmus' view of the contingency of the Church's power of excommunication, except that he emphasizes a point that medieval exegetes had not. His interpretation did not strip the Church militant of its actual power, but it raised the standards extremely high and made purity of motivation and spiritual consensus prerequisites for its efficacy.

When it came to the power of the keys, Erasmus maintained a partially traditional position, in that it entailed a dual power of binding and loosing. On the one hand, interpreting the loosing power of the keys as directly related to the initiation of sinners into the kingdom, through gospel proclamation and baptism, was a departure from the traditional emphasis upon "loosing sins" after

³⁶⁰ LB 7: 100F-101A: "Quod si damnaveritis aliquem humano spiritu, iam est iudicium humanum, non Dei: et is qui vestra sententia fuerit eiectus a vestro consortio, non protinus est alienus a consortio coeli. Vis igitur vestrae auctoritatis in affectibus est, quos solus Deus intuetur."

confession. On the other hand, interpreting “binding” as a reference to fraternal correction and excommunication was traditional, but Erasmus’ stress on purity of motives and consensus was rare.

Who possesses the keys?

In answering the question of who possesses the power of the keys, one must address the single most important exegetical issue of Matthew 16:18, that is, the meaning of the word *petra* in the famous phrase, “Upon this rock I will build my Church.” Erasmus first delineated his interpretation of that verse in 1516 in the first edition of his *Annotations on the New Testament*. Erasmus strongly advocates the *professio* interpretation of the passage and sharply criticizes the exegetical alternatives.³⁶¹ Erasmus writes: “Jesus calls him [Peter] a stone, since he is firm in the confession of faith and does not with fickleness waiver back and forth with the common opinion. And ‘upon that rock,’ that is, ‘that firm profession of faith’ I will construct my Church.” Erasmus acknowledges that the Christological interpretation of Augustine was similar to his own, yet he still maintains that it is forced and unnatural. His real criticism is reserved for “those who misrepresent this passage as a reference to the Roman pontiff,”³⁶²

³⁶¹ For Erasmus’ interpretation of this verse, see John E. Bigane, III, *Faith, Christ or Peter: Matthew 16:18 in Sixteenth-Century Roman Catholic Exegesis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981), 15-35.

³⁶² ASD VI-5: 248: “Saxum enim illum appellat, quod solidus sit in confessione fidei et non vulgarium opinionum levitate huc et illuc vacillet; ‘et super istam petram – hoc est

and he lampoons that interpretation as an example of scholars awarding immoderate praise of the Pope at the expense of responsible biblical exegesis.

In the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, Erasmus may have been attempting to soften his anti-papal tone, while maintaining his essential exegetical judgment. Just prior to its publication, Jacobus Stunica had severely criticized his interpretation of Matthew 16:18 in the *Annotations* because it amounted to a denial of papal supremacy. Erasmus' response was classic: he was only reporting what the Church Fathers had said about the text and nothing more.³⁶³ The *Paraphrase on Matthew* demonstrates that he agreed with the Fathers. Beginning with verse 16, where Christ asks the disciples for their opinion about himself, Erasmus heightens the uniqueness of Peter by denoting his special relationship to Christ and his future prominence among the apostles: "To this, Simon Peter, as the most beloved by Jesus, just as if he were the future head of the apostolic order answered for them all: 'you are Christ, the Son of the Living God.'" He continues this emphasis by mentioning in verse 19, where Christ promises the keys to Peter, that "it is appropriate that he should be first in authority who is first in profession of faith and love."³⁶⁴ Erasmus wishes to avoid

'solidam istam fidei professionem' - extruam ecclesiam meam;...Proinde miror esse qui locum hunc detorqueant ad Romanum pontificem."

³⁶³ Harry J. McSorley, "Erasmus and the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff: Between Conciliarism and Papalism," *ARG* 65 (1974): 40; Erasmus' responses to Stunica appear in LB 9: 386A, 365B-D.

³⁶⁴ LB 7: 92E, 93A: "Hic Simon Petrus, ut erat amantissimus Jesu, tanquam futurus ordinis Apostolici princeps, omnium nomine respondit: Tu es ille Christus, filius Dei

the lavish praise for Peter that marked the exegesis of the papal interpretation, but he does take the opportunity to make modest observations about Peter's importance. Essentially, he was closest to Christ, first in faith and love, and the earliest spokesman of the apostles.

Nevertheless, Erasmus maintains that the rock of verse 18, the foundation of the Church's existence, was not Peter and his successors, but his profession of faith:

And so in turn, lest you honor me with so magnificent a testimony without reward, I confirm this, that you are truly Peter, that is, a solid stone, not wavering here and there with the changing views of the crowds, and so upon this rock of your profession I will build my Church, that is, my home and palace, which I will so thoroughly fortify and set upon a firm foundation, that no forces from the kingdom of hell will be able to take it by force. Satan will attack you with many siege engines, and he will raise up against you a cohort of impious spirits, but under my protection my building will stand invincible, as long as that solid profession remains.³⁶⁵

Erasmus' paraphrase of the crucial text abounds in references to power and strength, all characterizing Peter's confession of faith and standing in direct contrast to the shifting views of the crowd. Even his depiction of Satan as an unsuccessful enemy siege master serves to emphasize the sturdiness of the

vivi...; Atque huius regni coelestis claves tibi sum traditurus. Convenit enim ut illic primus sit auctoritate, qui primus est fidei professione & caritate."

³⁶⁵LB 7: 92F-93A: "Atque ego vicissim, ne gratis me tam magnifico testimonio ornaris, illud affirmo, te vere Petrum esse, hoc est, solidum lapidem: non huc aut illuc vacillantem variis opinionibus vulgi, & huic saxo tuae professionis, superstruam ecclesiam meam: hoc est, domum & palatium meum, quam ita communiam innixam immobili fundamento, ut nullae vires regni tartarei valeant illam expugnare. Multis machinis vos impetet Satanas; concitabit in vos impiorum Spiritum cohortem, sed meo praesidio stabit aedificium meum inexpugnabile, tantum maneat ista solida professio."

confession and the ability to endure the greatest of tests. As if to make the point explicit, Erasmus uses a form of *professio* at least seven times in verses 15-19, emphasizing *what* was said about Jesus, not *who* said it.³⁶⁶ The conditional nature of the security of the kingdom is another noteworthy aspect of Erasmus' interpretation. Satan cannot destroy the Church, "as long as that profession remains solid," nor does anyone need to fear the devil's kingdom, "if only he is 'Peter,' that is, like you."³⁶⁷ Erasmus' interpretation serves to highlight the importance of the confession of faith by indicating the subjective nature of Christ's protection of the Church. Only if the profession of faith is maintained can the Church rest in the promise of its stability. Despite earlier comments, Peter's uniqueness is also diminished by Erasmus' view that anyone can be a "Peter" by making the same confession of faith. Erasmus firmly equates the rock upon which the Church is built, not with the historical Peter or his successors, but with the confession of faith first uttered by Peter, and anyone could similarly be a "rock."

Although this conclusion is implied throughout the paraphrase on the passage, in the *Ratio Verae Theologiae* (1518) Erasmus made that point overtly:

Peter replies as the voice and function of the entire Christian people: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." For there is nobody in the body of Christ, from whom that confession – "You are

³⁶⁶LB 7: 92E-93B: "eliceret professionem...solida professione...huic saxo tuae professionis...ista solida professio...professione et caritate...professus quod tu profiteris."

³⁶⁷LB 7: 93A: "Tantum maneat ista solida professio...Ab hoc non est quod quisquam sibi metuat, modo Petrus sit, hoc est, tui similis."

Christ, the son of the living God” - should not be required. Similarly, what is said to Peter: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” according to the interpretation of some, applies to the whole body of the Christian people.³⁶⁸

Despite the severe criticisms of it, Erasmus replicated this interpretation of Matthew 16:19 in his *Paraphrase on Matthew*, and it had immense ramifications for his entire understanding of the keys. Any privileges granted to Peter in the following verses would logically apply also to the entire Christian Church making the same confession. Peter was to receive the keys to the kingdom, not in the sense that he alone possessed their power, but as a representative of the apostles and the entire body of Christ. Erasmus continues in the *Paraphrase on Matthew* to indicate that the power was given to Peter only after the resurrection:

For although Peter’s declaration was highly praised by Christ, as in the case of [the declaration] of those journeying and gradually ascending towards greater perfection, yet they were still dreaming about a type of kingdom not entirely unlike an earthly one. And consequently Jesus promised in a hidden way, as if through a riddle, the right to the keys to Peter [but] did not hand them over immediately.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸Holborn, 198: “Petrus totius populi Christiani voce et vice respondet: Tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi. Nullus enim est in corpore Christi, a quo non exigatur ista confessio: Tu es Christus, Filius Dei vivi. Consimiliter quod Petro dicitur: Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam, et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum, iuxta quorundam interpretationem, ad universum populi Christiani corpus pertinet.”

³⁶⁹LB 7: 93C: “Quanquam enim Petri vox collaudata est a Christo, veluti iam proficientium, et paulatim emergentium ad perfectiora, tamen adhuc somniabant regnum quoddam non omnino dissimile mundano. Et ob haec Jesus obscure, quasique per aenigma Petro ius clavium pollicitus est, non continuo tradidit.”

Only after the apostles reached a full understanding of his divine and human nature and the spiritual character of his kingdom did Jesus actually give the keys to Peter. Erasmus' comments on the binding component of the keys in Matthew 18 expand the possession of the keys beyond even the apostles by indicating the power to admonish a brother and participate in his exclusion from the Church, and ultimately heaven, belonged not just to clergy. At the very end of the paraphrase on Matthew 18:18, Erasmus again pointed toward a laity in rightful possession of the keys of excommunication: "Even though that power [of binding and loosing] corresponds primarily to the leadership, yet it is given to all by me, provided consensus is reached, not a human [agreement] but one in my name."³⁷⁰ Although in both texts he concedes that the leadership eventually would take control of the procedure, Erasmus envisions excommunication resulting from a consensus of the offended congregation, not just the clergy. Commenting on verse 19, Erasmus attributes the effectiveness of the keys to God's love for "holy concord" among Christians. Erasmus' Jesus indicates that the Father would honor the decision of two or more individual Christians who truly agreed with God's Spirit.³⁷¹ In this way, Erasmus applies his well-known concern for the *consensus fidelium* to even the smallest gatherings of Christians and contends that one of the results of consensus was the effective power of the

³⁷⁰LB 7: 101A: "Ea potestas tametsi primoribus maxime competet, tamen omnibus a me dabitur, si modo consensus accesserit: non humanus, sed in meo nomine."

³⁷¹LB 7: 101A-B: "qui vere concordet meo spiritu, hoc est, non commoti affectu humano, sed concorditer, amantes ea qua Dei sunt...Adeo Pater amat Euangelicam sanctamque concordiam..."

keys; his paraphrase on the verse is a conspicuous acknowledgment of a active role for the laity in the performance of Church discipline. The power of the keys belonged to the entire Church, both the clergy and the laity.

Scholars have called attention to Erasmus' heightened appreciation of the laity's status within the Church. In the preface to the 1518 edition of the *Enchiridion*, Erasmus described the Church in terms of three concentric circles corresponding to the clergy, princes, and the common people all drawn gradually closer to Christ at the center. Erasmus contends that the Church consists of the people of Christ, and not simply the clergy, although they were more esteemed due to their close proximity to godly things.³⁷² Augustijn notes that the tripartite division of society was a medieval concept, but Erasmus had "upset the natural order" with his image of the Church because it envisioned mobility through the circles; the common people can and should gravitate toward the centre and are not destined to remain on the periphery if they progress in piety toward Christ, the centre. Indeed, in Erasmus' vision of the Church, "he who is a foot can become an eye."³⁷³ Lay participation in excommunication during the Middle Ages sometimes occurred if the matter was purely legal, but normally that power was reserved for high-ranking members of the clergy.³⁷⁴ Erasmus' assertion that

³⁷²See Hilmar M. Pabel, "The Peaceful People of Christ: The Irenic Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam," in *Erasmus' Vision of the Church*, ed. Hilmar M. Pabel (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995), 68-70.

³⁷³Cornelis Augustijn, "The Ecclesiology of Erasmus," in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, 2:142.

³⁷⁴Logan, "Excommunication," 536.

the keys had been “given to all” marked an attempt to recover a long-lost practice, and it corresponded well with his promotion of lay piety and his spiritually oriented concept of reform. After all, if the power of the keys was only effective when the internal dispositions of those using them corresponded with God’s Spirit, then it reasonably followed that pious laymen could exercise the same power as pious clergy. As indicated in his ecclesiological analogy of the circles, the critical factor was not title or office, but closeness to Christ.

The significance of Erasmus’ view of the keys is twofold. The first involves his interpretation of Matthew 16:18. The strength of Erasmus’ conviction about the meaning of that text is witnessed by the fact that even in light of the Protestant arguments against the papacy, subsequent editions of the New Testament not only retained the *professio* interpretation but reinforced it with more patristic evidence. For example, in the 1527 edition of the *Annotations* he added references to Theophylact and Chrysostom.³⁷⁵ The basis of Erasmus’ acceptance of the legitimacy of the papacy is debatable,³⁷⁶ but it is clear he did not accept it based upon the interpretation of this passage, for his meaning is

³⁷⁵See Bigane, *Faith, Christ or Peter*, 23-28, 31-35. Erasmus held fast to this interpretation even as Protestants took his rendering of Matthew 16, translated it into German, and published it as supporting their rejection of the papacy.

³⁷⁶See McSorley, “Erasmus and the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff,” 37-54, esp. 41, who attempts to demonstrate Erasmus accepted the papacy as a divine institution, but not as it was represented among his contemporaries. Cf. Payne, *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments*, 29-32, who believed Erasmus regarded it as a human institution, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

unequivocal: the power of the keys was given to the entire Christian Church and its strength depended upon Peter's profession, not his person.

Secondly, by attributing the power of the keys for excommunication to the *affectus*, "promptings of the heart," Erasmus applies his characteristic emphasis upon the internal and spiritual to yet another issue of the day. It is unlikely Erasmus' comments on excommunication in this passage and the high standards he required for its heavenly efficacy could have been formulated in early 1522 without some serious reflection upon *Exsurge Domine*, the bull which threatened Luther with excommunication, and that Erasmus found "completely foolish."³⁷⁷ Erasmus' clear emphasis concerning the keys was that their efficacy completely depended upon their spiritual use, and Church officials who exercised them for wrong purposes were abusing that power and could not expect any effects beyond the earthly Church.

It would be incorrect, however, to make too much of Erasmus' understanding of the keys. His view of them is primarily negative, and he is more intent on proving what they did not do, what they did not achieve, rather than enthusiastically describing fully their power. For a Christian intellectual deeply troubled by the corruption in the Church, a text that appeared to grant extraordinary powers to that earthly institution would have given him considerable pause. In interpreting Matthew 16:18, therefore, Erasmus

³⁷⁷ Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 123.

eschewed the connection of the power of the keys with the Roman Pontiff and instead emphasized the profession of Peter and the general way in which that profession led to the initiation of sinners into the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 18:19, Erasmus' interpretation "democratizes" the binding power of the keys and stresses the fact that only decisions reached in consensus and in communion with the Spirit of God had any effect in the eternal realm. In addition, by noting that excommunication was the Church's only disciplinary tool, he reminded his readers that the Church's power over its members was exclusively spiritual.

Hubmaier and the Keys to the Kingdom

Hubmaier's interpretation of the keys pervades his ecclesiological writings, particularly those published after he arrived in Nicolsburg in July 1526. After the city's conversion to Anabaptism, and its acceptance of him as its theologian, Hubmaier found himself at the head of a large congregation needing practical guidance and discipline, a situation facing other urban reformers such as Martin Bucer.³⁷⁸ Prompted by these circumstances, Hubmaier wrote several pastoral treatises in late 1526 and early 1527 that extensively build upon Matthew 16:13-20 and Matthew 18:15-20 as the basis for communal discipline. Hubmaier published more than sixteen treatises during his year-long stay in Nicolsburg, but the two most important works were *On Fraternal Admonition* and *On the*

³⁷⁸ See Amy Nelson Burnett, "Church Discipline and Moral Reformation in the Thought of Martin Bucer," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991): 438-456, who examines Bucer's attempts at solving some of the same issues challenging Hubmaier.

Christian Ban, both published in early 1527.³⁷⁹ The former provides the biblical evidence for private correction of errant congregants and the latter establishes the theological basis for banning those who refuse that correction. Some Anabaptists had criticized Hubmaier's success at proselytizing the town, complaining that many simply had been baptized and had not actually made a public profession of faith resulting in reformed lives. The disciplinary writings constituted Hubmaier's attempt at remedying the moral laxness in the Church.³⁸⁰

What is the Power of the Keys?

Hubmaier's most important single statement about the keys appears in *On the Ban*, where he emphasizes their dual power. Hubmaier provides a loose paraphrase on the text in Matthew and proceeds to declare that the power of the keys involved the dissemination of Peter's profession:

This same power and keys Christ gave and commended to the Church after his blessed resurrection; Namely, to preach the gospel, thereby to create a believing congregation, to baptize the same in water, thus with the first key unlocking for it the gates of the Christian Church, admitting her to the forgiveness of sins.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹For publication data see *HS* 337-338, 366. Other important treatises during this period making reference to the keys: *A Christian Catechism*, *A Form for Water Baptism*, and *A Form for Christ's Supper*.

³⁸⁰Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 320-328. Bergsten cautions against taking the complaints of Hubmaier's opponents at face value. There was, however, evidently some problem with the issue of discipline.

³⁸¹ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 412; HS 369): "Eben den Gwalt und Schlüssel hat Christus der Kirchen geben und zu gestelt nach seiner lobwirdigen ursteend. Namlich das

Hubmaier believed that the Church's ability to preach, to teach, to baptize, and to pronounce forgiveness was directly related to the granting of the keys to a Church that perpetually made Peter's profession. The power of the first key related directly to the Church's possession of salvation and its ability to incorporate sinners into it through their similar profession of faith and baptism, the two requirements for entrance into the kingdom. Hubmaier's version of loosing in this passage does not include the traditional absolution in the sacrament of penance, but represents the loosing from sin upon induction into the believing congregation and the body of Christ. The parallels with Erasmus' paraphrase on Matthew 16:19 are conspicuous. What Hubmaier calls the "first key" corresponds directly to Erasmus' interpretation of the keys in Matthew 16. Its power initially was to open the gates of salvation, not the power of absolution in the traditional sense. Particularly insightful is Hubmaier's explicit use of the same language of Erasmus' paraphrase, specifically "opening the gates" to the kingdom and the association of the forgiveness of sins with baptism. Hubmaier's interpretation of the passage could pass for a rough imitation of Erasmus' paraphrase on the verse.³⁸² For Hubmaier and Erasmus, the keys of Matthew

Evangelium zu predigen, damit ein glaubige Gmain zu machen, die selben nachmals im wasser tauffen, und mit dem ersten Schlüssel Ir die porten der Christlichen Kirchen auff schliessen, und sy einlassen zu verzeihung irer sünden."

³⁸² Hubmaier: "to baptize the same in water, thus with the first key opening to her the portals of the Christian Church" (PY 412); Erasmus: "he is freed from his sins through baptism. And so, by your leadership and your opening the doors to him, he will enter into the heavenly kingdom" (LB 7:93B).

16:19 correspond directly to the proclamation of Peter's confession, baptism, and initial forgiveness of sins conveyed upon new believers.

Hubmaier's interpretation of the second key envisioned a very different capacity:

Christ, rather, gives to his Church a second key, namely the authority to exclude again persons who had been received and admitted into the Christian congregation if they should not will to behave in a right Christian way, and to close her doors before them, as he says, "Whose sins you retain, to them they shall stand retained." [Matt. 18:18]. This command and authority Christ strengthened with an oath which he spoke in his own name as he said, "Verily I say to you, all that you will bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you will loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven."³⁸³

The first key enabled the Church to bring sinners into the kingdom and salvation, while the second key permitted the Church to exclude erring Christians from that same kingdom's salvific benefits. Hubmaier's reference to two keys is traditional, but he does not follow the medieval concept of *clavis scientiae* and *clavis potestatis*; instead he sees both keys as involving power to admit and to exclude. The exclusionary power of the second key was a major theme of his pastoral writings, particularly *On the Christian Ban*. That treatise provides an introduction to the practice, based on Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, as well as a practical guide for its implementation. In Hubmaier's view, the ban was a

³⁸³ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 414; HS 370).

“public separation and exclusion of a person from the fellowship of the Christian Church because of an offensive sin, from which this person will not refrain.”³⁸⁴

The ban had several purposes, all of which related to Hubmaier’s understanding of the Church as a untainted fellowship of believers. The ban is practiced to spare the Church the ridicule incurred by its members not living up to its own standards. It also serves to warn new members and the spiritually weak from falling into similar sins. And finally, the “ban does not take place out of hatred, nor to harm anyone, but out of Christian love, and for the welfare of the sinner, so that he might renounce his sins and that together with soul and body his spirit might be saved.”³⁸⁵ Hubmaier often points out that the ban is a tool for reconciliation, a cure, as much as it is a method of maintaining ecclesial purity. *On the Ban* explains that the procedure for excommunicating a person must dutifully follow the pattern of Matthew 18:15-20, which includes private and public exhortation. Only after these attempts failed to produce reconciliation does the congregation proceed to ban the sinner.³⁸⁶

Congregants then treat the banned individual as “a disorderly, offensive, leprous person, who is captive and bound by sin and given over to Satan.” Hubmaier explicitly points out that the banned person should not be viewed as an enemy. Specifically, “we should not strike him nor drive him away, nor kill him,

³⁸⁴ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 410; HS 367).

³⁸⁵ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 421; HS 375).

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* (PY 416; HS 371-2).

but should rather avoid him, flee from him, stay out of his company.”³⁸⁷ If the sinner repents, “immediately the Church shall receive him again with great joy and with the authority of the keys given to her, open again to him the kingdom of Christ.”³⁸⁸ According to Hubmaier, the keys of the kingdom actually served three functions: initially opening the gates of heaven, excluding lapsed Christians from the Church, and readmitting them upon true repentance.

Hubmaier’s view of the keys and the ban in some ways was very traditional. He affirmed the medieval Church’s right to excommunication, but he argued it had been wrongly applied. The ban “is not for petty offenses as our papists have been doing,” he writes, “but for an offensive sin.”³⁸⁹ He criticized the medieval Church for using excommunication for political, financial, or personal gain and for its use against those who correctly had pointed out its patently corrupt practices, such as simony and priestly concubinage.³⁹⁰ The ban was not a weapon used by the Church to enforce its own corrupt regulations, but as a tool for correcting erring Christians whose lifestyles would surely lead to their damnation. Hubmaier’s emphasis upon the ban’s usefulness in maintaining purity differs from Erasmus, whose overarching theme in the paraphrase on Matthew 18:15-20 was the cure of souls. Ironically, the leading advocate of moral reform and Christian piety in the early sixteenth century did not portray

³⁸⁷ Ibid. (PY 418; HS 373).

³⁸⁸ Ibid. (PY 423-4; HS 377).

³⁸⁹ *A Christian Catechism* (PY 354; HS 317).

³⁹⁰ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 421-3; HS 374-6).

excommunication as primarily a means of preserving Church purity, but as a “way of healing.” Indeed, Erasmus does refer to excommunication as something done lest a grievous sinner “mingle with the community of believers and poison others with his illness” or “so that he cannot infect the faithful,” but more often he portrays the ban as something useful for curing the spiritual ill, not for maintaining a pure Church.³⁹¹

Hubmaier’s theology of the keys depended upon his belief that the Church’s power to “bind and loose” was objectively effective; the power of the keys was neither symbolic, nor metaphorical. He insists that the Church did not possess the power of the keys while Christ was still present on the earth, but only after the resurrection and until the second coming. Through the keys, the Church wields Christ’s own power: “But as I said concerning the keys, first Christ himself used the keys loosed and bound the sinners according to the command of his heavenly father. Thereafter he turned the same power over the Christian Church and let her deal, practice, dispose, and authorize, as she possesses and will possess it and use it until the coming of the Lord.”³⁹² For Hubmaier, then, the power of the keys was nothing less than Christ’s own power exercised in the Church.

Who possesses the keys?

³⁹¹LB 7: 100C, 100D.

³⁹²*On the Christian Ban* (PY 413; HS 369).

Hubmaier's interpretation of the keys held that both the universal and local Church possessed the power of the keys. On the critical issue of the "rock" of Matthew 16:18, Hubmaier followed the *professio* interpretation, as indicated by his telling paraphrase on the passage in *On the Ban*:

You are a stony one, and on the rock, which you openly confess as you say fearlessly that I am the Christ, the son of the living God, I shall build my Church, my gathering, my congregation, and the gates of hell cannot stand against her, and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Truly I say to you: all that you bind on earth will be bound also in heaven, and what you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.³⁹³

Hubmaier's typical approach to biblical exegesis is simply to quote the text and assert the "clear and bright" meaning of the text. Here, however, he intermingles a few explanatory points within the quote that indicate his primary concerns. In keeping with his pastoral, not polemical, purposes, Hubmaier did not take the opportunity to fulminate against papal authority or the papal interpretation of the keys. Instead, he simply ignores the issue. Yet, his use of a common word for stone, *felser*, rather than a transliteration of *petra* (i.e. petrus) may indicate that Hubmaier specifically sought to avoid any association of the power of the keys with the office of the papacy. As if to ensure his semantic point was made, Hubmaier adds to the text of Matthew by explaining that the "the

³⁹³ *On the Ban* (PY 412; HS 368): "Du bist ein felsler, unnd auff den felsenn, den du offentlich bekhennest und sagst onerschrockenlich, das ich seye Christus, ein Son des lebendigen Gottes, wirde ich bauen mein Kirchen, meinen hauffen, mein Gmain, und die porten der hellen mügend wider sy nit obligen [i.d. ihr nicht überlegen sein], und ich wird dir geben die Schlüsslen des reichs der himelen. Fürwar sag ich euch: Alles das, so ir binnden werdent auff erden, wirdt gebunnden sein auch in den himelen, und was ir auff erden lösen werdt, soll gelösst sein auch in den himelen."

stone” upon which Christ would build his Church was Peter’s bold confession. In another context, he made the same explicit point concerning Matthew 16:18: “There Christ says, ‘You are Peter, and on this rock (meaning: which you confess) I will build my Church.’”³⁹⁴ His interpretation renders the historical Peter as simply the first one to discover the foundational doctrine concerning Jesus’ identity as Christ and God’s Son. The Church is built upon Peter’s profession of faith, not his person. Clearly, the common *professio* interpretation of Erasmus and Hubmaier constitutes a concrete connection between them. Erasmus’ advocacy for that interpretation in the *Annotations*, the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, and the *Ratio* – all texts Hubmaier had read and praised – heightens the possibility that Hubmaier learned the interpretation from him.

Hubmaier’s espousal of the *professio* interpretation naturally led him to conclude that the power of the keys belonged to all who made that same profession, but he accentuates this point to the extreme, arguing that those powers belonged not only to the Church universal, but also to its local expressions and even individual Christians. To make this point, Hubmaier resorts to questionable exegetical tactics as well as to conventional argumentation. The first approach involves a dubious harmonization of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. According to Matthew 16:19, in response to Peter’s confession, Jesus says: “I will give to you (sing.) the keys to the kingdom...and whatever you (sing.) bind ...and whatever you (sing.) loose” will be done in

³⁹⁴ *A Christian Catechism* (PY 352; 315-316).

heaven. The reference to binding and loosing in Matthew 18:18 uses the second person plural pronoun throughout the text. In Hubmaier's above-cited paraphrase, however, he modifies Jesus' words, retaining the singular [*dir*] for the first phrase but adding the plural [*ir*] for the latter two. Commenting on the text, he immediately addressed the point, noting, "When Christ says, 'To you,' (*Dir, dir*) he signifies the unity of the Church. But when he says, 'You,' (*Ir, ir*) he indicates that many men shall be gathered together in this unity of faith and Christian love."³⁹⁵ Hubmaier conflates Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, making it appear as if Christ had seamlessly promised the keys to both Peter and to all the other apostles in the same pericope. Hubmaier employs his creative exegesis to support his view of the availability of the keys to both the universal Church, indicated by the singular *dir*, and the particular churches, represented by the plural *ir*. Although the principle of the mother and daughter Church was a traditional theological distinction, Hubmaier's strict *sola scriptura* principle required biblical support for every doctrine, and it appears his harmonization of the passages on the keys provided him just such a proof text. It is clear that Erasmus could not have been the source of this exegesis.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁵ *On the Ban* (PY 412; HS 368): "In dem das nun Christus sagt (Dir, dir) bedeut Christus die ainigkhait der Kirchen. Das er aber sagt (Ir, Ir) zaigt er an, das vil menschen in diser ainigkait des Glaubens und Christenlicher liebe versamlet sein werdent."

³⁹⁶ Erasmus' translation in the New Testament (LB 6: 88C-90A) and the *Paraphrase on Matthew* (LB 7: 93A-B) accurately follow the text of Matthew 16:19 with the singular forms.

A more plausible way Hubmaier calls attention to the particular Church's full possession of the keys was by utilizing synonyms for "Church." By referring to the Church as *kirchen*, *hauffen* (gathering), and *Gmain* (congregation), Hubmaier seeks to emphasize the intimacy of the relationship between the universal and particular Church. It was not just the universal spiritual Church that was built upon Peter's confession, but also its physical local expressions. In *On Fraternal Admonition*, Hubmaier explains that the *ecclesia particularis* was the daughter to the mother universal Church and as such enjoyed the latter's privileges and responsibilities. Emulating Christ's relationship to the Father, the daughter Church does the will of the mother Church, just as the mother Church does the will of Christ.³⁹⁷ Hubmaier had explained the point fully earlier in *A Christian Catechism* (1526), where he addressed the universal Church, as expressed in the Apostles' Creed, and then explained that the particular congregation was an expression of that universal Church meeting in various locations for biblical instruction and participation in the sacraments. The relationship between the two is close largely due to the shared power of the keys: "The Church as daughter has the same power to bind and to loose on earth as the universal mother Church, when she uses the keys according to the command of Christ, her spouse and husband."³⁹⁸ Hubmaier interpreted the keys as something not simply reserved for the apostles, nor the hierarchy of the Church,

³⁹⁷ *On Fraternal Admonition* (PY 374; HS 339).

³⁹⁸ *A Christian Catechism* (PY 351-2; HS 315)

but possessed by every “gathering” of believers who formed a “community” of Christians. In fact, not only were they given to the particular Church and its leadership, but to every member of the congregation who then participated in wielding the keys. In Hubmaier’s ideal baptismal rite, bishops were to inform the new Christian that he was now part of the Christian community “as a member participating in the use of her keys.”³⁹⁹ Every confessing Christian, baptized into the Church, participated in the power of the keys. This point was stressed in *On Fraternal Admonition*, discussed in the baptismal liturgy, and reaffirmed in the administration of the Lord’s Supper.⁴⁰⁰

Erasmus did not launch into a discussion of the universal and particular Church in relation to the keys of the kingdom in the paraphrase on Matthew 16:18, but he did point out that Peter had “spoken for all,” that everyone who remained true to his profession of faith was rightly called “Peter,” and that the power of the keys given to Peter was the possession of the entire Church.⁴⁰¹ Erasmus’ point is that neither the pope nor the hierarchy had exclusive claim on the keys, but he did not address explicitly the powers of the local congregation. Yet Erasmus’ comment in the paraphrase on Matthew 18:19 that the power to ban was “given to all,” does suggest a laicized interpretation of the text in common with Hubmaier’s.

³⁹⁹A *Form for Water Baptism* (PY 389; HS 350).

⁴⁰⁰See *On Fraternal Admonition* (PY 373-85), *A Form for Water Baptism* (PY 387-92), *A Form for Christ’s Supper* (PY 393-408).

⁴⁰¹LB 7: 92E, 93A; LB 5: 86C.

One apparent difference between Hubmaier and Erasmus on the keys relates to the reason for their efficacy. For Hubmaier, the power of the keys, both to bind and loose, amounted to what Carl Leth described as a “total transfer of Christ’s own authority, exercised fully in his absence.”⁴⁰² Hubmaier himself seems amazed at this truth. Having described their proper use and purpose of the keys, he writes that they are effective because “so great and mighty is the authority of particular and visible Church, gathered together in part bodily and yet completely in the Spirit, even though only two or three are together in the name of the Lord Jesus and all of the others on the other hand are in error.”⁴⁰³ The authority of the keys was directly related to Christ’s physical absence from the earthly Church. In his place, the Church exercised his very own power until his return. At that time the keys would be returned to him. To deny the actual power of the keys to it would be to deny that Jesus had commissioned his disciples and empowered them with his Spirit. In this sense, Hubmaier was in line with late medieval practice, if not with medieval canon law, which carefully distinguished between the declaration and the actual fact.

Nevertheless, even with his lofty understanding of the objective potency of the keys Hubmaier implies at least two checks on the power of the local congregation, the first being that the ban’s efficacy rested upon its implementation “according to the command of Christ.” By this Hubmaier meant

⁴⁰²Leth, “Balthasar Hubmaier’s ‘Catholic’ Exegesis,” 116.

⁴⁰³*A Form for Water Baptism* (PY 414; HS 370).

the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-19. Although he does not discuss in detail how the congregation should come to its decisions, his recommended liturgical pronouncement of the ban implies unanimous agreement was required.⁴⁰⁴ Such a standard of agreement was probably seen as a safeguard against hasty or indiscriminate acts of banning. By requiring consensus, he implies that improper banning was ineffective only in the earthly sphere and not in heaven. What Hubmaier implied, however, Erasmus made explicit. In fact, the greatest single theme of Erasmus' interpretation of Matthew 18:18-20 was that without pious motivation and spiritual consensus the ban was completely invalid. At the same time one cannot agree with Leth's statement that the "total transfer of Christ's own authority is nowhere to be found in Erasmus' discussion of the keys."⁴⁰⁵ Erasmus indeed was able to affirm in impressive terms the actual effectiveness of the ban, as long as sincerity, piety, and loving consensus led to the judgment of the "two or three" gathered in the name of Christ.⁴⁰⁶ Fundamentally, therefore, Hubmaier and Erasmus agree on this point, but each maintained a different emphasis.

Following a brief examination of Hubmaier's interpretation of the keys, Windhorst concluded: "The renewed teaching of the keys is so important to Hubmaier, that in his opinion, understood rightly, it yields the correct

⁴⁰⁴ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 417; HS 372).

⁴⁰⁵ Leth, "Balthasar Hubmaier's 'Catholic' Exegesis," 116.

⁴⁰⁶ LB 7: 101A-B.

understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper."⁴⁰⁷ Hubmaier claimed several times that without a proper understanding of the keys, important theological truths would go unheeded to the detriment of Christian reform:

Whoever then understands correctly and fully the authority of the use of the Christian keys, the same will also know well and properly how to speak and to write of water baptism and of the Supper of Christ, namely, that the water does not save us, or that Christ is bodily inside the bread or the wine. But hitherto we had for a long time lost the keys, the belt, the Church, water, wine, and bread. Then, when we read it in the Bible, our Christian house got a roof over it.⁴⁰⁸

The doctrine of the keys tied together several important items in Hubmaier's theology. It touched on his baptismal theology because the rock of Matthew 16:18 was the profession of faith made by Peter. All those who subsequently appropriated that confession, were candidates for baptism, through which they committed themselves to God, the Christian life, and the Church. A proper understanding of the keys, then, was essential and inextricably connected to his doctrine of the Church's visible nature. For "where the water of baptism of Christ has not been restored according to the order of Christ, then it is impossible to know who is in the Church or who is outside, whom we have authority to admonish or not, who are brothers or sisters."⁴⁰⁹ Likewise, the restoration of the Lord's Supper in terms of Zwinglian memorialism was connected to the doctrine

⁴⁰⁷ Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*, 235.

⁴⁰⁸ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 413; HS 369-70). For the same point, see *On Fraternal Admonition* (PY 375; HS 339).

⁴⁰⁹ *On the Christian Ban* (PY 420; HS 374).

of the keys. Christ had to be absent from the world in order for the Church to wield the power of the keys. This, in Hubmaier's mind, ruled out the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.⁴¹⁰

Obviously, the doctrine of the keys also allowed for the restoration of the ban for the maintenance of a Church of identifiable saints. The Church properly defined, was a gathering of those who had responded to the gospel, submitted to baptism, and publicly pledged to "give [themselves] to the almighty God and to our Lord Jesus Christ in faith and to [their] neighbor in brotherly love, and that [they] would henceforth rule and lead [their] lives in the power of God according to his divine will."⁴¹¹ The pledge was so central to Hubmaier's view of baptism and Church discipline that in one place he commented that the pledge, not baptism itself, was the sacrament by which one committed oneself to God. In this sense, a lapsed Christian had not only fallen into a particular sin, but had perjured his baptismal pledge.⁴¹²

In Hubmaier's ecclesiology, a view of the baptismal promise and a life of discipleship meant nothing if those ignoring it were not corrected. If the Church were to be comprised of individuals who had pledged themselves to holiness, there had to be a way to enforce this requirement, and the ban was the means. One of the great criticisms Hubmaier and other Anabaptists leveled against the

⁴¹⁰*On the Christian Ban* (PY 413; HS 369).

⁴¹¹*On the Christian Ban* (PY 416; HS 371-2).

⁴¹²*A Form for Water Baptism* (PY 391; HS 352).

magisterial Reformers was that their theological breakthrough had not improved the moral quality of their Churches. In fact, Hubmaier argues that piety among Protestants was worse than before because of the hopelessness for moral reform engendered by Luther's doctrine of the bondage of the will. Hubmaier believed that the restoration of believer's baptism and the ban, combined with a traditional insistence upon freedom of the will, however, would provide the needed supplement to Luther's deficiencies. None of the magisterial Reformers adopted Hubmaier's belief in believer's baptism or free will, but Timothy Fulop has shown that Anabaptist criticisms were not lost on theologians such as Zwingli, Bucer, Capito, and later Calvin, who eventually adopted policies of Church discipline resembling those of Anabaptism.⁴¹³ Propping up Hubmaier's emphasis on the keys was his understanding of the Church as the visibly pure bride of Christ, "without spot or wrinkle," and the restoration of discipline as indispensable for maintaining that spotlessness. Other Protestants concluded that a true Church existed where the gospel was preached and the sacraments were correctly observed. These were the two marks of the Church. For Hubmaier and other Anabaptists, however, a true Church also must have discipline in order to maintain its purity and status as Christ's bride. As Davis aptly noted, Hubmaier's point was simple: "no discipline, no Church."⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³Timothy E. Fulop, "The Third Mark of the Church? – Church Discipline in the Reformed and Anabaptist Reformations," *Journal of Religious History* 19 (1995): 26-42.

⁴¹⁴ Davis, "No Discipline, No Church," 43-58.

Erasmus' interpretation of the keys in the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, however, does not suggest he held the same conviction about the importance of discipline and excommunication. Of course, he did acknowledge the Church's power to ban its members and even described it as the Church's sole means of correction as opposed to physical coercion, but his paraphrase evinces none of Hubmaier's enthusiasm and passion for that practice. Instead, Erasmus' paraphrase focuses on denouncing the vengeful and unspiritual application of excommunication, not on embracing its great potential for improving the Church's purity. Hubmaier sees correction and the ban as an indispensable, yet neglected, tool for reforming the Church and recovering its status as an authentic bride of Christ. Erasmus, however, pins his hopes for the rejuvenation of Christianity upon the instruction of the faithful in the philosophy of Christ, not on their correction through fraternal admonition and the ban. At best, Church discipline is a useful tool for curing the spiritually sick, but it did not constitute a third mark of the Church.

Contemporaries and the Keys to the Kingdom

Since the keys of the kingdom directly affected central issues of the Reformation, indulgences and papal authority, a full assessment of the contemporary exegetical landscape on these two scripture passages is not possible for a narrowly focused study. Yet, in order to provide some basis for evaluating the similarities between Erasmus' and Hubmaier's interpretations, it is

necessary to place their exegesis into an interpretive context, illustrated by three early sixteenth-century commentators: Eck, Luther, and Zwingli.

The Leipzig disputation (1519) elevated Eck to one of Luther's most famous antagonists and his writings largely represent an attempt to defend the traditional teaching of the Church against the heretical Reformers. In the *Enchiridion* (1525) Eck addressed, among other controversies, the power of the keys and the related issues of papal supremacy and excommunication. In the chapter "On Confession," he provides a succinct definition of the power of the keys, quoting Matthew 16:19 and 18:19. The first key, of knowledge, allows the priest to discern the nature of the sin confessed, and the second key, of power, corresponds to the power to forgive sins or not.⁴¹⁵ Defending papal primacy, Eck contends that the promise of the keys to Peter in Matthew 16:19 was fulfilled in John 21:17, where Christ's instructions to "feed my sheep" were essentially a command to rule the entire flock of the Church. In addition to asserting the truth of the papal interpretation of Matthew 16:18, Eck sought to bring all the Church Fathers into line in this interpretation, a difficult task since that interpretation was not well-known or used prior to the thirteenth century. This approach required the use of all of Eck's scholastic skills at harmonizing and, according to Leif Grane, it initiated a pattern of "stubborn denial of any disagreement in the

⁴¹⁵ Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces*, 72-73.

tradition” on the primacy text in subsequent Catholic exegesis.⁴¹⁶ Eck discusses the fine distinction between greater and lesser, and intrinsic and extrinsic, excommunication without elaborating on the purpose or function of excommunication.⁴¹⁷ Peter and his successors alone possessed the power of the keys, the power to rule the Christian Church, to forgive and retain sins, and to excommunicate. Eck’s definition of the keys summed up the entire late medieval confessional system which served as a theoretical and practical form of social control that rested upon the conviction that a properly ordained priest “with the words “‘I absolve you’– place[d] the penitent in contact with the passion and merits of Christ.”⁴¹⁸

Luther reacted against the theological system that held such a powerful view of the keys. Following the medieval exegetical tradition, Luther viewed Matthew 16 and 18 as intricately related and used both texts as witnesses to the power of the keys. Scott Hendrix has pointed out that from a very early period Luther interpreted the power of the keys as a source of “comfort and security,” not as tools for correction to frighten Christians into submission to the Church

⁴¹⁶ Leif Grane, “The Fathers and the Primacy According to John Eck,” in *Auctoritas Patrum II: Neue Beiträge zur Rezeption der Kirchenväter im 15. und 16 Jahrhundert*, ed. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, Markus Wriedt (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), 67-75, esp. 72, and 75 (quote).

⁴¹⁷ Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces*, 150-154.

⁴¹⁸ Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 345.

hierarchy.⁴¹⁹ A statement from a sermon preached just prior to the Leipzig debate encapsulates Luther's view of the keys: "This, you see, is what the keys do for you: what the priests were ordained for. When you feel your heart wavering or doubting whether you are in grace in God's eyes, then it is high time that you go to the priest and ask for the absolution of your sin, and thus seek the power and the comfort of the keys."⁴²⁰ The keys function as a reassurance of forgiveness, but a priest's utterance of absolution did not effectively accomplish forgiveness of sins. The Church's possession of the keys only allowed individuals to receive a comforting word about God's forgiveness, obtained solely by faith. In this sense, the keys were symbolic, not effective. The binding component of the keys received less attention from Luther, except in his rejection of the medieval Church's misapplication of excommunication as a tool of oppression. No doubt, the keys had a "binding" component for Luther, but that fearful side of the keys served primarily to threaten sinners with condemnation, thereby encouraging them to seek out and cling to the promise of the "loosing" key.⁴²¹

Luther's rejection of papal authority over the keys stemmed partly from his Christological interpretation of Matthew 16:18; thus, Christ is the rock of the Church and the entire Church possesses the keys. As his career progressed, he expanded upon his early interpretation of the keys, but he never abandoned the

⁴¹⁹ Scott Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 15-16.

⁴²⁰ Luther, *Sermon on Matthew 16:13-19* (LW 51: 59).

⁴²¹ Leth, "Balthasar Hubmaier's 'Catholic' Exegesis," 109.

practice of priestly confession and absolution or the idea that the keys functioned as a comfort and assurance of forgiveness.⁴²² For Luther, the keys were given to the entire Christian Church as a symbol to God's people of his promise to forgive their sins.

Zwingli addressed the issue of the keys in his major work, *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525). His position is a variation of Luther's. He agrees that the keys functioned as a means of providing assurance of salvation, but he disagreed with Luther's idea that confession and absolution were the means by which sinners received that assurance. Instead, Zwingli argued that the internal working of the Holy Spirit was the only way a person could achieve confidence of forgiveness, and that activity was triggered by the preaching of the gospel message.⁴²³ He writes: "Here then are the keys which Christ committed to the Apostles, by which they unlocked the gates of heaven – they preached the gospel. They that believed the gospel when it was preached felt the deliverance and comforting of the consciences."⁴²⁴

Zwingli believed that the power of the keys was essentially the preaching of the gospel that provided the opportunity for the Spirit to produce faith in the hearer and resulted in assurance of salvation. The loosing power of the keys

⁴²² See Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 13-15, 39, 83, for the development of Luther's view of the keys in relation to the Papacy; see also, Kling, *The Bible in History*, 80-81.

⁴²³ Gottfried Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 24-25.

⁴²⁴ *Commentary on True and False Religion*, 172

was the initiation into the Christian religion through hearing the proclamation of the gospel.⁴²⁵ Conversely, Zwingli believed the binding power of the keys simply to be the withholding of the gospel proclamation from those who persisted in serious sin: “Now I think the real Keys have been pretty well cleared of the rust of human traditions, so that anyone can see that they are nothing else than the administering of the gospel, and the withdrawal of it where there is obstinate unbelief.”⁴²⁶ Zwingli acknowledges that Christ himself had instituted excommunication in Matthew 18, but the abuse of the practice, not its proper implementation, dominated his discussion. He does require that those guilty of serious sins be excluded from the Lord’s Supper, but, as Locher points out, “the power of the keys, in the true sense, consists in preaching.”⁴²⁷

When it came to the question of who possessed the keys, Zwingli at length points out that in Peter’s profession of faith “all had confessed him” and consequently, “Christ promised the keys not to Peter alone, but to all who on being asked recognized that He is the Son of God.”⁴²⁸ The proclamation of the gospel belonged to the entire Christian population and was not the special possession of Peter and his successors, but of anyone called to make Peter’s initial profession of faith. In his polemic against the papal claim to sole authority over the keys, Zwingli forcefully argues for the Christological interpretation of

⁴²⁵ Leth, “Balthasar Hubmaier’s ‘Catholic’ Exegesis,” 111.

⁴²⁶ *Commentary on True and False Religion*, 174-5.

⁴²⁷ *Commentary on True and False Religion*, 175, 307-8; Locher, *Zwingli’s Thought*, 212

⁴²⁸ *Commentary on True and False Religion*, 159.

Matthew 16:18: “Christ alone, therefore, not Peter nor any creature, is the rock, built upon which the Church stands fast against all the vicious fury of all the storms.”⁴²⁹ To Zwingli, the keys were given to the entire Christian Church for the express purpose of preaching the gospel, thereby “loosing” people from their sins and bringing them to Christ, the ‘rock’ upon which the Church was built.

Conclusion

Comparative exegesis of Erasmus and Hubmaier on the Keys to the kingdom suggests a mixed conclusion to the question of influence. Similarities between Erasmus and Hubmaier are apparent on two exegetical questions. Erasmus advocated the *professio* interpretation of the *petra* of Matthew 16:18 in his *Annotations*, the *Paraphrase*, and the *Ratio*, as did Hubmaier. Erasmus interpreted the “loosing” of Matthew 16:19 to be the process of initiating sinners into Christianity and through profession of faith and baptism. This view was uncommon, yet Hubmaier employs it in his rendition of the passage. These similarities suggest Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on Matthew* had influenced at least certain aspects of Hubmaier’s exegesis, yet the discontinuity between their emphases cautions against attributing too much to Erasmus, particularly on the “binding” power of the keys. Although Erasmus’ interpretation of Matthew 18 heightens the role of the laity by hinting at communal participation in fraternal correction and excommunication, Hubmaier’s conviction that these practices

⁴²⁹ *Commentary on True and False Religion*, 161.

were critical to the spiritual renewal of the Church is nowhere to be found in Erasmus' paraphrase. His concern is to demonstrate that excommunication was effectual in the heavenly kingdom only if pious consensus characterized its implementation in the earthly Church, a truth that illustrates God's esteem for Christian concord. Hubmaier's conviction that the proper understanding of the keys was vital to the restoration of true Christianity could not have been acquired from Erasmus' interpretation.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION

Did Erasmus influence Anabaptism? The case of Balthasar Hubmaier recommends a cautious affirmative answer. It is evident that Hubmaier's contact with humanism made it possible for Erasmus to serve as an influence upon his religious thought. The evidence from his correspondence from 1521 to 1523 suggests that Hubmaier was making a full-scale commitment to the humanist intellectual culture. Hubmaier paid for his nephew to attend one of Europe's finest humanist Latin schools, corresponded with humanists specially connected to Erasmus, and he openly declared his rejection of scholasticism and his appreciation for Erasmus' theological method. He met Erasmus personally and discussed theological issues with him, gave works of classical authors to humanist luminaries, and praised and recommended Erasmus' *Paraphrases* and *Ratio*. Hubmaier's contact with Erasmus occurred during a time in his career when he was making profound alterations to his intellectual and religious commitments,⁴³⁰ and this fact heightens the probability of Erasman influence.

Comparative exegesis confirms that Erasmus' influence extended to Hubmaier's adopting specific Erasman interpretations of Scripture, particularly his reading of the Great Commission. Erasmus' stress upon the literal word

⁴³⁰ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 74-5; Sachsse, *D. Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe*, 130-36; Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*, 10.

order of the passage highlighted pre-baptismal catechesis and repentance as requirements for baptism and Hubmaier took up the same emphases in his interpretation. Hubmaier not only employed the essential features of Erasmus' exegesis, but he also quoted Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on the Great Commission and counted his interpretations as undermining infant baptism.

Since the Great Commission was one of Hubmaier's most cherished and oft-cited proof texts against infant baptism, Erasmus' influence proved significant. Hubmaier correctly adopted Erasmus' exegesis of the passage, but he went far beyond the humanist's intentions by concluding that infant baptism was therefore illegitimate. Although the practice fit awkwardly into Erasmus' theology of baptism, which emphasized personal appropriation of faith,⁴³¹ Erasmus nowhere rejected infant baptism, but instead accepted it as a longstanding practice of the Church.⁴³² Hubmaier adopted Erasmus' exegesis of the Great Commission, but he went far beyond what Erasmus had intended and arrived at conclusions at variance with his own theology.

Erasmus is also a highly probable influence for Hubmaier's interpretation of the parable of the tares. In the *Paraphrase on Matthew*, Erasmus interpreted the passage as calling for absolute toleration of heretics and that position forms the basis of Hubmaier's *On Heretics*. Erasmus and Hubmaier looked forward to

⁴³¹ Payne, *Erasmus, His Theology of the Sacraments*, 177-78.

⁴³² ASD V-3: 389; Allen Ep. 2853: 283; *De amabili Ecclesiae concordia* (1533), LB 5: 505C.

the conversion of the tares, both identified the servants of the parable as contemporary inquisitors, and each afforded full weight to the eschatological motifs as an argument for toleration. In contrast to most of the exegetical tradition, which interpreted the passage as only prohibiting the killing of heretics when intolerance would harm the orthodox, Erasmus and Hubmaier understood Christ's command of toleration as absolute for all circumstances in every age. Luther had already advocated toleration in 1523, but the parable of the tares did not serve as its biblical basis. Yet, that passage was crucial to Hubmaier's argument. Hubmaier's established use of the *Paraphrase on Matthew* and the centrality of the parable of the tares to his case render Erasmus the probable source of influence.

Erasmus' influence on Hubmaier's interpretation of the parable was significant, for it reveals the extent to which Hubmaier continued to utilize Erasmus' *Paraphrase on Matthew* after his conversion to the Reformation. Despite his dire personal situation, Hubmaier's argument against killing heretics was not the only way he could have defended himself. He could have simply continued to deny the charges of heresy and presented evidence that his opinions were not at variance with biblical teaching. Instead, he took the opportunity to apply his newly formed commitment to biblical theology to an issue of greater consequence: whether physical force and lethal punishment had any place in defending religious truth. His negative reply in *On Heretics* became the first Reformation treatise on toleration, and Erasmus' influence formed its biblical

basis. Hubmaier not only adopted the humanist's exegesis, but he also applied that exegesis theologically in a manner consistent with Erasmus' view of toleration. For, despite his later equivocation, there can be little doubt that Erasmus' paraphrase on the parable of the tares was a deliberate attempt to undermine the biblical basis for the inquisition and the killing of simple heretics.

Despite Erasmus' influence upon Hubmaier's interpretation of the Great Commission and the parable of the tares, it is unlikely he had substantially influenced Hubmaier's interpretation of the keys of the kingdom. Erasmus and Hubmaier both adopted the *professio* interpretation of Matthew 16:18 and linked the power of the first key with profession and baptism, but there is little evidence that Hubmaier's view of the ban, the most crucial aspect of the keys for Hubmaier, stemmed from Erasmian influence. Although Erasmus and Hubmaier laicized the process of excommunication, their reasoning for the effective power of the keys pointed in diametrically opposite directions, as did their views of the ban's role in Church reform. Erasmus viewed internal disposition and spiritual consensus as its source of power, whereas Hubmaier connected the ban's efficacy with Christ's physical absence from the Church. Erasmus' interpretation primarily served to warn against the improper use of excommunication, while Hubmaier stressed its paramount consequence for the rejuvenation of Christianity. For these reasons it is unlikely Erasmus played much of a role in shaping Hubmaier's interpretation of the keys of the kingdom.

The evidence suggests Erasmus was an exegetical influence for Hubmaier, but one must substantially qualify the nature of that influence with several caveats. First, arguing for Erasmian influence is not to characterize him as the sole, or even primary, influence on Hubmaier's thought. Other intellectual influences shaped Hubmaier's ideas, including Luther, whom Hubmaier read diligently, and Zwingli, his one-time colleague and friend. These major Reformers may not have agreed with Hubmaier's interpretation of the passages examined in this study, but they contributed greatly to his conversion to the Reformation and his understanding of key doctrines.⁴³³ In addition to these major figures, historians have also argued that Eck's nominalism continued to affect Hubmaier's theology well after the latter joined the Reformation, particularly with reference to free will and elements of his baptismal theology.⁴³⁴ Thomas Müntzer also may have contributed to Hubmaier's religious ideas on his visit to Switzerland in late 1524, and it is obvious members of the circle around Conrad Grebel were sources of important influence for Hubmaier's Anabaptist views.⁴³⁵ Hubmaier's letters to colleagues during his period of transition portray an individual seeking insight from many respected friends, asking them to help

⁴³³ Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 80-7.

⁴³⁴ Moore, "Catholic Teacher and Anabaptist Pupil," 78-94; Steinmetz, "Scholasticism and Radical Reform: Nominalist Motifs in the Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier," 123-144.

⁴³⁵ Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism*, 24-26; Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis*, 15.

him acquire a better understanding of Scripture.⁴³⁶ All this suggests Hubmaier read widely and that many influences were at work in his theology.

A second reason for a cautious view of Erasmian influence is that Hubmaier was also a capable and creative theologian who did not easily fit into one theological mold. Hubmaier respected Erasmus' scholarship and exegetical decisions, but that did not keep him from discarding his conclusions if he found them unconvincing. Obviously, he was not Erasmus' clone. Erasmus was not the final word for Hubmaier, but instead he followed Erasmus' exegesis in so far as it explained to him the plain sense of Scripture.⁴³⁷ Two examples illustrate the point. Hubmaier recommended Erasmus' translations for the study of the Bible, but in the case of Acts 16:34, the story of the Philippian jailer, he ignored Erasmus' guidance and translated the text to suit his own theological point.⁴³⁸ With reference to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Hubmaier's interpretation is only quasi-Erasmian. Even if Erasmus had influenced his *professio* interpretation of Matthew 16:18, Hubmaier's conflation of Matthew 16 and 18 and his view that the effectiveness of the keys directly precluded the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist bears no resemblance to Erasmus' interpretation. Hubmaier was not replicating Erasmus' every exegetical or theological judgment, but he approached the humanist's ideas creatively and critically.

⁴³⁶ *Letter to Adelphi*, 234; *Letter to Oecolampadius* (PY 70-1).

⁴³⁷ *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism* (PY 248; 228-29).

⁴³⁸ *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (PY 132; HS 148).

The most important non-Erasman element of Hubmaier's thought was his lack of deference to the consensus of the Church. To be sure, Erasmus' interpretations often challenged many of the prevailing traditions of late-medieval Christianity, but those interpretations were firmly rooted in a commitment to establish an understanding of the faith handed down by the Church. Longstanding agreement amongst Christians on doctrines was itself a testimony to their truthfulness, since Christ, the ultimate author of peace and concord, had guaranteed the agreement of the body of Christ on the fundamental issues of the faith.⁴³⁹ Erasmus often did propose interpretations that appeared to undermine the late medieval Church's proof texts for certain doctrines, but regularly they were based in what he considered the best elements of the Christian tradition, the Church Fathers, those authorities who provided the surest guidance to the Scriptures because they had successfully combined erudition and piety.⁴⁴⁰ For example, he could condemn the inquisition with his paraphrase on the parable of the tares, in part, because he knew that the practice was relatively new and that the Fathers had not sanctioned the killing of heretics.⁴⁴¹ Erasmus' Biblical interpretation occurred within a complex, yet, profound respect for the consensus of the Church, and this principle was essential to his theology, and it also helps explain his rejection of Protestantism. Hubmaier, however, had no such esteem

⁴³⁹ See Pabel, "The Peaceful People of Christ," 68-70, esp. 77-82, for a concise explanation of Erasmus' concept of consensus.

⁴⁴⁰ den Boeft, "Erasmus and the Church Fathers," 537-572, esp. 557-60.

⁴⁴¹ *Supputatio Errorum N. Beddae* (1527), LB 9: 581A.

for the consensus of the Church and, as early as the spring of 1524, he began to promote a strict hermeneutic which called for the rejection of teachings or practices that had “not been planted by God,” that is, without express biblical support.⁴⁴² This principle was an indispensable factor in Hubmaier’s opposition to infant baptism and without it, the catechetical interpretation of the Great Commission would have likely played little role in his opposition to infant baptism. Instead, Erasmus’ interpretation, positioned within Hubmaier’s theological framework, aided his renunciation of infant baptism. Since he understood the passage to preclude babies, his hermeneutic required infant baptism be uprooted.

A claim of Erasmian influence upon Hubmaier also must caution against assigning causal import to the intellectual influence. Erasmus influenced Hubmaier’s interpretation of Scripture, but that does not mean he caused him to become an Anabaptist, for many other factors contributed to his embracing Anabaptism. My study has simply demonstrated that it is reasonable to claim that Erasmus functioned as an important intellectual influence for Hubmaier’s interpretation of Scripture, particularly on two passages that formed the basis of distinctly Anabaptist doctrines. Consequently, Reformation historians can

⁴⁴² *Eighteen Theses Concerning the Christian Life* (PY 33): “All teachings, which God himself did not plan, are in vain, interdicted, and shall be uprooted. Hereby fall to the earth Aristotle, scholastics like Thomas, Scotus, Bonaventure, and Occam, and all teaching that does not spring from the Word of God.”

legitimately consider Erasmus as an important influence upon Hubmaier's thought.

Anabaptist historiography has passed lightly over Hubmaier because he fits awkwardly into the Anabaptism in the sixteenth century. Viewing Erasmus, who himself had difficulty finding a place in the increasingly tense environment of Reformation Europe, as an important influence for Hubmaier's theology can likely help explain some of the idiosyncratic elements of his theology. Perhaps the Erasmian element helps clarify his difference with other Anabaptists over the proper Christian view of government. Does Erasmian influence help elucidate the unexpectedly Catholic features of Hubmaier's short reforming career? Is it possible that Erasmus' influence stands behind Hubmaier's desire to locate his baptismal views within the broader Christian tradition? Might Erasmus' influence help illuminate the traditional elements of his final confession of faith, such as his belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary and vacillation on the existence of purgatory? James McClendon attempted to describe Hubmaier as a reformed Catholic whose peculiar theological emphases were due to his retention of traditional motifs, but he makes no reference to Erasmus' possible role in helping to shape Hubmaier's "Catholic" vision of reform.⁴⁴³ McClendon's direction may be generally correct, but it might take on a sharper focus if he and others were to explore the creative theologian's thought with recourse to Erasmus' writings.

⁴⁴³ James William McClendon, "Balthasar Hubmaier, Catholic Anabaptist," *MQR* 65 (1991): 21-33.

My study is significant to the broader question of Erasmus and Anabaptism in two ways. First, it provides plausible evidence of Erasmian influence on an important Anabaptist leader, consequently, validating the gist of the modern scholarship that has contemplated an intellectual relationship between Erasmus and Anabaptism. Considering Hubmaier's importance for shaping early Anabaptist theology, it is very possible that elements of Anabaptist theology that resemble components of Erasmus' thought are the result of an encounter with Erasmus' writings, and in this sense, my research supports the fundamental work of scholars such as Horst, Hillerbrand, and Davis who perceived in elements of Anabaptism traces of Erasmus.⁴⁴⁴ A profitable line of enquiry for further research into the question would be to pursue Lienhard's suggestion that the two most important things binding Erasmus to the Anabaptists were their primary concern for discipleship, as distinct from dogma, and their emphasis upon the liberation of the laity.⁴⁴⁵ It should be added, however, that comparative exegesis on the most important scriptural texts related to those issues would provide the most concrete basis for linking the Anabaptist views to Erasmus. Absolute proof of influence in intellectual history is ultimately elusive, but influence studies can do better than simply speculate about influence based on shared affinities. Comparative exegesis on particular Anabaptist

⁴⁴⁴ Horst, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists and the Problem of Religious Unity*, 1-32.

Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism," 157-158; Davis, "Erasmus as Progenitor of Anabaptist Theology and Piety;" *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins*, 266-348.

⁴⁴⁵Lienhard, "Die Radikalen des 16. Jahrhunderts und Erasmus," 103.

writers provides a more solid basis for influence claims and ought to be used in studies of Erasmus and Anabaptism.

Second, the case of Balthasar Hubmaier also suggests that exploring Erasmus' influence as an overarching explanation for the Anabaptist movement is imprudent. The case of Hubmaier provides arguably more concrete evidence of Erasman influence than any other early Anabaptist leader, but even then it is very limited. This evidence does suggest Erasman influence for components of Hubmaier's thought, but it does not allow for assigning causal import to that influence. The same is true for studies looking at the entire Anabaptist movement.

Studies on Erasmus on Anabaptism, therefore, should avoid Friesen's approach to the topic. As Hubmaier's case suggests, Erasmus' interpretation of the Great Commission found its way into Anabaptist thought, but Friesen's thesis went far beyond that simple statement and appeared to claim that Erasman influence was the primary factor in the emergence of Anabaptism. To his credit, Friesen correctly pointed scholars to the importance of the Great Commission and Erasmus' interpretation of it, but he attempted to prove too much from the limited evidence and in the process alienated otherwise sympathetic readers.⁴⁴⁶ Whatever one says about Erasmus' influence on Anabaptism, historians should

⁴⁴⁶ See for example, Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission*, 65-68 where he argues the Erasman interpretation holds together all the "true" Anabaptists, effectively becoming a common origin for the entire movement.

avoid assigning to him a sole or even a primary role in Anabaptist thought, especially since he explicitly denied at least one of its most central tenets.

Understanding Erasmus as one of the intellectual influences for Balthasar Hubmaier, and by extension Anabaptism, corresponds well with one of the current trends in Erasmus scholarship to examine Erasmus' legacy in ways that attends to his sixteenth-century reception. Recent research, particularly that of Silvana Seidel Menchi, has justified Williams' label of Erasmus as "patron of evangelicals in Spain and radicals everywhere."⁴⁴⁷ Her seminal study of the use of Erasmus by the Italian Protestants highlighted the ways in which Erasmus' writings were received as patently hostile to the Roman Church's dogmas and candidly supportive of Luther. For example, far from a harmless spiritual tract focused on internal religion, in Italy Erasmus' *Enchiridion* was viewed as so dangerous to orthodoxy that three of the five vernacular editions were completely destroyed. According to Menchi, the image of Erasmus encountered by Italian reformers of the sixteenth century was not the one of the modern historical consensus. They cited Erasmus' writings in opposition to many doctrines, such as purgatory and auricular confession, and viewed him as a "heretic" and an author of unrest and theological mischief.⁴⁴⁸ Bietenholz's study on Sebastian Franck came to similar conclusions, arguing that Franck praised Erasmus by assigning him a place of prominence on his list of approved heretics. Franck

⁴⁴⁷ Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 41.

⁴⁴⁸ Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus als Ketzer: Reformation und Inquisition im Italien des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 6-7, 7 (quote), 169-76, 186-88.

believed he was simply helping Erasmus draw the conclusions implicit in his writings and that needed amplification.⁴⁴⁹ The point is that the valid historical work in explaining Erasmus' thought through careful investigation of his writings needs to be complemented by attentiveness to the way his contemporaries understood him. From a distance and in light of his entire corpus Erasmus may appear to be an advocate of moderate religious reform, but Hubmaier serves as another example of how at least some of his contemporary readers understood him otherwise, and that legacy also warrants serious consideration.

⁴⁴⁹ Bietenholz, "How Sebastian Franck taught Erasmus to Speak with his Radical Voice," 233-248.

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