

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Introduction to the Volume	153
<i>STR Editor</i>	
David, the Book of Ruth, and Its Place in a Larger National Storyline	157
<i>J. Andrew Dearman</i>	
The Crucified King: STR Interviews Dr. Jeremy Treat	171
Jesus' View of Repentance and Forgiveness: A Hermeneutical Test Case.....	185
<i>Joshua Chatraw</i>	
A Return to Christ's Kingdom: Early Swiss Anabaptist Understanding and Temporal Application of the Kingdom of God.....	203
<i>Stephen Brett Eccher</i>	
Book Reviews.....	233

BOOK REVIEWS

James Henry Harris. <i>The Forbidden Word: The Symbol and Sign of Evil in American Literature, History, and Culture</i>	233
<i>Eric M. Washington</i>	
Walter Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough. <i>Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey</i>	235
<i>Michael L. Bryant</i>	
Victor H. Matthews. <i>The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World</i>	237
<i>Jason T. LeCureux</i>	
Mark David Hall. <i>Roger Sherman and the Creation of the American Republic</i>	239
<i>Brent J. Aucoin</i>	
Thomas R. Schreiner. <i>The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments</i>	241
<i>Matthew Y. Emerson</i>	
Kutter Callaway. <i>Scoring Transcendence: Contemporary Film Music as Religious Experience</i>	244
<i>Jeremy Evans</i>	
Robert B. Chisholm. <i>1 & 2 Samuel</i>	245
<i>Ryan P. O'Dond</i>	

J. Stephen Yuille. <i>Looking unto Jesus: The Christ-Centered Piety of Seventeenth-Century Baptists</i>	248
<i>G. Stephen Weaver Jr.</i>	
Barry Webb. <i>The Book of Judges</i>	250
<i>David T. Lamb</i>	
Jonathan R. Wilson. <i>God's Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation</i>	252
<i>Ken Keathley</i>	
Jonathan Stökl. <i>Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison</i>	254
<i>Jason T. LeCureux</i>	
Jackson Wu. <i>Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame</i>	256
<i>Wesley L. Handy</i>	
Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan, eds. <i>Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem</i>	258
<i>Jason B. Hood</i>	
W. Edward Glenny. <i>Hosea: A Commentary based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus</i>	261
<i>Joshua Moon</i>	
Michael McClenahan. <i>Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith ...</i>	263
<i>Nathan A. Finn</i>	
Dominique Barthélemy. <i>Studies in the Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project</i>	265
<i>Tracy McKenzie</i>	

A Return to Christ's Kingdom: Early Swiss Anabaptist Understanding and Temporal Application of the Kingdom of God

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Introduction

Jesus spoke often about the Kingdom of God as a part of His preaching ministry. Since His first century proclamations about Kingdom the idea has historically been interpreted in a variety of ways and applied in a host of divergent contexts.¹ The Kingdom of God served a prominent place in Eusebius of Caesarea's link between Emperor Constantine and the "Son of Man" designation from Daniel 7, was foundational to Augustine's *City of God*, and was even an impetus to Thomas Müntzer's radical call for the destruction of the godless during the German Peasants' War. Given the importance of this biblical phrase and subsequent confusion surrounding its meaning throughout history, the following will seek to identify its development in the early Swiss Anabaptists' answer to the question, "what is the Kingdom of God?"² By exploring the future Anabaptists' thoughts during Zürich's embrace of the Reformation in the early 1520s until the *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527, this exercise will present the Anabaptists' newly formed view of Kingdom amid their break from the Swiss Church. By 1527 the Anabaptists' view of Kingdom led them away from the territorial church model. Filling the vacuum left by their abrogation of a state church model, their new ecclesiology culminated in something different. Theirs was a church rooted in a kingdom dichotomy, was

¹ For a presentation of the historic models of Kingdom see Benedict T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington: Michael Glazer, 1988).

² The label "Swiss Anabaptist" is quite loaded and has been used to describe a plurality of people and movements. For this essay the designation will be used within one context unless otherwise noted. It will refer to those individuals who operated in or near Zürich and utilized believers' baptism as the entry point into a confessing, gathered church composed exclusively of regenerate believers.

assembled on the basis of regeneration, and intently disciplined given the temporal church's relationship with the eternal one in heaven.

By 1524 Huldrych Zwingli, the reformer of Zürich, had come to a stark realization about his former friends and students. His estranged followers, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, had leveraged the controversial and volatile issue of infant baptism as a means to realize an entirely "new church."³ What these future Anabaptists were doing was out of step with the era and Zwingli knew it. However, exactly what this meant for the group that was to later become the Swiss Brethren was not yet fully in focus.⁴ Zwingli's claim that his followers were founding a new church proved prophetic less than a year later when Grebel and Manz joined in the adult baptism of George Blaurock and what would later be identified as the recapturing of a believers' church.⁵ Whether these men were aware of the ramifications of such action remains debatable. What

³ Emil Egli, et al. (eds.), *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Schwetschke und Sohn, 1905-), Band IV p. 207 and Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618* (London: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 5.

⁴ Consensus regarding the origin of the Swiss Brethren has proven elusive. Several historians have argued the movement had purely religious motives born amid the belief that Zwingli's reform efforts had not gone far enough. See Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel c. 1498–1526: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren Sometimes Called Anabaptists* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1950) and John H. Yoder, "The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation," *MQR* 32 (1958), pp. 128–40. Other historians have contended that economic and social concerns dictated the group's departure from the magisterial Reformation in Zürich. See C. Arnold Snyder, "Revolution and the Swiss Brethren: The Case of Michael Sattler," *Church History* 50 (1981), pp. 276–87 and James M. Stayer, "Die Anfänge des schweizerischen Täuferturns," in *Umstrittenes Täuferturns* (ed. Hans Jürgen-Goertz; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 19–49; idem, "The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition," *Church History* 47 (1978), pp. 175–98; idem "Reublin and Brötli: The Revolutionary Beginnings of Swiss Anabaptism," in *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism / Les Debuts et les Caracteristiques de l'Anabaptisme* (ed. Marc Lien; The Hague: Springer, 1977), pp. 83–102.

⁵ For a first-hand account of this baptism see AJF Zieglschmid (ed.), *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder* (Ithaca: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1943), pp. 45–47 and George H. Williams (ed.), *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 42–44.

was clear is that through this one simple act a different concept of the church than Zwingli had envisioned was now a reality.

Naturally, this move towards the establishment of the Free Church had a profound impact on the Anabaptists.⁶ One implication was the group's newly emerging perception of the temporal application of the Kingdom of God. As the movement set itself outside the bounds of the *corpus Christianum*, a reassessment of Kingdom became inevitable. As will be demonstrated, this alternate understanding of the nature of God's Kingdom than found in Zürich would intersect with many foundational facets of the Swiss Anabaptists' theology, specifically in their developing ecclesiology and soteriology.

The Phrase "Kingdom of God" in the Sources

Before proceeding any further a brief word about phraseology is in order. The Swiss Anabaptists did not speak regularly through the phrase Kingdom of God or any similar derivatives. That is not to say that Kingdom language was absent in the sources from the movement in those early years, for it is present.⁷ Still, the sparse

⁶ For a survey of the origins of the Free Church see Chapter One of Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968). Fritz Blanke has argued that Conrad Grebel's 1524 letter to Thomas Müntzer stood as "*die älteste Urkunde protestantischen Freikirchentums*" (the oldest source for the Protestant free-church model). Fritz Blanke, *Brüder in Christo: Die Geschichte der ältesten Täufergemeinde* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1955), p. 15. However, Jürgen-Goertz is correct to question such an early date when stating "the (Müntzer) letter failed to set out an ecclesiological program... nor did it contain any suggestion that Thomas Müntzer should abandon his popular-church activities in Allsteadt and restrict him to a free-church model." Hans Jürgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (trans. Trevor Johnson; London: Routledge, 1996), p. 87.

⁷ For a movement that had such a strong New Testament orientation and used Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) as both hermeneutical priority and a lens to understand all of Scripture, Kingdom language would always be present. Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), pp. 28–30 and John D. Roth, "Harmonizing the Scriptures: Swiss Brethren understandings of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments during the last half of the sixteenth century," in *Radical Reformation*

usage of this phrasing should not be surprising given two important contextual realities. First, the Anabaptists were in agreement with the Swiss reformers regarding the future eschatological hope of heaven that was wrapped up in the language of Kingdom. The lack of deviation on this point is supported by their silence on the matter; there was no need to address theological points of agreement.⁸ This is why issues like the Trinity were not addressed as the Anabaptists codified their beliefs at Schleithem, for there was a preceding accord on such matters.⁹ Second, given that the Anabaptists' theology developed within the contextual framework of the movement's departure from the Swiss territorial Church, the bulk of their writings were concerned with the pressing matter of establishing a church they argued was founded on the model seen in the New Testament. As will be demonstrated, this left the Swiss Anabaptists' usage of Kingdom language dictated by their emerging separatist convictions and embodied primarily in their developing soteriology and ecclesiology.

Thus, while the specific language of Kingdom may be used only sparingly in the sources, the concept was still deeply embedded in the Anabaptists' theology. As the Anabaptists' attention turned to the proper manifestation of the church in light of their altering ecclesiology, a focus on the temporal Kingdom in their contemporary context dominated their writings.¹⁰ Vetting a new ecclesiology apart

Studies: Essays Presented to James M. Stayer (ed. Werner Packull and Geoffrey Dipple; Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 36–40.

⁸ The main exception and point of derivation rested in the Anabaptist's emerging theology of martyrdom, which was directly facilitated by the illegal status of Anabaptism and linked to the group's eschatological focus. For the importance of martyrdom in Anabaptist theology see Ethelbert Stauffer, "Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom," *MQR* 19 (1945), pp. 179–214; idem, "Täuferium und Märtyrertheologie," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 3 (1933), pp. 545–98 and Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 197–249.

⁹ Schleithem covered issues that the Anabaptists and Swiss state Church disagreed on including baptism, the ban, the Supper, separation from the world, support for pastors, civil authorities, and the use of oaths. "The Schleithem Confession" in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* (trans. and ed. John H. Yoder; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 34–43.

¹⁰ The modern way of demarcating this distinction in time is based in an already/not yet view of Kingdom. For details on this model of King-

from Zwingli's demanded the group focus on the present manifestation of God's Kingdom in the temporal realm. Therefore, as this essay will demonstrate, the focus on Kingdom for these Anabaptists was connected with their embrace of a gathered, believers' church. To rightly understand the Anabaptists' reclamation of a believers' church one must return to the early 1520s, to a time when these future Anabaptists were still in lockstep with Zwingli.

The Decidedly "Non-Territorial" Kingdom

Given the splintering division that was a consequence of the Protestant Reformation, one of the fundamental questions raised during the early modern period was "who is the true church?" This applied to the controversy between Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic Church. It was also a serious question debated between the early Anabaptists and their Swiss magisterial counterparts.¹¹ Attempts to find the "true church" amid the fragmentation of the Reformation begged a subsequent question regarding the initial departure from truth. The question of the "fall of the church" became an equally important point of emphasis. Identification of the earlier problem of the church's "fall" would inform the solution to the larger overarching question regarding the proper form of the "true" church.

The Swiss Anabaptists did not come to their separatist Free Church position all at once, nor to their new understanding of Kingdom that will be outlined shortly. In fact, almost all initial attempts at reform made by the future Swiss Anabaptists took place within the Swiss territorial Church. This is often all too easily forgotten about the leaders of the Anabaptist movement. During the early to mid-1520s serious attempts were made by reformers like James Brötli, Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Wilhelm

dom, or what Viviano calls the "ecclesial school" see Viviano, pp. 31, 51–56. A helpful overview of the historiography related to this tension may be found in George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 54–67 and Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), pp. 36–52.

¹¹ This was a major consideration at the Bernese disputations of 1532 and 1538. Martin Haas (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, Band IV; Drei Täufergespräche (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), pp. 94 and 313.

Reublin to realize territorial forms of Anabaptism.¹² Most of these were caught up in the flood of Reformation impulse that swept through the Swiss Confederation and their voices of concern echoed alongside reformers who would maintain magisterial Reformations, including reformers like Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, and Johannes Oecolampadius.

How then did these future Anabaptists come to reject the Constantinian state Church model that eventually necessitated their separation from the Swiss Church? The answer to that important question was what moved the group to consider a reassessment of their idea of Kingdom from a temporal perspective. The civil magistrates' authority, especially in ecclesiastical matters, played a critical role here. Each of the magisterial reformers noted above chose to pursue Reformation in the Swiss Church through the authority of the civil magistrates. By as early as 1523 this was a conviction eschewed by the future Swiss Anabaptists.¹³ Once that belief became a part of the future Swiss Anabaptists' narrative of dissent the first wave of persecutions ensued. Amid a growing persecution linked with the accusations of heresy and sedition, these future Anabaptists were forced to reassess their ecclesiology. This ecclesiological detour necessitated a form of the church outside of the previously established magisterial channels.¹⁴ They tried to reform the church from within. However, once that option was removed a departure from the Swiss Church became inevitable. Here, the con-

¹² Stayer, "The Swiss Brethren," pp. 183–85 and Clasen, p. 2–5; 10. Snyder has contended, "the fact that the Anabaptist movement eventually failed as a popular movement in northern Switzerland should not be allowed to obscure the fact that a serious attempt was made to establish Anabaptism on a territorial 'church' model." Arnold Snyder, "The Monastic Origins of Swiss Anabaptism Sectarianism," *MQR* 57 (1983), p. 7.

¹³ John H. Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers* (ed. C. Arnold Snyder; Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004), pp. 11–17.

¹⁴ Calvin Pater astutely argues, "Grebel naturally prefers to be a part of a mass movement that will lead to reformation. When the majority proves 'weak,' Grebel insists on a biblically determined theocracy that proceeds without tarrying. When these preferred options fail, he becomes a separatist." Calvin Augustine Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 137.

text of persecution not only served as a catalyst to the Anabaptists' embrace of separatism, but it also facilitated their belief that the fall of the church took place with the wedding of the church and state in the fourth century.¹⁵

Identifying the Constantinian state Church as the initial point of departure from the "true church" served to highlight the fact that the present, temporal manifestation of Kingdom, embodied in the local church, could not be territorial. Such a conviction harkened back to one of the first seeds of division between the future Anabaptists and Zwingli—the relegation of the pace of reform to the civil magistrates. During the Second Zürich Disputation (Oct. 26–28, 1523) Zwingli argued that God's Word alone provided the theological foundation for reforms like the removal of images in the church and the abolishment of the Mass. Still, the Zürich authorities were the final governing body that would determine the practical removal of such things from the liturgy.¹⁶ Simon Stumpf immediately rebutted Zwingli's understanding when he cried out, "Master Huldrych! You have no authority to place the decision in Milords' hands, for the decision is already made: the Spirit of God decides. If therefore Milords were to discern and decide anything that is contrary to God's decision, I will ask Christ for his Spirit and will teach and act against it."¹⁷

Conrad Grebel, one of those closest to Zwingli, was so incensed with his mentor's acquiescence to the civil authorities during this 1523 disputation that shortly thereafter he exclaimed, "Whoever thinks, believes, or declares that Zwingli acts according to the duty of a shepherd thinks, believes, and declares wickedly."¹⁸ By 1523 the link between the Swiss Church and the civil authorities started serving as a vivid reminder to Grebel and others of precisely what was wrong with the Reformation in Zürich. As Neil Blough reasons,

¹⁵ Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1958), pp. 46–78.

¹⁶ "The Second Zurich Disputation" in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism* (ed. Leland Harder; Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1985), pp. 242–43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹⁸ "The Grebel-Stumpf Alternative Plan of a Separatist Church" in Harder, pp. 276.

In Anabaptist eyes this was merely a repeat of what had already begun in the fourth century and had continued throughout the ensuing centuries, i.e., the creation of a 'Christendom' in which there was all too little difference between the church and the world, where earthly empires or kingdoms were all too closely identified with the kingdom of Christ, where the millennium became reality within the *corpus Christianum*.¹⁹

Driven by a desire to return to the church they saw in the New Testament, as well as by the contextually forced move toward separatism, the Anabaptists sought to gather a church loosed the civil authorities and based on confessing voluntarism. "They contrasted the *corpus Christianum* with the Body of Christ and, against an empire under the joint sway of the clergy and the princes, they counterposed the New Kingdom, where Christ would reign through the members of his body."²⁰ Thus, God's Kingdom was manifest in the present temporal sense through the gathered body of regenerate believers, not the territorial church.

Kingdom Dichotomy

Perhaps in no greater way was this newly forming view of the temporal Kingdom manifested than in the Swiss Anabaptists' embrace of a two-kingdom duality. As the group continued to explore a church loosed the entanglement of the state, a separation between the disparate contexts of a new vision of the church and anything outside of it surfaced. Eventually this separatism or what Robert Friedman classified as "the doctrine of two worlds" became solidified as a foundational tenet of the movement at Schleithem in 1527.²¹

However, even before Schleithem, a number of sources provide a window of insight into the emergence of this two-kingdom ideology. Recalling the first adult baptisms in Zürich on January 25, 1525 George Blaurock concluded with the bold declaration,

¹⁹ Neal Blough, "Introduction," in Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, p. liii.

²⁰ Jürgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, p. 85.

²¹ Robert Friedmann, "The Doctrine of the Two Worlds" in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (ed. Guy F. Hershberger; Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1957), pp. 105–18. Despite the fact that Friedmann overstated the importance of this kingdom dichotomy in Anabaptist theology, it was an important corollary of larger, more dominant tenets.

“Therewith began the separation from the world and its evil works.”²² The dichotomy of the Anabaptists’ recovery of the “true church” against the implied territorial manifestation was employed as a summarizing point of emphasis here and linked to the act of believers’ baptism. Nevertheless, one must remember that this reminiscence was a part of the larger corpus known as the *Hutterite Chronicle*. Therefore, it is difficult to know if the realization of this two-kingdom view was fully discernable to Blaurock in 1525 or if it was a later editorial addition during the documents’ inclusion in the work.

An equally important and yet just as potentially biased source came from the pen of Zwingli in his *Elenchus*. Relaying the Anabaptist’s arguments for a form of the church sometime after the Second Zürich disputation but prior to December 1523, Zwingli recorded the plan of Conrad Grebel and Simon Stumpf:

It does not escape us that there will ever be those who will oppose the gospel, even among those who boast in the name of Christ. We therefore can never hope that all minds will so unite as Christians should find it possible to live. For in the Acts of the Apostles those who had believed seceded from the others, and then it happened that they who came to believe went over to those who were now a new church.²³

The phrase “opposition to the gospel” clarified just how crucial this idea was to the Anabaptists going back to the overarching Reformation search for the true church. It also spoke to the group’s veiled accusation against Zwingli shortly after he relegated the pace of reform to the magistrates. The disunity mentioned appears a concession to the reality of two views of authority: the Swiss Anabaptists submitting exclusively to the Word of God and the Swiss Reformers at least partially to the magistrates. The logical corollary for this became a contextually driven abandonment of any territorial form of Anabaptism. Therefore, the temporal application of Kingdom was linked with the regenerate, gathered church. The unspecified reference to Luke’s *Acts of the Apostles* ostensibly referred to the establishment of the Christian Church apart from Ju-

²² “The Beginnings of the Anabaptist Reformation Reminiscences of George Blaurock: An Excerpt from the Hutterite Chronicle 1525” in Williams, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, p. 44.

²³ “Refutation of the Tricks of the Baptists” in *Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531): Selected Works* (ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), p. 132.

daism following Pentecost. In that biblical instance the separation of a regenerate church of confessing believers in Jesus was distinguished from the theocracy of Israel, specifically from those who denied Christ. For the Anabaptists, this demarcation demanded the same for their church, only the context had changed.

Again, since this statement from Grebel and/or Simon Stumpf is available only through Zwingli, there remain questions about the historical reliability of the words, especially given the polemical nature of His *Elenchus*. Nevertheless, at least two things suggest a high level of reliability to the statement. First, since this was conveyed shortly after the Second Zürich Disputation, the notion of separatism and a kingdom dichotomy must have at least been a consideration of these future Anabaptists as implied in their disdain for Zwingli's position. Second, this notion of separation was similar to Felix Manz's requirement that confessing followers of Jesus be "gathered" out from society; a statement made during his interrogation in December 1526 or January 1527.²⁴

If the aforementioned examples indicate a late 1523 or early 1524 emergence of a kingdom dichotomy, then the writings of Michael Sattler helped further embed this dualism into Anabaptist theology a couple years later. This was an idea that surfaced in Sattler's thought as early as 1526. After outlining convictions regarding regenerate church membership in a letter to the reformers of Strasbourg, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, Sattler proceeded to set forth a kingdom dichotomy when he argued,

Christ is despised in the world. So are also those who are His; He has no kingdom in the world, but that which is of this world is against His kingdom. Believers are chosen out of the world, therefore the world hates them. The devil is prince over the whole world, in whom all the children of darkness rule. Christ is the Prince of the Spirit, in whom all who walk in the light live... The citizenship of Christians is in heaven and not on earth. Christians are the members of the household of God and fellow citizens of the saints, and

²⁴ "Verhör von Manz und Blaurock" in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, Erster Band (ed. Leonhard von Muralt; Zürich: Hirzel Verlag, 1952), p. 216.

not of the world... In sum: There is nothing in common between Christ and Belial.²⁵

Using binary, dualistic language Sattler argued for an ontological distinction between the two disparate realities of Christ's Kingdom, of which regenerate believers were members, and the realm ruled by Satan known as "the world." These were two irreconcilable kingdoms, mutually exclusive in relation to personal membership. To follow Christ meant participation in His Kingdom alone. This, in turn, necessitated forfeiture of any other form.

What was a concern in contrast to the convictions held by Bucer and Capito became codified into Swiss Anabaptist doctrine at Schleithem in 1527.²⁶ Drawing on the ideas and language previously employed in his letter to the Strasbourg reformers, Sattler further highlighted the importance of this two-kingdom theology in his famous *Schleithem Confession*.²⁷ The idea of separation was a dominant theme from the outset of the work and even appeared in the cover letter to the document, which declared, "we have been united to stand fast in the Lord as obedient children of God, sons and daughters, who have been and shall be separated from the world in all that we do and leave undone."²⁸

Sattler's kingdom dualism eventually climaxed in the Fourth Article of the *Schleithem Confession*:

We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil and the wickedness which the devil has planted in the world, simply in this; that we have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations... Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who are [come] out of the world, God's temple and idols, Christ and Belial, and none will have part with the other.²⁹

This two-kingdoms conviction was so critical to the beliefs of those Anabaptists at Schleithem that, as Gerald Biesecker-Mast has

²⁵ "Parting with the Strasbourg Reformers" in *Legacy of Michael Sattler*, p. 22.

²⁶ John Yoder has famously referred to this as the "crystallization point of Anabaptism." John H. Yoder, "Der Kristallisationspunkt des Täuferturns," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 24 (1972), pp. 35–47.

²⁷ "The Schleithem Brotherly Union," pp. 34–43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

explained, “this call to separation is the framework within which nearly all of the remaining articles establish their distinctive formulas for the Christian practice of the Swiss Brethren and within which appeals to unity are made throughout the document.”³⁰ The repeated usage of various forms of the German verb for “separation” (*absondern*) afforded Sattler the medium to emphasize that affiliation with Christ via regeneration necessitated disassociation with those things outside of the church.³¹ Discordant categories such as “good and evil” (*Gutes und Böses*), “darkness and light” (*Finsternis und Licht*), and “servitude of the flesh [and] service for God and the Spirit (*Dienstbarkeit des Fleisches [and] Dienst Gottes durch den Geist*) became the means of demarcating Christ’s Kingdom from anything outside of it.³² Therefore, as new believers participated in God’s Kingdom, these were simultaneously required to disassociate with the world. Their new ontological reality of being adopted as children of the King demanded as much.

Without question the contextual circumstances of being forced to establish a church outside a territorial form played a role in this shift towards a dichotomist view of the temporal Kingdom. That reality surfaced following the Second Zürich Disputation and especially as persecution of the movement grew over time. However, arguably just as important to the emergence of this idea was the Swiss Anabaptists’ growing dependence upon a New Testament orientation and hermeneutic that placed a focus on the ethical teachings of Jesus in the gospel accounts. Here, the words of Christ served as the practical guide for what the authentic form of God’s Kingdom in the temporal realm was to look like.

The New Testament orientation of the Swiss Anabaptists was undoubtedly a by-product of their previous dealings with Zwingli. After all, Zwingli had instilled this in men like Grebel and Manz as they all labored for the Reformation of the Zürich Church prior to

³⁰ Gerald Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion: Radical Confessional Rhetoric from Schleithem to Dordrecht* (Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2006), p. 102.

³¹ Multiple cases of this usage may be found in “Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes Artikel und Handlung” in *Der linke Flügel der Reformation: Glaubenszeugnisse der Täufer, Spiritualisten, Schwärmer und Antitrinitarier* (ed. Heinold Fast; Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1962), pp. 61–62 and 64–65.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 64. English translations from “The Schleithem Brotherly Union,” p. 38.

their departure from it.³³ Although the group would not verbally abrogate the authority of the New Testament, as evidenced by Grebel's famous 1524 letter to Thomas Müntzer and Hans Krüsi's 1525 interrogation testimony, the words of Jesus in the Gospel accounts did provide the Swiss Anabaptists with a blueprint for the realization of their emerging view of the church.³⁴ Werner Packull has summarized this conviction as follows:

The New Testament emphasis arose out of the simple assumption that Christ constituted the final and full revelation of God's will to humankind. Any serious desire to follow Christ's example and heed his teachings would obviously lead to the New Testament. The way of Christ as a 'hermeneutic formula' explains not only the New Testament orientation and selectivity toward the Old Testament but also the importance of the Sermon on the Mount and the sayings of Jesus within the New Testament. In this view an ethical epistemology determined the hermeneutical starting point.³⁵

With focus placed on Jesus' words, specifically on the Sermon on the Mount, the Swiss Anabaptists took from Christ an ethically driven view of Kingdom that forced their dichotomist way of thinking. In the end, this ethical soteriology was a dramatically different way of thinking about the Kingdom of God, especially given the dominance of a territorial model for a millennium. However, one thing still remained: distinguishing with certainty those who

³³ John Roth has contended that the Swiss Anabaptist's strong New Testament orientation was based on a "Christocentric approach to ethics." Roth, "Harmonizing the Scriptures," p. 38. Hans Jürgen-Goertz has argued that the Swiss Anabaptist's strong New Testament orientation was a consequence of and a reaction to Zwingli's investment in the Old Testament beginning in 1525. Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, pp. 51–52. As the author of this article has previously argued, both arguments are valid, however, a timing element is critical in this. A "residual lean toward the New Testament" was a consequence of the group's earlier dealings with Zwingli. This then became further solidified given the contextual reality of Zwingli's stronger reach back to the Old Testament. Thus, both Roth and Goertz's convictions are valid, but dictated by the timing. Stephen Brett Eccher, *The Bernese Disputations of 1532 and 1538: A Historical and Theological Analysis* (The University of St. Andrews PhD Dissertation; St. Andrews, 2011), pp. 73–77.

³⁴ Roth, "Harmonizing the Scriptures," p. 38.

³⁵ Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, p. 17.

were genuinely regenerate from those that were not. Answering this question brought into fuller view their developing view of the Kingdom.

The Spotless Bride of Christ as Kingdom

Establishing a regenerate church in theory is one thing; realizing it in practice is something different. For Huldrych Zwingli such was a non-issue. In his arguments against the Roman Catholic apologist Jerome Emser, Zwingli made clear that the church gathered in a pre-glorified era was not a regenerate body. Drawing on both Israel's history and the same biblical parables once employed by Augustine to argue for a *corpus permixtum*, Zwingli contended, "You see that in the Old Testament as well as in the New the church was composed of the faithful and of those who were unfaithful but pretended faith, and therefore was not yet such that neither wrinkle nor spot attached to it."³⁶ Zwingli and the other Swiss magisterial reformers believed that the Anabaptists' proposed believers' church was thoroughly presumptive, for there was an anonymous element to any form of the gathered, visible church prior to glorification.³⁷

The Swiss Anabaptists contended that the practical realization of a believers' church was not only found in the commands of Scripture, but was actually quite simple; as Jesus had stated, "you will recognize them by their fruits."³⁸ What made such a church possible was a different soteriological construct from the one Zwingli and the other magisterial reformers held. As the Swiss Anabaptists' view of salvation came into focus their picture of God's Kingdom prior to the return of Christ emerged. Most magisterial reformers followed Martin Luther's lead by affirming a forensic view of justification whereby God is active in declaring sinners righteous on the basis of Jesus' alien righteousness and work at

³⁶ "Zwingli's Reply to Emser" in *Commentary on True and False Religion* (ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller; Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1981), p. 369. For Zwingli, any holiness for the Church in a pre-glorified era was to be derived from its direct link to Jesus. Jaques Courvoisier, *Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961), pp. 52–53.

³⁷ W.P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 115.

³⁸ See Matthew 7:20; quotation taken from the ESV.

Calvary.³⁹ On the other hand, the Anabaptists parted ways with these reformers in two specific areas of soteriology that shaped their notion of the temporal manifestation of Kingdom. These included a synergistic view of salvation and a much stronger link between the external action of a person and that individual's eternal standing before God. Although the Swiss Anabaptists first embraced the ideas of justification set forth by Zwingli in the early 1520s, a soteriological deviation soon became apparent as the group gained their own unique voice in the mid-1520s. As this embrace of a different understanding of salvation surfaced in the early Anabaptist sources it facilitated the group's embrace of the gathered church model, which was critical to a new realization of God's temporal Kingdom.

First, the Swiss Anabaptists retained much of the optimistic appraisal of humanity that was indicative of the late medieval view.⁴⁰ This view of humanity stood in stark contrast to Luther and the other reformers who reached beyond the prevailing view of the Middle Ages and who drew heavily from Augustine in their affirmation of a more extensive view of humanity's depravity post Genesis 3. The Anabaptists contended that humanity played a participatory role in regeneration not just through a one-time confession of faith, but also an ongoing obedience to the commands of Christ. In his December 1524 work, *Protestation und Schutzschriff*, Felix Manz implied such freedom when he argued against the use of infant baptism by stating, "only those should be baptized who have repented, who have taken to themselves a new life, having

³⁹ The main point of derivation between Luther and Zwingli being the former's focus on the individual, while Zwingli saw a greater impact on all of society. Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, fourth edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 125–29.

⁴⁰ This was not a wholesale embrace of the position. Rather, as David Steinmetz has argued, it was a mediated position between the late medieval view and Luther's. See David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 141–45. Details on the late medieval view of salvation and its impact on Luther leading up to his doctrine of justification by grace through faith all may be found in Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformation*, second edition (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 58 and 60–67.

died to their vices.”⁴¹ Manz employed language here that assumed individual believers take hold of their salvation in some part, which was at odds with the gifting language of justification found in the magisterial reformers. Manz’s soteriological language was not well nuanced, but his entire argumentation against the use of infant baptism betrayed a synergistic slant.

What was implied in Manz became even more pronounced and clarified in Balthasar Hubmaier two years later. Entering the famous debate between Erasmus and Luther, Hubmaier argued in April 1527 that Luther’s contention that “faith saves us” and “we have no free will” are merely “half-truths.”⁴² What exactly did Hubmaier mean by this? Reading through the Swiss Anabaptist sources from the 1520s one may come to the conclusion that the group waffled on their understanding of justification. At times Hubmaier and others seemed to affirm *sola gratia* in the tradition of Luther. Other times their stress on personal conduct and moral improvement sounded outright Pelagian, as Luther repeatedly argued. Bear in mind that some variation in language was attributed to the fact that none of these early Anabaptists were systematic theologians. Instead, these were occasional theologians speaking about pastoral matters as they arose in the context of ministry.

Kenneth Davis, in his appraisal of the Anabaptists’ synergism, has parsed out what Hubmaier meant in his rejection of Luther’s understanding of the human will.⁴³ Hubmaier did reject Luther’s strong idea of depravity when he asserted “if one says there is nothing good in man, that is saying too much” and “for God’s image has never yet been completely obliterated in us.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, this “good” was in no way present as a means to obtain salvation. God still had to first intervene with His grace, specifically through

⁴¹ “A Declaration of Faith and Defense” in *The Reformation: Luther and the Anabaptists* (ed. W.R. Estep; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), p. 288.

⁴² “Freedom of the Will, I” in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder; Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), pp. 427–28.

⁴³ Kenneth R. Davis, *Anabaptist and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1974), pp. 149–60.

⁴⁴ “A Christian Catechism” in *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, p. 360–361. Much of Hubmaier’s position on the will is embodied in his distinction between the uniquely distinct impact of Adam’s fall on the particular aspects of the human body, spirit, and soul. Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 58–61.

the calling of the Holy Spirit and via the Word, to provide regeneration. This ordering specificity is why the framing of human freedom in Hubmaier's famous treaties was repeatedly qualified as being realized after the restoration.⁴⁵ Thus, a key component of Hubmaier's synergistic soteriology was recognition that the human response of obedience to the commands of Christ remained seated after regeneration and not prior to it.⁴⁶

What this synergism meant for the Swiss Anabaptists is important. Justification was not God's divine activity in salvation alone, but was linked with the post-conversion activity of the individual responding volitionally in obedience. This is why the Swiss Anabaptists used language that framed salvation in terms of process. The German usage of the term *gelassenheit*, which meant "yieldedness" or "surrender," played a dominant role in shaping the Anabaptists' soteriology.⁴⁷ Here, the future attainment of heaven as the goal of salvation was inextricably linked with the present holiness of the individual as the realization of salvation via one's "yieldedness" to the will of God.⁴⁸ The temporal manifestation of Kingdom informed the eternal, heavenly Kingdom. Accordingly, it remained the confessing believer's ongoing responsibility to remain in a disposition of submission and obedience for that salvation to be deemed genuine.

Humanity's ability to respond was an adaptation by the Swiss Anabaptists of the medieval way of thinking about justification according to the Latin designation *facere quod in se est*, which conveyed the idea of humanity doing what lies within. While Alister McGrath has shown how this designation was understood in a variety of ways during the Medieval Period, the Swiss Anabaptists seem to have retained a late-Thomistic understanding of this, possibly transmitted to them by Johann Eck.⁴⁹ Aquinas' later thought

⁴⁵ "Freedom of the Will, I", pp. 439ff.

⁴⁶ Jürgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, p. 63.

⁴⁷ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, Pandora Press, 1997), p. 152.

⁴⁸ This was an idea likely transmitted to the early Swiss Anabaptists and earlier set forth by Luther's one-time colleague in Wittenberg, Andreas Karlstadt. See "Tract on the Supreme Virtue of Gelassenheit," in *The Essential Karlstadt* *(ed. E. J. Furcha; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995), pp. 28–39 and Pater, pp. 144–69.

⁴⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 88, 92–117.

on this, as presented in his *Summa Theologica*, stood strikingly similar to Hubmaier's idea that was outlined above. As McGrath clarifies,

While Thomas continues to insist upon the necessity of a preparation for justification, and continues to discuss this in terms of people doing *quod in se est*, he now considers that this preparation lies outside purely natural human powers. Humans are not even capable of their full natural good, let alone the supernatural good required of them for justification.⁵⁰

Therefore, both Aquinas and Hubmaier affirmed humanity's freedom to respond to God was dependent upon God's preceding intervention. The point of departure between them rested in the way the process of justification was then realized. Aquinas retained a focus on the appropriation of infused grace through the sacraments. However, Hubmaier and the Swiss Anabaptists looked elsewhere. Where these Swiss Anabaptists looked to the realization of justification moves to the second area of soteriological distinction from the magisterial reformers.

Second, the Swiss Anabaptists' synergistic soteriology led them to highlight a link between one's external actions and the internal disposition of that person's heart. Part of Luther's forensic understanding of justification included his *simul iustus et peccator* concept whereby a believer was understood to be both righteous and a sinner prior to glorification.⁵¹ But by the mid-1520s, following the influences of reformers like Andreas Karlstadt, the Anabaptists started moving towards an ethical view of justification based on their emerging synergistic soteriology.⁵² Such a shift permitted the group to avoid the tension necessary in Luther's view. This allowed the Swiss Anabaptists to view external action as a litmus test corroborating the veracity of one's confession. Just a few months prior to the first adult baptisms in January 1525, Conrad Grebel outlined such a commitment in his September 1524 letter to Thomas Müntzer:

Eddie Mabry has argued that Eck passed this view of justification to Balthasar Hubmaier during their shared time in Ingolstadt. Eddie Mabry, *Balthasar Hubmaier's Doctrine of the Church* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 17–18.

⁵⁰ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, p. 111.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–22.

⁵² Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p. 51.

Just as our forefathers had fallen away from the true God and knowledge of Jesus Christ and true faith in him, from the one true common divine Word and from the godly practices of the Christian love and way, and lived without God's law and gospel in human, useless, unchristian practices and ceremonies and supposed they would find salvation in them but fell far short of it, as the evangelical preachers have shown and are still in part showing, so even today everyone wants to be saved by hypocritical faith, without fruits of faith, without the baptism of trial and testing, without hope and love, without true Christian practices, and wants to remain in the old ways of personal vices and common anti-christian ceremonial rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, dishonoring the divine Word, but honoring the papal word and the antipapal preachers, which is not like or in accord with the divine Word.⁵³

In early 1524, Hubmaier had already identified a link between saving faith and external action when he wrote, "such faith cannot be idle, but must break forth in gratitude toward God and in all sorts of works of brotherly love toward others."⁵⁴ Arguably the most vivid language used by Hubmaier to frame this idea came four years later in his January 1528 prison work, *Rechenschaft*, where he contrasted "mouth Christians" (*Maul Cristen*) with those genuine believers who linked profession and action in their lives.⁵⁵ In the First Article of *Rechenschaft* Hubmaier sarcastically narrated the position of unregenerate professing Christians when he stated, "Still, we claim to be Christians, good Evangelicals, and boast of our great faith, but have not touched the works of the gospel and the faith with our little finger. Therefore, as stated above, we are nothing but mouth Christians, ear Christians, paper Christians, but not hand Christians."⁵⁶ This interrelated nature of genuine faith and

⁵³ "Grebel to Müntzer," in Harder, pp. 285–86.

⁵⁴ "Eighteen Theses" in *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, p. 32. This same theme of synergistic participation and the importance of a "working faith" continued in Hubmaier's "Summa of the Entire Christian Life" in *Ibid.*, pp. 84–87.

⁵⁵ "Rechenschaft" in *Balthasar Hubmaier Schriften* (ed. Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1962), pp. 461–62.

⁵⁶ *Noch wellen wir Cristen sein, gut ewangelisch, berieimen vnns eins grossen glaubens vnnd habenn aber die werckh des Ewangelions vnd glaubenns mit dem wenigsten*

external action left the Swiss Anabaptists to demand “a faith that bears visible fruit in repentance, conversion, regeneration, obedience, and a new life dedicated to the love of God and the neighbor, by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁷

Such an idea stood against Zwingli’s claim that the church was to be rightly understood through three senses.⁵⁸ First, the word “church” corresponded to “the elect, who have been predestined by God’s will to eternal life. Of this church Paul speaks when he says that it has neither wrinkle or spot.”⁵⁹ This universal church was not discernable to humanity, hence Zwingli’s employment of the modifying term “invisible.” Second, the church was to be understood in a “general sense.”⁶⁰ This spoke to all who confessed Jesus and rightly observed the sacraments. Since Zwingli affirmed the Swiss territorial Church this second church was visible to humanity, but was also composed of both the elect and the reprobate. Accordingly, the previous “invisible” church, the elect who were known only to God, was temporally hidden within the larger gathered body that included the non-regenerate. Third, the concept of church “is taken for every particular congregation of this universal and visible Church, as the Church of Rome, of Augsburg, of Lyons.”⁶¹

The Swiss Anabaptists came to reject Zwingli’s three-sense view of the church. Their developing belief that external action provided a window into one’s internal disposition toward God allowed the Swiss Anabaptists to argue Zwingli’s categories were flawed. Yes, the church was comprised of all genuine believers in Christ over the narrative of history. In that case the universal church was an

finger nie angerert. Darumb seind wir, wie oben gesagt, nichts den Maul Cristen, Oren Cristen, papeyren Cristen, aber nit Hannd Cristen. “Rechenschaft,” p. 462.

⁵⁷ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p. 151.

⁵⁸ Zwingli had earlier affirmed only two senses of the word church in his opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. The universal church with Jesus as its head (and not the Pope) and those local congregations gathered under the name and authority of Jesus Christ. Egli, Band I p. 459 and Band II pp. 54, 58, and 572. The division into three senses of the word church came in the midst of the Anabaptist controversy.

⁵⁹ “An Account of the Faith” in *Ulrich Zwingli: On Providence and Other Essays* (ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson; Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1922), p. 43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

eschatological Kingdom, for it would only be fully realized following glorification. However, the Swiss Anabaptists also argued that the fruits of faith (external action) tangibly demonstrated which people were and were not genuine followers of Christ. Accordingly, the gathered church that was previously hidden in the *corpus Christianum* was now attainable. As Davis has made clear, the hope of salvation “involved for them (the Anabaptists) not just forgiveness of sins, not just the quantitative but also the qualitative conception of eternal life which must begin in this life.”⁶² The visible church gathered on the basis of regeneration was now a present application of the Kingdom of God in a temporal sense. The constitution of these two churches, the universal and the gathered local church, were now distinguished in terms of time alone and not actual composition as the magisterial reformers had argued.

Therefore, the Kingdom of God for these Anabaptists was realized in a temporal sense via the gathering of a regenerate church body on the local level. The confessing believer needed only do two things that were critical for the ongoing maintenance of his or her salvation. First, the individual had to continually manifest regeneration through obedience to the commands of Christ in Scripture and remained a part of a regenerate church body. Here, the realization of salvation was not simply future focused on the basis of a declarative act of God, nor was it mired in the confusion of a mixed church body. Such was the Anabaptists’ perception of the magisterial reformers’ forensic view of justification. Rather, the realization of salvation was focused on the present and the confessing believer’s daily, willful participation in obedience to the commands of Christ. This is largely why the previously mentioned separatism and two-kingdom ideology embodied in the Fourth Article of the *Schleitheim Confession* was so critical. As G.H. Williams has contended, “In this article on separation (*absündierung*), what the predestinarian doctrine of the Magisterial Reformation at least keeps invisible the free-will perfectionism of the ‘free church’ makes boldly visible and mordantly moral.”⁶³ Second, the professing believer had to remain a part of community of faith gathered on the basis of regeneration and believers’ baptism. What was a future Kingdom hope for Luther and Zwingli was, for the Swiss

⁶² Davis, p. 135.

⁶³ George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 183.

Anabaptists, already a present reality through the believer's daily involvement in the gathered church.

The Keys to the Kingdom

With the establishment of a believers' church the Swiss Anabaptists had come to embrace an ecclesiastical model that looked dramatically different than the Swiss Church they had broken from. The group had embraced a non-territorial form of the church that was deeply rooted in a separatist mindset and focused on the corporate gathering of truly converted followers of Christ. Along with this newly constituted believers' church came the conviction that this community of faith in the temporal realm was acting in direct concert with the Kingdom of God in the eternal, heavenly sense. As a natural consequence the Anabaptists were forced to address the inevitable question of when sin surfaced in that regenerate body. As the Swiss magisterial reformers repeatedly argued, how could the Anabaptists' church be truly pure in a pre-glorified era? Moreover, given that only the Lord knows the heart of any one person, how could any gathered church in the temporal realm be an accurate reflection of the greater heavenly Kingdom? Here, the Swiss Anabaptists' implementation of the practice of church discipline and the importance of Jesus' usage of the phrase "the keys of the kingdom" answered these questions and left an indelible impression on their view of the temporal application of Kingdom. The Anabaptists' use of church discipline not only became a hallmark of the movement, but it also helped further establish the growing idea that the gathered church was a temporal, earthly reflection of its parallel heavenly Kingdom.

One of the earliest mentions of church discipline came in Grebel's 1524 letter to Müntzer. In the midst of outlining acceptable beliefs and practices for the true church, Grebel linked the observance of the Lord's Supper with the use of church discipline. Just after introducing the idea of a wayward brother in the context of the fellowship meal, Grebel reasoned, "It (The Supper) should not be practiced without applying the Rule of Christ in Matthew 18; otherwise it is not the Lord's Supper, for without the same [rule], everyone pursues externals. The internal, love, is neglected, if brethren and false brethren go there and eat."⁶⁴ Later, Grebel con-

⁶⁴ "Grebel to Müntzer," p. 288.

tinued to promote the need for church discipline when he exhorted Müntzer to “march forward with the Word and create a Christian church with the help of Christ and his rule such as we find instituted in Matthew 18 and practiced in the epistles.”⁶⁵ Grebel was not overtly explicit here in what church discipline was for or even how it was to be utilized practically speaking. Nevertheless, his statements to Müntzer stressed that to remain within the fellowship of the gathered, local church one must walk in obedience alongside that assembly. He also correlated the use of discipline for “one who does not intend to live in a brotherly way” with the Supper and saw this in some unspecified way to be a part of this church he was exhorting Müntzer to institute.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding Grebel's focus on discipline, its importance as a part of the Anabaptists' emerging ecclesiology may most clearly be seen at Schleithem and in the works of Hubmaier. In each of these, the responsibility was placed on the local, gathered church to accomplish two critical and interrelated tasks, both of which spoke to that community's identity as a temporal manifestation of the Kingdom of God. First, the local church body was to help shepherd its members in the ongoing maintenance of abiding in Christ through a repentant life of obedience. Second, the local church was tasked with preserving its regenerate orientation by utilizing a power bequeathed to the church; a power that Jesus spoke of as the keys to the kingdom.

Following their formal break with the Zürich Church the Anabaptists had utilized believers' baptism as the visible gateway into a regenerate church. A non-coerced confession of Christ, followed by one's willful surrender to the waters of believers' baptism, had become a means of distinguishing true believers from the non-regenerate. Remaining in that fellowship via the communal observance of the Supper then represented the ongoing abiding in the faith that was part of the ongoing demonstration of authentic faith. In light of such an understanding of the sacraments, the Anabaptists grew to view church discipline as a vital practice that tethered the acts of baptism and the Supper together. Church discipline's clear connection between baptism and the Supper may be found in the Second Article of Sattler's *Schleithem Confession*:

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 289.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 288–89.

The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after [Him] in His commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken... But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread, so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup.⁶⁷

Hubmaier took the link seen in the *Schleitheim Confession* even further as he explained the importance of discipline both baptism and the Supper. Setting the framework for this idea Hubmaier argued for the importance of believers' baptism as a requisite to both the Supper and church discipline. Using a fictitious dialogue between two figures discussing the true faith, Hubmaier stated,

For with outward baptism the church opens her doors to all believers who confess their faith orally before her and receives them into her bosom, fellowship, and communion of saints for the forgiveness of their sins. Therefore, as one cares about the forgiveness of his sins and the fellowship of the saints outside of which there is no salvation, just so much should one value water baptism, whereby one enters and is incorporated into the universal Christian church.⁶⁸

Here, Hubmaier employed strikingly Roman Catholic language that highlighted his belief that membership in a gathered church via baptism was the temporal realization of God's Kingdom in direct correlation to the greater, heavenly Kingdom reality. The Supper was understood as the repetitive action whereby members of the church continually renewed their commitment both to that fellowship and to walk in obedience to Christ. The sacraments were of vital importance to the Anabaptists. Not in that the sacraments infused the grace requisite for salvation, for that was the Roman Catholic Church's position. But in that participation in these sacraments demonstrated regeneration through the ongoing pursuit of moral improvement and obedience within a community of faith.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "The Schleitheim Brotherly Union," p. 37.

⁶⁸ "A Christian Catechism," p. 351.

⁶⁹ A similar line of reasoning may be found in Brian C. Brewer, *A Pledge of Love: The Anabaptist Sacramental Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), p. 142.

Therefore, for Hubmaier, the two sacraments were merely tangible signs of the repentance that was requisite for regeneration.

Church discipline, as a point of contact between baptism and the Lord's Supper, served to shepherd baptized members of a gathered community in the maintenance of their salvation. This was accomplished in a host ways. First, drawing on the separatism that was previously outlined, the gathering of an assembly of regenerate believers helped remove its members from the sinful world. Part of the impetus to separate out from the world was the conviction that the world was evil and could, in-turn, corrupt one desiring to walk in obedience to Christ. Separation became as much about removing oneself from the temptation of sin as it was anything else. Given the strong language of disdain for things outside of the gathered church, the removal of any person via the ban only highlighted the gravity of unrepentant sin for any wayward member. As Brian Brewer has pointed out, "the ban is also exercised as a deterrent for the sake of strengthening its own fellowship and to protect it from slander or shame."⁷⁰

Second, despite accusations from those outside of the movement, the Anabaptists in those early years never affirmed Christian perfectionism.⁷¹ In fact, as evidenced by those Anabaptists writing in the formative years of the movement, residual sin was a reality for all believers. That was precisely why the gathered community of believers was so critical. The individual success of any church member's pursuit of "yieldedness" to Christ was rooted in that person's corporate participation in the body of believers. Isolated, individual growth was a foreign concept outside of the community. This belief was so strong that the baptismal pledge was not just a covenant made to God and the community of believers regarding persevering in one's confession. The act of baptism was understood to be that person's willful submission to correction by the church community when sin should arise post-conversion. This

⁷⁰ Brewer, p. 151.

⁷¹ For a helpful rebuttal of the erroneous notion of Anabaptist perfectionism see Hans Georg Fischer, "Lutheranism and the Vindication of the Anabaptist Way," *MQR* 28 (1954), pp. 31–38 and Harold S. Bender, "Perfectionism," *Menonite Encyclopedia*, IV, pp. 1114–15.

was an idea especially cultivated in the thought of Hubmaier and linked with the baptismal pledge.⁷²

Third, the use of church discipline via the ban was understood to be a redemptive practice. All too often church discipline may be exclusively linked with the idea of excommunication. Expulsion from the church may be a consequence of church discipline, but the hope of restoration remained the Anabaptists' stated goal throughout the process of discipline.⁷³ Hubmaier clarified this when writing about the ban, "The same takes place also for the sake of the sinner, 1 Cor. 5:2, so that he might become aware of his misery, and willingly forsake sin and thereby escape from the eternal ban and exclusion, which the master of the house, Christ Jesus himself, will apply."⁷⁴ Love became the guiding principle behind the implementation of discipline in the believers' church.⁷⁵ Even the ostensibly demeaning act of "shaming," employed via the Anabaptists' usage of the German verb *schamrot*, was framed within the context of love.⁷⁶ Given the congruous relationship between the temporal Kingdom via the gathered church and the eternal Kingdom, there was simply too much at stake to act otherwise. Thus, church discipline had salvific impulses for the Anabaptists.

Beyond shepherding congregants towards a lifestyle of submission to Christ, sin in the church body was addressed as a means of literally preserving Christ's bride in the temporal realm. This idea was wrapped in the language and Anabaptists' usage of the keys to the Kingdom. Institutionally, the believers' church had been established as a temporal, visible representation of the eternal, invisible Kingdom of God. Accordingly, the consecration of the church was not an option or suggestion; rather, it was mandated by its very establishment. Here, the Swiss Anabaptists argued on the basis of

⁷² "A Christian Catechism" and "On Fraternal Admonition," in *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, pp. 349, 351, 353, 381, and 383.

⁷³ The redemptive nature of church discipline for the Anabaptists has been explored by John D. Roth, "The Church 'Without Spot or Wrinkle' in Anabaptist Experience," in *Without Spot or Wrinkle: Reflecting Theologically on the Nature of the Church* (ed. Karl Koop and Mary H. Schertz; Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000), pp. 13ff.

⁷⁴ "On the Christian Ban," in *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, p. 411.

⁷⁵ Accordingly, Hubmaier contended that when repentance was realized the church should receive the wayward member "again with joy, as the father did his prodigal son." "A Christian Catechism," p. 354.

⁷⁶ Haas, p. 129.

Matthew 16:19 that just as the gathered community played a vital role in promoting the ongoing obedience requisite for salvation, so too were the people of God entrusted with the preservation and promotion of a pure church. Offering a modified form of the typical late Medieval Roman Catholic reading of Matthew 16:19, Hubmaier eschewed the notion of a sacramental theology. Instead, he contended that the keys to the Kingdom were the binding and loosing powers of believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Before delving into these keys it may be helpful to first understand the source of the keys. For the Swiss Anabaptists, God had entrusted to the church the power to make pronouncements of judgment concerning the veracity of one's faith. Not only had God given each local church the power over excommunication, as evidenced by the Matthew 18:15–20 narrative. God had simultaneously given to these local assemblies the medium whereby they might correctly discern the authenticity of a person's commitment to Jesus. As outlined above, this is where the importance of external action as a litmus test for genuine conversion was so critical. Opening his work on the ban, Hubmaier stressed,

It is known and is evident that this authority is given to the Christian church and comes from Christ Jesus her spouse and bridegroom, as his heavenly Father has given the same to him, in heaven and on earth... But when he was to ascend into heaven and to sit at the right hand of his almighty Father, no longer remaining bodily with us on earth, just then he hung this power and these keys at the side of his move beloved spouse and bride.⁷⁷

Hubmaier continued, "This same power and these keys Christ gave and commanded to the church after his blessed resurrection... Namely to preach the gospel, thereby to create a believing congregation, to baptize the same in water."⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the power

⁷⁷ "On the Christian Ban," p. 411.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 412. It should be noted that in order to frame the giving of these keys to the local assembly of believers Hubmaier was forced to move away from the singular form of σοι "you" found in the Greek New Testament and to recast the entrusting of the keys via the plural German *Dir* "you." Matt. 16:19 in *The Greek New Testament*, fourth revised edition, edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), p. 62 and "Von dem christlichen Bann" in *Balthasar Hubmaier Schriften*, p. 368.

behind these keys was the gospel, which then became embodied in a church comprised exclusively of regenerate believers.

Accordingly, the first key of baptism served as a visible means of recognizing those who had confessed Christ and committed themselves to both the corporate church and Christ. Given that believers' baptism followed regeneration for the Anabaptists, this initial key provided the "binding" together of those who had already confessed Christ. But the power of the visible, gathered believers' church did not stop at baptism. Through the second key of the Lord's Supper, gathering around the elements was just as important. Participation in the Supper was an important demonstration, both publically and communally. The Supper showed members of the local church continually demonstrating their perseverance in the faith via their participation in that local body. That was precisely why any unrepentant member was withheld the bread and the cup; these were a symbol of the unity of the church body and representative of that person's salvation. For those who shared in the meal, these were "bound" in the sense that they were enduring in their baptismal pledge. However, those who had been removed from the Table (and in turn the fellowship) were "loosed" from the community. These were no longer abiding in their commitment to Christ and the community; as such their salvation very much was in doubt. As Christof Windhorst has stressed,

Here Hubmaier assumes that outside of the church there is no salvation. The church, however, has two keys that are applied in baptism and the Supper: In baptism the church is loosed and the forgiveness of former sins is demonstrated. In the Supper the church itself can be locked—those rejected by the church community not having their sins forgiven. It is clear here also that the binding and loosing of the church's word is a deciding factor over the forgiveness of sins.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Hier geht Hubmaier davon aus, daß außerhalb der Kirche kein Heil ist. Die Kirche aber hat zwei Schlüssel, die in Taufe und Abendmahl zur Anwendung kommen: in der Taufe wird die Kirche aufgeschlossen und die Vergebung vergangener Schuld dokumentiert; im Abendmahl kann die Kirche sich selbst verschließen—dem aus der Kirchengemeinschaft Ausgestoßenen werden die Sünden nicht vergeben. Deutlich ist auch hier, daß das bindende und lösende Wort der Kirche über die Vergebung der Sünden entscheidet.* Christof Windhorst, *Täuferisches Taufverständnis: Balhasar Hubmaiers Lehre zwischen Traditioneller und Reformatorischer Theologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 126–27.

Therefore, the ban was not a sacrament proper, as baptism and the Supper were.⁸⁰ Yet, its importance rested in the fact that it was a mediating mechanism that promoted the true gospel and allowed a regenerate church to be preserved. The magisterial reformers naturally argued against using discipline in this manner. They did not understand how the Anabaptists could police that which they could not perceive, especially given the anonymous nature of faith in the temporal realm. But for the Anabaptists who held to a different soteriological construct and view of the church, this was not an issue. In fact, given that the temporal Kingdom of the church was a direct reflection of the eternal, the Anabaptists would not be enjoined to lessen the requirements for membership in any local church body.

Conclusion

The words of Jesus bound men like Zwingli, Grebel, Manz, and Hubmaier together. During the early 1520s the Bible had stirred in their collective minds concerns related to the Roman Catholic Church, knit their hearts together in small group studies around Zürich, and served as a catalyst to the formal introduction of Reformation. However, Christ's words also eventually became the very thing that divided Zwingli from those who would bear the label Anabaptist as well. As the Anabaptists took what their former mentor had taught them about the authority of Scripture and began to ask important questions about the church, they came to embrace different ecclesiological convictions. Over just a window of three or four years those beliefs left the Anabaptists with a vision of the church that was outside the territorial model. In its place the Anabaptists established a church founded on the basis of separatism, regeneration, and discipline. The Anabaptists' church was one that looked completely different than the Roman Catholic or Zwinglian manifestations they grew to detest. Instead, theirs was a church that looked heavenly. But of course, that was exactly the point they believed Christ was making in the gospel accounts. Their church was a foretaste of the Kingdom to come.

⁸⁰ This is a point outlined in Brewer, pp. 146–48.