

Resourcing Free Church Ecclesiology: Pilgram Marpeck's Chalcedonian Doctrine of the Church¹

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Abstract: *This essay argues that Pilgram Marpeck's ecclesiology is properly understood only when it is placed within its Chalcedonian frame. Far from rejecting orthodox Christology, Marpeck's entire theology is built upon and flows from the narrative substructure of Chalcedonian Christology. It is not just Marpeck's Christology that is Chalcedonian, though. His entire theology, particularly his ecclesiology, is shaped by his conception of Christ. Marpeck conceives of the life of the individual Christian—a combination of flesh and Spirit—as constituting a new *wesen* ("reality") on analogy with the Chalcedonian two-fold (human and divine) Christ. In the same way, the church itself is a new *wesen* in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Marpeck's Chalcedonian ecclesiology has important implications for the practice of church discipline and for the church's relationship with the world broadly and the state in particular.*

Key Words: *Anabaptism, Chalcedon, Christology, ecclesiology, Free Church, Pilgram Marpeck*

Within earliest Anabaptism, there were variant understandings of the nature of the church. Although they bore a strong resemblance to one another, their differences were real. At least in the case of the Swiss, Dutch/North German, and the South German Anabaptist movements, their different ecclesiologies grew out of their differing Christological emphases.

For example, Pilgram Marpeck (c. 1495–1556), a leader in the South German Anabaptist movement, wrote at least four letters to the Swiss Brethren that amount to a critique of their ecclesiology. Specifically,

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Marpeck's letters critiqued their view of the incarnation, influenced by Melchior Hoffman and Caspar Schwenckfeld, which shaped their understanding church discipline. Although they had officially rejected the "Celestial Christology" of Hoffman and Schwenckfeld, both men were present in Strasbourg during the formative years of the Anabaptist movement and interacted with other followers there. Additionally, their ecclesiology bears resemblance to Hoffman's. This similarity shows that though they officially rejected his unorthodox Christology, its effects on their Christology held on. As I will show later, Marpeck combats this Christology in his letters to his Swiss counterparts.

Hoffman also influenced Menno Simons's Christology. Simons inherited Hoffman's celestial flesh Christology mostly intact, and it had a profound impact on his ecclesiology. In contrast, Pilgram Marpeck articulated an alternative Anabaptist ecclesiology built upon a completely orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology.

Contemporary Treatments of Marpeck's Christology

Marpeck was well-educated and from a wealthy family. He was involved in local politics through his vocation as an engineer (architect) and his debates with Reformed leaders in Strasbourg. He was also determined to articulate an Anabaptism in concert with classical theology.² Because of his wider involvement with city politics and his push for a more catholic Anabaptism, Marpeck has been treated as less extreme than his contemporaries. It is argued that whereas Marpeck's contemporaries and most of subsequent Anabaptism practiced a strict "separatism," Marpeck represents a non-separatist voice for many today.³

Since Marpeck was a chief engineer for the city of Strasbourg, some have argued that Marpeck was a "tame" Anabaptist who offered "a more

² This is not to say that other Anabaptist leaders did not care about their theology being in accord with the best of the Christian tradition. For example, Simons's writings engage with Augustine and other Fathers quite often. However, Marpeck was more successful at articulating Anabaptism in concert with the Great Tradition than were his contemporary Anabaptist leaders.

³ This turn toward Marpeck as a non-separatist option is evident outside of the Anabaptist tradition as well, for both theological liberals and conservatives. In fact, some within the Baptist stream have embraced Marpeck. See Malcolm Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (B&H Academic, 2007), 73–106.

moderate type of apoliticism” that was tolerated by the authorities because it was not a threat.⁴ Others have looked to Marpeck as “an Anabaptist for our times,” to whom many contemporary (progressive) Anabaptists have turned out of “frustration for the isolationist tendencies of their predecessors” and because “they are drawn to his engaged stance with the government.”⁵ Still others paint Marpeck as a sixteenth-century representative of contemporary activist Anabaptism, and in doing so they attempt to paint Marpeck’s Christology as less than orthodox, emphasizing his ethics over his theology.⁶

There are much better readings of Marpeck available. Interpreters like Neal Blough read Marpeck’s ecclesiology as focusing more on being “sent” than on being “separate.” This is a welcome point of focus, though the distinction is exaggerated.⁷ Gerald Mast points out that Marpeck did not reject church discipline; rather, he wanted it practiced with patience and love. As he argues, in a contemporary ecclesial context in which tolerance is the supreme virtue, “Marpeck’s critique of legalism by itself is easily misunderstood as a defense of tolerance, rather than as an expression of his concern for the church’s visible witness.”⁸ Similarly, both William Klassen and C. Arnold Snyder identify the influence on Marpeck of the Spiritualist tradition of Caspar Schwenckfeld and Hans Denck with the centrality of love reigning supreme.⁹ Klassen and Snyder have been

⁴ See, e.g., James Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Coronado, 1972), 186–87. These interpreters forget, though, that Marpeck had to resign his governmental positions twice because his convictions did not allow him to continue.

⁵ Andrea M. Dalton, *United with Christ: The Mystical Ecclesiology of Pilgram Marpeck* (MATS thesis, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2008), 1, 4.

⁶ See J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 2nd ed. (Herald, 2005), 88. The most recent example of this attempt to portray Marpeck as out of step with historic orthodoxy is the volume edited by J. Denny Weaver, Gerald J. Mast, and Trevor Bechtel, *Anabaptist Political Theology After Marpeck* (Cascade, 2022).

⁷ See Neal Blough, “The Relevance of Pilgram Marpeck for the Contemporary Church,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85 (January 2011): 37–58. See also Stephen B. Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology* (Duke University Press, 1992), 162–63.

⁸ Gerald J. Mast, “Patient Separation in Marpeck’s Theology,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85 (January 2011): 79.

⁹ See C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Pandora, 2002), ch. 13; William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Eerdmans, 1968), 176–77. Klassen is more hesitant than is

helpful in pointing out that Marpeck was in genuine dialogue, showing both agreement and disagreement with Schwenckfeld, rather than in simple antagonism. Each of these readings is correct, but we can and must dig deeper to fully understand Marpeck’s theology.

Though these readings are commendable and have furthered Marpeck studies, his ecclesiology, discipline included, is more complicated than these readings suggest and requires more nuance. If we stick to the surface of Marpeck’s theology, we miss the deep substructure of his thought. In what follows, I approach Marpeck’s ecclesiology guided by these questions: What is the theological account of Jesus’s identity that shapes Marpeck’s thinking and that leads him to push for a more patient and loving form of discipline? Was his thinking about discipline just because he was more tolerant, or was his view grounded in something more substantive?

I am following those interpreters who understand Marpeck’s theology as orthodox, particularly his Christology.¹⁰ I agree with those interpreters, John Rempel and Neal Blough especially, who argue that Christology is the center of Marpeck’s theology. But I place the emphasis on the Chalcedonian character of Marpeck’s Christology more than Rempel and

Snyder in placing Marpeck in the Denckian stream: “Even in Marpeck’s Strasbourg period there is no evidence of the depreciation of ceremonies seen in Denck, and they part ways decisively in their views of the Word of God. Even if it cannot be shown that Marpeck was dependent upon Denck in his view of the covenant or order, there does appear dependence on him at the point of asserting a great freedom in the ethical sphere, particularly such matters as the oath and participation in the state.” As I will argue below, there is no such “great freedom in the ethical sphere” in Marpeck, as Klassen would have us see.

¹⁰ On the classical nature of Marpeck’s theology, see Thomas Finger, “How ‘Classical’ Was Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology?,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85 (January 2011): 115–31. See also Walter Klaassen and William Klassen who claim that Marpeck “was thoroughly committed to the church’s creedal traditions” (*Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* [Herald, 2008], 25, 344). John Rempel, “Critically Appropriating Tradition: Pilgram Marpeck’s Experiments in Corrective Theologizing,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85.1 (January 2011): 74; see also Rempel’s Introduction and his introduction to Marpeck’s “Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld,” in Pilgram Marpeck, *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, vol. 1: The Exposé, A Dialogue, and Marpeck’s Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld, trans. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel (Pandora, 1999), 17, 72; Neal Blough, *Christ in Our Midst: Incarnation, Church, and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck* (Pandora, 2007); Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), 376, 381, 433, 434.

Blough.¹¹ Specifically, I see Chalcedonian Christology as the narrative substructure that undergirds Marpeck's Christology.¹² That narrative substructure shaped everything about Marpeck's theology, especially his ecclesiology. Furthermore, that narrative substructure was shared by Marpeck's Lutheran and Reformed counterparts, as Blough helpfully shows: "The Christological heritage that Marpeck embraced was common to medieval theology, and to the Reformation in general, including most of its Anabaptist wing."¹³

The Concept of "Narrative Substructure"

By "narrative substructure," I mean that which is assumed and so unstated as the narrative background or foundation of a text or worldview. In applying the idea to Paul's theology, Richard Hays elucidates what he means by "narrative substructure": "a story about Jesus Christ is presupposed by Paul's argument in Galatians, and his theological reflection attempts to articulate the meaning of that story."¹⁴ For Hays's reading of Paul as well as my reading of Marpeck, the word "presupposed" is key.¹⁵

To take another example from Scripture, 1 John does not mention, quote from, or allude to the Old Testament text. It does, however, allude

¹¹ This is not to say that Rempel and Blough do not hold Marpeck as Chalcedonian, although both qualify that label. See the sources cited above in footnote 10. By "Chalcedonian," I refer to the Christological consensus reached by the church in the fourth century regarding the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus. This is a consensus that the early church fathers believed was based on the Trinitarian logic of Scripture, was established in the Nicene Creed, and was upheld and explained further at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. For more on this history, see Frances M. Young and Andrew Teal, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*, 2nd ed. (Baker Academic, 2010).

¹² My framing of the question in this way is indebted to Richard Hays's investigation of the "narrative substructure" of Paul's thought in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2002).

¹³ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 196.

¹⁴ See Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, xxiv.

¹⁵ Hays is not the only scholar to make such a claim about Paul. In his book *Pauline Christology*, Gordon Fee claims that "we are seldom reading Paul's argued Christology, but rather his assumed Christology" (*Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* [Hendrickson, 2007], 4). And the same can be said about the doctrine of the Trinity broadly. In fact, Sanders makes exactly that claim: the Trinity is assumed (i.e., presupposed) in the New Testament. One does not see Paul saying, "And now, about the Three-in-One God ..." because, Sanders argues, what we came to call the Trinity was a shared assumption between Paul and the churches to which he wrote (Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* [Zondervan, 2016], 205).

to the Gospel of John. And the Gospel of John is saturated with quotations and allusions to the Old Testament story. As evidenced by its intertextual relationship with the Fourth Gospel, 1 John assumes but does not make explicit its reliance on the Old Testament story. It is unstated, but completely dependent on that story. Thus, the Old Testament story serves as the presupposed "narrative substructure" of 1 John.

Consider the contemporary analogy of baseball metaphors used by middle-class Americans. If after preaching a sermon, a pastor tells his family around the lunch table that he "really whiffed on that," or that he "hit that one out of the park," or that he "struck out with that one," he does not need to explain the source of those metaphors. They know without explanation what those metaphors mean because we share a common narrative substructure that includes a basic understanding of baseball. Marpeck's orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology is like that.

Critics will be quick to point out that Marpeck never uses the word "Chalcedonian" to describe his Christology, but he does not need to. That is precisely the point of a narrative substructure: one does not feel the need, or even realize the need, to make it explicit. It is assumed. When his writings are read closely, it becomes clear that Marpeck held to orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology and that it shaped everything else.¹⁶ It is the deep well of orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology out of which Marpeck's theology flows and that serves as the grounding for his particular Anabaptist ecclesiology.

The Chalcedonian Substructure of Marpeck's Theology: Hermeneutics, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology

Marpeck worked out his Christology in correspondence with three sparring partners. In his lengthy correspondence with the Swiss Brethren, Marpeck vigorously defended the role of the Holy Spirit (the "inner") and its implications for church discipline. In his Christological battles with

¹⁶ Although my reading of his theology should make this clear, one piece of evidence that can be quickly seen is the presence of the Athanasian Creed (one of the three historic creeds that expressed Chalcedonian Christology in the *Kunstbuch*, a collection of writings published after Marpeck's death that were important to his ecclesial circle). See John D. Rempel, ed. *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgrim Marpeck Circle* (Pandora, 2010).

Caspar Schwenckfeld, Marpeck emphasized the humanity of Jesus, “defending the external,”¹⁷ especially baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In interacting with these first two, Marpeck works out the implications of his Chalcedonian Christology for the questions of his context. For Marpeck, the inner and outer, spiritual and physical, divine and human are distinct, but they cannot be separated. Just as this is true in the life of Jesus, so also is it true in the life of the church.¹⁸ Marpeck’s third sparring partner was his Reformed colleagues in Strasbourg. Marpeck engaged in a lengthy correspondence with Martin Bucer over the questions of infant baptism and the nature of the church in relation to the world/state.¹⁹ Marpeck’s contributions to each of these three conversations work only because they grow from the Chalcedonian substructure of his thought.

Chalcedonian Christology is the doctrinal center around which everything else revolves. It shaped and was shaped by how he read the Bible (with Schwenckfeld) typologically as a progressive document, with the Old Testament a “promise” with “figures” that are fulfilled in Christ. It shaped how he viewed the relationship between the church and the world, with the Body of Christ as the “prolongation” of the incarnation and thus to be distinct from the world outside of Christ. It shaped how he viewed the radical change brought about by the new birth of redemption and filling with the Holy Spirit. It also animated Marpeck’s debates around the proper use of church discipline.

Marpeck’s Christology, hermeneutics, and pneumatology shape Marpeck’s ecclesiology. But Christology is chief among them—the glue that holds everything else together. And out of his ecclesiology, informed by the other doctrines, grows the way he treats church discipline. In other words, Marpeck only thinks the way that he does about church discipline

¹⁷ Walter Klaassen, “Church Discipline and the Spirit in Pilgram Marpeck,” in *De Geest in Het Geding: Opstellen Aanbieden Aan J.A. Oosterbaan*, ed. I. B. Horst, A. F. de Jong and D. Visser (H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1978), 171.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Marpeck’s letter “To Helena von Streicher,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. and trans. William Klassen and Walter Klassen (Herald, 1978), 389: “I also admit that the inner and the outer have to be kept distinct, but to divide one from the other, to use one and not the other, cannot be substantiated by any Scripture.”

¹⁹ See William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Eerdmans, 1968). See also Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Herald, 2008) and their introduction to *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 23–36. Among Marpeck’s extant writings, those directed to Bucer and the Strasbourg City Council are: “A Clear Refutation” (pp. 43–68), his “Confession of 1542” (pp. 107–58), and his letter “To the Strasbourg Council” (pp. 306–8). Each of these can be found in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*.

because of his (orthodox) view of the incarnation and its implications for ecclesiology. I will now unpack each of these doctrinal points in the rest of this section. Doing so will allow us to look closely at Marpeck’s treatment of discipline from the proper vantage point.

Marpeck’s Christology

In reaction to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s spiritualist Christology’s influence by the South German Anabaptist movement, Marpeck focused relentlessly on the materiality of the incarnation,²⁰ *die menscheit Christi* (“humanity of Christ”), insisting on the unity of the physical with the spiritual. In doing so, Marpeck was critical of those who, like Schwenckfeld and Hans Bänderlin, do not “esteem the humanity of Christ,” a mistake which leads “us into the spiritual pride of the devil, for we then assume to be already what we shall only become in the future.”²¹

This focus on the humanity of Christ has led some interpreters to miss or deny the fact that Marpeck’s Christology was Chalcedonian.²² They argue that the “center” of Marpeck’s thought was the human Christ, not the fuller picture of orthodoxy.²³ Although true to some extent, Marpeck only emphasizes the humanity of Christ when his “opponent”—typically Schwenckfeld—emphasizes the divinity of Christ and minimizes Jesus’s humanity. Or as Marpeck says, when Jesus was “divided.” On the undivided Christ (i.e., the Chalcedonian Christ), Marpeck is worth quoting at length:

²⁰ This emphasis can be found throughout Marpeck’s writings on Christology. See especially his various correspondences with Schwenckfeld and his “Concerning the Humanity of Christ,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 507–15. For more on this relationship, see Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balhasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Herald, 1993), 108–18.

²¹ Marpeck, “A Clear and Useful Instruction,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 86.

²² For example, see J. Denny Weaver, “Making Theology Specific to Jesus: Pilgram Marpeck as Anabaptist Theologian,” in *Anabaptist Political Theology after Marpeck*, 31–52. Weaver has made a career as a self-avowed anti-creedal, anti-orthodox, anti-tradition theologian who has attempted to redefine Anabaptism as such. He attempts to do the same thing with Marpeck in “Making Theology Specific to Jesus.”

²³ For example, Walter Klaassen incorrectly calls the humanity of Christ the “key concept in Marpeck’s theology.” See Walter Klaassen, “Church Discipline and the Spirit in Pilgram Marpeck,” 169. See also William Klassen, *Covenant Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 57–66. See again Weaver, “Making Theology Specific to Jesus,” in *Anabaptist Political Theology after Marpeck*, 31–52.

He was without beginning and from eternity the everlasting God and Spirit; but within time, he was made flesh (Jn. 1). Please understand, he was not newly-created, but was born of the already-created (*vorgeschoepften*) flesh of human generation in the body of Mary. And, as the first, figurate Adam had no father in his birth other than God alone and lifeless earth as his mother, from which God made him according to the flesh, so also the human Christ as the essential Adam had no other father than God alone and the earth of the living, that is, human, creaturely generation in his birth and incarnation. He came to the tribe of Judah and to the body of Mary, his mother. From her, God carved out Jesus' flesh, prepared through his holy and divine activity (Heb. 3:10).... In this and no other way did the origin and advent of the human being Christ happen. He was born out of God and the Holy Spirit and out of a remarkable act of God the Father, from his nature and essence, and from the Virgin Mary, full of grace and blessing under the sway of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

In his treatment of Marpeck's Christology, Rempel rightly identifies one of the influences on Marpeck's thought as Luther's repudiation of the Spiritualist influence on the church, namely that the "corrective spiritualism had brought to the church was being used to eliminate the material world as a medium of divine communication. Everything signified by the incarnation was under threat."²⁵ In taking up Luther's critique, Marpeck articulated for the early Anabaptists (and tried to unite the various Anabaptist movements under) an answer to the Spiritualist-influenced, celestial flesh Christology by repeatedly emphasizing the humanity of Christ. As stated already, that emphasis is an expression of the substructure of Marpeck's Chalcedonian thinking demanded by his context.

By contrast, Marpeck often emphasized the spiritual aspect—the divinity of Jesus and the importance of the Holy Spirit—in his interactions with the Swiss Brethren. And comparatively, he did not need to emphasize either in his interactions with Bucer and the Strasbourg Council. His emphases there were his points of disagreement with them: infant baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the nature of the church's relation with the state. But Marpeck's views in each case grew out of his understanding of Jesus. Marpeck's emphasis within the Chalcedonian frame varies—whether on the humanity or the divinity of Jesus—depending on which

²⁴ Marpeck, "Marpeck's Response," 126 (cf. p. 86). See also Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 509.

²⁵ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 96.

theological battleground he is fighting. In each case, though, Chalcedonian Christology (and its implications) is the tool that he wields:

Some wanted only a man from the seed of David (Mt. 24:41–45), and not a Lord such as the Son of God (Mt. 26:63–67; Jn. 8:53–59; 10:31–39), who was Lord over Moses, David, the prophets, and the Law, and who could forgive sins upon earth (Mt. 9:2; Lk. 5:20–24). The reason of man, and of those who presume to be Christians, works even today in dividing the Messiah.²⁶

Marpeck's Hermeneutic

Chalcedonian Christology shaped Marpeck's reading of Scripture. Though he later disagreed with Schwenckfeld about Christology, Marpeck inherited intact Schwenckfeld's early understanding of the relation between the Old and New Testaments.²⁷ But that is where their agreement ended.

Schwenckfeld articulated a narrative, progressive, figural hermeneutic that saw the Old Testament as the type, figure, and promise²⁸ fulfilled by the work of God in Jesus.²⁹ Neither Schwenckfeld nor Marpeck rejected the Old Testament by any means. Rather, they sought to read the Bible as a unified story that consisted of two covenants—those of Moses and

²⁶ Marpeck, "A Clear and Useful Instruction," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 80–81.

²⁷ On Schwenckfeld's hermeneutic, see Schwenckfeld's "Unterscheid deß Alten und Newen Testaments: Der Figur und Maarhait" ("Difference between the Old and New Testaments, the Symbol and the Truth") (ca. 1531), found in *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 4:414–443; and "Vom underschaid deß Alten und Newen Testaments" ("On the Understanding of the Old and New Testaments"), 4:470–79 (accessible online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015069633926&seq=10>); see also Maier, *Caspar Schwenckfeld*, 26–32; and Gottfried Seebass, "Caspar Schwenckfeld's Understanding of the Old Testament," in *Schwenckfeld and Early Schwenckfeldianism*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Schwenckfelder Library, 1986), 87–102.

²⁸ See Marpeck, "Admonition," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 225.

²⁹ Although I've not seen him acknowledge it anywhere, Baptist theologian Stephen Wellum's "progressive covenantalism" is strikingly similar to Marpeck's hermeneutic. See Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2018); Stephen Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 (B&H Academic, 2024), 393–485.

of Christ—not one. The two testaments are distinguished from one another, but they are not opposed.³⁰ The New fulfills the Old, which points forward figuratively to the New.³¹ Schwenckfeld's (along with Marpeck's) emphasis on the progressive fulfillment of the Old by the New was opposed to the Reformed one covenant hermeneutic that Schwenckfeld saw as legitimizing the fusion of state and church. As Snyder argues,

In clearly delineating two covenants—sharply distinguishing between the physical and spiritual covenants (“Moses” and “Christ”)—Schwenckfeld's hermeneutical template provided a clear counter to the unitary hermeneutics of “one covenant” and “one people” that lay at the heart of Reformed theology and which supported the founding of theocratic states.³²

But with that hermeneutic, Marpeck understood that it was precisely and only the Chalcedonian Christ—fully God and fully man—who could fulfill the promise of the Old Testament. The one who fulfilled the promise had to be fully flesh and fully God in order to bring the “spiritual” fulfillment of the “physical” covenant of Moses.³³ Christ could not be divided—as he saw Schwenckfeld doing with his focus exclusively on the “inward” Christ—and still fulfill the promise.³⁴

In other words, Marpeck read Scripture in a Chalcedonian frame, whereas Schwenckfeld did not. Marpeck engaged in the same kind of “partitive exegesis” that John Behr identifies in the Nicene theologians:

For the Nicenes ... Scripture speaks throughout of Christ, but the Christ of the Kerygma, the crucified and exalted Lord, and speaks

³⁰ Schwenckfeld, “Unterscheid deß Alten und Newen Testaments,” *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 4:436. I owe this reference originally to Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 476.

³¹ See Marpeck, “Admonition,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 225.

³² Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 478.

³³ See again Schwenckfeld's “Unterscheid deß Alten und Newen Testaments: Der Figur und Maarhait,” *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 4:414–43. As Snyder notes, Schwenckfeld's two covenant hermeneutic was also formulated in contrast to Luther's “Law” and “Gospel” schema. See Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 478n37.

³⁴ Rempel captures the issue for Marpeck well: “Already in his Strasbourg years Marpeck had written that such inwardness doomed the very nature of the Gospel. Not only a visible church and sacraments but the Bible itself was at risk. Without a robust theology of sacred history and of the incarnation, which issued from it, what objective basis was there for revelation and the church?” See Rempel's “Introduction” to Marpeck, “Pilgram Marpeck's Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld's Judgment,” in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck's and His Circle*, 69.

of him in a twofold fashion, demanding in turn a “partitive” exegesis: some things are said of him as divine and other things are said of him as human—yet referring to same Christ throughout.³⁵

As Behr argues, this “partitive” exegesis of the orthodox Nicenes contrasts with the “univocal” exegesis, similar to Schwenckfeld's, of their opponents:

The non-Nicenes, however, insisted on an absolutely univocal exegesis, which applied all scriptural affirmations in a unitary fashion to one subject, who thus turns out to be a demi-god, neither fully divine nor fully human—created but not as one of the creatures. And, at least in the modern reading of this, this demi-god is a temporal being, with his own history—the “preincarnate Logos” who eventually, as one phase in his existence, animates a body, becoming the man Jesus Christ.³⁶

Marpeck and Schwenckfeld too could agree on the general shape of the canonical story, but Schwenckfeld's focus on the “inward” Christ led him to “divide Christ” (as Marpeck says), finding only a divine or inner Christ in Scripture. Marpeck, on the other hand, understood that “Scripture speaks of Christ in a twofold manner.”³⁷ For Schwenckfeld, the interpretive key is a truncated Christ who is merely inner or divine. For Marpeck, the interpretive key to Scripture is the twofold, undivided Christ—fully God and fully human.

As Jamieson and Wittman rightly point out, “some things are said of him as divine, and other things are said of him as human. Biblical reasoning discerns that Scripture speaks of the one Christ in two registers in order to contemplate the whole Christ.”³⁸ Jamieson and Wittman then encourage readers to read their Bibles exactly as Marpeck did: “read Scripture in such a way that you discern the different registers in which Scripture speaks of Christ, yet without dividing him.”³⁹ Marpeck was no systematic theologian, so it has been argued that he sometimes gets categories mixed up (and he may have) but he remains remarkably consistent in his treatment of the “twofold” Christ. That consistency is sometimes not spelled out, but substructures do not need to be and usually are not. For Schwenckfeld, the interpretive key is a truncated Christ who is

³⁵ John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (St. Vladimir, 2004), 14.

³⁶ Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 14.

³⁷ R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Baker Academic, 2022), 153.

³⁸ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 153.

³⁹ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 153.

merely inner or divine. For Marpeck, the interpretive key to Scripture is the twofold Christ. This difference is subtle and can go unnoticed in Marpeck's writings, but it makes all the difference.

The New Chalcedonian-Like *Wesen*: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Believer

Closely related to and pivotal for his Christologically and hermeneutically-shaped ecclesiology was his theology of redemption—the reality (*wesen*) of new birth experienced by those baptized into Christ's death and filled with the Holy Spirit. Reception of the Holy Spirit is the decisive reality in the life of the church and of the individuals who make up the church. This reception is the major difference between life under the old covenant and the new, the spiritual covenant:

The old covenant brought forth [men] into slavery through the fear of God, but without the future love of Christ. Their understanding of the testament of promise was quite childish, and, thus, as young children, they had to wait under the tutelage of the eternal ordinances. Good and bad together, they need compulsion, for the freedom in Christ had not yet been achieved.... However, in the New Testament, by virtue of the Holy Spirit received through Christ, there is a different reality.... The Spirit of Christ, which is the true sanctification, was given to no one before the suffering and death of Christ, who Himself bought, acquired, and won that Spirit and comfort.⁴⁰

Marpeck forged his theology of the Holy Spirit in debate primarily with Schwenckfeld, Entfelder, Hoffman, and others including the Swiss Brethren. For Schwenckfeld, Christ came not to redeem fallen human flesh but to rescue us from his "creativity."⁴¹ In answer, Marpeck articulated a theology of the Holy Spirit on analogy with orthodox Christology: when we believe in Jesus Christ, our fallen fleshly bodies are filled with the Holy Spirit and so we become "similar to Christ" in that we become one new *wesen* out of what was previously separated: flesh and Spirit.⁴² The redeemed Christian is therefore a combination of flesh and spirit. Marpeck is worth quoting at length:

Although it is lived according to the Spirit derived only from God,

⁴⁰ Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 119.

⁴¹ Maier, *Caspar Schwenckfeld*, 41. By "creativity," Schwenckfeld meant our human existence with fallen human flesh. For Schwenckfeld, we inherit Christ's heavenly flesh.

⁴² Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 129.

childhood is nonetheless received in flesh and blood so that, through baptism, flesh and blood is born, under the Spirit, into obedience, never again to live according to its lust. Thus, here and there, the children of God and of men are spirit, flesh, and blood, and they are also eternal after the resurrection. Just as Christ is the Word, Spirit, and God, so, too, is He a man born from the seed of woman, but without the seed of man, born of a generation of human flesh and blood, and raised again according to the flesh of the seed of David. So, too, we are spiritual and physical children of God and of men; we are included in the Spirit and Word derived from God, but we are also flesh and blood, derived from man, and we remain such with Christ eternally.⁴³

Our flesh is therefore redeemed, not abandoned.⁴⁴ It is no longer our "willing and running" that matters; rather, "He gives the will."⁴⁵ Though he disagreed with Schwenckfeld about the purpose of the Spirit, Marpeck took seriously the reality of the Holy Spirit in the church and the implications for the presence and power of the Spirit in the life of God's people. The Holy Spirit, who brings a "new birth from God,"⁴⁶ was, in fact, the entire and only reason that a Christian, with a "heritage of flesh and blood," could be expected to practice obedience in the life of faith.⁴⁷ The Swiss Brethren, by contrast, seemed to have simply emphasized obedience without the spiritual reality that undergirds the Christian ability to obey. In other words, they were legalists. As Snyder explains: "The continuing inner power of the Holy Spirit would enable a life of righteousness that actively resisted sin. The Swiss Brethren, by contrast, emphasize the obedience of the elect, with little reference to the spiritual underpinnings

⁴³ Marpeck, "Admonition of 1542," in *Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 212. As Blough notes (*Christ in Our Midst*, 101–32), Marpeck's "Admonition" represents Marpeck's Christology at its maturest. Thus, the Chalcedonian substructure of his thought is most explicit in that document. But as the above quote from his 1532 "Confession" makes clear, the Chalcedonian substructure was still there ten years earlier.

⁴⁴ On this, see Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck's Response," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, 68–144.

⁴⁵ Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 510.

⁴⁶ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 29.

⁴⁷ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 29.

of that obedience.”⁴⁸

Though Marpeck emphasized the obedience of faith that is made possible by the “fusion” of flesh and Spirit, he “sought to take seriously the ethical life of the believer without falling prey to . . . legalism.”⁴⁹ The way that he did this was by his refusal to treat justification and sanctification as either Simons’s or his Lutheran conversation partners. For Marpeck, the two are not conflated, but neither can they be separated. We are not only declared righteous in Christ (Luther’s forensic view); we are also made righteous (Simons’s view).

In other words, justification is efficacious; it changes the believer. Marpeck writes, “To become a child of God means more than simply a spiritual change in the believer. It is a complete transformation of the human being. For Marpeck, the work of Christ transforms the very flesh of the believer, so that sinful flesh becomes conformed to Jesus’ holy flesh.”⁵⁰ But it does not do so instantaneously, as Simons often argued, and as later Anabaptist tradition has implied. Justification, becoming a “child of God,” is “the beginning of God’s work in the believer.”⁵¹

But such an experience is, of course, only partial in this life. The sanctification half of the justification/sanctification pairing is a process, and it is a process that continues throughout the life of the believer. The disciple is already transformed, filled with the Spirit, having taken on Jesus’s holy flesh, a child of God, but we will only fully experience that reality upon our own resurrection. Peter Orr, in his monograph on the ascension of Jesus, captures this reality well: “Our experience . . . mirrors Christ’s—who was fully God’s son before this resurrection but entered into the full experience of his sonship following his resurrection from the dead.”⁵²

The new *wesen* created by the Chalcedonian-like fusion of flesh and Spirit combined with Marpeck’s refusal to view justification as purely forensic is the seedbed from which his ecclesiology grew.

The Chalcedonian Analogy Applied to the Church

The substructure of Chalcedonian Christology is evident in Marpeck’s ecclesiology. Just as the eternal Christ “lived and worked on earth” in the incarnation before his glorification, Jesus works today through the

⁴⁸ Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 485.

⁴⁹ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 152.

⁵⁰ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 165.

⁵¹ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 217.

⁵² Peter C. Orr, *Exalted Above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 47 (IVP Academic, 2019), 35.

church, his “unglorified body on earth”⁵³ that has been filled with the Holy Spirit and redeemed in baptism. This is what Marpeck means by the church as the “prolongation” of Christ’s incarnation, of the human part of the Chalcedonian fusion. Marpeck continues: “Even today he works through his unglorified body (which is the church). It is the very temple of God—at work outwardly because Christ is at work in it inwardly.”⁵⁴ So, without mentioning it outright, Marpeck makes an important distinction here: the church is not identified with Christ; rather, Christ remains separate from the church, though in some way indistinct from it, operating as its head and working through it. The church is the literal continuation of Jesus’s earthly life, but the church is such analogically and unequally—just as Jesus was fully human and fully divine, by analogy the church is fully human and divine (by its filling with the Spirit). The church is the earthly, human body of Christ—emphasis on human—that has been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Like the rest of his theology, Marpeck forged his ecclesiology in conversation with both the Spiritualists (who elevated the inner or spiritual above the outer or material in the life of the church) and Reformed acquaintances in Strasbourg, whom he saw as elevating the outer over the inner and “establish a church on the dead letter.”⁵⁵ Marpeck’s Christology shaped his progressive hermeneutic. Together, they shaped how he understood the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. And those three together were the soil for his ecclesiology shaping his view on the relation between the Kingdom of Christ and secular authority. Marpeck’s theology of church and world is the clearest, most orthodox representative of early Anabaptist two-kingdom theology.⁵⁶ This is partly so because he is careful to clarify that God is sovereign over both kingdoms, a reality

⁵³ Marpeck, “Response,” 84.

⁵⁴ Marpeck, “Response,” 84. Marpeck formulated this distinction between the “glorified Christ” and the “unglorified Christ” in response to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s emphasis on the “glorified Christ” at the complete loss of any notion of the human Christ, or “unglorified Christ.” For Marpeck, the ceremonies are actions precisely of the “unglorified Christ” in the church. Blough is right when he claims that “Christ glorified, in heaven, always acts on earth by means of his unglorified body, the church” (*Christ in Our Midst*, 150).

⁵⁵ Marpeck, “The Churches of Christ and Hagar,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 397. Marpeck has that criticism to level against his Catholic and Reformed opponents, but on the same page, he criticizes his opponents on the Spiritualist side by accusing them of trying to be children of God “without a legitimate mother” (i.e., the church).

⁵⁶ Found in Marpeck, “Exposé of the Babylonian Whore,” in *The Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, 24–44.

that historic Anabaptists have not always made sufficiently clear:

Even as God has offered peace to everyone, but not all have accepted it, likewise he has in his mercy also established and ordained divine Authority on earth to preserve temporal peace wherever the true peace of God, which is incompatible with self-seeking, is not accepted, in order that they don't destroy each other over their property.⁵⁷

Although God is sovereign over both, the church's place is only in God's Kingdom.⁵⁸ And when carnal authority (the state) demands obedience that is contrary to the will of God revealed in Scripture, the church is obligated to "act against the Authority, remain faithful to God, and surrender bodily life in patience and love to the government as the Authority over the flesh but not over the Word and the Spirit."⁵⁹

The fusion of flesh and Spirit in the church and individual believers necessitates obedience, even when it means acting "against the Authority."⁶⁰ This especially applies when the state calls us to take up arms.⁶¹ Marpeck's Schwenckfeldian hermeneutic led him to agree with Schwenckfeld's belief that the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith is incomplete. He argued that it lacked sufficient emphasis on the obedience of faith that is part of the reason for the cross and resurrection in the first place: "What is missing in their teaching is the cross of Christ; they resist it and teach others to resist it."⁶²

⁵⁷ Marpeck, "Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *The Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, 31.

⁵⁸ Marpeck, "Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 39.

⁵⁹ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 31.

⁶⁰ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 20.

⁶¹ This is made plain through Marpeck's "Exposé," but he is especially clear on pp. 30–31.

⁶² Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 28. Snyder summarizes this well: "For Marpeck, as for Schwenckfeld, to be 'baptized within' by Christ's fire and Spirit was to experience a spiritual rebirth. Believers were 'justified' by Christ's sacrifice, of course. That is, their sins were forgiven, for Christ's sake. However, echoing Schwenckfeld exactly on this point, Marpeck would clarify that Christ's intent was not simply to justify, or to 'consider sinners righteous,' but rather to consider them righteous and to *sanctify* them—that is, to make sinners holy by the spiritual power of rebirth." See Snyder, "Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers," 484.

Marpeck's two-kingdom theology grew out of his Christological analogy of Jesus's Chalcedonian identity with the Body of Christ. As the "prolongation" of the Body of Christ on earth, Marpeck is making an analogy between the incarnation and the nature of the church. The incarnate Lord was both human and divine, both flesh and Spirit. Analogically, the church is both human and divine. The church is the prolongation of the human Christ, and the church is filled with and animated by the Spirit.⁶³ But the accent here must fall on the human side of the equation. As Marpeck says, this necessitates a spiritual battle on the part of every member of the Body of Christ:

While the unbeliever is nothing more than flesh and death (Rom. 8:6; Jn. 3), the true believer will not be able to slacken the struggle between Spirit and flesh. His flesh cannot bear the rule of the Spirit until it submits itself to the discipline of the Spirit. Then the struggle between flesh and Spirit begins (Gal. 5:17).⁶⁴

This elevation of the material—the flesh as the locus of the Spirit's struggle within us—impacted Marpeck's ecclesiology. It is the physical that mediates the spiritual; therefore, "the visible and material realms of our existence ... cannot be dismissed, despised, relativized as means for knowing God or for making God known."⁶⁵ This is important because it means that the concrete practices, including discipline, of the church are important for its integrity and witness.⁶⁶ These concrete practices, or "ceremonies" as Marpeck and his spiritualist opponents called them, were "anything out of Jesus' ministry which passes on his teaching and identity."⁶⁷

⁶³ Interestingly, this is remarkably parallel with Karl Barth's treatment of the church as the "earthly-historical" existence of Jesus. Though he rejects talk of the church as "prolongation," for Barth, the "horizontal" (human) dimension of the church is met by the "vertical" (divine) dimension, forever changing the reality of the "horizontal." See Kimlyn Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology* (Cascade, 2013).

⁶⁴ Marpeck, "A Clear and Useful Instruction," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 103.

⁶⁵ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 225.

⁶⁶ In opposing the Spiritualist treatment of the "ceremonies," Marpeck often refuses to distinguish between the different "ceremonies," saying instead that "If one is invalid, all are invalid; if one remains valid, all remain valid" (*WPM*, 52). By "all," Marpeck here lists "baptism and the Lord's Supper ... all Scriptures, external teaching, separation from the world, ban, rebuke, exhortation, prayer, kneeling, the example of the believers, and all ceremonies for improvement and corporate benefit."

⁶⁷ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper*, 98.

For Marpeck, observance of the “ceremonies of the New Testament” is important for two reasons.⁶⁸ First, doing so is a matter of obedience. The apostolic church was the historical norm for Marpeck, so the ceremonies practiced by those of the apostolic era were therefore crucial to the existence of the Church. Second, the ceremonies serve to connect the spiritual, or “inner,” to the physical, or “outer.”⁶⁹ They are the point at which the spiritual life of the Christian connected with the outer, physical world. As markers of God’s grace, the ceremonies show the truth that, for Marpeck, the physical mediates the spiritual. It was in these ceremonies that the work of the Holy Spirit was made visible in the world: “the external service of the church in the proclamation of the Gospel, in water, bread and wine, *and in mutual discipline* is fused with the internal spiritual service of Christ into one living, dynamic reality.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, it is in reflecting upon the “physical words, works, deeds, and life” of Christ that the Holy Spirit is received by the church.⁷¹ Moreover, an individual only receives the Spirit as a member of the church, Christ’s body: “God the Father is not completely in any one member of Christ’s body ... or in the single member alone; rather, He is in all when the members are knit together under the Head and united through His Spirit.”⁷²

The church is fundamental to Marpeck’s Christology because the church itself is one of the “external” realities that points to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Thus, the church, as the body of Christ in the world, represents physically and spiritually the presence of Christ, especially in its adherence to the ceremonies of the apostolic age. The church, as the continuation of the revelation of Christ, makes known God’s revelation precisely by its enactment of these ceremonies. The enactment of the ceremonies by the church was the enactment by Christ himself, the “unglorified Christ.”

This revelation of the “inward testimony of the Spirit” in the “outward testimonies” is best illustrated in baptism. Marpeck saw baptism as the entry point into the church. Baptism without discipline makes no sense,

⁶⁸ Marpeck, “A Clear Refutation,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 44.

⁶⁹ Marpeck, “A Clear Refutation,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 74. For more on the meeting between the “inner” and the “outer,” or the flesh and the Spirit, in the ceremonies, see also “A Clear Refutation,” 83. For more on this dual purpose, see Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper*, 99.

⁷⁰ Walter Klaassen, “Church Discipline and the Spirit in Pilgram Marpeck,” *De Geest in Het Geding: Opstellen Aangeboden Aan J.A. Oosterbaan*, ed. I. B. Horst, A. F. de Jong and D. Visser (H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1978), 170–71 (emphasis added).

⁷¹ Marpeck, “A Clear Refutation,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 63.

⁷² Marpeck, “A Clear and Useful Instruction,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 87.

though. Baptism, as an outward testimony, pointed toward the inward reality of the receipt of God’s grace *and* one’s submission to the community in the battle against the flesh.

Granted, this focus on the “ceremonies of the New Testament” is an important aspect of traditional Anabaptism’s ecclesiology as well, but where Marpeck’s thinking on this is different and important for the purposes of this essay is in the fact that Marpeck, more than perhaps any of the other early Anabaptists, understood what we would now call “formation”: “The fundamental reality leading to a life of love and peace was not a series of external New Testament ‘commands’ that were to be obeyed to the letter, but rather a life of spiritual growth informed by the living reality of Christ’s presence.”⁷³ Of course, for Marpeck “the life of spiritual growth informed by the living reality of Christ’s presence” necessarily includes the practice of discipline and the other “ceremonies” which mediate the spiritual in the world of the physical. This mediation is, for Marpeck, what leads to “spiritual growth,” or the process of ending “fleshly control,” in the church.⁷⁴

The Chalcedonian Analogy and Church Discipline

As stated at the beginning of this essay, Marpeck’s view of church discipline has enjoyed scholarly focus in the past generation. But because Marpeck’s treatment of church discipline, like all his theology, grows out of the Chalcedonian substructure of his thought, it is not simply pragmatic. Neither is it guided chiefly by some abstract concept like “patience” or “love,” though both concepts are important for Marpeck in the practice of discipline. The nuance of Marpeck’s thinking about discipline is at the intersection of that Chalcedonian Christology, its ecclesiological application, and his agreement with the rest of the Anabaptists that the church is to be characterized by radical faithfulness in the obedience of discipleship.

As the prolongation of the humanity of Jesus, the church must practice obedience to Jesus. From that lens, Marpeck saw the Swiss Brethren’s “hasty” practice of discipline to be more like the world than Christ.⁷⁵ The church is supposed to be different from the state and world, especially in the world’s use of the “carnal sword.”

Contrary to the contemporary tendency to turn to Marpeck as a less-

⁷³ Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 100.

⁷⁴ Marpeck, “Exposé of the Babylonian Whore,” in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 29–30.

⁷⁵ Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 313.

sectarian “Anabaptist for our times,” Marpeck insisted on a firm separation of the faithful from the world, but he did so in a different way than those of either the Swiss Brethren or the Dutch/North German Anabaptists. This is clear throughout his writings where he addresses the nature of the church’s relationship with the world, but one such quotation will suffice to support my claim.

The body of Christ is ... built inwardly through the Holy Spirit, and externally through the co-witness of works. His church or communion is His bride, internally in the Spirit and truth, externally with praise to God, and to be a light before the world. But this church is separated from the world, for it is a witness over it. Similarly, through word and work, the gospel must be preached before the coming of the Son of Man.⁷⁶

The problem arises when we start from the strict, legalistic separatism of what became historic Anabaptism. From that view, Marpeck’s view seems like a compromise. But to understand Marpeck’s approach to church discipline, one needs to see it as an outworking of Marpeck’s Chalcedonian ecclesiology. His focus on the church as the prolongation of the humanity of Christ, based on analogy to Chalcedonian Christology, means that members of the church really are new *wesen*, filled with the Holy Spirit. Christians really are new creations, transformed by the Holy Spirit. But unlike Christ, Christians are not sinless. We are new *wesen*, spirit and flesh, similar to Christ, but only similar to. This is where “on analogy” is an important qualifier. Like his stricter dialogue partners, Marpeck expects real change in the Christian life, but that change is the fruit of a process of sanctifying transformation. Marpeck is clear that this understanding *calls for* discipline within the Church *and* for separation. Marpeck says it well when he writes, “the church is separated from the world, for it is a witness over it.”⁷⁷ Discipline becomes a tool for the purpose of spiritual formation and the witness of the church.

There is no evidence that Marpeck disagreed with the Swiss Brethren’s Schleithem Confession and its insistence on the use of “the ban” to preserve the church.⁷⁸ Marpeck shared their conviction that separation from

⁷⁶ Marpeck, “On the Inner Church,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 423.

⁷⁷ Marpeck, “On the Inner Church,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 423.

⁷⁸ Although the truth of this claim is evident from a close reading of Marpeck’s writings, Klassen argued as such in his 1959 article in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*: “There is no evidence that the Marpeck brotherhood was critical of Schleithem at any time, even though there were some tensions between the

the world’s evil was of utmost importance for the life of the church.⁷⁹ He desired, however, to ground it more firmly in the Bible, particularly Christologically. Marpeck was chiefly concerned to unify the various Anabaptists movements under one theological umbrella, but in order for that to happen, he needed to see the Swiss Brethren reframe and reform their hasty and coercive use of judgment.

In “Judgment and Decision,” Marpeck addresses and critiques two opposite and equally misguided approaches to discipline. First, he critiques the rejection of discipline by those who proof-text Scriptures like Matthew 7:1:

But everywhere the devil selectively uses his weapons against us through the dead letter. Some do not want to judge at all, and take refuge behind Matthew 7[1]: “Judge not that you be not judged. Do not condemn so that you will not be condemned.” They do not see the contrary to this statement, Matthew 18[15]: “If your brother sins, punish him.”⁸⁰

Rather than entertaining that misuse of Scripture, Marpeck seeks to ground the practice of discipline in the character of Christ. Just as God dealt with us patiently and mercifully, so also we are to practice discipline in “patience, humility, meekness, and love.”⁸¹

Secondly, Marpeck critiques the opposite error that is “worse than the one referred to above, to lead men astray with hasty and uncertain judgments.”⁸² This criticism is aimed right at the Swiss Brethren. Marpeck views this approach to discipline as working against the Holy Spirit. By practicing discipline the way they do,

they are judging and condemning themselves, making sin where there is no sin, setting up laws, commandments, and prohibitions

Marpeck brotherhood and some Swiss Brethren.” I owe this reference to Gerald J. Mast, “Patient Separation in Marpeck’s Theology,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85.1 (January 2011): 79. Mast makes the same argument as Klassen and myself.

⁷⁹ Marpeck wrote four letters to the Swiss Brethren to correct their practice of church discipline, not their practice of it as such. These were “Judgment and Decision” (undated); “Another Letter to the Swiss Brethren” (1543); “Concerning Hasty Judgments and Verdicts” (1542); and “The Cause of the Conflict” (1543). The first two can be found in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, and the latter two can be found in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*.

⁸⁰ Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 327.

⁸¹ Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 326.

⁸² Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 327.

against the authority and sovereignty of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His own no law except the law of love.... They seek to establish laws, and would become the masters of Scripture, but they do not know what they establish. Because of this ignorance, the enemy takes hearts and consciences captive.⁸³

It is precisely because the church is the prolongation of Christ's physical presence on earth and thus subject to the desires of the flesh that discipline is to be undertaken with humility and love. We need discipline and "the ban" because we are imperfect. We also need to tread lightly and with love when we practice discipline, *because we are imperfect*.

On the other hand, though imperfect and fleshly, we need discipline because we have the invisible Spirit within us. Because the church is the prolongation of Christ's physical presence on earth, the church must work toward obedience; thus, we need discipline. There is obviously a tension here that is not to be solved. Rather, like Marpeck, we must live in the tension by practicing discipline patiently and faithfully, not running "ahead of Christ Jesus."⁸⁴ In other words, we *are* already the Body of Christ, and that reality necessitates an ongoing war against the flesh by means of the Spirit. As Minear writes regarding the identity of the church, "the church is always under constraint to become what it is."⁸⁵ Marpeck would agree. The church is the Body of Christ, mysteriously continuing his physical presence on earth, and so must learn to become that by means of the slow, patient sanctifying work of discipline. We can thus affirm Snyder's claim when he maintains that "Marpeck insisted that the function of the ban was not primarily for the maintenance of purity in the Body, but rather the ban, properly understood, was an instrument for the building up of the Body of Christ in love."⁸⁶

This alternative approach to discipline is best summarized by Marpeck's distinction between fruit and blossoms or leaves in a believer's life: "Christ commands us to judge by the fruit, and not by the blossoms or the leaves which precede the fruit, for blossom and leaf may become good or evil. Evil fruit, when it appears, can never become good. Then the faithful are obligated to exercise judgment."⁸⁷

⁸³ Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 327.

⁸⁴ Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 324.

⁸⁵ Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 127.

⁸⁶ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 331.

⁸⁷ Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 344.

Conclusion: Marpeck as Resource for a Renewed Anabaptism

Marpeck's Chalcedonian ecclesiology is a fascinating mix of convictions that are difficult to hold together. Marpeck focused resolutely on both the humanity, the materiality of Christ, *and* on the divinity of Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, not a legal adherence, which forms people.⁸⁸ But like Paul, Marpeck was misunderstood as a libertine. It is this conviction concerning the law that typically led other early Anabaptists down the path to Spiritualism. Marpeck's theology is in tune with the unfolding story of Scripture, with the Chalcedonian definition of Christ, with the reality of the church's vocation in the world, and with the ways that the Holy Spirit actually works in the life of a believer.

Marpeck refused to take the path that many have taken in Anabaptist history: separating theology from ethics. Modern Anabaptists fall into this trap often: so-called progressive Anabaptists do so, focusing on behavior without doctrine, and end up legalists. And so-called conservative Anabaptists often end up in the same place in their emphasis on a different set of accepted behaviors. Either way, a truncated ecclesiology centered around legalistic behavior policing is created. In their own ways, both are heirs of the Swiss Brethren's legalistic ecclesiology. Marpeck shows us another path—discipleship that begins with and grows from a proper Chalcedonian substructure. Theology and ethics cannot be separated. Proper, faithful Christian ethics grows from proper, faithful Christian theology, the center of which is Christology. The same has always and must remain the case for Anabaptism.

Anabaptism and the Free Church broadly have something important to offer the contemporary church, especially the Evangelical church as it grapples with its place in a rapidly changing culture. We do not help ourselves to gain a hearing with the wider church by denying the fact that Anabaptism is and must be orthodox at its core. Indeed, Marpeck shows us that Anabaptism is one among many possible representations of historic, orthodox Christianity. Historic Anabaptism has too often avoided the "Great Conversation" by imagining that it is entirely other than its Protestant brothers and sisters. Anabaptist theology and ecclesial practice is certainly distinct, but it has much more in common with rest of the

⁸⁸ Among many Marpeck passages that could illustrate this aspect of his thought, see Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 331: "whoever presumed to preserve, rule, and lead the kingdom of Christ through law, commandment, and prohibition, yes, through the law of God, not to mention human inventions, no matter how pious it appears, it, too, thrusts the voluntary Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the proper Ruler of hearts, out of His place and puts himself in the place where he ought not to be."

(Protestant) church than has been historically acknowledged. If the Anabaptist voice is to be heard among the contemporary church's struggle to find its place in our secularizing western culture, it must acknowledge and build upon the orthodox core that Marpeck exemplifies. In navigating his rapidly changing and contested theological environment of the Reformation, Marpeck provides the way forward to navigate a rapidly changing and contested theological environment.