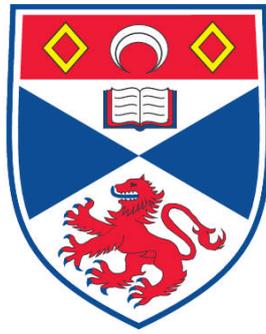


**THE BERNESE DISPUTATIONS OF 1532 AND 1538:  
A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

**Stephen Brett Eccher**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



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*The Bernese Disputations of 1532 and 1538: A Historical and Theological Analysis*

By: Stephen Brett Eccher

Dissertation

In Fulfillment of the Requirements for Doctor of Philosophy

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Doctor of Philosophy  
Declarations

I, Stephen Brett Eccher, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 78,500 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in October 2006 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in June 2011; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2006 and 2011.

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## Abstract

### *The Bernese Disputations of 1532 and 1538: A Historical and Theological Analysis*

Given the relative paucity of treatments relating to both the 1532 and 1538 Bern *Gespräche*, alongside a growing historiography which has offered a clearer understanding of the backdrop around which these two debates were held, the focus of this research project will be to provide a comparative analysis of the recorded dialogues from the debates at Bern. This ecclesiologicaly focused comparison aims to discern whether the debate relating to the nature of the church at the 1538 session was merely a redundant exercise and continuation of the earlier 1532 disputation or whether the latter debate offered anything substantively new to the ongoing religious dialogue between these two groups. Furthermore, all of the respective views on the nature of the church manifest in these debates will be examined in light of the preceding Anabaptist/Reformed dialogue of the period to determine their place contextually.

Having embarked upon the aforementioned goals several conclusions may be definitively drawn. First, the major ecclesiological suppositions expressed by both the Anabaptist and Reformed participants at the 1538 debate were, in fact, retained using the same core theological elements employed by their predecessors at the 1532 debate. Yet, despite this striking similarity, the independent nature of these debates must also be acknowledged. This may primarily be found in that both groups expressed their retained ecclesiologies with notable variation in things such as language, argumentative content, biblical corroboration, and illustrative evidence. Finally, both the similar and independent nature of these events will be shown to have been largely derived from the Anabaptist/Reformed dialogue already begun as the Swiss Brethren movement emerged from under Zwingli's reform efforts in Zürich. Each of these conclusions should help to paint a more accurate portrait of not only what was accomplished through these debates, but where each stands contextually during the period.

## List of Abbreviations

- ABRS* Yoder, John H. *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers*. Translated by David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder. Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, Number 4; Kitchener, 2004.
- CH* *Church History*
- ELENCHUS* Zwingli, Ulrich. 'Refutation of the Tricks of the Catabaptists.' In *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531): The Reformer of German Switzerland*. Edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson and translated by Henry Preble and George W. Gilmore. Philadelphia, 1901.
- LVM* *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, Band I. Edited by Leonhard von Muralt. Zurich, 1952.
- MQR* *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.
- Z* *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*. Multiple Volumes. Edited by Emil Egli. Berlin, Leipzig, and Zürich. 1905ff.

## INTRODUCTION

### Historiography

Despite its more inauspicious standing in relation to the other more dominant areas of Reformation scholarship, such as Zwingli's Zürich and Calvin's Geneva, Bern's place in the overall scheme of the Swiss Reformation has not been entirely neglected; still, it remains a place ripe for further scholarship.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true when it comes to the relationship between the Anabaptists in Bern and both the civil magistrates and Reformed preachers. Outside of those few scant details preserved directly from the Swiss Magisterial Reformers themselves, alongside the mention of events relating to Bern recorded in Stumpf's famous history of the Swiss Confederation during the Reformation, little consideration was given to the Reformed/Anabaptist relations in Bern for centuries following the Reformation.<sup>2</sup> However, beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a small handful of historians offered helpful accounts that considered not only the introduction of Reformation to the area, but also, more specifically, sought out the origin and role of Anabaptism in Bernese lands during this same time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruening has described Bern as 'the most significant forgotten city of the Reformation.' He believes one primary reason it has received little consideration in Swiss Reformation scholarship is largely due to the fact that it developed without the leadership of the strong personality figures that carried similar events in places like Zürich and Geneva. Michael Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays de Vaud, 1528-1559* (The Netherlands, 2005), p.61.

<sup>2</sup> Stumpf primarily tells of Bern's political role in the events leading up to the Protestant/Catholic conflict during the late 1520s and early 1530s, which resulted in the fall of both the Protestant forces and Zwingli at Kappel. Johannes Stumpf, *Schweizer und Reformationschronik*, Band II, ed. by Ernst Gagliardi, Hans Müller, and Fritz Büsser (Basel, 1955), pp. 136ff and 292ff.

<sup>3</sup> An account of the contextual backdrop of several aspects relating to the introduction of the Reformation to Bern was provided by Theodore de Quervain, *Kirchliche und soziale Zustände in Bern unmittelbar nach der Einführung der Reformation, 1528-1536* (Bern, 1906). For treatments dealing explicitly with the emergence and place of the Anabaptist radicals amid the shift in Bern's religious allegiance away from Catholicism see Ernst Müller, *Geschichte der Bernischen Täufer* (Frauenfeld, 1895), William McGlothlin, *Die Berner Täufer bis 1532* (University of Berlin Ph.D. Dissertation; Berlin, 1912), and Samuel Geiser, *Die Taufgesinnten-Gemeinden: Eine kurzgefasste Darstellung der wichtigsten Ereignisse des Täuferturns* (Karlsruhe, 1931).

Theodore de Quervain's 1906 piece centering on the events at Bern during this time offered two important insights which helped to shape the early historiography of the late 1520s Bern. First, through his work on the 1528 disputation, which included a replicated copy of the mandate formally ushering in the Reformation to Bern, he verified that the ecclesiastical measures instituted via Berchtold Haller, the city's principal Reformer, were thoroughly Zwinglian in their originating form.<sup>4</sup> With this, the initial questions relating to the influence of Zwingli on the events surrounding the impetus for the Bernese Reformation were given a specific direction quite early. Quervain also made some pioneering inroads into just how tense the situation was with the Anabaptists during this time period. His recording of the Bernese authorities' stance against Anabaptism through a 1527 mandate against the group and the subsequent decision for both exile and execution all show the great concern religious radicalism was given during the early years of reform in Bernese territories.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, a specialized study by Ernst Müller served as the first attempt at an academic historical account of the Anabaptists' presence in Bern from a more sympathetic perspective and devoid of the pejorative characterizations the radicals had received beginning with the Reformers' pens.<sup>6</sup> From this piece Müller set in place an early supposition regarding the radicals' first documented appearance in Bern. Here, the origin of Bernese Anabaptism was deemed to have been largely derived from the Waldensians and, therefore, had its

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<sup>4</sup> Quervain, pp. 185ff.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp 121 and 242-243.

<sup>6</sup> It was Müller's stated goal at the outset of *Geschichte der Bernischen Täufer* that the Anabaptist movement no longer be treated 'as an exceedingly troublesome, unnecessary, and loathsome expression of noisy, dissatisfied spirits who caused so much malicious difficulty for the Reformation in Wittenberg and Zürich, but instead as an independent, thoroughly evangelical-minded group.' *Nicht mehr als eine höchst lästige, unnötige und widerwärtige Aeufferung unruhiger, unzufriedener Geister ansehen, die der Reformation in Wittenberg und Zürich böswillig Schwierigkeiten bereitet hat, sondern als eine selbständige, durchaus evangelisch gesinnte Partei.* Müller, p. 4. Estep has rightly identified that for nearly four hundred years after the Reformation almost all historians joined in a collective 'thumbs-down treatment' of the Anabaptists, never fully engaging the movement according to their own sources. William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, 1963), pp. 1-2.

historic foundations within pre-Reformation Catholicism as a part of an earlier established evangelical movement.<sup>7</sup> But the real value of this treatment, widely considered as the seminal piece on Bernese Anabaptism by those deriving their roots from the Swiss Anabaptists, may rest in the fact that this helped to spark renewed interest in the study of the Swiss radicals in Bern, thereby ushering in a whole new era of Bernese Anabaptist scholarship half a decade later.

The middle to latter half of the twentieth century unquestionably brought the greatest influx of Bernese Reformation research to date. Particularly prominent among the 1940s through the 1960s was the appearance of a line of confessional historians who sought to determine the radicals' place in early modern Bern as a part of better understanding their own religious heritage.<sup>8</sup> Each of these treatments focused attention on both the historic and theological elements present in the movement in an attempt to further clarify the true tenets of the Swiss radicals as they developed over time.<sup>9</sup> As will be touched on in detail later in this study, these major tenets included a radical separatism from the world and the establishment of a free-church composed exclusively of regenerate believers in Christ.

Previous contributions during this century by Mennonite scholars such as John Horsch and Richard Feller also helped to effectively correct Müller's earlier premise regarding the origins

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<sup>7</sup> Müller, pp. 52-69.

<sup>8</sup> Jan P. Matthijssen, 'The Bern Disputation of 1538', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 22, 1948; hereafter designated *MQR*, Delbert L. Gratz, *Bernese Anabaptists and Their American Descendants* (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 7; Scottdale, 1953), John H. Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers*, trans. by David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder (Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, no. 4; Kitchener, 2004; Part I and II were originally published in 1959 and 1968); hereafter designated *ABRS*, and Walter Klaassen, 'The Bern Debate of 1538: Christ the Center of Scripture', *MQR* 40, 1966. Much of this burgeoning interest in Anabaptist scholarship was born out of Harold Bender's famous attempt to reorient the focus of contemporary research around the central conviction that discipleship was the essence of Swiss Anabaptism. Included in Bender's assessment was a strong belief in a separatist church gathered voluntarily. Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', *Church History* 13, 1944, pp. 3-24; hereafter designated *CH*, and *MQR* 18, 1944, pp. 67-88.

<sup>9</sup> Yoder's work is critical to this study as much of it embarks on a historical and theological analysis of not only the 1532 and 1538 debates at Bern, but the larger context of Reformation *Gespräche* in the first half of the sixteenth century. Yoder, *ABRS*.

of Anabaptism in Bern, showing their lineage to be derived not from the Waldensians, but from the Swiss Brethren who emerged within the context of Zwingli's Zürich instead.<sup>10</sup>

This time was not exclusively dominated by confessional historians, however, as purely historical considerations of Reformation Bern were also offered as a part of Guggisberg's more general examination of Bernese church history.<sup>11</sup> Here, while the continuing theme of Zwingli's indelible impression on the events leading to the institution of reform in Bern remained expressed, more importantly, Guggisberg also demonstrated the crucial role the polemical plays of Niklaus Manuel served in attacking the Catholic religion.<sup>12</sup> Two other important studies by Heinold Fast on Heinrich Bullinger's dealings with the *Täufer* further highlighted the ongoing importance of Zürich to Reformation Bern.<sup>13</sup> Much of Fast's work is particularly useful as it helped to show the tangible influence Heinrich Bullinger exerted over the Bernese church's stance against the Swiss radicals, particularly during the early 1530s and especially at the 1532 *Gespräche*.<sup>14</sup> Zwingli's influential legacy on the Bernese church's religious realignment was, therefore, partially preserved through his successor in Zürich, Heinrich Bullinger, albeit for a time.

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<sup>10</sup> John Horsch, *The Mennonites: Their History, Faith, and Practice* (Elkhart, 1893), p. 10-12 and Richard Feller, 'Die ersten bernischen Wieder-täufer', in *Archiv des historischen Vereins des Kantons Bern*, 1931. During this time Gratz also set forth the notion that a distinction between the Anabaptists in the urban center of Bern and those in the outlying rural areas must be made. He argued that the former city dwellers found their origin mostly in the Swiss Brethren from Zürich and the latter primarily as a continuation of the Waldensian heritage. Gratz, pp. 1-7.

<sup>11</sup> Kurt Guggisberg, *Bernese Kirchengeschichte* (Berne, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-59, 71-75, and 101ff.

<sup>13</sup> Heinold Fast, *Heinrich Bullinger und die Täufer: Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie und Theologie im 16. Jahrhundert* (Weierhof, 1959) and Heinrich Bullinger, 'How to Deal with Anabaptists: An Unpublished Letter of Heinrich Bullinger', translated and edited by Heinold Fast and John H. Yoder, *MQR* 33, 1959, pp. 83-95.

<sup>14</sup> This influence came not only through Bullinger's recommendations regarding the most useful biblical and rhetorical weapons employed in rebutting the Anabaptists' claims, but also in his suggested ordering of the discussions at Zofingen. Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, pp. 36ff and Bullinger, 'How to Deal with Anabaptists', pp. 84-92.

During the 1970s and 1980s a much clearer picture of the overall landscape of Reformation Bern prior to the Zofingen and Bern disputations began to take shape through several assessments of two crucial events relating to the introduction of Reformation to the region. Dan Hendricks' doctoral dissertation and subsequent journal article on the 1528 disputation provided the first lengthy attempt at showing direct evidence of Zürich's (via Zwingli) strong influence over the formal inauguration of the Reformation in Bern.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, accompanied by the premise that many of the carefully crafted decisions of the Bernese civil authorities were made in an attempt to carve a 'middle way', Hendricks was instrumental in bringing to light the preeminent burden the Bernese magistrates carried regarding the preservation of civil order in an otherwise unstable and flammable region of the Confederation.<sup>16</sup>

But one of the most important contributions during the latter half of the twentieth century was the expansive work by several scholars relating to the 1532 Bern Synod, including the printed publication of the actual minutes from the Synod.<sup>17</sup> These studies, compiled together in a two volume work by Gottfried Locher, not only served to show how the power of ecclesiastical authority was centralized and granted to the Christian magistrates in Bern, much as had been the case in Zürich via Zwingli's theocracy, but also how political expediency had moved the City Council away from Zwingli's views on the Eucharist towards Martin Bucer's attempts at a more unifying position.<sup>18</sup> This was an important stepping stone

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<sup>15</sup> Hendricks' central thesis in each of these related to the indebtedness the events of the 1528 disputation in Bern owed to Zwingli's Zürich and as a reaction to the Catholic victory at Baden in 1526. D.L. Hendricks, *The Bern Reformation of 1528: The Preacher's Vision, the People's Work, and Occasion of State* (Duke University Ph.D. Dissertation; Durham, 1977) and 'The Berne Disputation: Some Observations', *Zwingliana* 14, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Der Berner Synodus von 1532*, ed. by Gottfried W. Locher; 2 Bands (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> This move was especially aided through the efforts of Wolfgang Capito, the primary author of the Synod, who moved the religious influence on Bern regarding Reformation away from Zürich and towards Strasbourg. However, Capito was also responsible via the Synod for promoting Bern's untenable position in which debate

towards the more modern re-assessments of the political and religious associations in the region in which it has been shown that Bern's deliberate shift away from Zwingli and Zürich, following the Reformer's defeat at Kappel, was actually more towards Bucer's Strasbourg and not of Lutheran origin, as the previous historiography had once contended.<sup>19</sup>

### Purpose

And so, the past half century has really been witness to a number of useful historical and confessional attempts at understanding the events at the heart of Reformation Bern; these included the 1528 disputation which ushered in the era of reform in the region, *der Berner Synodus von 1532*, and a series of public *Gespräche* between the leaders of the Swiss Reformed church in Bern and the Anabaptists. But for all the historical and theological examinations of the events relating to the period, one prominent omission stands as the true impetus for this research project. Much of the work done on the 1532 and 1538 disputations in particular have come from a handful of mostly brief journal articles pertaining to one or the other debate and offered in almost complete isolation from the other.<sup>20</sup> Though some have also offered concise assessments of the proceedings from both the 1532 and 1538 Bernese debates between the Swiss Anabaptists and Reformed preachers most merely conjoin the two

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relating to difficult and divisive matters such as the Lord's Supper was to be avoided altogether in the hope of maintaining civil and religious unity. For Capito's role in the Synod see Ernst Saxer, 'Capito und der Berner Synodus', in Gottfried W. Locher, *Der Berner Synodus von 1532. Edition und Abhandlungen zum Jubiläumsjahr 1982*. Band 2, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Two important works by Amy Burnett and Michael Bruening highlight this crucial point. Amy Nelson Burnett, 'The Myth of the Swiss Lutherans: Martin Bucer and the Eucharistic Controversy in Bern', *Zwingliana* 32, 2005 and Bruening, pp.64ff. The previous omission of Bucer's palpable role in this shift and erroneous characterization of a Lutheran contingent in Bern, as Burnett has pointed out, are mostly derived from a nineteenth century work. Carl Hundeshagen, *Die Conflict des Zwinglianismus, Luthertums und Calvinismus in der Bernischen Landeskirche von 1532-1558* (Bern, 1842).

<sup>20</sup> While little direct treatment has been given to the 1532 debate, brief works relating to the 1538 Bern disputation may be found in Matthijssen, Klaassen, 'The Bern Debate of 1538', Herman Kocher, 'Die Disputation Zwischen Bernischen Prädikanten und Täufern vom 11.-17. März 1538', in ...*Lebenn nach der Ler Jhesu... Das sind aber wir!: Berner Täufer und Prädikanten im Gespräch 1538-1988* (Bern, 1989), and Rudolf Dellsperger, 'Die Täuferdisputation von 1538 im Rahmen der Bernischen Reformationsgeschichte', in Thomas Fuchs, *Konfession und Gespräch: Typologie und Funktion der Religionsgespräch in der Reformationszeit* (Wien, 1995).

and view the latter as nothing more than a continuation of the earlier *Zofingen Gespräch*.<sup>21</sup> Little has been done regarding a comparative analysis of these two disputations and none have set out to provide a detailed examination of the ecclesiological arguments preserved in the two protocols.

Scholars such as Walter Klaassen have certainly argued for the importance of these documents, especially for those making genuine attempts at ‘recovering the view of the Swiss Brethren on the various matters of the agenda.’<sup>22</sup> And John Yoder has even gone so far as to make a sweeping generalization regarding the importance of these disputation protocols, as he saw the views contained therein to represent what he argued to be the ‘purest’ and most advanced form of both Swiss Anabaptism (prior to the tainting of the movement by the rationalists and spiritualists) and Zwinglian Reformed theology.<sup>23</sup> Yet, these bold suppositions are offered casually in passing and without any substantial evidentiary corroboration. Moreover, such convictions generally paint these two disputations as nothing more than two sides of the same coin. Very little, if any, consideration has been given to the independent nature of these two events; and any notion relating to the development of argument or basic position for either of the participating groups has almost been entirely forfeit.

Furthermore, given the dramatic inroads made during the past half century to the overall historiography as it relates to the streams of influence on both the Anabaptists and Magisterial Reformers in Bern, the need to reassess both in relation to the protocols of the two final public disputations at Bern remains apparent. To date, no significant attempts have

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<sup>21</sup> The few occasions where these are dealt with in the same study they are simply cast as similar debates in a line of disputations held between the radicals and Swiss Reformed church. For examples of this see Gratz, pp. 9-11, 17-19 and Yoder, *ABRS*, pp. 102-110.

<sup>22</sup> Klaassen, ‘The Bern Debate of 1538’, p. 150.

<sup>23</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 103.

been made to examine these two debates in relation to each other in order to see if the arguments contained therein denote any substantial shift derived from the external influences bearing on the contexts of either the Bernese Reformed church or the Anabaptist movement in the region. As seen in the earlier historiography, while some have acknowledged certain influences upon the events recorded during these debates, no detailed treatments have looked at both the Anabaptist and Reformed positions offered at these proceedings and provided any definitive link with those external forces.

Consequently, the purpose of this research will be to examine historically and theologically the arguments preserved in the 1532 and 1538 Bernese protocols for both the Anabaptist and Reformed participants in the hope of accomplishing two critical and overarching goals. First, to embark on a comparative analysis for both sessions of debate with two thoughts set in place relating to precisely how these two debates relate to one another. To make definitive links of association when foundational arguments presented in the earlier 1532 Zofingen debate were retained and presented at the later 1538 conference and simultaneously highlighting if and when these deviated from or showed any progression or development in either substance or form from those previously offered at the earlier 1532 session. As will be seen shortly, with mostly new protagonists at the 1538 disputation, it must be considered whether there might be an accompanying variance in content of the arguments of debate as well. Ultimately asking if these two sessions of debate were essentially the same in their substance, and thus the 1538 disputation merely a redundant continuation of its earlier predecessor, or should these be viewed as entirely independent events.

Secondly, looking at the overall findings from the aforementioned goal, alongside careful consideration of the uniquely independent historical contexts in which each of these debates were held, an attempt will be made to identify the dominant streams of influence

dictating and directing the arguments expressed as a part of the dialogue between the Swiss preachers and Anabaptists at Bern. More specifically, asking not only what were the basic theological suppositions and supportive argumentation for each of the debating combatants, but, more importantly, where were these derived from historically? For the Anabaptists this means asking whether the theology expressed at both debates shows a definitive link of origin to the Swiss Brethren who originated from within the confines of Zwingli's initial attempts at reform in Zürich.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, to consider whether the radicals' positions at both assemblies of debate were truly, as Yoder conjectured, retained in their purest form and did retention of these basic positions necessarily negate any development and/or variation in articulated expression.<sup>25</sup>

Acknowledging the notable shift in religious polity away from Zwingli and towards Bucer that was apparent at this time in Bern, it will also be critical to see if this transition had any direct effect on the argumentative content of the Reformed preachers.<sup>26</sup> Did, for instance, this have an immediate bearing on the Reformed position at Zofingen or was its impact confined to and manifest more during the later 1538 debate? And did this shift fundamentally alter the way in which the Anabaptists' position was rebutted at either session

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<sup>24</sup> The precise origin of the Swiss Brethren movement in and around Zürich remains a debate even today. Several confessional historians generally consider the movement to have purely religious motives and derived exclusively from underneath Zwingli. Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel c.1498-1526: The Founder of the Swiss Brethren Sometimes Called Anabaptists* (Scottsdale, 1950) and John H. Yoder, 'The Turning Point in the Zwinglian Reformation', *MQR* 32, 1958, pp. 128-140. Other historians argue for the important role of broader economic and revolutionary social circumstances in the group's derivation. For specifics on this position see James M. Stayer, 'Die Anfänge des schweizerischen Täuferturns', in *Umstrittenes Täuferturns*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Göttingen, 1977), pp. 19-49; idem, 'The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition', *CH* 47, 1978, pp. 175-195; 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. by Marc Lien (The Hague, 1977), pp. 83-102, and C. Arnold Snyder, 'Revolution and the Swiss Brethren: The Case of Michael Sattler', *CH* 50, 1981, pp. 276-287.

<sup>25</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> The specific details of this shift will be outlined in Chapter One.

of debate or did the reorientation towards Strasbourg have no significant bearings on the preachers' programmatic agenda at both Bernese sessions?

All of these arguments presented at the two Bernese debates, whether put forth by the Anabaptists or Reformed preachers, ultimately fell under the discretionary judgment of the Bern City Council. No stranger to debate in religious matters, the City Council had already been dealing with the divide between the evangelicals and Catholics in Bernese lands since the late 1520s. In that instance, with a strong Catholic contingent remaining in the rural lands contrasted by growing evangelical leanings in its urban areas, the magistrates stressed the downplaying of division and the need to preserve civil harmony between the two as a major priority. While the City Council was largely composed of members from the city of Bern it did maintain a small percentage of its membership from those living in the outlying rural territories of Bern. Thus, while the magistrates' as a collective whole largely looked at matters from an urban perspective they did not entirely eschew concerns for what was going on in the countryside.<sup>27</sup> This is testified by the fact that the authorities regularly instituted public surveys that included questions relating to religious preferences throughout Bern as a way of gauging the religious climate in all of its holdings.

Although the magistrates showed a tangible level of awareness and concern regarding the religious inclinations of those Catholics in the rural parts of Bern, a similar standing was not afforded the Anabaptists. This point is crucial, especially given that the largest concentration of Anabaptists in Bernese lands remained in its rural parts during the era. Ultimately, the distance between the urban center of Bern and the rural lands had a direct impact on the magistrates' ability to fully understand the radical movement and, in turn,

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<sup>27</sup> The eventual embrace of the Reformation in Bern came as individuals in the City Council began to embrace the evangelical cause and as the mercantile families and guilds, who supported the Reformation as well, gained growing influence among the magistrates. Still, the Council was careful not to alienate those retaining an allegiance for Rome and that showed in the mandates that used imprecise language in order to appease both groups present in Bern. Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 104-106.

effectively engage it. As Gratz has noted, the first records of Anabaptists in Bern were a few cases that originated in the rural lands – a woman from Zofingen and Hans Pfistermeyer from Aargau.<sup>28</sup> The magistrates' action in these two cases began a lengthy campaign against the movement. And while the civil authorities tried a range of measures intended to suppress the Anabaptists, little success was found in those early years. Largely isolated from these groups and with little firsthand understanding of their radical teachings and beliefs, it took several frustrating years before the magistrates realized they were attempting to stifle a religious movement by the same tactics with which they dealt with common criminals. With this important realization finally coming to light the magistrates chose an added measure in their attack on the radicals that further highlighted the urban/rural dichotomy that existed between the two.

For the most part the magistrates remained undeterred in their use of strong measures against the radicals, including capital punishment, since they viewed the group as a seditious threat to the Bernese community. Yet, they eventually realized that the Anabaptists had to be confronted on theological grounds as well. Here, the magistrates and those key figures leading the Reformed church's rebuttal of Anabaptism in Bern felt they had a monumental edge against their radical foes. It was widely assumed by both that the Anabaptist leaders, who were mostly comprised of common peasants and uneducated lay folk, would be no match for the educated elite from Bern's urban intelligentsia. Consequently, the disputation was selected as a means of confronting the radical problem in the region from an entirely new perspective.

Having pursued each of the aforementioned goals, while paying careful attention to the unique historic contexts around which each of these debates were conducted, this study

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<sup>28</sup> Gratz, pp. 6 and 8.

should afford a clearer window into not only what took place and was accomplished through these debates, but may also provide a clearer window into the place of these debates in Bern's Reformation. Quite obviously these goals can only be achieved by a careful detailed study of the actual protocols of the 1532 and 1538 Bernese disputations. And so the documents preserved and published in the fourth band of Martin Haas' *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz* will serve as the primary source documentation for this project.<sup>29</sup> While a 1531 *Gespräch* was convened by the Reformed preachers in Bern with the Anabaptist leader Hans Pfistermeyer, and subsequently published in Haas' later work, only the 1532 Zofingen and 1538 Bern disputations will serve as the primary focus of this present study.<sup>30</sup> This decision has largely been made based on the fact that the 1531 debate not only was almost entirely held with one lone Anabaptist protagonist, but also in that it eventually resulted in Pfistermeyer's recantation. On the other hand, the latter two debates from 1532 and 1538 had multiple radical leaders championing the Anabaptists' cause; almost all of whom were undeterred in their radical beliefs at each sessions' close.

Both the Zofingen and Bern debates covered a wide range of topics during their respective proceedings. The agenda for the 1532 disputation focused on eleven distinct areas of discussion. These included issues relating to the role of God's love and love of neighbor in disagreements (1), the legitimate sending of the Anabaptist (2), which party stands as the true church (3), the ban (4), Christian civil rulers and the sword (5), considerations of the tithe and taxes (6), oath taking (7), the calling of the preachers (8), the support of the

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<sup>29</sup> *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, ed. by Martin Haas, Band IV; Drei Täufergespräche (Zürich, 1974).

<sup>30</sup> 'Gespräch der Berner Prädikanten mit dem Aarauer Täufer Hans Pfistermeyer, 19. bis 21. April 1531 in Bern', in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, Band IV, ed. by Martin Haas (Zürich, 1974), pp. 1-65; hereafter designated *QZ Pfistermeyer*, 'Gespräch der Berner Prädikanten mit den Täufern, gehalten vom 1. bis 9. Juli 1532 zu Zofingen im Aargau', in *Ibid.*, pp. 68-256; hereafter designated *QZ Zofingen*, and 'Gespräch der Berner Prädikanten mit den Täufern, gehalten vom 11. bis 17. März 1538 zu Bern', in *Ibid.*, pp. 257-467; hereafter designated *QZ Bern*.

preachers and benefices (9), use of interest (10), and baptism (11).<sup>31</sup> During the 1538 Bern debate only seven articles were considered. These included the value and authority of the Old and New Testaments of Scripture (1), the legitimate sending of the preachers (2), which side represents the true church and is the church to be without sin (3), the validity of infant baptism (4), the oath (5), Christian civil authorities (6), and the ban (7).<sup>32</sup> As one can see there is a fair bit of overlap in the topics addressed at each session.<sup>33</sup> Yet the distinct nature of these debates remains nevertheless and may be seen in at least four specific ways. First, only the earlier 1532 debate dealt with financial matters, such as benefices and the tithe. Second, the concluding disputation in 1538 included a hermeneutically based article regarding the relationship of the two testaments of Scripture that was absent in the earlier *Zofingen Gespräch*. Additionally, the ordering of the topics addressed shows some modification. It is difficult to discern precisely why the articles at each session were ordered in the manner in which they were. That information is not directly disclosed. However, the listing of each of the programs of discussion at the genesis of the debates does show that the agenda for both debates was established, most likely by the magistrates, at the outset of the proceedings. Finally, while the presence of the rule of faith and love may be found in a few of Erasmus Ritter's arguments at the Bern disputation, there is no discussion elsewhere on the matter in 1538. Yet the rule served as not only a major point of discussion at the Zofingen session, but was the very first topic addressed.

Due to the wide breadth of issues discussed during each of these two disputations this current project will only consider certain portions of these two *Gespräche* that directly related

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<sup>31</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> *QZ Bern*, pp. 238-269.

<sup>33</sup> These included matters relating to legitimate sending, who lays claim as the true church, baptism, oath taking, and the ban.

to ecclesiology, especially questions relating to the nature of the Christian church and the use of the ban as a valid and biblically established means of church discipline. The issue of baptism that was discussed at both debates would also add to this study and, strictly speaking, would fall under the umbrella designation of ‘ecclesiology.’ However, the limitations of space for this particular project have made the inclusion of an in-depth study of the baptismal discussions not possible at present. This decision to focus exclusively on ecclesiology will serve to narrow the scope of this study and center attention more directly on the heart of the divide between these two groups.

With the express goals of this study laid out above the actual direction of this project must now be outlined. The first chapter will begin by taking a look at the role of religious debate within the larger confines of Christendom and then quickly move to address the similar mechanism of the *Gespräch* employed during the Reformation. This chapter will also help to further set the historic backdrop for these two Bernese debates by considering the various participants involved in each and by examining closely the nature, tone, and language of these events. Additionally, the question of publication will be considered and the express limitations of this study via published disputation protocols acknowledged and conceded. Through these endeavors the various intentions behind each group’s participation at these two disputations will be made manifest and a clearer understanding of precisely what was going on in and behind the scenes of these debates offered to the reader.

Chapter Two will examine the crucial role hermeneutics played in the overall scheme of the ecclesiological debate at both Bernese sessions. It will help reveal how biblical interpretation not only served as a seed of division between the Swiss radicals at Bern and the Reformed Bernese church, but how it helped set both in motion towards positions that would ultimately prove to be irreconcilable theologically and practically speaking. Additionally, this chapter will demonstrate how the basic fundamental principles of interpretation

embraced by both groups at each session of debate were directly dependent on earlier hermeneutical suppositions previously expressed as the Swiss Brethren emerged from within the context of Zürich's own Reformation.

The third chapter moves the study into the important realm of ecclesiology and helps to establish it as one of the primary elements at the heart of the division between the Anabaptists and Magisterial Reformers in the Swiss Confederation. Through carefully unpacking the discussions relating to the nature of the true church this chapter will reveal two crucial elements relating to the Bernese debates. From the Anabaptists' perspective it will be shown that the major tenets of the movement remained unchanged from those previously established around Zürich and finally codified at Schleithem. Yet, the way in which the radicals at both the Zofingen and later 1538 Bern debate expressed and defended these convictions shows not only a level of independence, but some further refinement as well.

The Reformed preachers, while showing a shared concern for what they understood to be the seditious underpinnings of Anabaptism, also approached the radical problem from a slightly different perspective at both assemblies of debate. While Bern's move away from Zwingli and towards Bucer had been undertaken prior to the Zofingen debate, mostly Zwinglian arguments and concepts were retained and employed in defense of the Reformed faith. However, by the 1538 disputation a move away from Zwingli is evident in several aspects relating to the Bernese preachers' apology. Consequently, it will be concluded that each of the two events from 1532 and 1538, though extremely close in association, were not merely redundant exercises. Both maintained an independent nature and character; therefore, each must be afforded as much and considered on their own terms.

Chapter Four will continue the focus on ecclesiology by moving towards a study relating to the proper use of the Christian ban. Of critical importance here will be an examination of the possibility of a truly pure church and the place of the ban in such a

context. Building on the premise established in the previous section on the nature of the church, this chapter will continue to not only identify the affinity shared between these two debates, but also to stress the independent nature of these two events in regards to the arguments from both the preachers and Swiss Anabaptists. Additionally, the final part of this chapter will take the divergent suppositions relating to hermeneutics in Chapter Two and apply them directly to the discussions on the ban. This will allow the reader to understand more precisely from a contextual perspective how these differing views of interpretation played out in continuing to promote the widening theological divide between the two participating groups at Bern.

In closing, a brief word on the usage of certain terms implemented in this project is presently in order. First, while it is certainly conceded that the terms ‘Anabaptist’ and ‘radical’ or ‘Swiss radical’ can be understood and applied to a variety of contexts relating to those who embraced any number of forms relating to adult baptism, their usage in this project will be definitively more specific.<sup>34</sup> When explicitly used in conjunction with those individuals affiliated with the prominent separatist movements of Zürich these terms are meant to be applied to the Swiss Brethren who emerged both in and around Zürich in the early to mid-1520s. However, when directly applied to the participants at the two Bernese debates they should be understood as being directed exclusively at those individuals directly involved in verbally promoting the radicals’ cause at the 1532 and 1538 assemblies. For the

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<sup>34</sup> Although certain confessional historians sought to apply the term ‘Anabaptist’ exclusively to the group commonly known as the Swiss Brethren, more recent scholarship has shown such an attempt to be forced and unnecessary. The effort to identify a ‘normative’ type of Anabaptism is usually first ascribed to Bender who argued that non-resistance was a fundamental component of all who truly fell under the umbrella term. See Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision*. For the most important works affirming the more widely-accepted modern plural view of Anabaptist origins see James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, ‘From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins’, *MQR* 49, 1975, pp. 83-121, Werner O. Packull, ‘Some Reflections on the State of Anabaptist History: The Demise of a Normative Vision’, *Studies in Religion* 8, 1979, pp. 313-323, and James M. Stayer, ‘The Easy Demise of a Normative Vision of Anabaptism’, in *Mennonite Identity*, ed. by Calvin Redekop and Samuel Steiner (New York, 1988). For an excellent recent look at Anabaptist historiography and the usage of the term see Michael Driedger, ‘Anabaptism and Religious Radicalism’, in *Palgrave Advances in the European Reformations*, ed. by Alec Ryrie (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 212-227.

preachers the designation 'Reformed' has been selected and is meant to refer to the Swiss theology that was embraced initially at the 1528 Bern Disputation.

Secondly, although both the debates which comprise the focus of this study were convened in the territory ruled and governed at the time by the Bernese authorities, a further demarcation between the two has been employed to avoid confusion and redundancy. Since the 1532 debate was gathered in the town of Zofingen, which was located in a geographic region commonly known as Aargau, the city name will be exclusively used to refer to the *Gespräch* conducted from 1-9 July 1532. The later debate held from 11-17 March 1538 was conducted within the walls of the city of Bern itself. Consequently, the name of the city, Bern, will serve to distinguish this particular disputation from the preceding one held six years earlier in Zofingen.

Finally, for the purposes of trying to remain within the true historic context of the sixteenth century, the more modern designations of 'Switzerland' and 'canton' have been deliberately avoided. Instead, the classification 'Swiss Confederation' has been utilized to refer to the Swiss lands as a whole. Admittedly, there are limitations to each of these usages and problems in interpretation are certainly present. However, all of these terms have been carefully selected and implemented to maintain some level of consistency within this project.

## CHAPTER 1 - Gespräch

### Introduction

From the very inception of the Christian church during the apostolic era verbal discourse and debate have played a significant role in the ever-emerging ethos of the church.<sup>1</sup> Confronted by the introduction of a wide array of divergent and heretical beliefs to its body during the first few centuries the church regularly implemented various forms of religious debate in order to establish specific parameters of belief regarding doctrine and ecclesiastical practice which it deemed normative.<sup>2</sup> While the roots of Christian debate may be traced back as far as the apostolic era, the patristic period ushered in a more formalized means of applying religious dialogue via the ecumenical council.<sup>3</sup> Here, the church council was a tool used sparingly for the express purpose of establishing, articulating, and enforcing doctrine relating to matters of faith and church practice. Even though dialogue and debate over theology persisted through a number of alternative forms, the ecumenical council remained the most authoritative and visible form of debate during the infancy of the church. Beginning with the personal disputes among the apostles themselves, and continuing through the myriad

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<sup>1</sup> One of the first such instances of debate is generally considered the Jerusalem Council, whose events are recorded in Acts 15:1-29. Convened sometime circa AD 50 the Jerusalem Council was tasked with determining the extent to which Gentile converts to the Christian faith were to submit themselves to both an observance of the Mosaic Law and to receive the sign of the covenant in circumcision. E. I. Watkins, *The Church in Council* (London, 1960), pp. 15-16. For an insightful treatment of this council, including the ongoing debate relating to Paul's account from Galatians 2 see PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Minneapolis, 2000), pp. 118-120. Wiarda has also offered an intriguing look at the council as a contributing paradigm for proper biblical interpretation. See Timothy Wiarda, 'The Jerusalem Council and the Theological Task,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, 2003, pp. 233-248.

<sup>2</sup> These heresies included prominent attacks on the validity of the Trinity in light of the monotheism inherited from Judaism, Arius' unwillingness to affirm the eternal nature of Jesus, questions relating to the establishment of the canon of Scripture, and a multitude of questions relating to Christology. For an excellent overview of the development of heresies within the early church and their impact on the establishment of Christian orthodoxy see Alister E. McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> For detailed treatments of each of the ecumenical councils from the patristic era, including Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451) see Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History* (Collegeville, 2009), Christopher M. Bellitto, *The General Councils: A History of the twenty-One Church Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II* (New York, 2002), and William P. du Bose, *The Ecumenical Councils* (Edinburgh, 1914).

of major and minor ecclesiastic councils and colloquies present during the patristic and medieval periods, religious debate has been a mainstay part of the Christian church's history.

Therefore, considering the early precedence set through the aforementioned avenues it comes as no surprise that differences of doctrinal belief were retained during the Reformation era. Nor that these divisions were confronted via a similar mechanism of debate present centuries before. Following in the lengthy tradition outlined above, the Reformation *Gespräch* provided yet another forum of dialogue for not only legally challenging certain positions held by the ruling religious establishment, but for ultimately determining what was deemed and understood to be orthodox ecclesiastical doctrine and church practice.<sup>4</sup> Although widely used throughout Europe in a university context during both the Middle Ages and as a part of the early unfolding of the Reformation, the *Gespräch* played a particularly prominent role in both the establishment of the magisterial form of Reformation in the Swiss Confederation and in the development and proliferation of Swiss Anabaptism. These included such well-known *Gespräche* as the First and Second Zürich Disputations (1523), the disputation over believers' baptism (1525), the Baden Disputation (1526), and the four major Bernese disputations (1528, 1531, 1532, and 1538).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these disputations are also of great significance for Anabaptist scholarship given the fact that they provide a more accurate portrayal of the movement's theological tenets than those preserved in interrogation

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Gespräch*, while frequently translated in modern German as 'conversation, talk, (or) discussion' was, as will be demonstrated shortly, accompanied by a subtly different connotation during the sixteenth century. The contemporary translation of this term may be found in Helmut W. Ziefle, *Modern Theological German: A Reader and Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, 1997), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> The most extensive study on the Reformation debates between the Anabaptists and Swiss Reformers can be found in a most useful work by Yoder. Yoder, *ABRS*. Treatments on the disputations of Baden and Bern may be found in Irena Backus, 'The Disputations of Baden, 1526, and Berne, 1528: Neutralizing the Early Church,' *Studies in Reformed Theology and History*, vol. 1, 1993 and Gottfried W. Locher, 'Die Berner Disputation 1528', in *450 Jahre Berner Reformation: Beiträge zur Geschichte der bernischen Reformation und zu Niklaus Manuel* (Bern, 1980), pp. 138-155.

sources.<sup>6</sup> In a very real sense the Reformation disputation may be understood as an important quill which ultimately helped to write the Swiss Confederation's rich religious history during the sixteenth century.

Recognizing the crucial role the Reformation *Gespräch* played in reconstituting the social and ecclesiastic landscape of the Swiss Confederation in the early modern period, the primary goal of this chapter will be to assist the reader in moving beyond the mere words retained in the Bernese protocols from 1532 and 1538 and to more fully grasp contextually what actually took place during and through these disputations - to help understand the manner in which these dialogues were constructed and formulated, as preserved in the records that remain extant, and to illuminate what can be known about the historical contexts behind the words and arguments contained therein. In order to accomplish such an ambitious goal this chapter will first focus attention on setting the backdrop for these debates, specifically addressing who participated in these dialogues and in what form and for what reasons they were preserved and published. Second, it will be useful to explore such things as the nature, tone, and language of debate manifest during the dialogues, while simultaneously identifying the various reasons for each group's participation in the debate and their unique agendas. Finally, while this chapter will concede the express limitations of such a study, various reasons will be explored that denote why there remains a hope for a fairly accurate historical picture of these events born from the disputation protocols themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> Gerber has argued, rightly so, that since it is difficult to achieve a well-balanced understanding of Anabaptism because of the sparse availability of their writings and the tainted nature of interrogations and coerced recantations, the Bernese disputation protocols are of particular value to modern scholarship. Ulrich J. Gerber, 'Berner Täuferium und Berner Synodus', in Gottfried W. Locher, *Der Berner Synodus von 1532. Edition und Abhandlungen zum Jubiläumsjahr 1982*, Band 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1988), p. 168.

## Place of *Gespräche* in Ongoing Reformation Dialogue

The importance of the Reformation disputation to the overall dialogue that took place during the sixteenth century remains a key ingredient to the eventual change in the landscape of Christianity. The Reformation, at one of its most basic foundational levels, should be understood as the exchange and flow of ideas between individuals seeking to identify, articulate, and flesh out a genuine form of Christianity. It was a discussion, albeit quite heated and volatile at times, yet at its most basic levels a dialogue of individuals and groups trying to understand and express their Christian faith. In this context of conflict, the *Gespräch* simply served as one natural arena that it was hoped would allow for these goals to be met and Christian unity to be achieved. But what is it that truly sets the disputation apart from the countless other ways in which the conversation of the Reformation took place? To answer this question one must first begin by accurately identifying how the word disputation was used and understood during the early modern period.

The German term that remains at the center of all discussions pertaining to Reformation disputations is *Gespräch*. Although fundamentally important to this discussion, the difficulty in using *Gespräch* may immediately be found with the ambiguity that accompanies its usage when translated into English. Even though this specific German term is quite frequently translated into English as ‘disputation’ it also can carry with it a whole host of other meanings. For instance, as John Yoder has correctly recognized, the term *Gespräch* may be understood and applied in quite a broad sense. This may include a wide variety of theological discussions, ranging from private informal conversations between two people, all the way to officially sanctioned and recorded public debates held between two religious parties and overseen by the civil authorities.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, as Yoder has reasoned,

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<sup>7</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 2. Yoder also argues that the Reformation disputation, in what he describes as ‘the full sense of the word’, only took place when a safe conduct was granted to foreign participants and when both groups present for debate were involved in the editing and publication of the disputation records. *Ibid.*, p. 102. A

‘all oral or written confrontations with theological content,’ regardless of their level of formality, may be understood to fall under the umbrella German term *Gespräch*.<sup>8</sup>

Recognition of the various forms and manifestations of the *Gespräch* during the Reformation is essential to understanding the application of the disputation during the period, yet there remains one other major point of distinction which will bring further clarification to this study. Although the term *Gespräch* may be translated to include numerous types of dialogue between various competing groups during the Reformation, one key dividing line relating to all such forms of religious debate can definitively be drawn between those disputations conducted on an official level and those which were entirely more casual in nature. This distinction will be more clearly seen as this chapter examines the purposes behind the Bernese disputations. But suffice it to say, there is something entirely different and distinct about those discussions which were not only sanctioned, overseen, and enforced by the governing civil authorities, from those manifest through less formal avenues of dialogue. For instance, a polemical piece of pamphlet literature or a personal letter of reply defending one’s theological position cannot, and must not, be seen in equal comparison to those debates that were played out in a more formal setting and whose outcomes carried with them a much broader and authoritative scope of impact. These are simply not the same.

In no way does the difference between these alternative forms of a broadly understood rendering of *Gespräch* necessarily lessen the importance of the various manifestations of unauthorized or less formal dialogue, but the distinction must be made nevertheless.

Consequently, for the purposes of this project the decision to operate on the basis of such a fundamental distinction has been made, thereby deliberately narrowing the scope of this

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similar line of reasoning has been presented by Hans-Joachim Thilo. He argues that while the form of *Gespräch* permeating the Bible was largely an informal type of communication and dialogue which focused attention on both teaching and exhortation, during the Middle Ages the term took on a more formalized expression when used as a means and mechanism of debate throughout the universities of Europe. Hans-Joachim Thilo, ‘*Gespräch*’, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band 13, ed. by Walter de Gruyter, 1985, pp. 148-150.

<sup>8</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 2.

study. Such a decision will allow the present research to focus attention predominately on those disputations of a more formal nature, specifically those two sessions that took place in the region of Bern during 1532 and 1538.<sup>9</sup> Again, this choice should in no way imply a negation of the importance of other alternative forms of debate to the ongoing dialogue of the Reformation era, such as the publication of numerous theological treatises, personal letters of correspondence, the proliferation of polemical *Flugschriften*, and through the powerful avenue of the church pulpit.

Admittedly, each of these aforementioned mediums profoundly helped to not only direct the course of events that shook Christianity to its very foundation, but also continues today to afford contemporary historians a clearer window into this watershed moment.<sup>10</sup> For their critical importance to the overall landscape of the Reformation dialogue during the sixteenth century these avenues of expression will be referenced at times; however, only those disputations from 1532 and 1538 which were authorized by the civil authorities in Bern will serve as the primary focus of this study. These disputations were not merely a place for the exchange of ideas and the informal challenging of beliefs that frequently took place in

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<sup>9</sup> The important debated convened between the Bernese church and the Anabaptist leader Hans Pfistermeyer over three days in the spring of 1531 will also be referenced heavily. However, as alluded to earlier, since the Pfistermeyer debate was not engaged by multiple Anabaptist participants, but rather was simply one radical leader in debate with a concert of both Bernese civil and clerical authorities it will not be parsed nor examined as closely as the 1532 and 1538 debates. *QZ Pfistermeyer*.

<sup>10</sup> For three of the most important and recent pieces of historical work relating to the dissemination of Reformation ideas via these various avenues of influence see books by Pettegree, Matheson, and Edwards. Andrew Pettegree has rightly argued that based on the literacy rates present throughout Europe during the Reformation era various mediums of persuasion, such as drama, music, and (most importantly) the sermon, provided educated clergy and lay members with the instruments of means to compel an otherwise uncertain and disengaged people during the early modern period to embrace the Reformation ideas swirling around Europe. Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge, 2005). Matheson, focusing attention predominately on pamphlet literature, looks to the important role *Flugschriften* played during the period. He argues that the pamphlet served as a unique tool of polemic which afforded its users an effective medium for attacking the established church institution while simultaneously motivating the larger early modern population as a whole. Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1998). More specifically, Edwards' book offers an insightful window into how print was used as a tool of persuasion by Martin Luther to help reshape and reorient the focus of the Christian church. Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, 1994). A similar line of reasoning relating to the powerful role of print in changing societies consciousness through Reformation may be found in Richard D. Cole, 'The Dynamics of Printing in the Sixteenth Century,' in *The Social History of the Reformation*, ed. by Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy (Columbus, 1972), pp. 93-103.

churches, homes, and university classrooms across Europe. Rather, such debates were convened under the authority of the governing civil authorities with the express purpose of not only discussing matters of religious belief and practice, but also to make a final ‘official’ ruling on particular issues for the region. It is precisely for this very reason that the early modern disputation remains a fruitful and much needed place of research for historians in their ongoing attempt to construct a more accurate portrait of this important crossroads in time for the Swiss church.

### **Participants**

Before delving into the various purposes behind the Anabaptist and Swiss preachers’ willingness to engage in theological debate at Bern the actual participants of the various dialogues should first be recognized. Simply looking at the disputants of these debates one is immediately struck by two main points of significance which directly shaped the content of these disputations and ultimately helped to distinguish the various Bernese sessions from one another as independent entities. First, beginning with the 1528 debate, as the major disputations in Bern were conducted over the next decade and a half they slowly began to take on a more native and indigenous component with more limited direct involvement from people outside of Bern. The unveiling of the Reformation in Bernese lands through the 1528 debate clearly had the most direct external presence from both sides in attendance, including such prominent leading figures as Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, and the first future Swiss Brethren to receive adult baptism, Jörg Blaurock.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, as Hendricks has

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<sup>11</sup> Other foreigners involved include Commander Conrad Schmid of Küsnacht and Conrad Sohm of Ulm for the preachers, along with Hans Hansmann (Seckler) from Basel, Hans Töblinger of Freiburg, Ulrich Ister of Bitsch, and Thomas Maler from Franconia (Bavaria) as the Anabaptist protagonists. While Commander Schmid’s presence has been questioned he is included in an early list of participants by Stumpf. Stumpf, p. 372. For the primary account of Blaurock’s involvement in the first adult baptisms in Zurich see *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder: Ein Sprachdenkmal aus rühneuhochdeutscher*, edited by A. J. F. Zieglschmid (New York, 1943), pp. 45ff. For further reading on the introduction of the Reformation to Bern via the 1528 debate see Hendricks, ‘The Berne Disputation’, pp. 565-573; idem, *The Bern Reformation of 1528*, and G.R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 253-262. An excellent theological assessment of the 1528 disputation may be

correctly identified, the 1528 disputation was really nothing more than ‘a product of ideas conceived in other places and sponsored by outsiders’ (of Bern).<sup>12</sup>

For the 1532 debate, although Berchtold Haller, Bern’s principal reformer, desired Bullinger’s presence alongside the Bernese ministers at the debate, Zwingli’s successor in Zürich was expressly restricted from attending by the Bern Council. This was done in an attempt to avoid the impression of civil interference by the ruling authorities.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the Zofingen debate was led on the Reformed side by several prominent ministers of Bern including Haller, Caspar Megander, Simon Sulzer, Sebastian Hofmeister, Heinrich Möricker, Heinrich Lincki, and others.<sup>14</sup> For the twenty-three Anabaptists in attendance, not forced to endure the self-imposed strict restrictions relating to participation by the Bern Council that the Reformed disputants faced, they had Martin Weniger (called Lincki), a native of Schaffhausen and Hans Hotz, both of whom were working presently in Solothurn at the time, as their primary speaking leaders.<sup>15</sup> When the two sides reconvened six years later for the final act of the Bernese debates almost every one of the principle verbal combatants named in the 1538 protocol, with the exception of five Anabaptists who played a major role in defending the radicals’ position, hailed from or had direct ties to the Bernese region.<sup>16</sup>

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found in Gottfried Locher, ‘Die Berner Disputation 1528: Charakter, Verlauf, Bedeutung und Theologischer Gehalt’, *Zwingliana* 14, 1978, pp. 542-564.

<sup>12</sup> Hendricks, ‘The Berne Disputation’, p. 565.

<sup>13</sup> Bullinger, ‘How to Deal with Anabaptists’, p. 83-84.

<sup>14</sup> Although many of these preachers were transplants to and not originally from Bern all had worked intimately in the region to promote reform prior to the convening of the Zofingen debate. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 72 and Geiser, p. 174. Other notable speakers on the Swiss church’s behalf included Andreas Rappenstein and the recent convert from Anabaptism, Hans Pfistermeyer. Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> Only six of the twenty-three Anabaptists in attendance are named. Along with Lincki and Hotz little is known of the other four other than their names: Simon Lantz, Michael Ott, Michael Brügger, and Hans Ryff. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 71 and Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> These five foreign ‘exceptions’ included Hans Hotz, Michael Ott, Matthäus Weiser, Heinrich Weniger, and Georg Traffer from Ammergöuw. For the names of the other thirty-one Anabaptist participants see *QZ Bern*, p.265-267 and Müller, p. 88.

Sebastian Meyer, Haller's successor in Bern, led the Swiss church contingent along with Peter Kunz, Erasmus Ritter, and Simon Sultzer.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, from the details of the Bernese protocols it is clear that while a small handful of individuals took part in each of the two disputations of the 1530s mostly new faces are present as protagonists in the final 1538 debate.

Secondly, in addition to showing that a steady movement away from foreign influence characterized these debates, what is known from the historical record about the aforementioned individuals reveals yet another crucial shift relating directly to the participants of the Swiss church. A more in-depth look contextually at the preachers leading the Reformed church's position at the final Bern *Gespräch* reveals a notable shift away from Zwingli's reform movement emanating from Zürich and towards a much stronger association with the reform efforts of Martin Bucer in Strasbourg.<sup>18</sup> As will be shown in Chapter three, this shift is especially noteworthy as it subtly altered the way in which the Reformed position was both articulated and defended biblically from the parallel positions offered by the preachers at Zofingen.<sup>19</sup>

The 1530s were a tumultuous time for the Bernese church without question, not merely because of the irritating presence of Anabaptism in the region, but also as it embraced a temporary reorientation theologically as it sought to heal civic and religious divisions prominent throughout its lands. Both the death of Zwingli on the battlefield in 1531 and the defeat of the Protestant forces at Kappel posed a grave threat to the continuity of the

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<sup>17</sup> Just as they had done at the 1532 session, Rappenstein and Pfistermeyer spoke in support of the Swiss church. *QZ Bern*, pp. 263-264.

<sup>18</sup> As mentioned earlier, an important article by Amy Burnett has shown that this shift in Bern was, in fact, not driven by a predominately Lutheran contingent, as the earlier historiography had maintained, but by disciples of Bucer who sought 'to heal the divisions within the Protestant church.' See Burnett, 'The Myth of the Swiss Lutherans', pp. 45-70. Also see Bruening, pp. 63ff.

<sup>19</sup> For further details on precisely how this distinction played a dramatic role in shaping the Reformed argument see Chapter Three on ecclesiology.

Reformed effort in the Swiss Confederation.<sup>20</sup> The *Zwiter Landfrieden* which ended this brief military struggle at Kappel afforded Catholicism a stronger foothold in the Swiss Confederation by offering protection for those loyal to the Pope living in Protestant territories and further fragmented a Confederation already struggling to maintain unity. Keenly aware of the constant threat posed by the Habsburgs to the East and now forced to face the daunting prospects of paying monumental war reparations to the Catholics, Bern was left in a rather tenuous and precarious position politically.<sup>21</sup>

With relations clearly strained with neighboring Zürich, Bern was forced at this time, out of necessity, to procure a unified religious front with other Protestants in an attempt to help further stabilize their disintegrating position in the Swiss Confederation.<sup>22</sup> With all of this unrest swirling around and these external political pressures bearing down on Bern, the civil magistrates sought out some form of uniting compromise in the hope of procuring societal peace above all else.<sup>23</sup> And this desire to curtail division and social unrest led Bern, largely through the work of Wolfgang Capito, to embrace Martin Bucer's type of reform

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<sup>20</sup> J. Wayne Baker, 'Church, State, and Dissent: The Crisis of the Swiss Reformation, 1531-1536', *CH* 57, 1988, p. 136. Gordon has also recognized the immense pressure Bern was under at this time given that many perceived the failure at Kappel to have been directly the result of Bern's unwillingness to become fully involved in the struggle with the Catholics. Gordon, pp. 133 and 135-140.

<sup>21</sup> The longstanding financial burden the Kappel War left on the city of Zürich alone lasted more than a decade according to some estimates. Helmut Meyer, *Der Zweite Kappeler Krieg: Die Krise der Schweizerischen Reformation* (Zurich, 1976), p. 306.

<sup>22</sup> Bern's reluctance to aid Zurich at Kappel not only incited Caspar Megander to publicly criticize Bern for inadvertently aiding the Catholic's to victory, but it directly led to the dissolution of the Christian Civic Union. Hans Rudolf Lavater, 'Die Verbesserung der Reformation zu Bern', in Gottfried W. Locher, *Der Berner Synodus von 1532. Edition und Abhandlungen zum Jubiläumsjahr 1982* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1988), Band 2, pp. 57-58. Both of these results left what Gordon has described as 'bad blood' between the two Swiss regions. Bruce Gordon, 'Switzerland', in Andrew Pettegree, *The Early Reformation in Europe* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 86. For details on the nature and purpose of the Christian Civic Union see Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 269-270. Gordon has argued that at its deepest level the failure of the Swiss Reformation was based largely on the intense and corrosive rivalry Bern shared with neighboring Zürich. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 128.

<sup>23</sup> The Bernese magistrates were reverting here to their previous pragmatic practice of seeking compromise to quell societal and religious dispute. At the outset of the reform movement in the Swiss Confederation, Bern had sought out what Glenn Ehrstine has described as a 'middle path' between the new reform ideas of Protestantism and the established Catholic religion through a mandate requiring all sermons to simply be based on the Gospel. Glenn Ehrstine, *Theatre, Culture, and Community in Reformation Bern, 1523-1555* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 46-47.

prominent in Strasbourg.<sup>24</sup> This shift, it was hoped, would bring Bern and its surrounding rural lands into closer alliance with other members of the Swiss Confederation, such as Strasbourg, and help stabilize an otherwise untenable situation.<sup>25</sup> Of the major participants in the ecclesiological discussions at the final Bern debate only one lone individual, Erasmus Ritter, held out allegiance to Zwingli at the time.

During this clearly unstable time in Bern's history, the pressing need to oversee aspects relating to both the church and state fell to the final major group of participants at these disputations - the magistrates themselves. At the inception of the 1532 Zofingen and 1538 Bern disputations the formal declarations for opening the debates were instituted through the proclamation 'We the mayors of the small and great councils.'<sup>26</sup> As a part of Bern's founding constitution of 1294 the civil authorities were divided into two groups: the Great Council composed of two hundred members and the Small Council comprised of

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<sup>24</sup> The various impulses for this change, including the desire to heal division in the Swiss lands, may be found in Bruening, pp. 64ff. Bucer, as has been characterized, was largely known at this time as being a 'fanatic for unity.' Marijn de Kroon, 'Martin Bucer and the Problem of Tolerance', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, 1988, pp. 157-158.

<sup>25</sup> Bern's fugacious shift in theology first became evident when Wolfgang Capito's forty-four articles were embraced and adopted as a part of the Bern Synod of 1532. Saxer, pp. 150-166. For the most recent English translation of Capito's forty-four articles from the Bern Synod see James T. Dennison, Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids, 2008), vol. I, pp. 226-276. While Capito's contribution to the Bern Synod provided the first fruits of a new foothold for Bucer's theology in Bern and a suppression of Zwingli's tradition imparted from Zürich, other events later embodied this change as well. For instance, the Bernese magistrates' acceptance of five articles on the Supper agreed upon during a 1535 meeting between Swiss church leaders in Aarau (and subsequently by Luther) continued to quell the acceptance of Zwinglian theology in Bern and promote that of Strasbourg. See Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 147. Just two months prior to the 1538 debate at Bern, the magistrates provided further evidence of the aforementioned shift in theology when the staunch Zwingli supporter Caspar Megander was forced from the canton over language relating to the Supper. Although the magistrates' had initially tried to subdue the ideological divide by restricting the use of the phrase 'real presence' in the catechism, Megander eventually forced an ultimatum from the magistrates who now had sided with Bucer's edition of the catechism. Guggisberg, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> *Wir, der schultheiß, der klein unnd groß radt. QZ Zofingen*, p. 70. The 1538 debate provides alternate spellings indicative of the various Swiss dialects present at these hearings. Here it is conveyed via the statement 'Wir, der schulltheis, khlein unnd gros rhatt.' *QZ Bern*, p. 259.

twenty-three members including two mayors or *die Schlutheißten*.<sup>27</sup> Presiding over both the 1532 and 1538 *Gespräche* were four presidents sent from the four main cities of Bern.<sup>28</sup>

These collective councils remained in place at the time of the Reformation and, while clearly not a part of the actual theological wrangling at Bern, played a vital role in the disputation process through three particular avenues of influence.

First, the magistrates established and enforced the actual parameters of these two debates in question. This included such basic fundamental matters as issuing the legal mandate offering a passage of safe conduct for the radicals, as well as imposing the acceptable authoritative standard of appeal during argumentation, namely the two testaments of Scripture.<sup>29</sup> The authorities oversaw minor logistical matters as well, such as formal debating procedures which included when and how long a person might speak. Second, they were responsible for making a final decision on the matters discussed and a ruling that would be accepted and enforced as law in Bern. The magistrates' judgment in these matters became ratified into law for Bern and its territories. Finally, at the close of the disputations the civil authorities were responsible for the dissemination or, in the case of the 1538 debate, the withholding of the debate record itself to a wider public audience. This was ultimately accomplished through two mediums. The Bernese Council made preparations for the minutes of the debates to be edited and published; the 1532 protocol eventually being published by Zwingli's publisher in Zürich, Christoph Froschauer.<sup>30</sup> The council also made

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<sup>27</sup> The Great Council, also called 'the Two Hundred', actually permitted a membership of up to three hundred citizens from Bern. It was responsible for ratifying the public governmental policies set forth and established by the Small Council. Ehrstine, pp. 42-43.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Zender (former mayor of Zoffingen), Hans Tellsperger (mayor of Lentzburg), Gabriel Meyer (Zofingen notary), and Sigmund Fry (Brugg notary) all served at the Zofingen debate. The men presiding at the 1538 debate included Bernhardt Tillman and Peter von Werd of the Small Council and Hans Abrechtenn and Niclausen from the Great Council. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 71 and *QZ Bern*, p. 261-262.

<sup>29</sup> For the importance of procuring a passage of safe conduct by the radicals at this time see Kocher, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Bullinger was included in the proofreading effort of the 1532 Zofingen protocol prior to their publication. Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, p. 37.

certain that their findings and legal precedents were to be read aloud from the pulpit to the people of Bern.<sup>31</sup> Following the conclusion of the 1538 debate, and despite initial plans to publish the disputation record, the magistrates withheld the protocol from publication.<sup>32</sup>

### **Publication, Dissemination, and Question of Veracity**

The magistrates' oversight of the publication and dissemination of the disputation proceedings at Bern elicits one very important question. Given that the magistrates maintained exclusive oversight of these debates and were actively involved in their publication, can the minutes of these protocols be considered reliable sources? An answer to this most crucial question will ultimately emerge as the details surrounding the recording of these debates are first considered. The record for each of the Bernese debates was entrusted to qualified city notaries. Hans Glanner and Bartholme Schürman, both residents of Bern, and Sebastian Haßli, a schoolmaster from Zofingen, were collectively tasked with recording the 1532 discussions.<sup>33</sup> Glanner was charged again with preserving the content of the debate at Bern in 1538 alongside Hans von Rhütli.<sup>34</sup> Once these men chronicled the events at Bern, as stated previously, the minutes took two entirely divergent routes. The 1532 Zofingen record was supposed to have been edited by representatives from both parties and then published by Christoph Froschauer, publisher of the 1528 disputation.<sup>35</sup> However, mostly driven by fear since their safe passage had expired, no Anabaptists actually aided in the editorial process, thereby bringing into question the reliability of the extant document post-

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<sup>31</sup> The official decree stated that the findings from Zofingen were to be disseminated throughout Bernese lands and 'read before the congregations from the pulpit.' *Uf der Kanzlen verhört werden vor der Gmeind*. Original in the Ratsmanual (R.M) from 13 September 1532. Quoted in Müller, p. 70. Also see Gratz, p. 18

<sup>32</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> *QZ Bern*, p. 262.

<sup>35</sup> Ehrstine, p. 49.

editing.<sup>36</sup> The 1538 debate, however, was not brought to publication at all by the council and the subsequent request by the Anabaptists for a copy of the minutes went unheeded.<sup>37</sup> This, as will be developed in detail later, was largely driven by the magistrates' recognition that the radicals were finding some level of success in these debates.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the fact that the civil authorities remained in a position of power regarding the distribution of the content of these debates, including oversight of the editorial process following their transcription, a number of evidences, including linguistically based ones, suggest that the content of these protocols are generally trustworthy and, in turn, remain useful for providing an accurate picture of the interplay between Anabaptism and the Swiss church in Bern during the 1530s. After all, it was the express task set before the scribes at Bern that they preserve everything that was stated during the discussion with detailed precision. As the magistrates at Zofingen ordered, 'what, however, was done and said by both parties, as far as the scribes can give account of it, follows word to word in the simplest form.'<sup>39</sup> Later on it was clarified that 'accordingly, the appointed scribes shall also to the best of their ability write down everything, regardless of party, sect, favor, hostility, etc all that is necessary and relates to what occurred during the disputation.'<sup>40</sup> That such an ambitious task

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<sup>36</sup> Bullinger, now the lead antagonist of the Swiss Anabaptists during the early 1530s, and Caspar Megander, a faithful follower of Zwingli, edited the record in the radicals' absence. Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, p. 37 and Baker, *Church, State, and Dissent*, p. 139. The Anabaptists' absence during this process is critical, for as has been shown by Arnold Snyder, the veracity of such publications often came into question when the radicals were not involved in the editing and publication of disputation proceedings. Arnold Snyder, 'The (Not-so) "Simple Confession" of the Later Swiss Brethren. Part I: Manuscripts and Marpeckites in an Age of Print', *MQR* 73, 1999, p. 681.

<sup>37</sup> Müller, p. 80.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> *Was aber da gehandelt und von beiden parthyen geredt, sovill die schryber habend mogen fassen, volgt von wort zu wort aller einfaltigstenn hernach. QZ Zofingen*, p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> *Demnach sollent ouch die geordneten schryber ungeachtet parthy, sect, gunst, fyendschafft etc. alles, das so nottwendig, unnd dem handeln dienstlich, sovil inen möglich und dergestalt somlich gesprach gehalten, und wie obstat angesehen, getrüwlich uffzeichnen. Ibid.*, p. 73.

was accomplished in full measure can be seen in both disputation protocols through the following.

First, moving to the actual words preserved in these protocols one is immediately struck by the difficulty in reading and translating these documents into English. This is largely due to the fact that spelling has not been assimilated into any unified standard, as the various dialects present at these disputations were preserved by the scribes.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the minutes of the original Bernese documents are without the contextual apparatus of punctuation and so starting and stopping points can be infectiously hard to discern for a modern audience. Admittedly, while the preservation of various Swiss dialects in no way directly implies a parallel concern for content it at least testifies that significant efforts were undertaken to maintain a genuine transmission of the disputation record. Furthermore, as becomes fully evident through reading these protocols, the use of repetition by both parties suggests a highly accurate account of these events. As will be seen in this project's later study on topics such as the nature of the church and the ban, arguments are frequently offered *ad nauseum* by both the radicals and the Swiss preachers. At times it can even become easy to get lost in the protocols as the exact same arguments and biblical justification are retained and presented time and again. The city notaries, along with the editors of these protocols, obviously had ample opportunity to abridge and pare down these debates, yet even the redundant nature of these dialogues are maintained and preserved in the disputation records.

Looking at the way in which the preachers and Anabaptists dealt with these protocols following the completion of the proceedings at Zofingen and Bern also helps to further suggest the authenticity of the content contained therein. From the preachers' perspective their reaction to and usage of the protocols reveals a great deal. Stepping back for a moment to the Pfistermeyer debate of 1531, what is most interesting about the course of its

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<sup>41</sup> Matthijssen, p. 19.

publication was the speed with which these protocols were being prepared for dissemination. In fact, the drafting of the forward began on 19 April 1531, a full day before the disputation officially closed.<sup>42</sup> Based on this time frame, and the fact that it had not previously been determined to publish the session's findings, it appears that the council's decision to publish the minutes of the disputation was made rather impulsively and only after Pfistermeyer's defeat had become a mere formality by the second day. With a victory well in hand the magistrates recognized the tremendous value in the public proclamation of the minutes from the 1531 debate.

However, once the dialogue with the Anabaptists finally came to an end seven years later at the 1538 Bern disputation the authorities, as we have touched on early, were clearly not as motivated to present their publication of the disputation record before the people of Bern. The previously arranged plans for publication and dissemination were halted and the protocols from the final *Gespräch* were tucked neatly away in the state archives of Bern under the catalogue heading 'useless papers' (*der Unnützen Papiere*).<sup>43</sup> Clearly the magistrates were fearful that if the minutes of the 1538 debate were afforded a broad public forum they could potentially promote the radicals' cause and continue to perpetuate the spread of Anabaptism seen throughout the 1530s. Additionally, if the content at the final debate had been preserved and or edited to reflect a prejudice against the radicals it would seem odd that the Anabaptists would be refused a copy of the preserved proceedings. Rather, the suppression of the 1538 protocol to a wider audience seems to suggest that the magistrates and Swiss preachers knew exactly what was contained in them. From the authorities' perspective, at the very least they offered little to promote the Reformed church's

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<sup>42</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, pp. 98 and 351.

<sup>43</sup> Geiser, p. 180.

cause and may have even, at worst, been a dangerous and incendiary catalyst further fanning the flames of Anabaptism in the region.<sup>44</sup>

One final argument that promotes the veracity of these protocols centers on the theological position of the Anabaptists retained in the sources. If, as has been argued, there was ample time and opportunity for editorial distortion of the radicals' position at Bern then one might expect to find notable discrepancies between the Anabaptists' suppositions expressed during these disputations from those previously established as a part of the emergence of Swiss Anabaptism in the 1520s. However, as will be a major thrust of Chapter Three's focus on ecclesiology, the movement's major tenets appear to have been preserved without exception and undoubtedly demonstrate a strong affinity with the Swiss Anabaptism that developed out of Zwingli's program of reform.<sup>45</sup> Each of the aforementioned arguments suggests an overall reliability of the Bernese sources extant. Yet historians must still remember that limitations remain nevertheless. And so while one need not entirely eschew the possibility of casting an accurate representation of the state of affairs between the Anabaptists and Swiss church in Bern, any such characterizations must also be tempered within the greater context of the inherent limitations of such a project. These were, after all, the preserved hand written and edited accounts of notaries and not the digital recordings of the modern era, and so questions will always remain.

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<sup>44</sup> As Müller has suggested the council recognized that the Anabaptists were finding a level of success in the final Bern debate. Müller, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Again, Yoder's confidence in the veracity of both the Anabaptist and Swiss preachers' positions as preserved in these documents is held to such an extent that he is able to boldly express the tremendous value in the 1532 and 1538 disputations since both views expressed at each are retained in their 'purest fashion.' Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 103. Schaff properly contends that Zürich served as 'the cradle of the Anabaptist movement.' Harold H. Schaff, 'The Anabaptists, the Reformers, and the Civil Government', *CH* 1, 1932, p. 35. More recently Lewis Spitz used an agrarian illustration to convey the same idea by stating that Zürich 'provided the soil from which Anabaptism grew.' Lewis W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation, 1517-1559* (New York, 1985), p. 196.

## Purpose behind Participation in Debate at Bern

1532

Any examination of the disputations held at Bern in the 1530s requires an extensive consideration of the various purposes behind such deliberations. Beginning with a basic cursory assessment of the relationship between the participants involved in debate, one may suspect the implied purpose of winning one's opponent to their adversarial position through the process of discussion to be preeminent. Although a lofty and honorable concern, it remains doubtful whether this was, in fact, a primary goal of either the 1532 or 1538 disputations. The idea was certainly present, as seen by the introductory exhortation from the Bern Disputation of 1532, which included the magistrates' hope that 'their (the Anabaptists') mistake would be refuted'.<sup>46</sup> And the promise of eliciting a recantation must have actuated a sense of optimism following the successful conversion of the Anabaptist leader Hans Pfistermeyer in 1531.<sup>47</sup> Some scholars, such as GH Williams, have even argued that the Zofingen debate was prompted by the magistrates in a genuine attempt 'to regain the Anabaptists in sufficient numbers in order to win their allegiance for a completely reformed State.'<sup>48</sup> However, the extent to which this stated goal was exigently pursued or merely given lip service remains highly debatable. It is certainly conceded that in the course of dialogue if the preachers were to effectively persuade the Anabaptists at Zofingen of the error of their radical ways then such would have obviously been greatly welcomed; but, given the contextual evidences available, such should hardly be considered the primary concern of the preachers. Given the questionable nature of such a proselytizing goal, what then were the primary purposes behind the Anabaptists and Swiss preachers' participation in these debates?

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<sup>46</sup> *Iren irthumb abzeleinen. QZ Zofingen*, p. 70

<sup>47</sup> *QZ Pfistermeyer*, pp. 3-65. That this motivational hope was a present concern for the magistrates was also expressed in Geiser, p. 174.

<sup>48</sup> George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 593.

Unfortunately, the specific context around which the direct calling for debate in Zofingen remains somewhat vague based on the limited sources extant. Yet, while it is unknown exactly why the debate was first called a number of things strongly suggest the Bernese magistrates as the principle initiators of the 1532 *Gespräch*. There is little question that the convening of the 1532 Zofingen session was made in direct response to the spread of Anabaptism despite the authorities' ongoing attempts to suppress the movement. Harsh measures against the Anabaptists in the region were ushered in with Bern's participation in an August 1527 mandate against the radicals, known as the *Anabaptist Concordat*.<sup>49</sup> As the Anabaptist problem persisted the magistrates were forced to take further action, eventually culminating in the first death sentences carried out against several radicals espousing the Anabaptist faith in the summer of 1529.<sup>50</sup> Despite repeated efforts to thwart the spread of Anabaptism the movement continued to gain a strong foothold in the region as missionary activities flourished.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, as the civil authorities began to come to grips with the fact that they were actually dealing with matters of religious conviction and not merely acts of civil disobedience, further steps were in order. Here, it remained only logical that the magistrates would expediently pursue some kind of intervening means to undercut and refute the theological convictions of the Swiss radicals in and around Bern. A disputation held in a public forum and led by the leading Reformed minds of the Swiss church appeared the

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<sup>49</sup> Through this 1527 mandate Bern partnered alongside Zürich and St. Gall in making a firm and unified stand against Anabaptism in the Swiss Confederation. Dellsperger, p. 73. A copy of this mandate may be found in Quervain, pp. 242-243. Gerber has argued that this mandate became the principle authority related to handling Anabaptism in the region. Gerber, 'Berner Täuferium und Berner Synodus,' p. 174.

<sup>50</sup> The list of Anabaptists initially executed under the aforementioned mandate included Hans Hansmann (called Seckler), a hat maker from Basel, whom Haller had once described to Zwingli as the leader of the Anabaptists. Geiser, p. 170-171 and Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater of Martyrs Mirror* (Scottsdale, 1950), p. 1129.

<sup>51</sup> This spread was particularly prominent to the north and east of the city of Bern (especially the Emmental) as Anabaptist ideas dispersed freely from places such as Basel and Solothurn where radical communities largely escaped hostile civil intervention. For a useful assessment relating to the various means of communication used to disseminate Anabaptist ideas among such groups of radicals during the formative years of the 1520s and 1530s see C. Arnold Snyder, 'Orality, Literacy, and the Study of Anabaptism', *MQR* 65, 1991, pp. 371-392.

perfect remedy for the ills of Swiss Anabaptism and a way to both stabilize the newly organized church and stem the flow of radicalism throughout Bern.<sup>52</sup>

And the timing for such an event could not have been more appropriate. With the close of *Der Berner Synodus von 1532* the Bernese church had successfully reaffirmed its new religious identity born out of the earlier 1528 disputation which had sought to align Bern with the movement of reform coming out of Zwingli's Zürich.<sup>53</sup> Religious order was once again slowly being established in Bernese lands, but now amid a religious climate that included the introduction of a shift away from Zwingli and towards the unifying reform efforts underway via Bucer in Strasbourg.<sup>54</sup> In an effort to more fully affirm and explore the positions ratified at the 1532 synod, it appears that the magistrates now saw an opportunity to make a decisive blow against the irritating radical problem. With the victory struck against the Catholics through the 1528 disputation it makes perfect sense that the civil authorities would want to use that momentum as a springboard to finally defeat the Swiss Reformers' other adversary, the Anabaptist foe from within.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, despite winning a victory against the Catholics, it must be remembered that a strong vacuum of leadership in Bern remained at this time. Haller's questionable

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<sup>52</sup> After all, the Reformation *Gespräch*, as Gerber has succinctly stated, was the 'principle anti-Anabaptist measure' (*Grundsatz anti-täuferischer Massnahmen*). Gerber, 'Berner Täuferium und Berner Synodus,' p. 174. Bruce Gordon has argued that the Swiss preachers did not share in the Bernese magistrates' 'enthusiasm' for confronting the Anabaptists at the Zofingen disputation. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 207. One must remember that successes like that seen through Pfistermeyer's recantation were the exception and certainly not the norm. More harm could come than good and it appears the preachers were consciously aware of that reality.

<sup>53</sup> Locher, *Der Berner Synodus von 1532*. Further contextual reading is located in Bruening, pp. 63-72, Guggisberg, pp. 147-154 and *Le Synode de Berne de 1532*, ed. by Henri Meylan (Lausanne, 1936). A copy of the acts of the 1532 Bern Synod penned by Wolfgang Capito may be found in Dennison Jr., pp. 226-276. For detailed information relating to Capito's involvement in the Synod and his place in establishing reform in Bern see Otto E. Strasser, *Capitos Beziehungen zu Bern* (Leipzig, 1928), p. 67-121.

<sup>54</sup> Bruening, pp. 64ff.

<sup>55</sup> And once again, as stated previously, Bern was in the rather delicate position of trying to find stability in a time in which they were still paying financially for their defeat at Kappel and politically for their perceived culpability throughout the Confederation for Zwingli's death and, ultimately, the Swiss defeat. Providing a further integrated base of solidarity in Bern remained a pressing concern, especially for the magistrates.

leadership and lack of theological sagacity are no secret, while Caspar Megander's own questionable standing given his unrelenting association and support of Zwingli left Bern in a vulnerable position from within.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, while the urban center of Bern clearly had leadership issues to deal with itself, the more rural and outlying areas of the region had their own leadership concerns lingering at the time.<sup>57</sup> These problems may largely be understood as stemming from both a lack of theological training among the ministers and the abuse of clerical power by several of those leading the rural church communities.<sup>58</sup> The anti-clerical sentiment that had been and remained present in the Swiss Confederation during the 1520s and 1530s, coupled with the fact that the Anabaptists primarily lived mostly in the rural areas of Bern at this time, clearly left these parts of the territory particularly susceptible to those radicals outside the Reformed tradition.<sup>59</sup> Given the palpable inroads Anabaptism had made into Bern by 1532, coupled with the dangers the radical movement posed to the newly founded Reformed establishment, a forceful push by the magistrates to eradicate the

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<sup>56</sup> Haller's shortcomings as a Reformer have been conveyed by Bruce Gordon. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, pp. 89 and 105. Not only was Megander in deep trouble with the Bernese Council during 1532 for unrelentingly declaring Bern's culpability in Zwingli's death and the devastating loss to the Catholics at Kappel, but his position promoted an air of distrust regarding foreign involvement and leadership in the Bernese church. Bruening, pp. 64.

<sup>57</sup> It must be recognized that in Bern during this time there was a distinct difference between what was going on in the urban center of Bern and the rural outlying communities of the region. The Bernese citizens residing in the countryside, outside of the places where Anabaptism had made great inroads, generally took a more conservative and less involved stance on Reformation matters, while the evangelical Reformers in the city were much more aggressive and insistent in their newly established religious polity. Hendricks, 'The Berne Disputation', p. 567. Furthermore, the distrust and concern regarding religious foreign influence in Bern, as Gordon has clarified, was largely based outside the city walls and prevalent throughout the rural lands. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 138.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>59</sup> For important treatments recounting the anticlericalism that swirled during the early part of the Reformation in Continental Europe see Geoffrey Dipple, *Antifraternalism and Anticlericalism in the German Reformation: Johann Eberlin von Gunzberg and the Campaign against the Friars* (St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History; Aldershot, 1996), *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. LI; Leiden, 1993), Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. by Trevor Johnson (London, 1996), pp. 36-67, and Stayer, 'The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition', pp.175ff. During 1532 the Anabaptists were largely located in the rural areas to the northeast of Bern in Aargau, while by 1538 the movement was more predominate in the Emmental directly east of the city. Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 106.

movement, it was hoped, would further suppress the unrest in the region and usher in greater stability moving forward.

Just four short months after the close of the 1532 Synod the Bernese magistrates intervened in an attempt to address these concerns, sending out an order for Berchtold Haller and Caspar Megander to visit churches in the area and help prepare these congregations to engage the baptismal issue presented by the radicals. On 18 April 1532 *der Rat* set forth the instruction ‘Lord Berchtold and Caspar shall ride out to the chapters and report to the preachers regarding baptism.’<sup>60</sup> Although no source evidence provides us with the specific content of Haller or Megander’s instruction to these local Bernese chapters it should be assumed that they faced some resistance based on the known influx of Anabaptism into the region at the time. It is quite likely then that such opposition may have, in part, helped to show the magistrates that the need for addressing and dealing with the radicals was finally now at hand.

Based largely on the events outlined above it appears that the calling of the 1532 *Gespräch* at Zofingen was prompted by the civil magistrates and was done in order to address multiple issues pertinent to their stance against Anabaptism in the region. First, a public disputation would have afforded the Swiss church another opportunity to further solidify the Reformed position in Bern. Along with the wave of ongoing religious dialogue and subsequent controversy that characterized many of the early years of the Reformation came an air of confusion and uncertainty to the overall landscape of Christianity. With increased attacks on the old church structure and new religious innovations being offered as a way to illicit reform many were left wondering what to believe and why. Into this sea of uncertainty the disputation was an important navigational tool that it was believed would provide answers to these burning questions. It bears noting again that Bern was merely four years removed

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<sup>60</sup> *Herr Berchtold (Haller) und Caspar (Megander) sollend auf die Capitel riten, die Predicanten des Taufs halb berichten.* From the *Bern Ratsmanual*, no. 233, p. 189. Quoted from McGlothlin, p. 8.

from a major shift in religious polity and only months from their discernable move away from Zwingli. Consequently, any effort to further entrench the newly embraced reforms would have undoubtedly been thought of as a useful and necessary endeavor.

Second, considering the strong stance previously taken against Anabaptism, including the use of capital punishment, it was also hoped that offering a platform for the accused to have their voices heard would undoubtedly cast the civil authorities in a much more positive light. Additionally, it would have also allowed the shortcomings of the radicals' position to be made known in a public forum, thereby validating the authorities' measures. Here, the magistrates were so concerned to avoid the appearance of impartiality and civil overbearing that they took two steps in order to at least provide the impression of a level playing field. First, Zofingen was selected as the site of the disputation. This was done in order to nullify any reminiscent thoughts of the mistrust resulting from the authorities' choice to renege on their previously afforded passage of safe conduct for those Anabaptists participating at the 1528 debate and in an attempt to avoid accusations of magisterial interference or bias.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, as touched on earlier, the Swiss church would put forth only those religious leaders from within Bernese lands to debate the radicals. Outsiders, such as Bullinger, were strictly forbidden attending; although Bullinger's influence on the proceedings is wholly undeniable.<sup>62</sup> It was hoped that such a debate would allow for the magistrates to shed any notion of autocratic dominance, while allowing for their radical adversaries to finally be overcome and the inherent dangers of Anabaptism made plain before the people. Ultimately, the Zofingen session provided the Bern Council with a means of justifying their firm civil

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<sup>61</sup> Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Bullinger's involvement may clearly be seen by his ordering of the Bernese church's agenda and their initial prerequisites for debate. For details on this see Bullinger, 'How to Deal with Anabaptists', p. 83-84 and Yoder, *ABRS*, pp. 103ff. These two steps are also outlined in Williams, p. 593.

stance against the radicals while also affording them the opportunity to unmask what they believed were the erroneous theological suppositions of their radical adversaries.

Yet another catalyst behind the magistrates' calling for debate in 1532 focuses attention on the tenuous nature of societal order and its preservation during the period. Again, the threat of civil unrest always loomed during this time and frequently followed the dissemination of radical ideas. It should be remembered that the far reaching wounds resulting from the German Peasants' War less than a decade earlier were undoubtedly still fresh on the Swiss authorities' minds as they addressed the 'Anabaptist problem.'<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the magistrates were not so naive as to ignore that the harsh measures doled out against the radicals since the 1527 *Anabaptist Concordat* remained a potentially explosive impetus for similar rebellion. Consequently, it was the stated desire that the Zofingen disputation would serve to, as the Bernese magistrates declared, 'quell disturbance and dispute' in the region.'<sup>64</sup> Just as Zwingli had feared widespread unrest among the Swiss people if the Anabaptist movement was not suppressed by the God-ordained rulers of the Swiss Confederation, so too was the Bern *Rat* mindful of such a reality.<sup>65</sup> And with the tenuous political and social climate facing the Bernese region, which was outlined earlier in this chapter, civil unrest was something the Bernese magistrates simply could not afford on many different levels.

Finally, it was clearly the desire of the civil authorities at Bern to use the 1532 disputation at Zofingen as a pedagogical tool which, it was hoped, would finally help the

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<sup>63</sup> Fast argues that by 1532 the Bernese magistrates had come to fear a difficult and bloody advance by the Anabaptists. Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, p. 38. For an important look at the German Peasants' War and Anabaptist involvement in the event see James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal, 1991), Franz Günther, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg* (Munich, 1933), Bob Scribner and Gerhard Benecke, *The German Peasant War of 1525 – New Viewpoints* (London, 1979), and Heinrich Böhmer, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des Bauernkriegs und der Wiedertäufer* (Berlin, 1933).

<sup>64</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 70.

<sup>65</sup> Zwingli expressed such a concern to Wolfgang Capito in a correspondence from 31 August 1530. *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, XI. ed. by Emil Egli (Leipzig, 1935), p. 99 (hereafter designated Z).

magistrates shut off the burgeoning flow of Anabaptists to their lands through its porous borders. As Michael Bruening has accurately recognized, the disputation provided a place for the leaders of the Swiss church to hone and further sharpen their theological positions, while at the same time exploring various options of support for their own developing arguments.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, the Reformation *Gespräch* served not only as a testing ground for the validity of one's positions, but more directly it allowed for one to better understand and defend their own beliefs and convictions against an opponent. This is of critical importance since many of the ideas and religious beliefs at the time of the Reformation were not static but remained quite fluid over time. Therefore, a provision must be made allowing for some development to take place among the various theological positions that were continually being refined by the Reformation contingents. In truth, the disputation served as a mirror of sort, teaching each of the participating groups about themselves as much or more than it taught them about their opponents.

Clearly, the value in fleshing out one's beliefs in a context that lent itself to a teaching environment remained an important part of the disputation process. In fact, this may help offer a better understanding regarding why the Anabaptists, who not only operated without the support of the magistrates, but who also frequently engaged in public debate knowing themselves to be blatantly overmatched intellectually, would take part in such a one-sided endeavor. It should be remembered that the gathering of the Zofingen debate took place a mere seven years following the first adult baptisms in Zürich. Furthermore, as evidenced by the presence of at least two distinct branches of Anabaptism in Bern, including a Zürich non-resistant type and a more engaging Waldshut form, the radical movement remained largely in

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<sup>66</sup> Bruening, p. 137. A similar 'didactic purpose' is presented by Bruce Gordon. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 207.

flux.<sup>67</sup> Recognizing the inchoate nature of the Anabaptist movement during this time it is highly likely that, just as it was for the preachers, the *Gespräch* served as an important didactic platform from which the leaders of the radical movement could disseminate their ideas to what was for them an otherwise diffuse and non-centralized movement. Is it possible that the Anabaptists shared the similarly stated goal of convincing their Reformed opponents of their passionately held positions? Certainly such could have been the case. However, while the Swiss Anabaptists had at once held out a strong hope that their magisterial counterparts could be converted to their views of reform, by now the reality of the irreconcilable theological differences between the two groups was widely apparent.<sup>68</sup>

Conceding the predetermined nature of almost every Reformation *Gespräch*, it is much more likely that the Anabaptists who participated in the Zofingen debate did so for two related reasons. First, it supplied them with an invaluable opportunity for their convictions, unfiltered by the polemical misrepresentation of their magisterial adversaries, to be put forth before the larger populace of Bern. The radicals were quite confident that if the biblical veracity of their simple beliefs could only be allowed to stand on their own merit and the errors of the Swiss church simultaneously brought before the people of the Confederation, then it was assumed that many others would abandon the current church structure in favor of the radicals' separatist one. Consequently, when confronted by truth the wider disputation

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<sup>67</sup> The most extensive study done on these two types of Anabaptism may be found in James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, 1972).

<sup>68</sup> As late as December 1524 several of the Zürich radicals, including Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and Simon Stumpf, were still making genuine appeals to persuade Zwingli, and ultimately the Zürich Council, of their theological position in the hope of some form of territorial Anabaptism. Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618* (London, 1972), p. 3-10. Such a position remains at odds with Ben Kaplan's recent supposition that religious toleration, even during the sixteenth century, was something that was sought out by most in the early modern world, as most could not even conceive of a divided society of faith. Instead, Kaplan has argued that toleration was 'a pragmatic move, a grudging acceptance of unpleasant realities, not a positive virtue.' Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007).

audience would be forced to actively make a choice regarding what they had heard.<sup>69</sup> The disputation in such a context was a proselytizing platform that provided a means for swaying public opinion among the Bernese people similar to other mediums such as polemical *Flugschriften* or the church pulpit.<sup>70</sup> The reward of growth certainly outweighed the risk of attendance.

The second reason for their participation is much more internal. Once the Anabaptists' positions were shown to be biblically dominant over those held by the Swiss church then it would help to further stabilize and mobilize those supporters of the movement. Although the Swiss Anabaptists operated with a perpetual specter of death hovering over them, a public demonstration of the biblical superiority of their position would have greatly elevated the groups' morale and empowered them even further to stand on their convictions no matter what the cost. To this end, As Peter Matheson has succinctly offered, 'Civic disputations brought theology into the public arena', and through the ongoing struggle for the hearts and minds of an early modern audience, vied first for one's allegiance and then spurred that individual on towards action based entirely on conviction.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Köhler, in his work on Luther, has effectively shown how early modern audiences were frequently moved from being un-invested spectators the sidelines of the Reformation dialogue and forced to actively participate in the religious and social theatre playing out before them. Hans-Joachim Köhler, 'Erste Schritte zu einem Meinungsprofil der frühen Reformationszeit,' in *Martin Luther: Probleme seiner Zeit*, edited by Volker Press and Dieter Stievermann (Spätmittelalter und Frühe Neuzeit Band 16; Stuttgart, 1986), p. 246.

<sup>70</sup> While it has been argued by Jürgen Habermas that the concept 'public opinion' was a much later innovation spawned predominately by and among the bourgeois middle class of the nineteenth century, Bernd Balzer corrected this notion by showing that Habermas' suppositions were not only unfounded, but that public opinion was an important dynamic present during the 1520s. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, 1989) and Bernd Balzer, *Bürgerliche Reformationspropaganda: Die Flugschriften des Hans Sachs in den Jahren 1523-1525* (Stuttgart, 1973), pp. 11-13. Recently, two works have added considerably to Balzer's correction of Habermas. Bob Scribner has effectively shown just how powerful various mediums of propaganda were in assimilating Reformation ideas among the 'common folk' in Germany; while Mark Edwards has demonstrated the link between printed Reformation works and the spread of religious ideas to the literate portion of society (and then to the larger uneducated population via oral dissemination) with the goal of enacting institutional change. Bob Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981) and Edwards.

<sup>71</sup> Matheson, pp. 4-6.

The magistrates' hope of reducing the Anabaptist influence through the Zofingen debate clearly was not met since the radicals' numbers continued to swell for the next few years.<sup>72</sup> And while all indications suggest that the Zofingen debate was first initiated by the Bernese magistrates the subsequent debate that took place six years later within the walls of the city of Bern itself was actually assembled first at the behest of the Anabaptist radicals themselves. Again, even the contextual calling of these debates speaks volumes to the independence of these debates. Those Anabaptists in and around Hönstetten, an area directly due east of the city of Bern, had requested that matters between them and the Swiss church be revisited and even acknowledged their acquiescence to be instructed from the Bible on said matters.<sup>73</sup> Apart from the differing points of impetus for these two debates, another distinct feature of the 1538 disputation, especially when compared with the earlier Zofingen session from 1532, is found in the fact that the Anabaptists were required to acknowledge the Bernese Council's authority prior to any formal meeting.<sup>74</sup>

As a part of the 1538 disputation forward the magistrates' declared, 'likewise they (the Anabaptists) recognized [as they allow us to note] that each magistrate is established by God to wield the sword for the punishment of evil and the protection of the righteous; and agree to hold and maintain that which is found and preserved in the Old and New Testament's of God's divine Word.'<sup>75</sup> This requirement was absent from any of the other

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<sup>72</sup> Müller, pp. 35-36.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 79. As Martin Haas has made known, this request was presented through the pastor Johannes Gniers von Großhöchstetten. *QZ Bern*, p. 262. Hönstetten was a municipality in the area of Bern known as the Emmental which during the mid-1530s had become a hotbed of Anabaptist activity.

<sup>74</sup> Kocher, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> *Item das sy erkennent (wie sy unns lassenn antragenn), das jeder magistratus von gott ingesetzt, das schwertt füre zu straff der bößenn unnd schirm der gutten, unnd was beschlossenn unnd erhalltten mitt göttlichem wortt, allts unnd nüws testaments, darby zu belybenn unnd sich dessenn ze halltten.* *QZ Bern*, p. 261.

previous disputations held between the two groups, including Zofingen, and its inclusion at Bern made even more peculiar since the issue served as one of the major talking points of the debate.<sup>76</sup> While not explicitly stated, the most plausible reason for the inclusion of this acknowledgment was to preserve, as Matthijssen has argued, the predetermined element of the disputation for the ruling authorities.<sup>77</sup>

While the magistrates' intentions behind this condition are not hard to ascertain, considering the previous history between the radicals and Magisterial Reformers, it certainly begs one critical question.<sup>78</sup> What specifically did the radicals intend to accomplish through this debate, especially in light of the previously stated concession relating to the magistrates' authority, which made a victorious outcome hardly attainable?<sup>79</sup> The Swiss Anabaptists were hardly naïve about such things and so any thought that the radicals could now, after almost a decade of previous dialogue, sway the leaders of the Swiss church to their position seems highly doubtful. Considering the precedence of persecution for the group in Bernese lands it certainly is plausible that the Anabaptists had hoped to facilitate a cessation of persecution through one of two avenues.<sup>80</sup> Either the magistrates might have become convinced that the radicals did not actually pose quite the threat to the integrity of society as once thought or that sympathy for the movement won among the larger Bernese population through this debate might have produced enough of a ground swell that the authorities would be forced to soften

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<sup>76</sup> The proper biblical role of *die Obrigkeit* served as the sixth of seven main points of discussion at Bern. *QZ Bern*, pp. 269, 419-439.

<sup>77</sup> Matthijssen, pp. 21-22.

<sup>78</sup> These intentions have been outlined by Yoder and include a general hope that the radicals were now willing to be instructed on the related matters and, since the protagonists were now almost exclusively from Bern, brought a personal intention as well. Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 107.

<sup>79</sup> Matthijssen, pp. 21-22.

<sup>80</sup> This is especially true in light of the fact that stricter measures against the Anabaptists were ushered in at the beginning of 1535 following a time of more passive acceptance for those Anabaptists who outwardly obeyed the church. Gratz, pp. 9-10. Klaassen has theorized that with a greater understanding of the radicals' position a subsequent softening of the measures against the radicals might follow. Klaassen, 'The Bern Debate of 1538', p. 148.

their stance on Anabaptism in the region. While each is possible both remain highly questionable given the strength of the magistrates and their position as overseers of the debate process, alongside the relatively benign influence of the larger Swiss population at this time.

To find a more likely reason for the radicals' participation at Bern one must look to the events at the close of the debate and the accompanying reaction of the magistrates' that followed. As the 1538 debate came to a finale there was definitely an air of frustration among those on the Reformed side and one stark realization. With the benefit of hindsight the magisterial participants now realized that rather than delivering a final blow to the radical movement they had inadvertently granted a prominent platform of propagation which the Anabaptists had ostensibly used to great benefit. Ernst Müller has pointed out that once it was understood what had taken place, 'through the revealed success of the Baptists, the (Bern) Council ordered thorough disciplinary action.'<sup>81</sup> The pertinacious insurrection of the radicals, now exasperated by a perceived Anabaptist victory in many eyes, incited the magistrates to their harshest actions against the Anabaptists to date. Just six months after the close of the 1538 session the Bernese authorities, in what Müller has cleverly labeled as 'the founding of the high point of anger towards the Baptists', instituted measures of immediate execution for Anabaptists in the Bernese lands.<sup>82</sup> And so, as Hermann Kocher has appropriately offered, 'with this sentence (the magistrates' decision) the period of Bernese dialogue between the preachers and the Baptists came to an end.'<sup>83</sup>

While these harsh measures provide valuable insight into the frustrations facing the Swiss church following the 1538 debate, they also offer a parallel window into the Anabaptists' intentions as well. If the radicals' request for debate was, in fact, a calculated

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<sup>81</sup> *Durch die offenbaren Erfolge der Täufer findet sich der Rat zu weitem gründlichen Maßregeln veranlaßt.* Müller, p. 81.

<sup>82</sup> *Hat die Erbitterung gegen die Täufer ihren Höhepunkt erreicht.* Ibid., 82.

<sup>83</sup> Kocher, p. 14.

attempt to assuage persecution of the group in Bern, then it failed miserably. However, for a people whose very identity was born through and emerged amid the very real threat of persecution, attenuating the risk of martyrdom was clearly not a major priority and concern. After all, the prospect of martyrdom was in essence part and parcel of being an Anabaptist in the 1500s.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, in a thought previously visited in brief, with the magistrates positioned as overseers of the entire disputation proceedings, a victory that resulted in a dramatic change of the reform intentions of both the Swiss church and Bern Council appears highly improbable as well.<sup>85</sup> Alternatively, what the magistrates' response demonstrates is that 'success' in the debate was almost certainly gauged by the radicals in the spreading of their religious ideas and beliefs.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, their initial submissive statement related to 'being taught' appears merely to have been a guise that facilitated a means of widespread dissemination of their beliefs throughout the region. Winning the debate against the Reformed preachers was certainly a genuine ambition, but it was really only a means to an end and the ultimate goal of much greater importance. The preachers finally recognized this point and so 'it was decided not to hold any more such open meetings.'<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Stauffer went so far as to argue for a 'theology of martyrdom' among the early Anabaptists, which he viewed as a central component of their theology and rooted in their apocalyptic expectations. Ethelbert Stauffer, 'Täuferum und Märtyrtheologie', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* III, 1933, pp. 545-598. Despite this well thought out theory, Bender is correct in arguing that the prominence of martyrdom was clearly overstated by Stauffer and that the value in looking at Anabaptist martyrologies rests in their ability to show contextually the circumstances around which the movement developed and spread. Harold S. Bender, 'Editorial', *MQR* 19, 1945, p. 178. The 'deep martyrological sensibility' of certain groups of radicals, including the Swiss Brethren, developed largely against the backdrop of the Peasants' War of 1525 and eventually was prominently displayed in the Anabaptists' writings, preaching, and hymns. Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 199-212.

<sup>85</sup> It must be remembered that by its very organization, the disputations of the period proceeded with their conclusions largely forgone. See Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 206 and Matthijssen, p. 21-22.

<sup>86</sup> This is especially true given the fact that the printing press was only introduced to Bern sometime at the end of 1536 or early in 1537 by the German music printer Mathias Apiarius and remained, like other presses of the day, largely inaccessible to the radicals. Ehrstine, p. 62 and Gerber, 'Berner Täuferum und Berner Synodus', p. 167.

<sup>87</sup> Gratz, pp. 18-19.

## Language of the Bernese Disputations

With the purposes behind both groups' participation in these important debates established, attention must now be turned toward the content of the protocols, specifically the language of the debate. At issue here remains what types of languages characterized these dialogues and the underlying purposes behind the words employed at Bern. Strictly speaking the argumentative content of the Bernese disputations may be described as both theological and biblical in nature. The theological complexion of these dialogues is not surprising given the historic record of Christian expression from the inception of the church in the apostolic period. Issues such as the composition of the triune God and the nature of Jesus as the God/man have always found articulation through carefully formulated and precise theological terminology.<sup>88</sup> Following in this tradition the Bernese debates are similarly laden with precise theological language employed to project a specific view of the Christian faith from each group's distinct perspective.

Interestingly, while precise language pervaded the arguments of both the Anabaptist radicals and Swiss preachers almost all were offered solely in the vernacular Swiss German tongue. Despite the fact that Latin was the preferred and nearly exclusive language of theology during the Reformation era, and the one which offered a greater avenue for theological precision and clarification, the native language common to all the participants at Bern served as their means of argumentative expression.<sup>89</sup> Such a choice further supports, as

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<sup>88</sup> For a brief monograph treatment of the seven major church councils, including the historic background surrounding each session and the unique content of each debate, see Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Wilmington, 1987).

<sup>89</sup> Latin, after all, was not simply the official language of the Holy Roman Empire, including serving as the liturgical language of the church, but it was the principle means of academic communication for Reformers like Martin Luther. *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. by Karl Rahner (New York, 1975), pp. 866-867, Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 142 and Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Works*, trans. by Robert C. Schuktz (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 99. Abraham Kuyper has argued for the importance of the Latin language from an historical perspective, as it not only dominated the Christian church's theological expression for more than twelve centuries, but also as it was the clearest vehicle for the unambiguous communication of complex religious ideas. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Lafayette, 2001), pp. 274ff.

outlined earlier in the chapter, the plurality of reasons behind each faction's willingness to engage in such a debate and lends credence to the idea that these disputations were intended for a widely diverse audience in Bern. Moreover, the fact that almost none of the radicals present at either debate actually were able to read and work in Latin, made the use of Swiss German a requisite part of any such dialogue between these two groups.

Additionally, the theological language and concepts retained in these protocols were strongly rooted in biblical language. Most of the various concepts, ideas, and arguments presented by both the radicals and Swiss preachers found their voice through terms, passages, stories, and imagery previously offered as a part of the biblical record. Thus, while the language at Bern was clearly theological, it was a theology encased and couched in the language of Scripture. Some of the topics clearly lent themselves to discussions relating to specific passages of the Bible, such as Jesus' institution of the ban in Matthew 18.<sup>90</sup> In such a case the biblical language was merely an impetus for debate which ultimately revealed points of theological divergence as disparate hermeneutical assumptions were fleshed out during the dialogues. Scriptural language in such a discussion would be expected. Yet, the deliberate choice to apply certain Scriptural passages and/or imagery as support for an argument not only speaks to the independent nature and aspect of both the 1532 and 1538 debates, as will be explored later, but also reveals how the individual expression of each competing party took shape. So, for instance, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, the preachers' strong affirmation of a mixed church ecclesiology drew on certain key imagery and passages of Scripture interpreted to show non-believers functioning collectively within the larger church body. For the Anabaptists, their strong beliefs regarding separation were offered within a larger context that showed biblically-based distinctions between what they recognized as the two incompatible realms of Christ and the world. These, of course, were

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<sup>90</sup> Matthew 18:15ff.

used in a variety of independent ways in both of the protocols and always directly presented according to the Swiss preachers' and Anabaptist radicals' respective interpretations of these biblical passages. The Bible, in such a context, became the verbal weapon of choice for both parties; and its imagery, stories, and passages the individual linguistic ammunition used to assail their opponent's affirmed convictions.

Tucked neatly alongside the specific language present in the 1532 and 1538 disputations is the overall tone of these two dialogues, which ultimately reveals a great deal about the overall course of the discussions at Bern. Generally speaking the overall tone of these disputations was rather reserved and devoid of the vitriolic attacks one might anticipate or expect. When considering the tone of the dialogues between the Anabaptist radicals and Swiss preachers at Bern, strikingly absent from these disputation protocols are the harsh polemical utterances that accompanied much of the literary genre of the Reformation period.<sup>91</sup> The coarse language, cutting statements, and degrading personal characterizations that frequently pervaded the polemic of the early Reformation are almost entirely absent from the discussions at Bern. In fact, bearing in mind the painful past history between the Anabaptists and the Swiss church, alongside the divisive nature of the content of these disputations themselves, the docile and largely cordial tone of these debates almost appears out of place.<sup>92</sup> During the 1532 Zofingen debate the Swiss preachers even went so far as to emphasize shared points of ecclesiology held in common, while at the same time downplaying the various points of contention. This point is most highlighted by the preachers' statement, 'We are one in the main articles of the faith and the quarrel is alone

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<sup>91</sup> For specific detailed examples of this and their role in Reformation polemics see Matheson, pp. 125ff.

<sup>92</sup> For background information regarding the painful emergence of the Swiss Brethren from Zwingli's Reformed church see Stayer, 'The Swiss Brethren', pp. 174-195.

about the outer articles which are not according to the Gospel.’<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, throughout both the 1532 and 1538 Bern debates the Anabaptists are even addressed in familial terms as ‘brothers’ (*brüder* and *Touffbrüedern*) by the Swiss preachers, although during the final declaration of judgment at the latter sessions’ close in 1538, the friendly part of this designation was consciously removed by the preachers.<sup>94</sup>

It must be clarified, however, that the overall lack of an abrasive polemical tone should in no way paint a fictitious or overly rosy picture of the disputation proceedings at these two debates. As stated earlier, the Anabaptist radicals and Swiss Reformed church shared a hurtful past. This history, coupled with the contextual realities that accompanied almost all the Reformation dialogues that involved deep-seated religious convictions, understandably, must concede some level of tension. At times the frustration level of the debating groups at Bern welled up and became manifest as the failure to find an accord on the nature of the church persisted. One place where this is most clearly perceived is through the repetitious nature of both groups’ arguments and use of biblical citations. As alluded to earlier, arguments during these debates were often repeated *ad nauseum* as ecclesiological suppositions were regularly constructed in such a way as to recapitulate back to earlier positions not equally embraced by both factions.

This phenomenon may best be shown through the example of a snapshot from the 1538 debate over the nature of the church in which the Anabaptist protagonist, Georg Träffer von Ammergöuw, responded to Erasmus Ritter’s question regarding what precisely the Christian church should look like. Here, Träffer, drawing from Paul’s exhortation to the church in Ephesus, initially contended that the community of God was to be composed of

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<sup>93</sup> *Wir sind in hauptstucken der articklen des gloubens eins, und ist allein der span umb usserlich artickel, [die] dem evangelio nit gmaß. QZ Zofingen*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>94</sup> *QZ Bern*, pp. 317 and 466 offer such examples. Also Matthijssen, pp. 22-23. This same use of familial terms was employed by the preachers at the earlier Zofingen debate in 1532. See Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 105.

those ‘who walk unpunished, are holy, neither stained nor wrinkled.’<sup>95</sup> Shortly thereafter, Träffer responded again to Ritter’s subsequent query regarding the impeccable state of the church by stating, ‘Through Jesus Christ God has purified all who are obedient to Him; they are holy, unpunished, not wrinkled nor stained.’<sup>96</sup> In each of these instances Träffer chose to rely on the same biblical passage as support for his repeated claim regarding the holiness of the church. Although the focus of Ritter’s question had shifted, a near verbatim response was given by Träffer and with the same biblical justification for his position. Quite obviously, such an approach not only failed to help reconcile the existing theological differences between the radicals and Swiss church, but it also perpetuated the escalating frustration related to their inability to move towards a unified understanding of the church.

In addition to the repetitious nature of the arguments at both Bernese debates, the tense tone between the radicals and Swiss preachers may also be seen in several of the conclusions drawn and the way in which these were presented. The Anabaptists, for instance, in affirming the requisite separation from the world, argued that the preachers who ‘have and allow the rule of the world... are sent from the same.’<sup>97</sup> To all present such a claim, especially in view of the Swiss radicals’ previously affirmed stance on separation and their historic conception of ‘the world’, would have been draped in otherwise demeaning and pejorative undertones.<sup>98</sup> For their part, the Reformed preachers also added to the overall

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<sup>95</sup> *Die da wannlent unsträfflich, heillig, nitt fleckenn, runtzel noch masen hatt. QZ Bern*, p. 316. Also see Ephesians 5:27.

<sup>96</sup> *Gott hett durch Jhesum Christ gereinnigett alle, die im gehorsam sind, das sy heillig, unsträfflich sin, nitt runtzeln noch masen. QZ Bern*, p. 317.

<sup>97</sup> *Das regiment der walt darinn hand unnd fürgabend... syend von derselben gesandt. QZ Zofingen*, p. 98.

<sup>98</sup> For further reading related to the emergence of the Swiss Anabaptists’ separatist mindset see Article IV in Michael Sattler, ‘The Schleithem Brotherly Union’, in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, trans. and ed. by John H. Yoder (Classics of the Radical Reformation, no. 1; Scottdale, 1973), pp. 37-38, Gerald Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion: Radical Confessional Rhetoric from Schleithem to Dordrecht* (Scottdale, 2006), Walter Klaassen, ‘The Anabaptist Understanding of the Separation of Church and State’, *CH* 46, 1977, pp. 421-436, and Schaff, ‘The Anabaptists, the Reformers, and Civil Government,’ pp. 29ff.

mood of the debate with their divisive conclusions. This may best be seen through yet another part of Ritter's confrontation with Georg Träffer. Adding to the drama at the 1538 session, Ritter asked Träffer 'do you think that the believing church is not fleshly and is without any fault and sin?'<sup>99</sup> Taken in isolation such would not have been a noteworthy question. However, Ritter's question quickly reveals its sarcastic bent and ostensible rhetorical nature when one considers that it was cleverly located immediately following a quotation from Psalms 116, which described the universality of man's dishonesty.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that these two dialogues at Bern took place within a highly explosive context, both the radicals and preachers at both the 1532 and 1538 debates demonstrated a substantial level of restraint in their dealings. Although both sides offered negative perceptions of their opponents, which may be considered entirely understandable given the nature of Reformation *Gespräche*, such was done in a fairly subdued manner. The language and verbiage implemented by both was critical for sure, but conclusions were regularly offered as mere statements of theological fact rather than allowing their convictions to be couched in vitriolic expressions and personal accusations.<sup>101</sup> These differences may seem subtle, but each goes quite a long way in revealing the unique setting in which these two isolated ecclesiological discussions were conducted at Bern.

### **Conclusion**

Having carefully reconstructed several of the major aspects relating to the 1532 and 1538 Bernese debates we are left with one lingering questing related to each of these two independent sessions and their place in the overall landscape of both Anabaptist and Swiss

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<sup>99</sup> *Ob du meanest, das die khilch der glöübigen fleischs halb gar ane alle mackell unnd siünd sye. QZ Bern*, pp. 316-137.

<sup>100</sup> Psalm 116:11.

<sup>101</sup> A perfect example of this may be found when the preachers at the Zofingen debate acknowledged the hypocritical nature of the Swiss radicals' position on the nature of the true church, while not specifically labeling them as hypocrites in the process. See *QZ Zofingen*, p. 97.

Reformation historiography. Considering all that is known contextually about the convening of these two debates and their various participants are these events really to be considered debates? The answer to this very important question in many ways depends on how one defines and understands the term ‘debate.’ If one sees a debate as simply the exchange of ideas through a partisan setting where external suppositions are challenged and one’s own personal convictions set forth and defended, then strictly speaking these Bernese *Gespräche* would fall under such a category. However, viewing these events exclusively in such narrow terms fails to recognize a couple key components relating to the two.

First, it must be clarified that while the content of these protocols was offered through the course of theological dialogue, little actual ‘conversation’ took place during these two debates. While both sides presented their cases and offered numerous challenges to their adversaries ecclesiastic suppositions, what is evident is that neither the Anabaptists nor the Swiss preachers at either session did much listening. In fact the debate at both sessions may be best characterized as a talking past each other, rather than an attempt, as was the stated goal at Bern, ‘to find together the truth.’<sup>102</sup> As Matthijssen has so succinctly stated in reference to the 1538 debate, ‘neither side seemed to listen to the arguments of the other, or to the other’s refutation of its own arguments. Thus an infinite talking on different levels was the result, only using the same words for different biblical interpretations of the same ideas.’<sup>103</sup> Ultimately the 1532 and 1538 debates at Bern proved to be infinitely more informative, rather than irenic in their scope; they set forth the foundational ecclesiological convictions and programmatic reform agenda of each at the time, but without a true interaction of content between the two.

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<sup>102</sup> *QZ Bern*, p. 267.

<sup>103</sup> Matthijssen, p. 24.

Second, after affirming the predetermined nature of these debates, alongside the host of reasons for the willing participation from both sides at each session outlined above, it appears that the disputations at Zofingen and Bern may be more fittingly characterized as theatre debate than anything else. Now such a portrayal should not be seen to impugn the personal and religious convictions found at Bern. If nothing else the 1532 and 1538 debates were the verbal discourse and heartfelt outcry of individuals trying to express and justify their understanding of a particular way of living out what each believed was the truest form of a genuine Christian faith. The participants at the Bernese debates were not actors in this sense to be sure. However, the contextual parameters of these contests, which have been developed above, definitely reveal something entirely crucial to the reality of these forums of discourse. These two *Gespräche* were as much about casting theological ideas and beliefs in an appealing and convincing manner to a wider audience in the Swiss Confederation than they were about successfully melding the religious views present at the debates into a unified consensus. The two competing ecclesiologies present at both sessions of debate at Bern were, by now, fairly well developed and well-known by both the Swiss radicals and the Bernese church.

Thus, in a similar parallel to Niklaus Manuel's *Fastnachtspiel* (Carnival plays) which were cleverly and artistically employed as polemical attacks calling for religious reform in Bern, so too were these disputations a unique stage for the participating combatants to set forth their beliefs and agenda of reform before a wider Swiss audience.<sup>104</sup> The Swiss preachers, who were fully empowered and operated with the support of the Bernese magistrates, crafted their arguments in such a way that the seditious radicalism of the Anabaptists would be finally shown for what they believed it was and the harsh civil measures established against the radicals given public justification. For those protagonists of

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<sup>104</sup> For an in-depth look at Niklaus Manuel's plays and the wider theatrical community in Bern during the early modern period see Ehrstine, especially Chapter Three pp. 79-134.

the Reformed church in 1538, following the disassociation with Zwingli and Bern's subsequent alignment with the reform ideas of Bucer's Strasbourg, the debate provided a time to set forth a new religious agenda which sought first and foremost to stabilize the religious and civil order of Bern. The Anabaptists, oppressed and persecuted from the first signs of their existence in Bernese lands, had little opportunity and even fewer means with which to disseminate their idea of the Christian faith in the Confederation during the 1520s and 1530s. Accordingly, to be cast as a lead player in a major disputation that it was assumed would be viewed (via public readings) by a wider Swiss audience, was reason enough to risk the threat of exposure and any violence they might endure for their participation. And so the protocols of the Bernese debates from both Zofingen and Bern afford their readers a comfortable box seat to an interesting and informative stage of the Reformation world of the 1530s Bern.

## CHAPTER 2 – Hermeneutics

### Introduction

The rediscovery of the Reformation principle *Sola Scriptura* was not only one of Martin Luther's greatest contributions to church history, but also one which ultimately helped reshape the very face of Christianity forever.<sup>1</sup> From as early as his bold 1518 declaration that Pope Clement VI's papal bull *Unigenitus* (1343) stood in contradiction to the Scriptures, and including his rebuttal of Johannes Eck the following year regarding the fallibility of both the Pope and church councils, Luther began to affirm the primacy of Scripture in determining doctrinal matters of the faith.<sup>2</sup> Without question this doctrine, with its strong stand against the Papacy's authority in Rome, quickly emerged as one of the most significant points of division between Luther and his Catholic opponents. While the Reformers had hoped that a general consensus of agreement regarding Scriptural authority would elicit a broad theological concord between those subscribing to *Sola Scriptura*, as the Papacy predicted, it produced exactly the opposite effect. Religious chaos and further fragmentation within the Christian church eventually became two of the negative consequences spawned by this famous doctrine.<sup>3</sup> And as the painful division between Zwingli and his erstwhile followers in

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<sup>1</sup> While *Sola Scriptura* was clearly not an innovation of Luther's alone, as demonstrated by its tangible (albeit not clearly or as definitively articulated) presence not only during the patristics period, but also in the medieval era, it was the Wittenberg Reformer who made it an integral part of his attack on the Roman Church establishment. Friedrich Kropatscheck, *Das Schriftprinzip der lutherischen Kirche*, Band I (Das Erbe des Mittelalters; Leipzig, 1904), pp. 438-431 and Terry L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 19-46. For the place of *Sola Scriptura* in Luther's theology and its overall impact on the Protestant Reformation as a whole see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. and ed. by Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, 1999), pp. 187-195, Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 148-151, and Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1966), pp.3-8.

<sup>2</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, pp. 107-109, Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era* (New York, 1954), p. 114 and Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms* (New York, 1964), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> As Goertz has poignantly stated, 'The watchword of *scriptura sola* thus not only united the Reformation's supporters, at least not for long; it divided them as well.' Hans-Jürgen Goertz, 'Scriptural Interpretation among Radical Reformers', in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Interpretation*, Vol. II; From Renaissance to the Enlightenment, ed. by Magne Saebo (Göttingen, 2008), p. 587.

Zürich would eventually demonstrate, simply recognizing the Scriptures as the sole fount of divine revelation was not nearly enough to ensure theological concurrence.<sup>4</sup> Hermeneutics brought with it a whole new impetus for division in the Reformation era.

For those ascribing ultimate authority on doctrinal matters to the Bible, the divisive nature of *Sola Scriptura* is not too hard to ascertain. Widely divergent conceptions and applications of the *Sola Scriptura* principle resulted in dramatically different theological convictions for the Swiss Anabaptists when contrasted with the Magisterial Reformers. Appreciable differences in things such as personal agendas and previously affirmed theological commitments all led to differing hermeneutics and interpretive methodologies of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> For instance, CJ Dyke has correctly shown how personal quests led the Anabaptists to differing applications of *Sola Scriptura* when compared with Luther. Dyke reasons,

Luther and the Anabaptists came with different questions. Luther's existential search for a gracious God led him, via Augustine and the medieval synthesis, to

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<sup>4</sup> At the very outset of his reform efforts in Zürich Zwingli repeatedly argued against human innovations and traditions, while simultaneously arguing for the sufficiency of Scripture as the lone source of God's Word and the standard by which anything may be called 'Christian.' *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, Band XI. ed. by Emil Egli (Leipzig, 1935), p. 99. *ZI* (Berlin, 1905), pp. 27ff. This sufficiency Zwingli recognized as an act of liberation from the human traditions which had enslaved the church. *ZI*, pp. 88-136, 372ff. Despite the fact that most modern Reformed theologians would agree with Heinrich Heppé's assertion that *Sola Scriptura* means that 'the only source and norm of all Christian knowledge is the Holy Scripture', it must be recognized that this did not entirely negate the role of the early church fathers in establishing church dogma. '*Die einzige Quelle und Norm aller christlichen Erkenntnis ist die heilige Schrift.*' See Heinrich Heppé, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Neukirchen, 1958), p. 10. As Paul Althaus has correctly recognized regarding Luther's own understanding of *Sola Scriptura*, 'we may trust unconditionally only in the Word of God and not in the teaching of the fathers; for the teachers of the Church can err and have erred. Scripture never errs. Therefore it alone has unconditional authority. The authority of the theologians of the Church is relative and conditional. Without the authority of the words of Scripture, no one can establish hard and fast statements in the Church.' Althaus, pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Traditionally hermeneutics has been understood as 'the science of reflecting on how a word or event in a past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation.' Carl E. Braaten, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. II, (History and Hermeneutics; London, 1980), p. 131. Ollenburger states the problem with such a doctrine plainly when he writes that '*Sola Scriptura* is understood, and for good reason, as a slogan promoting the singular authority of Scripture. But authority is a complex notion, and especially so in relation to Scripture. This is due in part to the diversity of the church's life, and thus the variety of contexts, and hence the variety of ways in which and purposes for which, the church uses Scripture.' Ben C. Ollenburger, 'Sola Scriptura/No Other Foundation and Other Authoritative Sources?', in *Without Spot or Wrinkle: Reflecting Theologically on the Nature of the Church*, ed. by Karl Koop and Mary H. Schertz (Occasional Papers, no. 21; Elkhart, 2000), p. 66.

theology and sacrament. The Anabaptists search for a biblically paradigmatic community of faith and a life style of obedience led them to the way of the cross and the ethics of absolute obedience to the written and living Word.<sup>6</sup>

Simply affirming the Bible's authority was no longer the end of the story, for as Luther correctly concluded via the pithy statement 'the Scripture has a wax nose', the biblical text could be egregiously distorted to say whatever one so desired.<sup>7</sup> And so the various lenses through which the biblical text were read and understood had a profound impact upon the way in which early modern readers, including the Magisterial Reformers and the Anabaptists understood and applied the Scriptures. Biblical interpretation became an entirely new battlefield for the Reformers.

Recognizing the important role biblical interpretation played as a seed of schism during the Reformation, the purpose of this chapter will be twofold; to show how divergent hermeneutical suppositions directly contributed to the ever growing theological divide between the Anabaptist radicals and Swiss preachers at Bern and to simultaneously elucidate how the dominant rules of biblical interpretation manifest during the Bernese debates were directly dependent on earlier positions previously articulated during the Swiss Brethren's extrication from Zwingli and Bullinger's reform efforts in and around Zürich.

### OT / NT

With much of the Reformation debate over orthodox theology and proper ecclesiastical practice having taken place in the arena of hermeneutics, differences of belief relating to the Scriptures were entirely inevitable. One specific area of division in the dialogues between the Anabaptists and Reformed church leaders focused attention on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments of Scripture. In fact, discussions relating to testamental authority grew to be such a major point of contention during the sixteenth

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<sup>6</sup> CJ Dyke, 'Hermeneutics and Discipleship', in Willard M. Swartley, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives* (Elkhart, 1984), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther* (London, 1972), pp. 95ff.

century that the topic became a foundational part of the discussions at almost all of the major disputations from 1531 onward through the end of the century.<sup>8</sup> Historically speaking this was by no means a new quarrel for Christianity. One of the earliest battles over the relationship between the two testaments was waged in the second century A.D. against an influential teacher in Rome named Marcion and, ironically, led to the development of the biblical canon of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Although both the Anabaptist radicals and Swiss Reformers shared an acceptance of both canonical testaments of Scripture, unlike Marcion, the differing lenses through which each looked at the Bible, along with their divergent views regarding the relationship of the two testaments, were major points of division and a kin to previous battles fought over the issue. Now, in order to more fully understand the substantive differences regarding testamental orientation between the Swiss Reformers and Anabaptists radicals during the 1530s at Bern one must first return to a more tranquil time in Zürich's history when the future Swiss Brethren were still laboring alongside their 'Master Ulrich.'

### **Zwingli's Early Appeal to the NT and the Emergence of a New Understanding**

When Zwingli was promoted to serve as 'people's priest' in the beginning of 1519, the Zürich Reformer held true to his belief regarding the power of the Word and spent the following five years preaching through the Bible, beginning with the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> This choice to begin with and focus on the New Testament portion of Scripture was certainly not made at random. Rather, such a choice, while showing a strong indebtedness to the influence

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<sup>8</sup> These include disputations at both Pfeddersheim (1557) and Frankenthal (1571). John D. Roth, 'Harmonizing the Scriptures: Swiss Brethren understandings of the relationship between the Old and New Testament during the last half of the sixteenth century', in *Radical Reformation Studies: Essays presented to James M. Stayer*, ed. by Werner O. Packull and Geoffrey L. Dipple (Aldershot, 1999), p. 40-41 and Goertz, 'Scriptural Interpretation among Radical Reformers', p. 587. For an in-depth analysis of the testamental discussions at Frankenthal see Jess Yoder, *A Critical Study of the Debate Between the Reformed and the Anabaptists Held at Frankenthal, Germany in 1571* (Northwestern University Ph.D. Dissertation; Evanston, 1962), pp. 80-113.

<sup>9</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, 1999), pp. 132-133 and Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. I (New York, 1984), pp. 61-65.

<sup>10</sup> Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore, 1995), p. 18.

of Erasmus, appears to have been part of a specific desire and calculated effort by Zwingli to appropriate the teachings of Christ in the Zürich church.<sup>11</sup> Zwingli's conviction regarding the authority of the New Testament grew so strong during those formative years of the Swiss Reformation that while participating in the First Zürich Disputation in 1523 he exhorted the priests of Zürich to not only obtain copies of the New Testament, but also to institute a plan of Bible reading beginning with specific portions of the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> This early tendency to emphasize the New Testament lingered through 1523 and helped to serve not only as a catalyst for Zwingli's theological battle with Rome, but also was foundational for many of his initial ideas for reform. This may especially be seen in the case of Zwingli's rejection of the Mass as a sacrifice during the Second Zürich Disputation in the end of 1523.<sup>13</sup>

While Zwingli relied heavily upon New Testament passages as the source for many of his reforms in the early 1520s, scholars such as John Roth have argued that a shift in orientation from the New to the Old Testament came out of his exposure to the radical ideas

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<sup>11</sup> W.P. Stephens has effectively shown how Zwingli's preoccupation with the original biblical sources, especially the New Testament, alongside his Christocentric writing focus, was mostly derived from Erasmus. W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 9-10. Snively, in his brief biographic treatment of Zwingli, has rightly recognized that this program of reading was highly 'unconventional' at the time, especially given that it completely neglected the traditional lectionary reading agenda in favor of one that sought to focus on the narrative of Jesus. I. L. Snively Jr. 'Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)', in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, 1998), p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> Alongside stressing to the minister the importance of acquiring a Bible in a known language (including Latin and German), Zwingli argued for a program of reading that began first with Matthew's Gospel, followed by the other three Gospels, Acts, and the Pauline Epistles. Only after this did he encourage the clergy to 'work in the Old Testament, in the prophets and other books of the Bible.' Ulrich Zwingli, 'The First Zurich Disputation', in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. by Leland Harder (Scottsdale, 1985), p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> Here, Zwingli drew a parallel between the Catholic understandings of the Mass as a sacrifice with the sacrifice made by the Levitical priests in the Old Testament. From this parallel he then used passages from the book of Hebrews and several Pauline texts to claim that the Levitical sacrifices had been done away with as they were 'only a figure of the coming of Christ, the true Priest' and, if continued, would now serve to obscure the sufferings of Christ. Such a statement not only continued to show Zwingli's reliance on the New Testament, but also at least conveyed an implication that the New Testament brought a much fuller and more substantial revelation to humanity than the more hidden and shadowy Old Testament. Ulrich Zwingli, 'Zwingli's Introduction to the Disputation Findings', in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. by Leland Harder (Scottsdale, 1985), pp. 263-264.

offered by the future Swiss Brethren leaders.<sup>14</sup> But was this truly a shift in theological orientation or something else entirely? In actuality, Roth's premise overstates the case and is flawed in its primary assertion that Zwingli's thoughts on the two testaments, which were precipitated by the radicals, represent a true 'shift' in his theology. Rather than viewing this as such, it remains much more accurate, based on concepts used by Zwingli prior to the emergence of Swiss Anabaptism, to view Zwingli's usage and reading of the Old Testament in the mid-1520s as a new way of expressing and defending biblically previously affirmed beliefs in Reformed theology.<sup>15</sup> In other words, his newly expressed application of the Old Testament provided an innovative and effective apologetic means of defending theological suppositions already established.

Yet, ultimately, the impetus for his expanded usage and particular reading of the Old Testament demonstrated the evolving nature of Zwingli's theology and was primarily derived from two separate sources; from Zwingli's exposure to the radical ideas eventually manifest in and around Zürich during the mid-1520s and as he began to embrace and employ a Christological reading of the Old Testament that was becoming widely accepted in places such as Zürich and Basel during the 1520s. Each of these influences, which will now be considered, profoundly helped to reconstitute the way in which Zwingli articulated his Reformed position, especially in his dealing with the Swiss radicals, and remained a part of the Reformed hermeneutical construct at the 1532 and 1538 Bern debates. Eventually this

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<sup>14</sup> Roth, in his examination of the Swiss Brethren's understanding of the relationship between the two testaments, boldly concludes that this moment of hermeneutical reorientation for Zwingli, in fact, 'can be identified fairly precisely' with his 1524 treatise, *Those Who Give Cause for Rebellion*. Roth, 'Harmonizing the Scriptures', pp. 36-37. In *Those Who Give Cause for Rebellion*, Zwingli used the Old Testament as the biblical foundation for not only his acceptance of infant baptism, but also for his position on other oft debated matters such as marriage and the rejection of images. Ulrich Zwingli, 'Those Who Give Cause for Rebellion', in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. by Leland Harder (Scottsdale, 1985), pp. 316-321.

<sup>15</sup> That Zwingli's Reformed theology, along with others such as Oecolampadius and Bullinger, included the notion of a 'covenant continuity' between the two testaments of the Bible prior to the mid-1520s has been outlined in detail by Lillback. Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2001), pp. 81ff, especially 90.

emerging position of the Zürich Reformer set him on an entirely different course of reform from his Anabaptist children, thereby fundamentally negating any possible theological accord between the two sides moving forward.

### **The Radicals' Views on Baptism as Impetus for Zwingli's Reassessment**

Before these divergent paths of reform are misunderstood, especially as is related to Zwingli's relationship with the radicals in Zürich, one point of clarification must be made. It should be noted that Zwingli's re-articulation of testamental relationship did not take place immediately when confronted by the radicals and their pursuit of believers' baptism. In truth, one of the initial causes of friction that agitated the rural congregations outside of Zürich centered on the issue of the tithe.<sup>16</sup> Here, support for Zwingli's preliminary statements over the growing discussions relating to the tithe remained largely based on New Testament passages.<sup>17</sup> Even during the aforementioned Second Zürich Disputation in 1523 Zwingli retained the use of New Testament passages as the primary basis for his criticism of the Catholic Mass.<sup>18</sup> In what can now be recognized as a moment of great irony, it was during this disputation that the division between the Zürich Reformer and the future Anabaptist leaders began to first materialize with Zwingli's relegation of the pace of reform to the civil magistrates.<sup>19</sup>

Although concerns over the tithe and the abolition of the Mass served to begin the slow and painful separation of the Swiss radicals from Zwingli, the debate over baptism

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<sup>16</sup> Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, p. 10-13.

<sup>17</sup> Zwingli's position on the tithe relied heavily upon Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels. Ulrich Zwingli, 'Sermon on Divine and Human Justice', in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. by Leland Harder (Scottsdale, 1985), pp. 213-219.

<sup>18</sup> Zwingli, 'Zwingli's Introduction to the Disputation Findings', pp. 259-267.

<sup>19</sup> For specific details surrounding the role of Zwingli's views on the magistrate as a catalyst to his separation with the future Anabaptists see Robert C. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 176-208.

loomed on the horizon and soon became a dominant point of contention by the mid 1520s.<sup>20</sup> Sometime during 1524 the Swiss radicals began questioning the use of paedobaptism, forcing Zwingli to both reassess his understanding of the traditional rite and further develop a biblical justification for its retention in the Swiss church.<sup>21</sup> Wholly committed to the *corpus Christianum*, and fearful of the societal chaos that might ensue if the radicals' views on both church and baptism were embraced; Zwingli was now, as Peter Lillback has appropriately recognized, 'compelled by circumstances to declare his position on infant baptism.'<sup>22</sup> Consequently, Zwingli began to rely on a particular reading of the Old Testament as a means to validating the use of infant baptism.

### **OT / NT Continuity as Guiding Premise**

Zwingli's acceptance of paedobaptism and his subsequent justification for its employment in the church highlight a major point of departure with his radical counterparts. Although Zwingli admitted that there was once a time when he had questioned baptizing children, having witnessed firsthand what he perceived to be the seditious and destructive end

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<sup>20</sup> For insightful reading regarding the role of the tithes and the abolition of the mass in the emerging Swiss Brethren movement see Stayer, 'The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition.'

<sup>21</sup> The reticence to continue infant baptism was first brought to light in the rural communities outside of Zürich, specifically in the villages of Zollikon and Wytikon, as parents began withholding their children for baptism according to the preaching of Wilhelm Reublin and James Brötli. John W. Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical and Practical Theology* (Louisville, 2002), pp. 22-23, Henry S. Burrage, *A History of the Anabaptists in Switzerland* (New York, 1882), p. 77-78 and 101, and Williams, pp. 96-97. While the questioning of infant baptism emerged as a later concern, born from the Swiss radicals' willingness to allow their emerging ecclesiological convictions to proceed to a logically consistent end, Grebel's 1524 letter to Thomas Muntzer and Felix Manz's *Protestation* stand as concrete points denoting the movement's rejection of its usage. Conrad Grebel, 'Konrad Grebel und Genossen an Thomas Müntzer', in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, Band I, ed. by Leonhard von Muralt (Zurich, 1952), pp. 17-18; hereafter designated *LVM*. For English translation see Conrad Grebel, 'Grebel to Müntzer', in *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. by Leland Harder (Classics of the Radical Reformation, No. 4; Scottdale, 1985), pp. 284-292. Felix Manz, 'Protestation und Schutzschrift', in *LVM*, pp. 23-28. For English translation see Felix Manz, 'Protest and Defense', in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. by Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge, 1991), pp. 95-100.

<sup>22</sup> Infant baptism, according to Lillback, masked a seditious form of religious radicalism that stood as a direct threat to the large scale reform Zwingli envisioned through his national agenda. Lillback, p. 89. Along with circumstances, Zwingli also found increased pressure from both his Reformed counterparts in the Swiss Confederation and several radical leaders, including Hubmaier and Manz, to offer a biblical justification for infant baptism. Jack Warren Cottrell, *Covenant and Baptism in the Theology of Huldreich Zwingli* (Princeton University Th.D. Dissertation; Princeton, 1971), pp. 86-87.

inherent in believers' baptism, the Reformer sought to formulate a biblical justification for infant baptism against the backdrop of the Swiss Brethren's push for its abolition.<sup>23</sup> While the totality of his arguments in favor of infant baptism remain outside the scope of this study, one in particular stood in direct contrast to the Anabaptists and directly relates to the issue of the relationship of the two testaments – the continuity of the Old and New Testament.<sup>24</sup> As Peter Opitz has succinctly set forth, 'the guiding principles in his dealings with the Old Testament can be laid open in this way, even if it remains incomplete in some points. Zwingli's point of departure is undoubtedly the basic unity of the Old and New Testaments, which is based in the unity of God and his word, and which possesses in Christ its center, but also its guiding principle.'<sup>25</sup>

As will be shown shortly, while the Swiss Anabaptists emphasized the elevated status of the New Testament in their hermeneutical construct, Zwingli chose instead to focus on the cohesive and associative nature of the two parts of Scripture, especially from a soteriological perspective.<sup>26</sup> While the argument for infant baptism was frequently made on the basis of Zwingli's famous parallel between circumcision and baptism, this continuity really took shape in one overarching conviction when applied to the issue of baptism. Here, the link between the two testaments of Scripture was derived from Zwingli's affirmation of the

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<sup>23</sup> Zwingli once believed that it seemed prudent to withhold baptism, offering it only to children who had come to discern the difference between right and wrong. *ZIV* (Leipzig, 1927), pp. 228-229. This apology for infant baptism was initially developed and expressed by the Zürich reformer through a series of works during the mid to late-1520s, including a 1524 letter to Strasbourg, and three treaties directed against the Anabaptists– *Baptism, Rebaptism, and Infant Baptism, A Reply to Hubmaier*, and *A Refutation*.

<sup>24</sup> For a brief summary of these introductory arguments developed by Zwingli see W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 86-92.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Opitz, 'The Exegetical and Hermeneutical Work of John Oecolampadius, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin', in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Interpretation*, vol. II; From Renaissance to the Enlightenment, ed. by Magne Saebo (Göttingen, 2008), pp. 416.

<sup>26</sup> It should be recognized, however, that Zwingli still maintained an element of discontinuity between the two and the superiority of the New Testament over the Old in certain areas. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

continuity of the covenant.<sup>27</sup> Clearly expressed through his defense of infant baptism, Zwingli came to affirm that the covenant found in the New Testament was not an innovation or fundamentally different from the one offered to the Jews in the Old Testament. Rather, it was simply a continuation of the same covenant previously made, meaning that the New Testament Christian participated in the same covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis. Consequently, just as the Hebrew children took part in the covenant and received its sign (circumcision), so too should children of Christian families receive the parallel sign of baptism. Obviously, such a view of the covenant had a dramatic effect on the way in which Zwingli understood and read the entire Bible. The two testaments of Scripture worked in tandem, one providing a commentary on the other. Such a hermeneutical foundation regarding the two parts of Scripture, as will be seen shortly, was dramatically different than the Anabaptists' conceptions of the two.

Such a view of the interplay between the two testaments of Scripture was not confined to Zwingli alone, but also had a prominent place in Bullinger's Reformed thinking as well. While the debate over whether Zwingli or Bullinger first came to affirm the continuity of the two testaments continues today, both clearly shared a strong conviction that an indissoluble relationship between the Old and New was a foundational part of a proper biblical hermeneutic.<sup>28</sup> Along with Zwingli, Bullinger affirmed that there was nothing fundamentally different between the New and Old Testaments.<sup>29</sup> Rather, recognizing the unique nature of each in conveying the differing aspects of 'promise' and 'fulfillment', both shared a

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<sup>27</sup> This idea took root in Zwingli's thought sometime between 1525 and 1527. For the most detailed assessment of Zwingli's view on the unity of the covenants see Cottrell, pp. 173-249.

<sup>28</sup> For specific details relating to both Zwingli and Bullinger's development of this idea of continuity see Chapter One of J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, 1980). As Heindol Fast has set forth, the associative relationship of both covenants for Bullinger, much like Zwingli, was largely based on the historic act of God in salvation. Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, p. 156.

<sup>29</sup> This conviction was developed over time, beginning as early as 1525, and predominately formulated as Bullinger engaged the Anabaptists in debate. Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, 1991), pp. 18-21.

soteriological unity with Christ as their center. Recognizing Jesus' own usage of the Old Testament, Bullinger reasoned that 'In brief, I find the New Testament to be nothing other than the interpretation of the Old. I saw that what the latter promises, the former teaches what has been made real; the latter more concealed, the former more open, the latter has to do with veils and figures, the former with clear evidences and the things itself.'<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, as would become a hallmark of Bullinger's hermeneutic which he passed down to the Bernese church, it was understood that 'we interpret Scripture from Scripture.'<sup>31</sup>

### **Christological Reading of OT**

If, as has been argued, the radicals' embrace of believers' baptism forced the Swiss Magisterial Reformers to reassess how they were going to biblically defend their developing Reformed positions, then a certain Christological reading of the Old Testament served as one of the principle weapons of choice in their attempts to defeat the seditious spread of Anabaptism in the Swiss Confederation. While a distinctive shift towards a Christocentric focus and reading of the Old Testament started to become manifest in places such as Zürich and Basel during the 1520s and 1530s the roots of such a position are actually derived from Erasmus. As alluded to earlier, Zwingli's indebtedness to Erasmus for many of his humanistic ideas remains without question.<sup>32</sup> But in particular it was Erasmus' willingness to both embrace a Christocentric focus of the Scriptures through *imitatio* and to retain, albeit in a modified form, the traditional medieval multiple 'sense' of Scripture when interpreting the Bible that had the most profound impact in relation to Zwingli's Christological reading of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 5 and Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, pp. 180ff.

<sup>32</sup> This is especially true as it related to Erasmus' famous Greek New Testament and the coinciding humanistic push to return to the original Christian sources (especially the Bible and early Church Fathers). Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, p. 10.

Old Testament.<sup>33</sup> As was the case for both Erasmus and almost all of the mainline Magisterial Reformers in the Swiss Confederation one of the axiomatic principles undergirding their hermeneutical construct was a preoccupation with allowing the text of Scripture, both of the Old and New Testaments, to speak directly to the contemporary Christian church context.<sup>34</sup> And while such a position did not directly set these Reformers apart from the Swiss Anabaptists in any tangible way, it was their application of this principle through a modified usage of the *quadriga* that promoted the burgeoning divide between the two.<sup>35</sup>

Again, drawing heavily on Erasmus' retention of the various multiple 'sense' usage of Scripture from medieval scholasticism, Zwingli chose to divide his specific interpretation of the Old Testament into no less than three distinct, yet interrelated steps.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to the many scattered Anabaptist claims that he completely neglected the literal meaning of Scripture, Zwingli actually made allowance first for the 'literal sense' of Scripture, although

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<sup>33</sup> Erasmus' focus on *imitatio* as related to man was, as Locher has demonstrated, clearly influenced by the Dutch humanist's early exposure to Thomas a Kempis. Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, p. 245. The traditional fourfold sense of Scripture, most frequently designated as the *Quadriga*, though widely used by many of the mainline Reformers in an amended form, really has its original origins in the patristic period and was widely implemented during the Medieval Era as well. See Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, editors, *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit* (Oxford, 2003), H. Caplan, 'The Four Senses of Scriptural Interpretation and the Medieval Theory of Preaching', in *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, vol. 4, 1929, pp. 270-281, and McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, pp. 152-172.

<sup>34</sup> This, as Aldridge has demonstrated, was particularly important for Erasmus. Especially, since not only the proper explanation of the text of Scripture, but also the relevant application of it to a contemporary setting was fundamental to a sound exegetical method. John William Aldridge, *The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (Basel Studies of Theology, No. 2; Richmond, 1966), pp.59ff.

<sup>35</sup> For an examination of Erasmus' usage of the four fold sense of Scripture see Manfred Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1994), pp. 101-106; idem, 'Faith and Piety in Erasmus' Thought', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 20, 1989, pp. 245ff. For specifics detailing Martin Luther's use of the fourfold method of interpretation, including its role in his breakthrough relating to 'the righteousness of God', see Erich Vogelsang, *Die Anfänge von Luthers' Christologie: nach der ersten Psalmenvorlesung, insbesondere in ihren exegetischen und systematischen zusammenhängen mit Augustin und der scholastik dargestellt* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1929), Karl Holl, 'Luther's Bedeutung für den Fortschritt der Auslegungskunst', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 1, 1948, pp. 544-550, Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, 1989), pp. 250-253 and Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, trans. by R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 101-109.

<sup>36</sup> For an analysis of these steps see Snavely, Jr., pp. 253-254.

from an entirely different perspective than the radicals. The literal interpretation of the Old Testament, which became a primary task of the *Prophezei* in Zürich, focused attention on the historical setting seen in the Scriptures, with particular attention given to word studies in the original Hebrew.<sup>37</sup>

With the literal (or natural) meaning fully established through the interpretation of the biblical historical record, Zwingli next emphasized the need to take what was taught in the historic account and apply it to one's present contemporary situation and setting.<sup>38</sup> Once again, as Opitz has cited, the way in which the Old Testament offered valuable instruction to everyday life in the early modern world as a part of the process of biblical instruction was largely carried over by similar instructions passed on by Erasmus.<sup>39</sup>

Zwingli certainly argued for the presence and focus on Christ in each of the aforementioned steps of interpretation, but the third sense of Scripture, the allegorical (or mystical sense), demonstrated the various ways in which Christ was hidden in the Old Testament and became prominent in his rebuttal of Anabaptism. Fully cognizant of the multitude of figures, types, and tropes he recognized were present, the Zürich reformer argued that failing to recognize the ubiquitous nature of Christ as a part of the Old Testament

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<sup>37</sup> This focus on the historical portion of the Old Testament, or what is commonly referred to as the 'natural sense' of Scripture, emphasized the usage of exegetical aids such as a working knowledge of the original biblical languages, and was largely influenced by Erasmus. The historical sense, as Torrance has demonstrated, worked hand in hand with the other subsequent senses and was, for Erasmus, foundational to their usage in interpretation. Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Hermeneutics of Erasmus', in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. by Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville, 1989), p. 63. Also see Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology*, p. 104. The *Prophezie*, also known as the Zürich *Lectio*, was originally established in 1525 as a direct consequence of the activities of Grebel and Manz and as a part of a larger concerted attempt to suppress the spread of Anabaptism. The detailed inner workings of the *Prophezie* from their inception may be found in R. Gerald Hobbs, 'Zwingli and the Study of the Old Testament', in *Huldrych Zwingli, 1484-1531: A Legacy of Reform*, ed. by E.J. Furcha (Papers from the 1984 International Zwingli Symposium; Montreal, 1985). For the chronicled origins of this group see Heinrich Bullinger, *Reformationgeschichte*, vol. I, ed. by J.J. Hottinger and H.H. Vögeli (Frauenfeld, 1838), pp. 289-290.

<sup>38</sup> Although Zwingli never specifically used this term, as Künzli has noted, this 'moral sense' is merely the application of the literal sense to the reader/hearer. *Z XIII* (Zurich 1963), p. 209.

<sup>39</sup> Opitz, p. 424.

was to grossly misunderstand not only Jesus and the apostle's own usage of the Law, but also much of the core of its content.<sup>40</sup> All of Scripture, including the Old Testament was witness to Christ, according to Zwingli. Consequently, mistakenly over-valuing the New Testament as the radicals had done barred the full biblical record of Christ from being realized nor fully understood. And since both testaments of Scripture served as commentaries on the other, the precise meaning of certain difficult passages found in the New Testament could only be properly interpreted when viewed through an Christological reading of the Old Testament.

As mentioned previously, Zwingli was not alone in his promotion of an Christological reading of the Old Testament. In fact, Basel's chief reformer, Johannes Oecolampadius, had almost as much to do with influencing Zwingli's hermeneutic in this regard as did Erasmus, especially through his famous Isaiah commentary published in 1525.<sup>41</sup> In a similar manner as Zwingli, Oecolampadius recognized the great value of the Old Testament. The pedagogical aspect of the Old Testament was plainly evident as the Hebrew Scriptures were shown to speak to the present era. In this regard the prophets, such as Isaiah, offered instruction which was not exclusively confined to any one era, but contained timeless truths regarding the Christian life. This, Oecolampadius would argue, was accomplished only when Christ was sought out in the Old Testament. As Opitz has summarized from Oecolampadius' forward to the Isaiah commentary, 'Only the one who sees Christ and Christian life in the prophets will understand them.'<sup>42</sup> What he deemed the 'allegorical' or 'spiritual' sense of interpreting the Old Testament then became the way in which the various figures and types present in the historic record directed attention toward Christ and offered a vivid picture of salvation

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<sup>40</sup> For an insightful look at the subtle differences in the various forms of typology and allegory employed as a part of this hermeneutical step see Edwin Künzli, 'Quellenproblem und mystischer Schriftsinn in Zwinglis Genesis- und Exoduskommentar', *Zwingliana* 9, 1949-1953, pp. 257-280.

<sup>41</sup> Opitz, p. 409.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

history. To understand just how different both the Swiss Reformers' understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments of Scripture and their Christological reading of the Old Testament was to the Swiss Anabaptists' hermeneutic, attention must now shift to the radicals' views relating to Scripture.

### **Swiss Brethren NT Orientation**

Obviously any discussion relating to the hermeneutical disparity that existed between the Anabaptists and the Swiss Reformed church must take into account the historical emergence of the radicals' New Testament orientation.<sup>43</sup> That the Swiss Brethren recognized the New Testament portion of Scripture to be the most authoritative source behind their understanding of the nature of the Christian faith and what they would deem 'authentic Christianity' is not in question.<sup>44</sup> A cursory assessment of each of the most prominent early works associated with the movement, including Manz's *Protestation*, Sattler's letter to the Strasbourg Reformers, the *Schleitheim Articles*, and the *Submission to the Diet of Grüningen*, to name but a few, all testify to such a strong dependence.<sup>45</sup> Still, a simple recognition of this fact does not move us any closer to answering the more pertinent question associated with why the Anabaptists ostensibly embraced a strong New Testament orientation. At least two

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<sup>43</sup> Although many of the Anabaptist radicals retained a New Testament orientation, it must be noted that not all the radical groups shared such a position. Bernd Rothmann is a classic example of a prominent Anabaptist leader who not only failed to share this aforementioned New Testament orientation, but actually ostensibly favored the Old Testament, seeing the latter as more of a commentary on the former. Robert Stupperich, *Die Schriften Bernhard Rothmanns* (Münster, 1970) and Frank J. Wray, 'Bernhard Rothmann's Views on the Early Church', in *Reformation Studies: Essays Honoring Roland H. Bainton* (Richmond, 1962), pp. 236ff. Despite the fact that most historians recognize this unique Anabaptist view regarding the Old Testament Jack Porter has argued that Rothmann was not, in fact, preoccupied by the Old Testament, but argues that both testaments were viewed by him merely as 'one organic unit of divine revelation.' Jack Wallace Porter, *Bernhard Rothmann 1495-1535: Royal Orator of the Munster Anabaptist Kingdom* (University of Wisconsin Ph.D. Dissertation; Madison, 1964), pp. 117-123.

<sup>44</sup> Bender, *Conrad Grebel*, p. 214, Myron S. Augsburger, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, 1967), pp. 11ff, and Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, pp. 15ff.

<sup>45</sup> Felix Manz, 'Protestation und Schutzschrift', pp.23-28, Michael Sattler, 'Sattler's Letter to Capito and Bucer', in *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, trans. and ed. by John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, 1973), p. 21-24; idem, 'The Schleitheim Brotherly Union', in *Ibid.*, pp. 34-43, and *LVM*, 'Eingabe der Grüninger Täufer an den Landtag', pp. 234-238.

theories remain a topic of debate even today.<sup>46</sup> The first position is more contextually driven and affirms that the radicals' testamental focus was actually precipitated by Zwingli's move toward the Old Testament and specifically done to distance them from the Zürich Reformer. Championing this position, Hans-Jürgen Goertz postulates,

Gradually (they - the Anabaptists) came to the conclusion that it was inadmissible to quote the Old Testament as an authority on the conduct of the Christian people of God: only the commandments of the New Testament could be considered binding. The more Zwingli insisted on basing arguments on the Old Testament, the more the Anabaptists were compelled to dismiss it.<sup>47</sup>

Essentially, as Zwingli began to disproportionately utilize the Old Testament portion of Scripture to validate positions which they did not recognize as being set forth by the biblical text, the Swiss Anabaptists, in turn, sought out their doctrinal positions predominately from the New Testament. Accordingly, the radicals' orientation was both reactionary to and in direct contrast with their former instructor's newly articulated position and emerged only when driven by such a context.

A second theory considers the radicals' specific Scriptural orientation to have been derived from a strong focus on Christ Himself alongside a progressive view of divine revelation which understood the Messiah's teachings to be the highest and most authoritative form of revelation granted by God.<sup>48</sup> According to this view, scholars such as Ulrich Gerber argue that 'The Baptist-hermeneutical formula reads "...one must live according to the rule, as Christ and the apostles taught.'" By this it is understood that this is primarily derived from

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<sup>46</sup> Packull has suggested a third consideration here relating to the availability of the Bible in the vernacular amongst the Anabaptists in and around Zürich. He maintains that since only the New Testament portion of Scripture was readily accessible to the radicals during the early to mid-1520s their orientation may have, in part, been dictated by such circumstances. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, pp. 26-30.

<sup>47</sup> Goertz also argues that because Zwingli 'was on the way of reforming Zürich according to the pattern of an Old Testament theocracy, the Anabaptists, by way of reaction, had to found their reform alternative, the longer, the more, on the New Testament.' Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>48</sup> John Roth has argued such a position was based on a 'Christocentric approach to ethics.' Roth, 'Harmonizing the Scriptures', p. 38.

the New Testament.<sup>49</sup> This supposition, Gerber proceeds to reason, is precisely why Bullinger warned those in Bern prior to the 1532 *Gespräch* of the Anabaptists' persistent reliance on Hebrews 8:13 and the great need for the Bernese church to endorse the Old Testament portion of Scripture.<sup>50</sup> Previously thinking along the same lines, Clarence Bauman similarly argued 'This foundational thought regarding the priority of the revelation in Christ became divided into different concepts, the way to understand the radical difference between the acts of God in both testaments. The historical contrast between Moses and Christ in all of this was emphasized.'<sup>51</sup>

The one point that reigned supreme in the Swiss radicals' views relating to testamental authority was that because of Christ the New Testament portion of Scripture was more highly esteemed than the Old.<sup>52</sup> Despite Zwingli's claim that the Anabaptists completely denied the Old Testament, such was not the case.<sup>53</sup> Rather, its value was simply

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<sup>49</sup> Gerber is quoting here from the protocol of the Berner Synodus of 1532. Ulrich J. Gerber, 'Berner Synodus – Berner Täuferum: Gemeinsames und Trennendes', in *Anabaptistes et dissidents au XVI siècle*, ed. by Jean-George Rott and Simon L. Verheus (Allemagne, 1987), p. 290.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>51</sup> *Dieser Grundgedanke von der Priorität der Offenbarung in Christo wurde in verschiedene Begriffspaare aufgeteilt, um den radikalen Unterschied des göttlichen Handelns in den beiden Testamenten herauszustellen. Durchweg wurde der heilsgeschichtliche Kontrast zwischen Moses und Christus betont.* Clarence Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferum: Eine Untersuchung zur Theologischen Ethik des Oberdeutschen Täuferums der Reformationszeit* (Leiden, 1968), p. 158

<sup>52</sup> John Ruth contends that this progressive view of Scripture originally grew out of the small Bible study sessions prevalent in and around Zürich and as the Swiss commoners began to recognize the simplicity of Jesus' instruction. Expressing this position he writes, 'Students, bakers, a pastor, a tailor, a goldsmith – they are fascinated, as they take the Scriptures into their own hands, to find Christ's teachings going beyond what they had learned from Zwingli. Reading both the Old and New Testaments they discover that the New transcends the Old in its moral requirements, as well as its revelation of God through Christ.' John L. Ruth, *Conrad Grebel: Son of Zurich* (Scottsdale, 1975), p.89. The most famous of these groups was a study led by Andreas Castelberger, a local bookseller in Zürich. Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli: Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz* (Berlin, 2003), pp. 129-130 and C. Arnold Snyder, 'Swiss Anabaptism: The Beginnings (1523-1525)', in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, ed. by John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden, 2007), pp. 49ff. Goeters has even gone so far as to contend that Castelberger's particular study served as the crèche for Zürich's Swiss Anabaptism. Goeters, J. F. G, 'Die Vorgeschichte des Täuferums in Zurich', in *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie der Reformation*, ed. by Louise Abramowski and J. F. G. Goeters (Neukirchen-Vlyn, 1969), p. 255.

<sup>53</sup> In his famous work, *Elenchus*, Zwingli claimed that the Swiss radicals 'have finally come to the point of denying the whole Old Testament... For they have written to our senate: The Old Testament is antiquated and the testimony adduced from it is void, and so can prove nothing. Ulrich Zwingli, 'Refutation of the Tricks of

minimized by the fact that a clearer revelation had been offered through Jesus via the New Testament. The shadowy dispensation of the Old Testament was but a time of preparation from the coming of Messiah. And so naturally the entrance of Jesus in the New ushered in not simply fulfillment of that previously set forth in the earlier dispensation, but a clearer picture of the Christian faith in light of the cross.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, it has been argued that this focus on Jesus and His teachings recorded in the New Testament ultimately became the source of the Anabaptist concerns for *Nachfolge* and their strong emphasis on obedience.<sup>55</sup>

While there certainly are elements of both views present as determining factors behind the radicals' New Testament orientation an important point relating to time specificity remains. Goertz's contextually driven model is entirely correct in stressing that as Zwingli attempted to move Zürich towards a theocracy the Swiss radicals were forced to ask questions not only about what they believed theologically, but also where specifically their concluding beliefs were derived biblically. To this end Goertz is entirely correct in ascribing such a direct link of dependence. However, any efforts that misconstrue Goertz's comparative analysis in such a way as to think that the Anabaptists' New Testament focus was merely done out of pure reaction and in an attempt to be polarizing oversteps too much.<sup>56</sup> The leaders of the Swiss Brethren were hardly the type to spitefully and petulantly come to such bold religious positions. Rather, they were quite thoughtful and deliberate in their

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the Catabaptists', in Samuel M. Jackson, *Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531): Selected Works* (Philadelphia, 1901), pp. 146-147; hereafter designated *ELENCHUS*.

<sup>54</sup> John C. Wenger, 'The Biblicism of the Anabaptists', in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. by Guy F. Herschberger (Scottsdale, 1957), pp. 176-177.

<sup>55</sup> In highlighting the difference between the Magisterial Reformers' embrace and emphasis on Pauline doctrine against the Anabaptists Gospel centeredness, Friedmann has correctly shown one of the key distinctions which led to divergent hermeneutical positions for the mainline Reformers and the Swiss Anabaptists. Robert Friedmann, 'The Doctrine of Two Worlds', in Guy F. Herschberger, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixteenth Century Tribute to Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, 1957), p. 106ff.

<sup>56</sup> This is a shard point with Yoder that he offered while exploring the two groups' divergent understandings of the unity of the covenants. Yoder, *ABRS*, pp. 168-169.

theological construction, mostly coming to conclusions, they believed, born out of study with their former teacher. But what this does show is that Zwingli's move towards the Old Testament in establishing a biblical basis for many of his Reformed ideas clearly facilitated the Anabaptists' reassessment of what biblical Christianity actually looked like. Therefore, both were vital components of the radicals' move towards the New Testament, but one took place first and directly impacted the other.

This early relationship with Zwingli leads us to a further point of clarification. Swiss Anabaptism, it must be remembered, did not develop in isolation, but rather grew directly out from under the Zürich reform movement lead by Zwingli.<sup>57</sup> As previously stated, prior to the Second Zürich Disputation in 1523 Zwingli had lead and been an integral part of a group of Swiss clerics and humanists who, inspired by their readings of the New Testament, began pushing for reform in Zürich. When one considers Zwingli's strong endorsement of the New Testament during the early years of the reform movement in Zürich, alongside his close association with many individuals who would eventually embrace and take prominent roles in the early Anabaptist movement, it is not surprising at all to see a residual lean towards the New Testament for the Swiss radicals.<sup>58</sup> In many ways one should actually expect it. Accordingly, the inseparable link that characterized the Zürich radicals' relationship with Zwingli both prior to and forever following the eventual division of the two parties cannot be too overstated. The Swiss Brethren were the Zürich Reformer's theological children and their views on Scripture a clear consequence of his early instruction to them regarding the

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<sup>57</sup> Lewis Spitz is indeed fully justified in reminding us that it was 'Zwingli's Reformation (that) provided the soil from which Anabaptism grew.' See Spitz, 169.

<sup>58</sup> For biographical information regarding the early Swiss radicals relationship with their humanist teacher, Ulrich Zwingli, see Larry Lundy Eakes, *Konrad Grebel and Huldreich Zwingli and the Birth of the Radical Reformation in Zurich: 1521-1527* (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Th.M. Dissertation; Wake Forest, 1978), pp. 18-23 and 27-33.

Bible's authority.<sup>59</sup> Either way one understands it the early Swiss radicals' views on testamental priority were ultimately born out of their relationship with Zwingli.

While the differing testamental orientations of Zwingli and the Swiss Brethren leaders further widened the chasm between the two, what must be concluded from the above study is that an even greater cause for their separation may be found in two alternative readings of the Old Testament. At issue here is not simply the authoritative role of the Hebrew Scriptures in establishing Christian doctrine, but the lenses through which these biblical texts were read and ultimately understood. Ironically, Christ played a prominent role for both the Swiss Reformers and Anabaptists in shaping these lenses. Yet differing applications of Christ in relation to the Old Testament directly led to two divergent and irreconcilable ways of interpreting the Law.

### **Testamental Authority at Bern**

That the Reformed preachers at Bern knew the issue of testamental authority was critical in their battle against Anabaptism is not in doubt, for at the outset of the 1531 *Gespräch* with Hans Pfistermeyer they sought to make sure that the Old and New Testaments of Scripture were both recognized as God's Word and granted equal authority by the Bernese church. Dovetailing on their initial thoughts regarding the importance of faith and love in biblical interpretation the preachers broadly declared, 'So each must also confess that the Old and New Testaments are both God's Word and are of equal value to us.'<sup>60</sup> The preachers requirement of the qualifying designation 'equal value to us' clearly demonstrates that they were consciously aware of the Anabaptists' New Testament orientation and were resolved to

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<sup>59</sup> The great irony of this relationship remains that it was from the radicals' exposure to and detailed study of the Word of God, which Zwingli had specifically encouraged, that eventually led the future Swiss Brethren to question Zwingli's theological position on a number of issues. As Bruce Gordon has accurately identified, the very thing that united these two parties, namely the Bible, in the end also served as the primary catalyst to their eventual division. Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation*, p. 192.

<sup>60</sup> *So mustu ye ouch bekennen, das alt und nüw testament beide ein gottswort unnd unns in glychem wardt syend. QZ Pfistermeyer, p. 7.*

not allow Pfistermeyer to use such a position in his defense of Anabaptism. Clearly harboring the Swiss radicals' penchant to elevate the New Testament portion of the Bible, Pfistermeyer quickly retorted, 'The New Testament is more perfect than the Old and the Old is fulfilled and made clear through Christ. What Christ has now made clear and made understandable, that I also hold, for it is the will of His heavenly Father.'<sup>61</sup> Using the same biblical imagery of Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament Law that the Anabaptists at Grüninger had previously employed, Pfistermeyer's statement made clear that he believed the Christ event brought an historic demarcation between the new and old covenants.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, Jesus was the fundamental difference between the two testaments and His teachings, according to Pfistermeyer, were not only afforded a higher authority than those recorded in the Old Testament, but they served as the very lens through which the Law was to be interpreted.<sup>63</sup>

Despite Pfistermeyer's eventual recantation, the issue of testamental dominance remained a major point of contention between the two groups tracking forward and reared its head yet again in the Swiss Confederation less than a year later. This was revealed through Berchtold Haller's 1532 appeal to Bullinger for guidance regarding what he, much like Zwingli's previously articulated stance, understood to be the radicals' complete denunciation

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<sup>61</sup> *Das nüw testament ist volkomner dann das allt, unnd das allt ist durch Christum erfüllt und erklart worden. Was nun Christus erklart unnd zu erkennen geben hat, das halt ich ouch, dann er ist der will sins hymelschen vatters. QZ Pfistermeyer, p. 7.*

<sup>62</sup> The parallel usage of Christ's 'fulfillment' (*erfüllt*) as proof of the New Testament's elevation is baldly evident in each. Those radicals at Grüninger, largely using Paul's testimony from the New Testament argued, 'Paul also says, Christ is the end of the Law. And again Paul says, Thus Christ has come, He has taken away the first one (and) he has established another one. Here in these words, thus, notice that Christ has fulfilled the first testament and through Him has raised another one, a new one has been established.' *Paulus ouch spricht: Christus ist des gesatzts end. Und abermals spricht Paulus: Do Christus ist kommen, do hebt er das erst uff, das er das ander insetze. Hie in disen worten so merckend, das Christus das erst testament hett erfüllt und in im hett uffgehört und ein anders, ein nüws, hat in gesetzt.* See LVM, 'Eingabe der Grüninger Täufer an den Landtag', pp. 237-238.

<sup>63</sup> *QZ Pfistermeyer, p. 8-13.*

of the Old Testament.<sup>64</sup> In Bullinger's 1532 letter of reply, Zwingli's successor in Zürich, offering his own thoughts on how to successfully engage the Anabaptists at the Zofingen *Gespräch*, concurred with Haller's prioritization of the matter and proceeded to stress the importance of addressing the topic at the outset of the debate. In fact, Bullinger's first exhortation to Haller, following his opening greeting, was to proceed with the following overarching rule of debate:

What counts is to define at the very beginning with what weapons the battle is to be waged, lest in the midst of the proceedings things which should have been taken care of and defined should rise up to obscure and confuse completely what is being discussed. Accordingly, when the prayer and opening address have been completed you should immediately bring forward the following proposition: When tensions and conflicts arise between Christians concerning matters of faith, they should be decided and clarified with Holy Scripture of Old and New Testament. You should state this proposition just this flatly. For as soon as it has been read you shall call out: 'If anyone holds otherwise, let him come forward!' In this way you will be able to wring it out of them if anywhere there lurks a negation of the Old Testament.<sup>65</sup>

From this it is clear that Bullinger now knew that the divide between the Anabaptists and the Swiss church stemmed not simply from disagreements over a few matters of doctrine and church practice, but more principally on underlying hermeneutical suppositions which fostered the widening ecclesiological gulf. The matter carried such weight in Bullinger's mind that he even advised Haller to carefully watch for the use of key terms such as 'Law' with which the Anabaptists might be able to marginalize the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>66</sup> Following this introductory admonition, Bullinger then offered to Haller a concise set of arguments,

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<sup>64</sup> Johann Heinrich Ottius, *Annales Anabaptistici Hoc Est, Historia Universalis de Anabaptistarum Origine* (Basel, 1672), pp. 55ff.

<sup>65</sup> *Principio refert definire, quibus armis haec pugna sit conficienda, ne in ipsa actione hoc, quod expeditum definitumque esse oportebat, omne negotium obscuraret et inturbaret. Proinde post habitas preces et praefationem protinus proponitis hanc propositionem: Wan spän vnd stöss sich vnder christen von wägen dess glaubens zu(o)tragend, sollend die mitt h[eiliger] biblischer gschrift alts und nüws testaments etscheiden und erlüteret werden. Nudam autem hanc ponatis positionem. Mox enim atque publice fuerit praelecta, clamabitur: 'Si quis diuersum sentiat, prodeat.' Extorquebitis igitur, sicubi latuerit veteris Testam[enti] negatio.* Bullinger, 'How to Deal with Anabaptists', p. 84.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

mostly drawn from his earlier work *Von dem Unverschampten Fräfel*, which provided arguments for the continuity of the two testaments of Scripture.<sup>67</sup>

The prominence of the testamental debate remained evident when the two groups met for the subsequent *Gespräch* in 1538. In fact, the acceptance of both testaments of the Bible as the basis for the debate was a pre-requisite that had to be acknowledged by the radicals before the Bernese preachers would even sit down for further dialogue.<sup>68</sup> Despite the fact that the Anabaptists agreed to this condition, the differing applications of the Old and New Testaments remained nevertheless and were apparent from the outset.

Strangely, the preachers must have known this was a reality even as they reopened a dialogue with their radical adversaries; for the correlation of the testaments served as the opening article of the debate.<sup>69</sup> Following a fairly brief discussion on Jesus' usage of the Hebrew Scriptures Erasmus Ritter succinctly concluded, 'That is the quarrel: If the Old Testament is applicable or is it abolished.'<sup>70</sup> Hans Hotz immediately offered the Anabaptists' reply by stating 'We confess, as before, that the Old Testament is a witness of Christ. And we also accept the Old Testament where it is not abolished by Christ and is in agreement with the New (Testament). Also, as it serves and pertains to faith, love, and a good Christian life, we accept it and hold it to be right and good.'<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, while Hotz's reply, alongside his subsequent agreement with Ritter that certain issues such as the priestly ceremonies and

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<sup>67</sup> This included a list of twelve proof texts which Bullinger believed offered New Testament validation of the Old. *Ibid.*, p. 86-89.

<sup>68</sup> Beyond basic constrictions regarding who specifically could attend and participate in the debate, a second requisite rested in the recognition of the civil magistrates divinely appointed role as punishers of evil and promoters of good. Klaassen, 'The Bern Debate of 1538', pp. 106-107.

<sup>69</sup> *QZ Bern*, p. 269ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Das ist der span: Ob das alltt testament unnd wieverr es güldt oder ufgehept. QZ Bern*, p. 273.

<sup>71</sup> *Wir bekhennent, wie vor, das das alltt testament ein zügcknus uf Christum sye. Unnd denne lassent wir das alltt testament ouch gellten, woe s Christus nitt ufgehept unnd sich verglichett mitt dem nüwenn; ouch sovil es diennet unnd reichet zum gloubenn, liebe unnd gutten christenlichem läbenn. Soverr gloubennt wir's unnd hallttennt's für recht unnd gutt. QZ Bern*, p. 273

sacrificial system found in the Old Testament had been abrogated, agreement on the relationship of the testaments remained completely elusive.

Reading between the lines of Hotz's reply one can easily see that an overall clarity to the matter is strikingly absent. What or who, for instance, would serve as the final arbiter in expressing precisely what things had or had not been abolished by Jesus or what directly pertained to things such as faith and love? This was agreement in mere word alone and not in any substantive way, for as Yoder has perceptively stated, 'the promised agreement on the first point was easily achieved, so long as the question was put abstractly.'<sup>72</sup> The testamental orientation and theological bias of each party would eventually become manifest as the radicals and preachers battled over issues such as baptism, the ban, and the nature of the church.

### **Differing Hermeneutical Suppositions**

While there is no doubt that the differing biblical orientations of the two opposing camps at Bern played a prominent role at these Bernese debates, yet another problem further negated any attempts at theological accord between the two. Even if the entire corpus of canonical Scripture had been understood and applied from an equally authoritative perspective there still remained a need to interpret the passages contained therein. This reality was in no way lost on Bullinger who offered to Berchtold Haller advice on how to properly establish rules of interpretation when debating with the radicals at Zofingen in 1532.

Early on in his dealings with the Anabaptists Bullinger had initially followed his predecessors' actions in chastising the radicals for their appeal to 'the spirit' and reluctance to allow themselves (and their teachings) to be tested by Scripture.<sup>73</sup> In *Von dem*

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<sup>72</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 108.

<sup>73</sup> In his famous *Elenchus* Zwingli argued early on that that Anabaptists denied Scripture through their vague and abstruse appeal to 'the spirit.' Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, p. 126.

*Unverschampten Fräfel* Bullinger, likewise, pitted the Scriptures against the Anabaptist ‘spirit’ which he recognized to be false and further argued that once confronted with truth the Anabaptists would always ‘cry out’ that it was ‘the spirit’ which taught them.<sup>74</sup> In what would soon prove to be a statement of great irony for the Swiss Reformer, Bullinger proceeded to reason that the Anabaptists’ appeal to ‘the spirit’ allowed the group to erroneously conclude that they were ‘neyther subiecte, ne bound to the litterall sense, or letter (of Scripture).’<sup>75</sup> However, by 1532 a discernable shift in Bullinger’s focus of attack on the radicals had clearly taken place.<sup>76</sup> Following his personal interaction with the Anabaptists via the Pfistermeyer *Gespräch* and at *Der Berner Synodus von 1532*, Bullinger grew to realize that it was now what he saw as their overly simplistic reading and application of the sacred Scriptures via the letter of the Word that had to be refuted.<sup>77</sup>

Once the equally authoritative nature of both testaments of Scripture was established as a debating parameter, Bullinger proceeded to encourage Haller to offer an additional hermeneutical premise when convening for debate at Zofingen; ‘Scripture shall not be interpreted according to the judgment and spirit of men, but by and through itself, also with the rule of faith and love.’<sup>78</sup> Setting aside for a moment the latter appeal to an interpretation via ‘faith and love’, which will be addressed shortly, Bullinger made certain that the Bernese

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<sup>74</sup> Through the fictitious dialogue between Jehoiada and Simon, Bullinger even went so far as to claim that the Anabaptist spirit, which he posited to be derived directly from the devil, went against the true ‘spirit’ that was conveyed through the sacred Scriptures. Heinrich Bullinger, *Von dem Unverschampten Fräfel, ergerlichem verwyrrren unnd unwarhafftem leeren der selbgesandten Widertöuffern* (Zürich, 1531), trans. by John Veron, *Early English Books Online*, eebo.chadwyck.com, image 25 and 32-33.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, See image 33.

<sup>76</sup> Bullinger’s shift in thought may simply be attributed to the fact the he inadvertently imputed to the Swiss Brethren the doctrinal views of other fringe radicals; for as CJ Dyck has stated, there were diverse understandings of the Bible among the various forms of Anabaptists during the period. Dyck, ‘Hermeneutics and Discipleship’, p. 32. More likely, however, is that Bullinger had merely become more acquainted with the Swiss radicals’ views on interpretation and, in turn, more thoroughly prepared to defeat them.

<sup>77</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 209.

<sup>78</sup> *Die gschriftt aber soll nitt vssgleit werden nach menschen gu(o)tduncken vnd geist, sonder mitt vnd durch sich selbs, ouch mitt der regel dess glaubens vnd der lieb.* Bullinger, ‘How to Deal with Anabaptists’, p. 88-89.

preachers recognized that one of the greatest interpretive tools of Scripture was the Bible itself.<sup>79</sup> It was critical to recognize, as Bullinger would later reason, ‘that whatever is affirmed in Scripture is also clarified and expozited by Scripture.’<sup>80</sup>

This tact was certainly taken to heart, for as a part of the opening statements regarding the rules for debate at Zofingen in 1532, the Bernese council declared, ‘therefore, both parties earnestly urge that the issues be discussed with proper chaste words the events as they gradually occurred; and what is not included in the true holy Scripture should not be pursued unless one Scripture is explained and made clear with another Scripture.’<sup>81</sup> Such an interpretive tool was not only an acceptable practice for most of the Reformers during the period, but it was also quite useful in their ongoing attacks on the validity of the Roman church. However, as several historians have properly noted, this rule was highly limiting as it was also accompanied by a flawed assumption that the clear and unambiguous passages of Scripture were uniformly recognized by all parties outside of medieval Catholicism.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Rule of Faith and Love**

Still, Bullinger understood full well that simply affirming the entire corpus of Scripture as a part of the interpretive process was not the sole requirement for constructing a proper biblical hermeneutic. The preacher, he maintained, was also entrusted with the important task of allowing the totality of Scripture to be read through the principle which Christ outlined as the summary of all His teachings. Here, Bullinger was careful to cast his views on the authority of both testaments of Scripture alongside his appeal to what he

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<sup>79</sup> Gerber, ‘Berne Täuferium und Berner Synodus’, pp. 183-184.

<sup>80</sup> *Quod iste in scripturis fultus ex scripturis erutus et prolatus est.* Fast, ‘How to Deal with Anabaptists’, p. 90-91. Bullinger also maintained that when the Anabaptists made an argumentative appeal to a text of Scripture that ‘they should be no less obliged to prove the sense and seek confirmation in other Scriptures.’

<sup>81</sup> *Darob haltind und beid parthyen in ernst vermanind, das man mit fugen, züchtigen worten die sachen, so sich ye für und für zutragent, handle, und usserhalb, und was in heiliger wearer göttlicher gschrift nit gegründet, nit yngfurt, dann alleinn gschrift mit gschrift erlütert; und erklart warden.* *QZ Zofingen*, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> Bullinger, ‘How to Deal with Anabaptists’, p. 150

recognized as the ‘rule of faith and love.’<sup>83</sup> Now the rule of faith and love certainly was not a hermeneutical innovation of Bullinger’s. Although in no way developed to the significant measure as in his successor’s thought, Zwingli had sought out ‘love’ (*charitas*) as a guiding principle in his early debates with Conrad Grebel and the Swiss radicals in Zürich. In a letter to Franz Lambert reporting on his discussions over baptism with the future Anabaptists Zwingli stressed that ‘we (he and the radicals) mutually obligated ourselves most conscientiously to discuss everything according to the norm of love.’<sup>84</sup>

Such a declaration, as Yoder has properly adduced, simply meant only that the Swiss radicals ‘were to remain quiet, even though they had been not persuaded in the discussions.’<sup>85</sup> Three years later Zwingli further refined his understanding of the concept of love (*charitas*) in his polemical anti-Anabaptist treatise *Elenchus*. As a part of arguing for infant baptism despite it not being expressly commanded or used by the apostles, Zwingli stressed,

For example, at Zürich it was permitted by the goodness of God to abolish all externals without compromising public peace. Since this was done legally it is not lawful to do away with all at Winterthur and Stein if only love as a judge permits it right. At Jerusalem things strangled and blood were interdicted because of the weak. Now at Bern and Basel certain things which are not most wicked can be borne to a certain extent if love warns that it is right; impious things, such as the mass, idols, false doctrine, are not to be suffered.<sup>86</sup>

*Charitas*, according to this example, required that careful circumspect actions always be taken in any matters that might facilitate civil or religious strife and unrest. Actions, therefore, were to be mostly contextually driven and with the larger overarching hope of promoting unity.

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<sup>83</sup> Each time Bullinger made mention to Haller of the Bible’s role in interpreting Scripture he specifically mentioned this in tandem with the rule of faith and love. *Ibid.*, p.88-91.

<sup>84</sup> *Anxie obtestabamur nos mutuo, ut omnia iuxta charitatis normam ageremus. Z VIII* (Leipzig, 1914), p. 269. For English translation see ‘Zwingli to Lambert and other Brethren in Strasbourg’, in Leland Harder. *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents* (Scottsdale, 1985), p. 304.

<sup>85</sup> Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 177.

<sup>86</sup> Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, p. 142.

As with much of his thought, Zwingli's usage of love as a guiding principle bore a striking resemblance to Erasmus' and most likely was, in part, derived directly from the Dutch humanist's thoughts relating to Christian unity. As Hilmar Pabel has recently shown, Erasmus was quite inclined to promote peace within the Christian church community, even going so far as to directly link the survival of the church with its ability to maintain and promote peace within its body.<sup>87</sup> Because the church was essentially a 'community of love' certain sacrifices had to be offered in order to maintain peace, according to Erasmus. Love in such a context, especially as it related to fellow members of the community, meant a greater concern for elevating places of agreement and minimizing those places of disagreement.

Such a view even extended to the schism that had developed between Protestants and Catholics. Here, Erasmus urged that 'concessions' be made on both sides since, as Pabel has conveyed regarding Erasmus, 'ecclesiastical concord ranks above all other virtues, and any vice is more tolerable than that of discord in the church.'<sup>88</sup> Quite obviously, Erasmus' appeal to peace as a stabilizing force during the tumultuous affairs of the Reformation was a principle that Zwingli took to heart and, albeit in a modified form, became, as demonstrated in Chapter One, part of the Bernese authorities program for dealing with strife in the region.

Interestingly enough, the norm of love as a critical part of the Swiss Reformers' theological formulae against the Anabaptists can also be gleaned from Balthasar Hubmaier's personal recantation in early January 1526. While the Reformed leaders' precise statements regarding the measure of love as an interpretive norm do not remain extant here, Hubmaier conveyed their sentiments on the issue during his renunciation of certain radical beliefs.

Speaking with the issue of infant baptism as the contextual backdrop, Hubmaier declared, 'In addition I have been shown by Master Leo, Dr. Bastian and Myconius how love is to be the

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<sup>87</sup> Hilmar M. Pabel, 'The Peaceful People of Christ', in *Erasmus' Vision of the Church* (Kirksville, 1995), p. 58.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83-85.

judge and referee in all Scriptures. This went to my heart. So I have meditated much about love, and have at last been moved to abandon my conviction that one should not baptize children, and [to conclude] that in rebaptizing I have been in error.’<sup>89</sup> Despite the fact that love served as an interpretive tool for the earlier Swiss Reformers in and around Zürich its presence was much more muted and less strictly defined. In the end love for Zwingli meant compromise for the sake of unity.

Notwithstanding Zwingli’s usage of the rule, once Bullinger and the other Swiss Reformers came to grips with precisely how important the issue of hermeneutics was to the Swiss church’s debate with the Anabaptist radicals, the rule of faith and love took on a much more central and dominant role; ultimately for Haller and the Bernese church it became an indispensable part of their rhetorical program against the wayward Anabaptists in Bernese lands.<sup>90</sup> Beginning with the successful conversion of the Anabaptist leader, Hans Pfistermeyer, at a *Gespräch* in 1531 the prominence of this rule began to become evident. At the outset of the dialogue the Bernese preachers, following Pfistermeyer’s clarification regarding the teachings of Jesus, challenged the Anabaptist leader by asking, ‘However is not the sum of Christ’s teachings and a true Christian penitent life in these two points, namely faith and love?’<sup>91</sup> Following Pfistermeyer’s acknowledgement of the aforementioned point the preachers further clarified, ‘So you also believe that faith and love are a guiding principle regarding the entire sanctified Christian life; and all that are true, godly, and Christian must

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<sup>89</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, ‘Recantation’, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, 1989), 151-152.

<sup>90</sup> Though possibly overstating its importance and from entirely too narrow a perspective, Williams has argued that the 1532 Zofingen debate was ‘the most significant of the Anabaptist disputations in Switzerland, since it clarified the Reformed principle of love as a concern for the unity and peace of Christian society and as a major exegetical standard.’ Williams, p. 594.

<sup>91</sup> *Stat aber nit die sum der leer Christi unnd ein recht christenlich bußfertig leben in disen zweyen stucken, namlich glauben und liebe?* *QZ Pfistermeyer*, p. 6.

continue according to this rule.’<sup>92</sup> In the end, Pfistermeyer was overcome on all points and verbally recognized that the rule of faith and love was the proper means of determining when ‘compromise’ was the preferred action.<sup>93</sup>

As briefly alluded to earlier, the appearance of the rule of faith and love at the Zofingen *Gespräch* was clearly the result of Bullinger’s direct influence on Haller.<sup>94</sup> The extent to which this hermeneutical supposition was embraced by the Bernese Reformer and transmitted to the Bernese Council may first be discerned by looking at the minutes of the 1532 *Gespräch*. Here, the dominant position of the rule of faith and love was quite clear, for it served as the first article on the docket for discussion at Zofingen. As the magistrates would carefully convey, before moving forward to engage the divisive topics relating to things such as baptism, the Supper, and the ban, it was important to first establish that the ‘Love of God and neighbor is a judge of each quarrel in this disputation.’<sup>95</sup> This rule was so foundational to the established Bernese position that the Bern Council declared at the outset of the debate that ‘The goal of this disputation is faith and love.’<sup>96</sup> The magistrates proceeded to reason, ‘So, however, in this act a true goal or purpose (is) established; that we both sides, where we do not agree on the Word or must meet together, then (shall we) take each other’s hands and be content.’<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *So gloubstu ouch, das gloub und liebe ein richtschnur sygind eines gantzen gottsaligen christenlichen lebens, und alles, das by diser regel beston mag, das sye recht, gottlich und christenlich.* Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>93</sup> While Pfistermeyer certainly recanted his Anabaptist position, Yoder has provided some useful argumentation theorizing that he was by no means a typical Anabaptist of the Swiss Brethren tradition and, in fact, may be categorized more as a Pietist than anything else. Yoder, *ABRS*, p. 99-100.

<sup>94</sup> Haller was simply following the prescribed means for debate given to him by Bullinger, which included an appeal to the rule. Bullinger, ‘How to Deal with Anabaptists’, p.88-91.

<sup>95</sup> *Gottes und des nechsten liebe ist ein obman alles gspanns in disem gesprach.* *QZ Zofingen*, p. 69.

<sup>96</sup> *Zil diß gesprachs ist gloub und liebe.* Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>97</sup> *Damit aber in diser handlung ein eigentlichs zil oder zwack gesteckt, deß wir beyder sydt, wo wir in den worten nit übereinkommen oder einannern betratten mochtend, den an d’hand zu nemmen, und uns deß vernugen.* Ibid. This goal was established on the basis of texts from Matthew 22:37-40 and through Paul’s admonition to Timothy in II Timothy 1:13.

Through each of the aforementioned references the Bern Council used the Swiss German term *'liebe'* to convey their notion of love and used the term synonymously with Zwingli's earlier usage of love via the Latin designation *'charitas.'* Citing Jesus' summation of the Law when confronted by the Pharisees to offer His view on the greatest of the commandments, alongside Paul's instruction to Timothy, love was expressly elevated by the council as a normative standard relating to issues of civil and theological division. Through their inclusion and explanation of love at the outset of the debate it was quite clear that the civil authorities eschewed concern for reaching an accord on every theological point explored during the debate. Rather, their agenda was to diffuse an otherwise contentious situation by encouraging the debating parties to move forward in unity according to Christian love when a theological impasse became manifest. However, the Bernese magistrates' notion of being 'content' in such matters, practically speaking, ultimately meant a sacrifice of theological conviction on the altar of societal unity.<sup>98</sup>

The Anabaptists were not so credulous as to embrace the magistrates understanding of love, but were instead quick to vocalize their differing perception of the ideal according to other passages of Holy Scripture. In an effort to not only show that the Old Testament portion of Scripture was not entirely abrogated, as frequently charged, and with an eye to the practical teachings of Jesus, they retorted as follows:

We also give witness that these words hang on the law and prophets. However, they do not cover everything, namely the foundation, order, and origin of a Christian life. Such things we desire to openly explain: how the one follows after the other and bears witness to it. Especially to explain and speak about love as John has shown in his Epistle and in the Gospel of John Chapter 14: The love of God is when one holds His commands just as Christ Himself remained in the love and held the commandments of God His heavenly Father. Therefore, we desire ourselves to act accordingly; and we know that if we do then we are on the true path.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Notwithstanding the religious situation in Bern, which certainly had its own set of problems, it must be remembered that the civil and social context facing the Bernese Magistrates in the mid-1530s was tenuous and best. For specifics regarding the unrest faced by Bern refer back to Chapter One.

<sup>99</sup> *Wir gebend ouch zügnuß, das gsatz unnd propheten in disen worten hange. Aber es ist nit alles darinn begriffen, als namlich der grund, ordnung und anfang eins christenlichen labens. Solichs begaren wir ze offnen,*

Love according to the Anabaptists at Zofingen was not associated with surrendering one's theological convictions for the sake of societal unity, but was rooted in an obedient life to the commandments contained in God's Word. The practical reality of this as it related to the radicals' interpretation of Scripture from a strictly literal perspective will be explored shortly. But what must be stated at this point is that the Swiss Anabaptist at the 1532 debate repeatedly argued that they were not 'speaking against the true love', but that such love must be understood in terms of 'obeying God's commandments' (*halting der botten gottes*), rather than the promotion of any sort of temporal civil peace.<sup>100</sup>

In the end the divergent understandings and practical consequences of the standard of love for the preachers and Anabaptists at Zofingen dramatically shaped each of their hermeneutics. The issue of the Christian ban certainly served as a dramatic illustration to this point. While the differing views on the ban will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four, a brief word is in order regarding precisely how these incompatible views of love, and the hermeneutical assumptions that accompanied them, contributed to the ever growing ecclesiological divide between the groups.

In what may best be described as a consecration versus restoration model of the ban, the very definition of love for the preachers and the Swiss radicals directly facilitated each group's understanding of the purposes behind church discipline and, in turn, its very application. Again, driven by the notion that love was directly linked with obedience, the Anabaptists viewed the ban as a means of policing the pure and holy church community.

Looking at Jesus' institution of discipline in Matthew 18, the radicals argued for a strict

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*wie eins dem andern nachvolge und zügnuß gabe, ouch besonder die liebe zu underscheiden und vonn der liebe ze sagen, die Johannes in sinen episteln und im evangelio Johannis 14 anzücht: Das sye die liebe gottes, das man syne gebott hallte, wie Christus selbs in der liebe beliben, unnd gott sins hymlichen vatters gepott gehalten. Darnaach begarent wir uns ouch ze richten. Und [wir] wüssend, wenn wir's thund, das wir recht farend. QZ Zofingen, p. 74.*

<sup>100</sup> This was an argument that the Anabaptists repeatedly used during the first article at Zofingen. *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 74-77.

application of the ban for anyone within the confines of the assembled church community who were found with unrepentant sin. The Christian ban, as will later be shown, was even deemed an act of love by the Anabaptists and was applied in the hope of procuring repentance in the wayward sinner.<sup>101</sup>

Unwilling to promote what they theorized would facilitate too great an upheaval in the community, both ecclesiastical and societal, the preachers at Bern sought, instead, to sparingly use the ban as a means for addressing only those offenses which were of the most egregious variety. Outside of those few isolated instances the literal words of Jesus in Matthew 18 did not apply or at best were to be understood much more loosely according to the rule of faith and love. Sin in the church was a practical reality of living in a fallen world prior to the return of Christ.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, love demanded that the church temper judgment regarding manifest sin with an eye to building up the church body.<sup>103</sup> Sin must be ‘tolerated’ (*dulden*) since the possibility of repentance remained an option.<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, loving outreach to such an individual was considered the most effective way of orienting the sinner’s affections towards Christ and not the prescribed exclusion and castigation offered by the Anabaptist. Ultimately, the very same text of Scripture from Matthew’s Gospel meant two entirely different things for the debating groups at Zofingen.

Following the Zofingen debate the rule of faith and love continued to be a pressing concern in the Swiss preachers’ hermeneutical construct. It may likely be understood as being retained as a part of Bullinger’s hermeneutic, as demonstrated by the second article of

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<sup>101</sup> The radicals’ understanding of the ‘love’ element behind the ban was cloaked largely in terms of discipline. They even provided an illustration of a father chastising his child to prove that discipline was done out of love for the good of the rebellious one. *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 117 and 129.

<sup>102</sup> Again, this is a principle first found in Erasmus’ thought and then passed down to the Bernese through the Zürich Reformers. Pabel, pp. 91-93.

<sup>103</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 116 and 124.

<sup>104</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 129.

his First Helvetic Confession of 1536.<sup>105</sup> Here, the summary statement on interpretation declared, ‘The interpretation of this [holy Scripture] ought to be sought out of itself, so that it is to be its own interpreter, guided by the rule of love and faith, (John 5; Rom. 12; I Cor. 13).’<sup>106</sup> Bullinger, along with the other collaborators at Basel, argued for the need to allow Scripture to be its own interpreter and for the rule of faith and love to serve as the final arbiter.<sup>107</sup>

Predictably, the rule also made a return appearance at the 1538 Bern debate. Although it did not serve as an overarching talking point at the opening of the *Gespräch*, as it had at Zofingen, its place in the debate remained a point of division between the two camps. In his opening explanation relating to the oft discussed issue of testamental priority, Erasmus Ritter stated, ‘as long as it establishes faith, love, and a rightly constituted Christian life it (the Old Testament) remains valid.’<sup>108</sup> Following the lead of Bullinger and those at the Zofingen *Gespräch* six years earlier the preachers at the 1538 debate employed the rule of faith and love as a means for validating their elevated understanding of the Old Testament.

In many ways one of the primary functions of this rule for the Swiss preachers was to provide a means for understanding and interpreting the Old Testament portion of Scripture. Over time, as Zwingli carefully constructed a parallel between the Jewish rite of circumcision and Christian baptism as proof that paedobaptism was permissible, he set in motion a consequential need to both elevate the Old Testament portion of the Bible and to simultaneously read it from a perspective conducive with his theological convictions. Into

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<sup>105</sup> ‘Confessio Helvetica prior (sive Basileensis posterior)’, in *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. III, ed. by Philip Schaff (New York, 1877), p. 211-212

<sup>106</sup> Dennison, Jr., p. 343.

<sup>107</sup> While those individuals principally given the task of penning the confession included Bullinger, Caspar Megander, Leo Jud, Oswald Myconius, and Samuel Gyrnaeus, others, most notably Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, also influenced the content of the document. Arthur C. Cochrane and Jack Rogers, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville, 2003), pp. 97-99.

<sup>108</sup> *Soverr es gloubenn, liebe unnd ein rechtgeschaffenn christenlich läbenn anrichte, das es also belybenn sye. QZ Bern*, p. 273.

such a context the rule of faith and love was cleverly developed and inserted. Obviously the preachers at the 1538 debate knew of the rule's role in this regard. That is precisely why Ritter, as seen above, drew a correlation between the validity of the Old Testament and the rule of faith and love. Therefore, an appeal to this rule, as seen both here and with Bullinger's 1532 letter to Haller, was strategically placed after and alongside the validation of the Old Testament because it was a commentary on the issues of testamental priority and biblical interpretation.

Alongside the motivation to recognize the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures for New Testament believers, the rule of faith and love also served as a means of both promoting and protecting the societal order of the *corpus Christianum*. This was especially true with regards to the preachers' stance on positions such as the ban and oath taking. The issue of the ban, as we have already seen was a divisive topic to be sure. However, looking at the preachers' position at the 1538 debate one can see that it was not simply that the group did not want to hold to the high standard of discipline that the radicals desired; more so, it was that their firm commitment to the *corpus Christianum* disallowed such a possibility. In a sixteenth century culture in which the church and political authorities were so dramatically intertwined the practical limitations, not to mention the potentially devastating consequences to the societal disorder, were simply too much to allow for the Anabaptists' strict views on discipline.

The Bernese preachers knew this and so their understanding of the ban was driven by hermeneutical suppositions (including the rule of faith and love) that lent themselves to such a view. In this instance, the Anabaptists' understanding of the ban was compared with the Jews who had 'abused' (*misßbrucht*) discipline in a like manner, while the preachers argued vehemently that the ban must be employed with the building up of the church body in

mind.<sup>109</sup> Time and again the Bernese preachers, Ritter in particular, stressed that the ban was correctly applied only when it promoted the edification of the church and not the breaking down of its body. Bifurcating the consequential outcomes of both usages of love via the contravening German terms for ‘building up’ (*buw*) and ‘breaking down’ (*brechung*), Ritter has followed the preachers’ model at Zofingen in conveying the dramatic difference between the two regarding biblical interpretation.<sup>110</sup> Relying heavily upon II Corinthians 10:8 and 13:10 Ritter repeatedly argued that the strict discipline implemented by the radicals was entirely flawed, for it was erroneously driven by punitive goals instead of being guided by love and with a redemptive focus.<sup>111</sup>

While the rule of faith and love served the Swiss preachers in the aforementioned capacity, there was one final reason for its implementation which remains arguably its most substantial and lasting contribution. As an interpretive norm this rule impugned the notion that a more strict and legalistic interpretation of the Scriptures was the preferred means for sound exegesis. Contradicting the Anabaptists’ accusation that they had carelessly embraced a ‘fleshly form of love’ (*fleischlichen liebe*), the preachers at Zofingen chided the radicals by stating, ‘it is not proper, however, to describe love from the letter (of Scripture), because love ought to rule over the letter.’<sup>112</sup> After extolling the virtue of love according to Paul in I

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<sup>109</sup> Erasmus Ritter, in exploring the origins of the Christian ban, argued that although the ecclesiastic discipline had been first used by the Jews in the book of Acts it had also been abused by them as well. Ritter continued to reason that while Jesus did not usher in the use of the ban He did provide a shift in its purpose and application by stressing the importance of love as a motivating factor for its usage. Through such an historic view of the ban Ritter cleverly placed the Anabaptists alongside what they saw as the abusive Jewish church of the first century while casting the Swiss church as a friendlier more Christ-like church. *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that while these terms (and the concepts they represented) were used at both Zofingen and the 1538 debate, they were used from different contexts; under the opening discussions relating to ‘*glaube und liebe*’ at Zofingen and predominately as a part of the later discussions relating to the ban at the 1538 *gespräch*. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 76 and *QZ Bern*, p. 443.

<sup>111</sup> *QZ Bern*, pp. 441-445, 447-451, 454.

<sup>112</sup> The radicals had previously juxtaposed two forms of love, a ‘fleshly’ (*fleischlich*) and a ‘spiritual’ (*geistlich*), and argued that only the latter was properly in accordance with the idea of obedience. *Understond aber, die liebe uß dem buchstaben zu beschryben, das aber nit sin: sunder die liebe den buchstaben regieren soll.* *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Corinthians 13, the preachers at the 1532 session referenced the adulterous acts of David and Abraham to reason that ‘in all things one ought to act according to love’ and not blindly follow the letter of the law.<sup>113</sup>

The Swiss preachers at the *Gespräch* six years later, likewise, enacted the rule of faith and love as a hermeneutical tool to combat the Anabaptists whom they believed had overstepped into too legalistic a view of Scripture. As a part of the discussion on the ban, and following his declaration that ‘we must hold all Scripture and all understandings of the Scripture to the guiding principle of faith and love’, Erasmus Ritter carefully compared the Swiss radicals’ position on the Scriptures with that of the despised Catholic church.<sup>114</sup> Both Rome and the Anabaptists’ willingness to remain stuck on what Ritter deemed the ‘dead letter of the Word’ (*totten buchstabenn*) meant not only that the rule of faith and love had been neglected, but also that ‘violence’ (*gwaldt*) had been done to the sacred Scriptures.<sup>115</sup> Next, using examples previously employed at Zofingen, Ritter argued that the biblical examples of Jesus’ treatment of divorce among the Jews and David’s law-breaking act of eating the priests’ showbread sufficiently demonstrated that Christ Himself was not always stuck on the letter of the Word when dealing with Scripture.<sup>116</sup> Using these examples as a springboard, Ritter then astutely employed a rhetorical comparison between what he deemed the ‘dead letter’ (*tot buchstab*), again related to a strict hermeneutical literalism, and the ‘living word of God’ (*lebenndig wortt gottes*) made so by and through faith and love.<sup>117</sup> This

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>114</sup> This was accomplished by referencing the Roman church’s strict literal understanding of Matthew 16:18 for their ideas of the Papacy’s legitimate succession. *Allso müsent wir alle gschrift unnd allen verstand der gschrift zu dem richtschitt des gloubenns unnd der liebe heben.* Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 446. In what is most likely a deliberate reciprocal charge of defamation, Erasmus Ritter, arguably the staunchest of the Zwinglians remaining in Bern in 1538, has here cleverly returned these same accusations to the radicals that the early Swiss Brethren had previously assigned to Zwingli himself. Clasen, p. 79.

<sup>116</sup> *QZ Bern*, pp. 158 and 446-448.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 449.

juxtaposition then allowed the Swiss preacher to stress precisely how important proper interpretation was for the Christian; that which is proper leading to life and those carelessly handling the Word, as the Anabaptists had, ultimately leading to eternal death.<sup>118</sup>

### **Biblicism of the Anabaptists**

The preachers' usage of the rule of faith and love as a tool against what they deemed the narrow-mindedness of the radicals brings us to our final point of discussion in the hermeneutical divide between the debating participants at the 1532 and 1538 sessions; the Anabaptists strict form of biblicism. For centuries now the Anabaptists have been described as biblicists and yet, as many historians have aptly recognized, such a designation is problematically laden in its particular usage.<sup>119</sup> This is mostly due to the fact that the label 'biblicist' remains pregnant with a plurality of meanings, largely derived from whether it is used as a pejorative designation, a simple description, or as an extolling virtue.<sup>120</sup> While an in-depth analysis of the various usages of this term during the period remains outside the scope of this study, the concluding portion of this chapter will focus on the antithesis of the preachers' faith and love principle; that the Anabaptists' biblicism was embodied in a strict literal interpretive hermeneutic.

The debasing charge of biblical literalism manifest through the preachers' usage of the faith and love principle at Bern was by no means unfamiliar to the radicals; rather, it was one that the Swiss Anabaptists had first endured during the group's emergence in the mid-1520s. As the Swiss Brethren formulated and articulated their understandings of such things

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>119</sup> The problem in the terms usage and its various historical definitions have been explored in the following studies. William Klassen, 'Anabaptist Hermeneutics: The Letter and the Spirit', *MQR* 40, 1966, pp. 86ff, Dyke, p. 35ff, Wenger, 'The Biblicism of the Anabaptists', pp. 167ff, and Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Studies in the Believers Church Tradition; Kitchener, 2000), pp. 17ff.

<sup>120</sup> These meanings of biblicism include at a minimum speaking merely to an extensive use of and reliance on Scripture, the reluctance to form and subscribe to confessions or systematic theological constructs, or the oversimplification of the Bible and a stress on the simplistic 'letter' of Scripture.

as infant baptism, the oath, and sword bearing they were continually berated by the Swiss Reformers, including both Zwingli and Bullinger, for an overly literalistic hermeneutic.<sup>121</sup> This frequently came in the form of charges that the Swiss radicals held erroneous convictions regarding their understanding of the ‘plain sense of Scripture’, the principle of *scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, and in their willingness to allow ordinary uneducated believers to openly interpret the Bible. And while such a charge clearly did not recognize the multitude of ways in which the Anabaptists permitted ‘the character of Scripture’ to have be expressed through the text in a general way and with careful attention given to specific biblical contexts, a much more simplistic and straightforward approach to reading and interpreting the Bible characterized the radicals’ hermeneutical methodology.<sup>122</sup> The Swiss Anabaptists’ stance on interpretation certainly did not follow the carefully crafted hermeneutical apparatus implemented by the Magisterial Reformers via the multiple sense method of interpretation and such a distinction will clearly be manifest later in this study as issues such as the ban are examined in detail.

Before delving into precisely how such a differentiation in Scriptural interpretation continued to exacerbate the growing divide between the Anabaptists and Swiss church, one must first address a larger more over-arching question that directly impacted each of the aforementioned hermeneutical positions. Namely, who precisely was granted the privilege of interpreting Scripture? Considering this question will clearly orient us towards addressing a more pertinent matter that directly contributed to the growing divide between the Anabaptist radicals and the Bern church. Indeed, the persistent attacks on the Anabaptists’ for their biblicism really goes much deeper than the various means of interpreting a particular passage of Scripture. As demonstrated earlier, the Reformed churches in the Swiss Confederation

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<sup>121</sup> John H. Yoder, ‘The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists’, *MQR* 41, 1967, pp. 296ff.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

certainly embraced a literalistic interpretation of Scripture, for it was foundational to properly understanding the various other senses they believed were preserved in the biblical text. Yet, what the biblicism of the Anabaptists really demonstrates is that certain ecclesiological suppositions had already directly led to two differing hermeneutical communities.

Recognizing just how the Anabaptists arrived as such a position on Scripture will actually help to demonstrate just how severe these differences actually were at the time and how irreconcilable they were going to make the relationship moving forward.

To better understand how the Swiss Brethren arrived at their position relating to Scriptural interpretation one must look to several contextual factors that worked in tandem, ultimately resulting in the simplistic and straightforward hermeneutical approach retained by the Anabaptists in the debates at Bern. First, it must be remembered that the Swiss Brethren were caught up in the wave of initial reform facilitated by Zwingli in the early 1520s, which included both a renewed emphasis on the Bible itself (especially the New Testament) and a greater access to the Scriptures by the laity.<sup>123</sup> This may especially be seen, as noted earlier, through the lay group Bible studies that flourished in and around Zürich during the gestational period of the Swiss Brethren movement. Furthermore, while literacy rates precluded most in the sixteenth century world from reading the Bible themselves, translations of the Word in the vernacular opened the way for the non-clerics to be directly exposed to the biblical text.<sup>124</sup> So the Bible, as with most groups during the period, was quite important to the Swiss Anabaptists.

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<sup>123</sup> The elevated place of the Scriptures for the Swiss Anabaptists has been recognized for quite some time. While admittedly draped in the author's confession language, Bender's declaration in his biography of Conrad Grebel 'the Anabaptists were Biblicists and it was from the biblical fountains alone that they drank' certainly encapsulates the group's high esteem for the sacred Scriptures. Bender, *Conrad Grebel*, p. 214.

<sup>124</sup> The vernacular Bible, as Snyder has contended, was 'the undisputed textual focus' for such groups during this time of the Reformation. C. Arnold Snyder, 'Communication and the People: The Case of St. Gall', *MQR* 67, 1993, pp. 158-159. For insights regarding literacy rates during the Reformation, including the difficulty in their accurate assessment see James Patrick, *Renaissance and Reformation* (New York, 2007), pp. 1172ff and

Such was foundational to the groups' hermeneutical development, but later circumstances served to further the initiative towards a more basic literal approach to Scripture than the Swiss church. Most notably, Zwingli and the other Swiss Magisterial Reformers' growing reluctance by the mid-1520s to allow for the laity to interpret Scripture; opting, instead, as Snyder has clarified, for the Bible 'to be interpreted, and events controlled, by an alliance of the power elite with the preaching intelligentsia.'<sup>125</sup> The Swiss church's position, offered on the heels of the sizeable movement of anti-clericalism that still provided a residual influence during the time and had even served as an impetus for many of the early reform movements in and around Zürich, now looked hypocritical at best to the Swiss radicals.<sup>126</sup>

Additionally, practical limitations relating to the radical movement served to promote their simple approach to Scriptural interpretation. As the separatist bend of the Swiss radicals began to be deemed and punished as sedition by the religious and civil authorities in the Swiss Confederation many of the educated leaders of the Anabaptist community were lost early on.<sup>127</sup> The absence of leadership produced by these widespread executions, in many instances, left the further development of the radical movement in the hands of mostly

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Robert W. Scribner, *Religion and Culture in German (1400-1800)*, ed. by Lyndal Roper (The Netherlands, 2001), pp. 237ff.

<sup>125</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, 'Word and Power in Reformation Zurich', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 81, 1990, p. 283. Yoder, concurring with Snyder's assessment, lays much of this blame on Zwingli, for 'at the crucial point the Reformers abandoned their initial vision of the visible church, the hermeneutic community, and were obliged to shift the locus of infallibility to the inspired text and the technically qualified theological expert.' Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists', p. 308.

<sup>126</sup> The vitally important role of anti-clericalism to the founding of the Anabaptist movement has been preserved in Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (London, 1996), pp. 36-67, James M. Stayer, 'Reformation, Peasants, Anabaptists: Northeastern Swiss Anticlericalism,' in *Anti-clericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden, 1993), pp. 558 ff., Werner O. Packull, 'In Search of the "Common Man" in Early German Anabaptist Ideology,' *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, 1986, pp. 51-67.

<sup>127</sup> Conrad Grebel succumbed to the plague in the summer of 1526, Felix Manz was given his 'second baptism' in the Limmat River in January 1527, Michael Sattler was burned following horrific acts of torture in May 1527, Balthasar Hubmaier was executed in Vienna on 10 March 1528, and Georg Blaurock was burned at the stake on 6 September 1529. John Allen Moore, *Anabaptist Portraits* (Scottsdale, 1984), pp. 43, 65-66, 90-91, and 240.

uneducated lay individuals.<sup>128</sup> To expect anything more than a basic simplistic literal approach to Scriptural interpretation with a strong focus on obedience to the teachings of Christ from the New Testament may seem highly presumptive given the circumstances.<sup>129</sup>

For all the difficulties inherent in biblical interpretation the Swiss Anabaptists, early in their movement's establishment, recognized the sufficiency of the local church as the proper context for reading and understanding the Bible. And with this recognition the radicals distanced themselves even further from the Swiss church. Following what Yoder has recognized as 'the Rule of Paul', the local church community was, if nothing else, a hermeneutical body entrusted with the task of reading the Bible and collectively establishing its true meaning.<sup>130</sup> This meant that the text of Scripture was best understood and applied through the local church community. As Lydia Harder has clarified, this ultimately meant 'biblical authority functions best in particular hermeneutic communities that interpret the Bible to structure their own communal life and practice.'<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, not only was the local church community granted the authority to interpret Scripture, including those members devoid of learned education, but that same body of believers was understood to have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to rightly understand and apply the Word.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists', p. 297.

<sup>129</sup> The importance of simple obedience in the Anabaptist hermeneutic has been highlighted by Murray, p. 189, Walter Klaassen, 'Anabaptist Hermeneutics: Presuppositions, Principles, and Practice', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Willard M. Swartley (Elkhart, 1984), p. 6ff, A. J. Klassen, 'Discipleship in a Secular World', in *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology* (Fresno, 1970), pp. 108ff, and Fast, *Bullinger und die Täufer*, pp. 156ff.

<sup>130</sup> This rule, which commonly served as the foundation for many of the Reformation *Gespräche*, was based on I Corinthians 14:29 and provided an open forum for debate before a final decision was made by the assembled group. The Anabaptists took this rule, which the Reformers had used in the context of formal debates, and applied it to the local church setting. Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists', pp. 300ff.

<sup>131</sup> Lydia Neufeld Harder, *Obedience, Suspicion, and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority* (Waterloo, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> The important role pneumatology played in the hermeneutical construct of the Anabaptists may be found in W. David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality* (Downers Grove, 2006), pp. 73-74 and Klaassen, 'Anabaptist Hermeneutics', p. 5.

The varying positions relating to Scriptural interpretation outlined above clearly demonstrate that sometime shortly after the Anabaptists' definitive break with Zwingli and the mainline reform efforts in the Swiss Confederation two independent hermeneutical communities were established.<sup>133</sup> The divergent hermeneutical suppositions that were retained as a part of each of these two groups' development not only meant that two irreconcilable paths of conviction were being set out independent of the other, but also that more substantive theological points of departure were undoubtedly inevitable. There was simply no possible way that the Swiss Reformers and their radical Anabaptist counterparts were going to embrace, read, and understand the Scriptures in such vastly different ways and not come to differing conclusions and convictions. The spectacles of interpretation each used to open the Word simply would not allow it. The consequence of such a reality meant substantive differences relating to issues such as baptism, the ban, civil participation, and even the very constitution of the Christian church. Thus, as Yoder has succinctly written, 'the most extensive documentation of this clash of hermeneutical assumptions is to be found in the recorded disputations of the 1530s.'<sup>134</sup> Having established the stark and ominous reality inherent in these two hermeneutical views attention will now be diverted to showing just how these basic interpretive suppositions left the debating participants at Bern in what was really a hopeless struggle to find uniformity of thought on ecclesiological issues.

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<sup>133</sup> Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, p. 16.

<sup>134</sup> Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists', p. 297.

## CHAPTER 3 - Die Rechte Kirche

### Introduction

The importance of ecclesiology to Swiss Anabaptism has been well documented by church historians for over a half century. During this time Fritz Heyer has broadly stated that ‘The core of the Schwärmertum of the sixteenth century is found in the view of the church’, while Eddie Mabry has correctly recognized that ‘the Anabaptist’s understanding of the church stood behind all of their beliefs and practices.’<sup>1</sup> From the genesis of the Swiss Anabaptist movement in the early 1520s through the meeting at Schleithem in 1527 the doctrine of the church remained both a primary concern for the radicals and a contentious talking point between the group and their Reformed counterparts. Consequently, the inclusion of individual articles at both the 1532 and 1538 Bernese debates to address the question of ‘the true church’ (*die rechte Kirche*) should contextually be viewed as a continuation of that dialogue opened a decade earlier with the inception of the Swiss Anabaptist movement within the cradle of Zwingli’s reform in Zürich.<sup>2</sup>

Although the doctrine of the church remained at the heart of the discussions between the radicals and the Swiss Reformers throughout the early sixteenth century, what remains uncertain is the extent to which this ongoing ecclesiological conversation had progressed, if any, when the two sides convened for the Bernese debates during the 1530s. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter will be twofold. First, it will be useful to consider whether the ecclesiological convictions present at the 1532 debate in Zofingen were passed down and retained verbatim by those groups participating at the subsequent session six years later or if they had been amended and/or further developed in any way over the course of time? When posed to both of the participating sides at the 1532 and 1538 debates this question should not

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz Heyer, *Der Kirchenbegriff der Schwärmer* (Leipzig, 1939), p. 166 and Eddie Mabry, *Balthasar Hubmaier’s Doctrine of the Church* (Lanham, 1994), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Spitz, p. 169.

only provide a window of insight into the development of the Anabaptists' ecclesiology, but simultaneously reveal if the Swiss Reformed position against the budding radical movement was modified in any way during the 1530s. This should help to answer our overarching question centering on how these two debates related to each other and whether the second was merely a continuation of the first or if they should be viewed as independent events. Secondly, by examining in detail the ecclesiological arguments preserved in the disputation protocols from Bern a better understanding of the specific streams of influence upon the two sides should begin to surface. The two factions at Bern were not debating within a theological vacuum; consequently, identifying and understanding which external voices helped to shape and direct the ecclesiologies found in these debates should help provide a historical frame of reference from which to more accurately place the Bern disputations contextually among the other Anabaptist/Reformed dialogues of the period.

As will be shown through the course of this chapter, the disputation protocols from Bern reveal that while the major suppositions and essential components relating to the doctrine of the church at Zofingen were retained and expressed by both groups at the subsequent debate six years later, a host of changes had taken place relating to the way in which those convictions were articulated and defended. These included dramatic variations linguistically and rhetorically in the constructs of the contending arguments, as well as different usages of biblical passages to express and authenticate said positions. Essentially, the individual character of each of these two debates became manifest as the arguments were intermittently presented through the use of certain language, imagery, and biblical passages absent from the other protocol. Indeed, by the time the radicals and Swiss Reformers

reconvened for debate in 1538, an entirely new stage had been set, including a largely new cast of protagonists and a theological climate in Bern rife with ideological controversy.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, while an unmistakable bond in ecclesiological convictions remained preserved through the 1538 disputation, historians should still recognize the uniqueness and independence of each event. The ecclesiological debate at Bern in 1538, it will be shown, was not simply a redundant exercise in futility when compared with its earlier predecessor at Zofingen and to treat it as such a gross misrepresentation. Furthermore, while conceding a plurality of influences upon the people and groups participating in these disputations, it will be demonstrated that the prevailing voices of inspiration for much of the foundational content of these ecclesiological debates came predominately from two particular founts: the teachings of Swiss Reformers, specifically Zwingli and Bullinger, for the Bernese preachers and the earlier Swiss Brethren movement projected through Schleithem for the Anabaptist radicals.<sup>4</sup> Again, subtle variations to the Reformed position from 1532 to 1538 certainly reflected the winds of change associated with the city's transitory shift towards Bucer's Strasbourg theology, but the theological impression left through the emergence of the Swiss Brethren against the backdrop of the Swiss Reformed movement emanating from Zürich remains unmistakable.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The controversy in Bern revolved around the city's temporary two-decade shift away from Zwinglianism towards Martin Bucer's irenic Strasbourg theology which sought a closer association with other Protestants in the Swiss Confederation. As seen in Chapter One, initially precipitated by the devastating loss at Kappel in late 1531 and Caspar Megander's subsequent finger pointing at Bern for their role in the defeat (and Zwingli's death), this shift was really mostly ascribed to Bern's desire to avoid division among the Swiss lands. Bruening, pp. 64ff. Again, an important article by Amy Burnett has shown that this shift in Bern was, in fact, not driven by a predominately Lutheran contingent, as the earlier historiography had maintained, but by disciples of Bucer who sought 'to heal the divisions within the Protestant church.' Burnett, 'The Myth of the Swiss Lutherans', pp. 45-70.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Gerber is veridical in ascribing a plurality of divergent streams of influence upon those seeking to direct the course of the Reformation in Bern. Gerber, 'Berner Täuferum und Berner Synodus', p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> For specific details relating to this shift towards Bucer's Strasbourg refer back to the Introduction and Chapter One, pp. 5 and 22-24.

## Opening of the Article

The discussions relating to the nature of *die rechte kirche* during the 1532 *Gespräch* were first initiated by the Anabaptists immediately after the close of the session related to the legitimate ‘sending of the radicals’ (*Sendung der Täufer*) and immediately preceding the final eight articles addressed at Zofingen. In this instance the Swiss radicals used the previous discussions relating to the authenticity of their true calling to seamlessly direct attention towards the proper form and genuine manifestation of Christ’s body on earth. The article was introduced by the Anabaptists through the following declaration:

Not everyone who comes to us and claims to have a call is an apostle (or) has the authority to preach, but rather he who is assured in his heart and also appointed by his community. Thus it is with us also: we desire, however, to know if we have the righteousness that a church and overseer should have according to the method of Scripture. Then Christ sent them out two by two (Luke 10, Mark 6) advising them to preach and proclaim repentance. That we also do. Therefore, we have the true church in accordance with the custom and practice of the first church of the apostolic period.<sup>6</sup>

Through this introductory statement the Anabaptists cleverly accomplished two things which would ultimately help shape and direct the remaining ecclesiological debate at the 1532 session. Through the insinuation that they had established and instituted their church according to the prescriptions found in sacred Scripture, the Anabaptists attempted to first establish the presumption of validation for their church; thereby shifting the burden of proof back onto the Swiss preachers to provide evidence that the radicals really did hold an aberrant view of the church as regularly claimed. If the Anabaptists’ ecclesiology was going to be refuted by the Swiss Reformers then the latter were going to have to confirm such ‘according to the method of Scripture.’

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<sup>6</sup> *Nit ein yeder, der harkumpt und sich angibt für ein bestellten, ist ein apostel, hatt gwalt ze predigen, sonder der versichert in sinem hertzen und ouch bestellet von siner gemeynd. Also ist es by uns ouch: Wir begarend aber ze wüssen, ob wir nit die tugend habind, wie ein kilch und fürtrager nach art der geschrift sin sol; dann do Christus ye zwen und zween sandt (Luc. 10, Mar. 6), empfalch er inen zu predigen und zu verkünden besserung. Das thund ouch wir. Darumb hand wir die rechte kilchen nach dem bruch und gwonheyt der ersten kilchen zur apostelzyten. QZ Zofingen, p. 94.*

Secondly, the explicit parallel drawn between the Anabaptists' church and the witness of Jesus' words from the synoptic gospels not only provided a firm foundation, through the affirmation of a call to repentance, for what the radicals knew was an important tenet of their ecclesiology, but it also attempted to place them as a voice of truth alongside the apostolic witness.<sup>7</sup> Although this was undoubtedly a bold move to portray their church as the one which had exclusively re-tapped into the apostolic stream which the movement argued had run dry throughout the post-Constantine/Medieval landscape, it was one that was clearly used to promote some level of historic validation for the radicals' views.<sup>8</sup>

With the onus of proof returned squarely onto them, the preachers at the 1532 session surprisingly chose an anomalous tact in opening their ecclesiological arguments against the Anabaptists. Rather than swiftly addressing what they understood to be the radicals' audacious claim to apostolic association or their emphasis on the assumed validation of their church, the preachers chose instead to highlight the most basic shared doctrines of the faith. Referencing the Apostle Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church relating to the foundation of the faith, the preachers began to re-affirm many basic Christian truths in language directly dependent upon the Apostle's Creed.<sup>9</sup> The Bernese preachers declared,

(We believe) also in the Holy Spirit, who rules the church, reigns, and leads to repentance: one holy Christian church, which is a community of all believers, also in the forgiveness of sin which is not through outer ceremonies, but alone made through those united with Christ our Savior, and the resurrection of the flesh according to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> In arguing for the importance of 'religious primitivism' in relation to Anabaptist thought, Franklin Littell has accurately shown how the chronological disparity between these two groups' identification of the fall of the church resulted in longstanding ecclesiological consequences. This was especially true in light of the fact that the Anabaptists held an early view of the fall due to the influence of Constantine, while Zwingli and other Reformers looked towards later dates which did not preclude affirming the *corpus Christianum*. Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (The Dissent and Nonconformity Series, Number 11; Boston, 1958), pp. 46-78. Henry Townsend has uncovered the uniformity with which all free-churches shared in ascribing the Constantine Era as the inception of the fall. Henry Townsend, *The Claims of the Free Churches* (London, 1949), p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Friedmann has correctly recognized that the Anabaptists were orthodox in their shared affirmation of the Apostle's Creed and the doctrines contained therein. Friedmann, 'The Doctrine of Two Worlds', p. 105.

power of the Holy Spirit. That we teach, confess, and hold as true dogma, as Paul laid it down, and hope that no one in our church allows untruth.<sup>10</sup>

These rather benign words, coupled with the blatant absence of an immediate attack upon the initial claims of the Anabaptists, may appear at first glance rather odd. Still, this statement is in keeping with two important things relating to the preachers' agenda. First, it should come as no surprise to see the Bernese ministers reserved in their opening comments on the church, for their strategy in this debate was not so much to provide substantive corroboration for their own ecclesiology as it was to dissolve the major theological tenets which supported their opponents' view of the church. Secondly, the relatively reserved opening and appeal to the Apostle's Creed by the preachers was directly in keeping with an overriding theme that was present throughout the discussions relating to *die rechte Kirche* in 1532; namely, the preachers' repeated use of words and phrases to underscore certain shared points of conviction agreed upon by both sides. As stated in Chapter One, whether the preachers genuinely believed that by using this tactic they could win the radicals away from what they considered an aberrant form of Christianity, as had been done with Hans Pfistermeyer the previous summer, remains highly debatable.<sup>11</sup> However, the Swiss preachers' recurring reminder of places where the two groups shared theological accord remained a thread woven throughout the 1532 protocol.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [Wir glauben] ouch in den heyiligen geist, das der sin kilch regiery, reinige, leyte zu besserung: ein heylige christenliche kilchen, welche ist gmeynsam aller gloubigen, ouch verzychung der sünd umb keyner usserlichen ceremonien willen, dann allein durch das verdienen deß einigen Christi, unsers heylands, und uferstentnuß des fleischs nach der krafft des heiligen geists. Das leerend und bekennend wir, haltend solichs für das recht pfullment, wie es Paulus gleyt, und hoffend, das niemand unsere kilchen für unrecht gaben. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> For the disputation account which resulted in Pfistermeyer's conversion see *QZ Pfistermeyer*, pp. 3-65.

<sup>12</sup> This theme may be found in statements such as, 'in this is no division' (*In de mist kein span*), 'you are one with us' (*Ir sind mit unns eins*), and 'we are one in the main things of the articles of the faith' (*Wir sind in hauptstucken der articklen des goubens eins*). Each of these at the very least implied a downplaying of the division between the two camps. *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 99-101 and 111. Even as the optimistic language of uniformity can be detected from the preachers at the Zofingen debate it was almost altogether absent from the preachers' vernacular during the 1538 debate at Bern. As Jan Matthijssen has pointed out, the only exception to this was the preachers' repeated use of the designation 'baptist-brethren' (*Touffbrüdern*) in describing their counterparts. Matthijssen, pp. 22-23.

Much like at the earlier 1532 Zofingen session, when the time came for the debate over the nature of the church to open in 1538, the issue was first introduced by the Anabaptists. However, an immediate difference in their initial approach signals a point of departure. In this case, the Anabaptist protagonist Mathiß Wiser, rather than making a bold reference regarding the Anabaptist church's close association with the apostles, as was done at Zofingen, chose an altogether different tact in commencing the talks relating to the church. Here, in what can best be described as an abrupt and disjointed transition from the previous discussions over the 'calling of the Anabaptists' (*Berufung der Täufer*), Wiser opened this article of the *Gespräch* with a series of questions relating to the church. Specifically, Wiser asked, 'Regarding the church, which one is the holy Christian church. If she (the church) is the one without sin or does it have faults and defects. Where, how, and which one is the church.'<sup>13</sup> Quite obviously these were not truly sincere inquiries, for as Wiser and the other Anabaptist protagonists would soon reveal, they were extremely well versed in presenting the Swiss Anabaptists' litany of answers to such questions. Instead, this series of questions was employed as a way to facilitate the ecclesiological discussion and from a vantage point in which the Anabaptists felt confident in confronting their Swiss adversaries on the matter.

Challenged by the aforementioned preliminary questions and obviously knowing full well the direction into which the Anabaptists were steering the course of the dialogue, Erasmus Ritter offered the preachers' response by attempting to shift the direction of the debate altogether. Rather than focusing attention on the issue of church purity so explicitly contained in Wiser's questions relating to the sin of church members, Ritter redirected the dialogue towards an individual's confession of Christ as the standard for membership. Ritter reasoned, 'According to the articles of the faith, the holy Christian church is a community of

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<sup>13</sup> *Von der kilch, was die heilige christennliche kilch sye. Ob sy hie ane sünd oder ob sy etwas välls unnd mangells habe. Wo, wie, welliches die khilch sye. QZ Bern, p. 313.*

holy ones and all believers who confess Christ and believe in Him as the rock on which Christ Himself, according to Matthew 16, has built His church.’<sup>14</sup> Notice here how the preachers’ previous attempts at Zofingen to focus attention on those shared points of agreement with the radicals are completely absent as Ritter, instead, began to lay the groundwork for the preachers’ rebuttal of the Anabaptists’ idea of church purity. The optimistic tone of the preachers’ opening ecclesiological arguments at Zofingen was now replaced by a resolved focus on refuting the radicals. As will soon be seen, this shift was in no way arbitrary but specifically provided a foundation from which the preachers’ ecclesiological arguments at the 1538 session could be drawn.

### **Answering the Ecclesiological Questions**

Having identified the unique historic settings around which the ecclesiological discussions at both Bernese sessions of debate were first introduced, attention must now be moved to the main body of the discussions pertaining to *die rechte Kirche*. Here, the focus immediately shifts toward two overarching doctrinal questions, each of which speaks directly to the heart of the schism between the Anabaptists and Swiss Reformers. These include questions relating to the specific composition or makeup of the church body and how, in turn, that body should relate to others outside its fellowship. As will be shown by the following assessment, the article on the church at both disputations ultimately came down to a debate between the Anabaptists’ free-church and the mixed church ecclesiology of the Swiss preachers.<sup>15</sup> In the end, the staunch commitment to each of these irreconcilable ideologies precluded any attempt at ecclesiological concord between these two Swiss factions.

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<sup>14</sup> *Die heilige christennliche khilch ist, lut des arttickells im gloubenn, ein gemeinsame der heiligenn unnd glöübigenn unnd alle, die den Christen bekhennent unnd im glouben [ihm] alls dem vellsenn, daruff er, Christus selb, Mathei 16, sin khilchenn buwenn hatt, sind ein christennliche khilchen. QZ Bern, p. 313-314.*

<sup>15</sup> Acknowledging the importance of these distinct ecclesiological positions Verduin affirms, ‘In the sixteenth century the strife between the Reformers and the Anabaptists was at heart a struggle between proponents and opponents of Christendom; the Reformers were resolutely committed to Christianity as culture-religion and the Anabaptists were resolutely opposed to it. The Reformers feared a composite society and the Anabaptists feared

Although not initially a core tenet of Swiss Anabaptism, the belief in a separate free-church composed exclusively of genuine regenerate believers in Jesus now dominated the Swiss radicals' perception of the church by the mid 1530s.<sup>16</sup> At the heart of the free-church movement was a belief that the constitution of the church itself had a profound impact upon its validity as a genuine manifestation of Christ's body on earth.<sup>17</sup> In essence, the gathering of the church body via a non-coercive manner and with an emphasis on remaining pure became the primary means for determining its authenticity.<sup>18</sup>

A logical corollary that flowed out from the Anabaptists' pure-church ecclesiology was an unwavering commitment to separatism. The separatist mindset of the Swiss Anabaptists has been well documented by historians and, while not initially pursued by the

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a non-composite one.' Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat less than God: The Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 95

<sup>16</sup> Originally there were significant efforts by Swiss Anabaptists, including Balthasar Hubmaier, Conrad Grebel, Wilhelm Reublin, and James Brötli to establish Anabaptism on a territorial basis. Stayer, 'The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition', p. 183 and Snyder, 'The Monastic Origins of Swiss Anabaptist Sectarianism', *MQR* 57, 1983, p. 7. The shift toward a separatist free-church model did not take place until later when the natural implications of the Anabaptists' theology were made explicit amid widespread persecution and oppression. Despite Fritz Blanke's failed attempt to argue that Grebel's letter to Muntzer was 'the oldest source for the Protestant free-church model', other scholars, like Hans-Jürgen Goertz, are entirely justified in questioning such an early date. Fritz Blanke, *Brüder in Christo* (Zurich, 1955), 15-16. Goertz correctly points out that Blanke clearly overstated the case, for 'the (Muntzer) letter failed to set out an ecclesiological program... nor did it contain any suggestion that Thomas Muntzer should abandon his popular-church activities in Allstedt and restrict himself to a free-church model.' Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, p. 87. Therefore, the Swiss Brethren had really actually attempted to 'urge Muntzer to take a step they had not yet taken themselves.' Marc Lienhard, *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism / Les Debuts et les Caracteristiques de l'Anabaptisme* (The Hague, 1977), p. 24. Regardless of the date of its establishment, historians remain convinced that by Schleithem, or what Snyder has famously regarded as the 'crystallization point for the Swiss movement', the notion of a separatist free-church had clearly been established. C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, 1995), p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> The term 'free-church' remains pregnant with meaning and varying usages among scholar today. The differing definitions and origins of the free-church movement may be found succinctly presented in Chapter One of Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believer's Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York, 1968), pp. 3-33. For the purposes of this study the term free-church has been employed to denote those communities which were founded on the basis of voluntary non-coercive participation in a church, composed exclusively of genuine believers in Christ, gathered under the affirmation of believers' baptism, and strictly disciplined according to the Rule of Christ via the ban.

<sup>18</sup> Bender has provided a useful article on the assembling of the free-church through non-coercive means. Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty', *MQR* 29, 1955. For additional reading related to the continuing debate over the origins of the free-church concept see Franklin H. Littell, 'The Historic Free Church Defined', *Brethren Life and Thought* Autumn 1964, pp. 78-90 and James Leo Garrett Jr., *The Concept of the Believers' Church*. (Scottsdale, 1969).

group, eventually became one of the hallmarks of their distinct ecclesiology.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is not at all surprising to see this idea strongly articulated as a part of the Swiss radicals' ecclesiological debate. In fact, the reality of the Anabaptists' commitment to this free-church ideal materialized at the outset the 1532 debate and was first accompanied by a stinging accusation at the preachers' expense. Cleverly working from the I Corinthians 3 text that the preachers quoted in their introductory comments, the radicals argued 'The church is to be separated from the world and acts alone according to the way of Christ, so we must let this remain. They (the preachers), however, are still in the world, so we cannot confess them to be the church.'<sup>20</sup>

The importance of this rather brief statement should not be downplayed, for it contains two judgments that were foundational to the Anabaptists' separatist ecclesiology. First, the importance of the idea of separation is clearly established. Expressed through the German verb *abgesünderet*, the Anabaptists at Zofingen made it known that the true church was to have no association with those outside its body (what they deemed 'the world'). The use of this term subsequently reappeared throughout the 1532 protocol and was used by the Anabaptists in a variety of contexts to show how the Swiss preachers had erred in allowing the Bernese church to be co-mingled with the world.<sup>21</sup> The Anabaptists, referencing Titus

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed assessment on the origins of the Swiss radicals' separatism see Martin Haas, 'Der Weg der Täufer in die Absonderung: Zur Interdependenz von Theologie und sozialem Verhalten', in *Umstrittenes Täuferium, 1525-1975: Neue Forschungen* (Göttingen, 1975), pp. 50-78, Idem. 'Michael Sattler: On the Way to Anabaptist Separation', in *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical Sketches from Thomas Muntzer to Paracelsus*. ed. by Hans Jürgen-Goertz (Scottsdale, 1982) and Klaassen, 'The Anabaptist Understanding of the Separation of Church and State.'

<sup>20</sup> *Der grund ist wol geleyt, ein yetlicher sahe aber, was er daruf buwe I Corinth. 3. Ist die kilch von der walt abgesünderet unnd handelt allein nach der art Christi, so mussend wir sy dafür lassen belyben. QZ Zofingen*, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> Here it was used by the Anabaptists in conjunction with I Corinthians 3:10-11 to invalidate the Swiss preachers' standing as a church. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 95. Later, it was used to authenticate the radicals' church which was composed of those who had repented of sin and experienced genuine conversion. *Ibid.*, p. 98. Additionally, it was used while the Anabaptists offered their own interpretation of the Matthew 13 'wheat and tares' parable. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

1:16, continued their assault on the preachers church by declaring that although the membership of the Swiss church had professed Christ in word, through their deeds they had shown themselves to be no different than the pagan world (and ultimately not a true church).<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, the reference to I Corinthians 3 revealed just how important the answer to this question was for a proper ecclesiology in the minds of the Anabaptists; ultimately, it was a foundational part of proving a church's biblical and historical legitimacy. As they proceeded to reason, since the preachers were 'still in the world' (*noch in der welt*), it was argued that they had lost their valid standing as a part of Christ's body on earth. Essentially, as the radicals understood it, the preachers' participation in and association with the world precluded their claim as a valid manifestation of Christ's church. Separation, in this context, became paramount to the church's identity.

To further qualify the reason for their separatist convictions the radicals at Zofingen would later make reference to the ontological difference they believed existed between two earthly realms. They argued, 'we desire, however, to distinguish the church; as the worldly realm cannot exist with Christ's church and the gospel.'<sup>23</sup> Continuing this theme they later maintained,

In all those who God's word bears fruit and sprout, they form the community of God, have a godly nature, (and) will be called Christ's brothers and sisters, according to Matthew 13. This is now the difference regarding the children of God and the world, which is covered by the devil's weeds. That is why the Son of Man came, to redeem them from the gruesome darkness. But whoever remains in Him, should walk as the Lord, hold His commandments, and be freed of the sins of the

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<sup>22</sup> See Paul's words in Titus 1:16. Also, through a unique usage and interpretation of I Corinthians 4:20, the Anabaptists reiterated the deceptive capacity mere words alone (specifically confessions of Christ) could have in this context. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> *wir begierend aber denn den unterschied der kirchen, dann das weltlich regiment mit der kirchen Christi und dem evangelio nit besten mag.* Ibid., p. 97.

flesh. Whoever has the Son has eternal life. But, whoever puts glory on himself, saying he knows God, and does not hold His commandments is a liar.<sup>24</sup>

The German term '*underscheyd*' (difference) was shrewdly employed here by the Zofingen radicals in tandem with what they saw as the Bible's 'call to separation' (*abgesünderet*) in order to highlight the ontological distinction they believed existed between the true church and the world.<sup>25</sup> Drawing a logical implication from their free-church ecclesiology, the radicals at Zofingen contended that the change in nature which accompanied becoming a true Christian meant a subsequent change in association as well. The mention of a new 'godly nature', a newfound sibling relationship with Christ, and the designation 'community of God' were all used synonymously here to show how the shift in one's being necessitated a move away from the world which was deemed evil.<sup>26</sup> The parallel drawn between the world and the pejorative concept of 'darkness' (*finsternuß*), along with the affiliation made between the world and the Devil, each served to demonstrate the evil nature of those outside the church body. Separation for the Anabaptists, therefore, was not simply derived at random but was

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<sup>24</sup> *In allen denen das wort Christi fruchtet unnd grunet, die synd die gmeynd gottes, sind gottlicher nature, werden bruder und schwostern Christi genempt, Matth. 13: Das ist nun der unterscheyd der kyndern gottes und diser walt, die vonn dem unkrut des tüffels gesayt sind. Darumb ist der sun des menschen kommen, sy zu erlosen von der grusamen finsternuß. War aber im herrn blypt, sol wandlen wie der herr, syne gebott halten und abgestorben sin im fleisch der sünden. Dann war den sun hatt, der hatt das ewig laben. War sich aber synen berumpt, er kenne gott, und haltet syne gebott nitt, der ist ein lugner.* Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> This was a particularly effective rhetorical tool given that the radicals had now turned the preachers' previous usage of the term *underscheyd* on its head. Earlier in the proceedings, while articulating their visible/invisible church construct, the preachers had implored the Anabaptists to recognize such a difference/distinction in the church. Ibid., p. 98. In addition to the previous examples, the Anabaptists also referenced this distinction when rebutting the preachers' claim that Paul had accepted the church at Galatia even though he verbally recognized they had not previously been obedient. See the preachers' argument and the Anabaptists' confutation in Ibid., pp. 100-101.

<sup>26</sup> It is not at all surprising, given their understanding of the church's composition, that this new Christian reality was directly linked with an individual's actions and understood in terms of obedience. Eventually the Anabaptists would promote this same idea by referencing Jesus' admonition in Matthew 5 concerning murder and I John 3:15. Not only were these two passages used to show how sinners would not enter the Kingdom of God, but also that God had called His people to a 'distinction' (*underscheydet*) from the world. Ibid., p.101.

rooted in a two-kingdom theology quite distinct from the one held by the Reformed preachers.<sup>27</sup>

Notwithstanding its immediate presence in the Anabaptists' ecclesiological formulation At Zofingen, separation was not a mainstay argument for those radicals involved at the 1538 disputation.<sup>28</sup> That is not to say that the concept of separation was totally absent from the 'true church' conversation in 1538, for it certainly was an implied part of the ecclesiological argumentation of the Anabaptist leaders. However, it was not nearly as central a premise in their ecclesiological apology as it was for those at Zofingen nor expressed in such precise terms and with such illustration. In fact, the only explicit reference to separation at the later dialogue on the church was made by Mathiß Wiser and Hans Hotz. As a part of defining what makes a church Christian, Wiser referenced I John to show the need for true believers to distance themselves from what he labeled 'the darkness' (*der finsternus*).<sup>29</sup> Later, as a part of his criticism of the preachers' interpretation of the wheat and tares parable, Hotz offered one of the underlying purposes of the radicals' use of separation. Aligning himself with his understanding of the Apostle Paul, Hotz argued that the great hope behind the act of separation was that it might incite moral improvement in the sinner.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Although Bender definitely overstated the prominence of the radicals' two-kingdom theology as a major supposition of Swiss Anabaptism, its role in promoting separation as a logical consequence is completely correct. Harold S. Bender, 'The Pacifism of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists', *MQR* 30, 1956, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, the notion of separation became much more pronounced for the radicals at the 1538 debate through discussions relating to the *Obrigkeit* (Article VI) and the use of the Christian ban (Article VII). While formulating their position against the Bernese authorities the Anabaptists maintained that the church functioned according to the standards set forth by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, while the city was governed by Satan. *QZ Bern*, p. 419- 439, especially pp. 424 and 430. For specifics relating to the radicals dichotomistic view of believers and non-believers when related to the ban see the following Chapter Four.

<sup>29</sup> See I John 2:9ff and *QZ Bern*, p. 316.

<sup>30</sup> See I Corinthians 5:1ff and *QZ Bern*, p. 322.

While separation played a role (albeit implied) at the 1538 session of the Bernese debates its presence in the early sources of Swiss Anabaptism remained somewhat muted.<sup>31</sup> Still, the inclusion of a separatist ideology may be discerned through a series of key works as the Swiss Brethren were forced to further articulate and formulate their theological convictions against growing magisterial opposition and persecution. To begin such a comparison attention will first be directed towards the Schleithem Articles. Here, separation played a prominent role in the Anabaptists theological formulation. From as early as his introductory preface through the important Article IV, Michael Sattler boldly declared that the children of God must separate themselves from the world.<sup>32</sup> Speaking directly for those assembled at Schleithem, Sattler stressed, ‘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.’<sup>33</sup> Shortly thereafter, and speaking against those ‘false brethren’ who he believed had erred by embracing an antinomian philosophy, Sattler reminded, ‘But for you (those unified at Schleithem) it is not so; for they who are Christ’s have crucified their flesh with all its lusts and desires. You understand me well, and [know] the brothers whom we mean. Separate yourselves from them, for they are perverted.’<sup>34</sup>

In each of these two instances, along with others from the main body of Article IV, the various forms of the German verb for ‘separation’, *absondern*, were used by Sattler to

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<sup>31</sup> This is largely due to the fact that separatism was not a chief concern of those Swiss Anabaptists functioning in and around Zürich in the early 1520s. Yoder has effectively argued that even Michael Sattler did not pursue separatism at first since he had initially viewed himself as a co-laborer alongside Bucer and Capito. John H. Yoder, ‘Der Kristallisationspunkt des Täufertums’, *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 30 (1973), pp. 24-41.

<sup>32</sup> In fact, it has been correctly argued by Biesecker-Mast that Schleithem’s call to separation ‘is the framework within which nearly all of the other remaining articles establish their distinctive formulas for the Christian practices of the Swiss Brethren and within which appeals to unity are made throughout the document.’ Biesecker-Mast, p. 102. Goertz concurs, stating that it was the *Brotherly Union*’s call to separation that ultimately gave the other articles ‘their profound meaning and inner strength.’ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Sattler, ‘The Schleithem Brotherly Union,’ p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

show the fundamental distinction the Swiss radicals believed existed between two distinct realms and the need to keep the two isolated.<sup>35</sup> Through a reference to II Cor. 6:17 Sattler even closed Article IV by directly aligning obedience in separation with an ensuing participation in the family of God.<sup>36</sup> Here the same ecclesiological focus on and use of the German term *absondern* found at Schleithem remains employed in a strikingly similar manner as it was at Bern during the 1530s.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside the specific and repeated usage of *absondern* a thread of continuity between the Bernese debates and earlier Anabaptist writings may also be found in the recognition of the two discordant and ontologically alienated realms of the church and world. For both Schleithem and the Zofingen debate, II Corinthians 6:14ff was seen as proof that the mutually incompatible categories of ‘light/darkness’ (*Finsternis/Licht*) and ‘Christ/Belial’ could not be conjoined.<sup>38</sup> While the radicals at the 1532 session utilized these specific binary categories to make precisely the same point Sattler had five years earlier, not all were preserved verbatim; rather, these two were but a small sample from a myriad of archetypal figures used by Sattler to highlight the church’s calling to separatism.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, while Wisser’s use of I John 2:9ff at the 1538 debate did not mirror exactly the incongruent

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<sup>35</sup> The other instances can be found in the main body of the fourth article on separation. See ‘Brüderliche Vereinigung etlicher Kinder Gottes’, in Heindrich Fast, *Der linke Flügel der Reformation: Glaubenszeugnisse der Täufer, Spiritualisten, Schwärmer und Antitrinitarier* (Bremen, 1962), pp. 61-62, and 64-65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64

<sup>37</sup> Both used the concept of ‘separation’ (*absondern*) to show what a properly constituted church body looked like, especially in view of their dualistic view of reality.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64 and *QZ*, p. 108. Although much less strictly defined, his belief in a polarity between the two realms of Christ and Belial had previously been evidenced in Sattler’s thought through his letter to the Strasbourg Reformers. Sattler, ‘Sattler’s Letter to Capito and Bucer’, pp. 22-23.

<sup>39</sup> Sattler also used the dualistic categories of good/evil, believing/unbelieving, and God’s temple/idols to illustrate this important point. Fast, *Der linke Flügel*, p.64-65.

categories found in his predecessors' works, the negative portrayal facilitated by John's understanding of 'the darkness' (*der finsternus*) certainly flowed from a like stream.<sup>40</sup>

The repeated embrace of separatism can not only be traced back to Schleitheim, but also appeared ever so faintly during the infancy of the Swiss Brethren movement in the mid to late 1520s. One of the earliest mentions of separation was brought to light during the reform discussions between Zwingli and the future Anabaptist leaders Conrad Grebel and Simon Stumpf.<sup>41</sup> Recorded in his *Elenchus*, Zwingli reiterated the radicals' own position on separation as follows:

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. Therefore, we 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 those who came to believe went over to those who were now a new church.<sup>42</sup>

While the direct use of *absondern* was not retained here (because the *Elenchus* was a Latin work), it was clear to Zwingli by the end of 1527 that Grebel and Stumpf had envisioned a wholly different church than the Swiss Reformed church he had now come to embrace.<sup>43</sup>

Based on an unnamed text from Acts, the radicals argued for a 'new church' composed exclusively of those who had extricated themselves on the basis of faith. While not articulated in its full measure this certainly appears to be but a small seed (and completely

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<sup>40</sup> *OZ Bern*, pp. 315-316.

<sup>41</sup> Evidence of the Grebel-Stumpf authorship can be found in Harder's introductory comments to this portion of Zwingli's *Elenchus*. See Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, pp. 276-278.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132.

<sup>43</sup> Since Zwingli was quoting and commenting on a dialogue he had engaged in three and a half years prior to penning his *Elenchus*, the extent of his recognition of the Swiss radicals' separatism remains in question. His labeling of the movement as 'a sect' in his treatises on baptism denotes that he clearly knew of their separatist agenda by as early as 1525 for sure. See 'Of Baptism', in G.W Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Library of the Christian Classics, Vol. XXIV; Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 152 and 158.

undefined notion) of the separatism which was fully in bloom by the Bernese debates a decade later.<sup>44</sup>

Other Anabaptist works from the 1520s were not so specifically undefined in their views on separation. The Swiss Brethren leader Felix Manz took great pains to not only recognize those who desired to follow after Christ, but to insist that such individuals be ‘gathered’ out from the societal realm.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Sattler later continued to promote his belief in the need to segregate the church from the world. Speaking from prison in Horb he exhorted his brethren to not only ‘sanctify yourselves for Him that has made you holy’, but also to ‘flee the shadow of this world.’<sup>46</sup> As those Anabaptists at Grunigen would likewise conclude, entry into the church community meant a simultaneous rejection and forfeiture of the world.<sup>47</sup> This dramatic ontological distinction in being for the two realms meant a necessary and irrefutable disassociation for these radicals. The distinction of these two realms became so prominent for the early Anabaptists that as one figure argued, it became the hermeneutical key to understanding the redemptive purposes of God in history.<sup>48</sup>

Originally presented as a part of their statements made during a broader dialogue concerning the marks (*die zeichen*) of the church, the radicals at Zofingen proceeded to defend their notion of separation by shifting attention to the individuals in a gathered church community. Speaking directly in response to the preachers’ opening rejection of separatism, the Anabaptists argued,

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Haas correctly recognized that the emerging separatist notion, ‘which had earlier been at most intimated’, following the Peasants War debacle, eventually became a dominant characteristic of the movement. Haas, ‘Michael Sattler’, pp. 136-137.

<sup>45</sup> *LVM*, ‘Verhör Manz und Blaurock’, p. 216.

<sup>46</sup> Braght, p. 420.

<sup>47</sup> *LVM*, ‘Eingabe der Grüninger Täufer an den Landtag’, p. 235.

<sup>48</sup> Two columns of completely incompatible and inimical terms are employed to denote such a dualism. J.C. Wenger, ‘An Early Anabaptist Tract on Hermeneutics’, *MQR* 42, 1968, pp. 42-43.

The foundation and beginning of the Christian church, an assembled Christian community, are those who from the beginning walk by faith in obeying the Gospel, in a penitent life, repent and demonstrate sorrow (over one's sin), believing that their sins are forgiven. These also (the sins) are erased, buried with Christ, the sins made dead, the old man put away and through the symbol of baptism risen to a new life, now rooted in Christ, living not for one's self, but for the will of God, according to Hebrews 5: Thus, as He did this, He became a cause of eternal life for those who are obedient to Him.<sup>49</sup>

Through this assertion the Anabaptists focused attention on the gathering body of the church community. And while many variant groups could and did assemble physically as one church body, the radicals at Zofingen made it plainly clear that for any gathered community to be an authentic manifestation of the true church its members had to meet one overarching requisite; they had to act in accordance with their verbal declaration of faith. As it related to this requirement, the Anabaptists at the 1532 debate looked to the specific daily activity of individuals as the primary means for determining if such a person was permitted to gather with the true church community.<sup>50</sup> In their eyes, the true church was a gathered community of Christians who not only shared in their confession of Christ, but also, more importantly, in a distinct way of living in light of the work of Christ. This is precisely where the radicals' emphasis on external action came into being. Terms such as 'obedience' (*ghorsamme*), 'a penitent life' (*ein bußvertig laben*), and 'repentance' (*rüw*) all had one thing in common; each was personified in and verified through the life of the confessing individual. Consequently, each of these concepts eventually became used by the radicals as a part of a greater litmus test of sorts, where one's actions were used to validate that individual's

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<sup>49</sup> *Der grund unnd anfang der christenlichen kilchen, ein versamlung einer christenlichen gemeind, ist die sich vonn anfang begabend durch den glouben in ghorsamme des evangelions, in ein bußvertig laben, rüw und leyd empfhend, gloubend, das inen ir sünd vergaben. Die werdend also yngeschriben, mit Christo begraben, der sünden abgestorben, der alt mensch hingeleyt und durch die bedütung des touffs in ein nüw laben ufferstanden, nun yngepflantzet in Christo, nit mer inen selbs, sonder dem willen gottes labent, zun Hebreern 5: Do er ist volendet, ist er worden aller deren, die im gehorsam sind, ein ursach der ewigen saligkeit. QZ Zofingen, pp. 97-98.*

<sup>50</sup> Previously the Anabaptists had provided a tangible example of such actions by stressing the need to separate from those individuals who held onto the idolatrous tradition of transubstantiation. Referencing Gal. 5:19-21, they proceeded to argue that certain actions prohibit one from inheriting the Kingdom of God. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

confession. In the eyes of the Anabaptists at the 1532 debate, the sum total of the gathered parts of any church had a direct and profound impact upon its genuine standing as a communal body.<sup>51</sup>

The Anabaptists early move towards a discussion of their free-church ideology came as no surprise to the Swiss preachers at Zofingen. Having become familiar with the Anabaptists' divergent ecclesiological arguments for several years now, the preachers knew quite well that their opponents' free-church ecclesiology stood as the fulcrum of the entire debate regarding the nature of *die rechte Kirche*.<sup>52</sup> Faced with what they saw as the radicals' aberrant and unbiblical form of church organization, the preachers moved quickly to undercut this particular aspect of Anabaptist ecclesiology by focusing attention on what would become their primary concern at both Bernese debates regarding the church; namely, their commitment to a mixed church ecclesiology.

Keenly aware of the prominent role of this particular tenet to their entire ecclesiological construct, the preachers at Zofingen cleverly steered the course of the dialogue towards a belief cultivated in Zwingli's later thought whereby a fundamental demarcation was made between two forms of the church: the invisible and visible.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This is especially true given the very specific ethical agenda of the Swiss Anabaptists' 'kingdom theology.' As Robert Friedmann has rightly noted, the social ethos of this kingdom theology meant that the Magisterial Reformers' individualistic emphasis on justification was replaced instead by a focus on the communal nature of salvation embodied in *die Gemeinde*. Friedmann, 'Doctrine of Two Worlds', pp.112-113.

<sup>52</sup> The preachers would later argue that the true 'heart of the matter' (*haft lyt*) was the disparate interpretations of the wheat and tares passage from Matthew 13. *QZ Zofingen*, p. 111.

<sup>53</sup> This distinction is emblematic of Zwingli's later thought, especially as his doctrine of election had become more fully defined and in light of his dealings with the Anabaptists. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought*, pp. 112-116. Focused initially on combating the Roman Church, Zwingli understood the church through two expressions: the universal church with Christ as its head (and not the Pope), which is the pure bride of Christ, and those local congregations or parishes gathered under the name and Rule of Christ (such as the Corinthian Church). *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, I. ed by Emil Egli (Berlin, 1905), p. 459, II, p. 54, 58, and 572. Later, Zwingli refined his view of the church even further to include three senses of the word church. Jaques Courvoisier, *Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian* (Richmond, 1963), p. 51. In his 1530 *Fidei ratio* Zwingli argued that the church should first be 'used for the elect, who have been predestined by God's will to eternal life.' This church is without 'wrinkle or spot' (Eph. 5:27) and, except for the inner assurance granted by the Holy Spirit, its membership cannot be discerned by man (Prov. 15:11). The church is also to be taken in a 'general sense' and is gathered on the basis of one's confession of Christ and participation in the sacraments.

Responding to the radicals' emphasis on separation, the preachers offered their own view of the church by arguing,

It is a gathered Christian church of all holy ones according to the articles of the faith. Who are not gathered together in this time... those God alone recognizes and themselves working hard to live within the will and standard of the Holy Spirit; according to Romans 12. Still we desire that you distinguish the church or alone say that you are sent from the general church.<sup>54</sup>

Although brief, this statement succinctly presented two key points that helped to define the preachers' embrace of a mixed church at Zofingen. First, the preachers made perfectly clear, through the qualifying statement 'who God alone recognizes' (*der gott allein erkendt*), that the gathered church of all genuine believers in Christ was known to God alone. Therefore, as church communities convened in the present age there had to remain an 'anonymous' element to them, for man's finitude restricted him from knowing with certainty who had experienced authentic regeneration. Accordingly, a distinction in churches needed to be made, which left one to only affirm they were from the 'general church community' (*allgemeinen*). Secondly, through the use of the phrase '*in diser zyt*' (in this time) the preachers' made sure to imply that the general church was but a temporal community. The invisible church (the elect) would ultimately be revealed at a later time following the *Parousia*.

Operating on the basis of these two affirmations regarding the mixed church, the Bernese preachers at the 1532 session used the need to differentiate between the inner and outer forms of the church in a manner quite similar to Zwingli's earlier usage, as an ongoing

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Although this 'visible' church gathers on the basis of Christ its membership consists of those in the aforementioned elect body alongside the reprobate. Finally, the church 'is taken for every particular congregation of this universal and visible church.' Ulrich Zwingli, 'An Account of the Faith of Huldreich Zwingli Submitted to the German Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg', in *Ulrich Zwingli: On Providence and Other Essays*, ed. by William John Hinkle (Durham, 1983), pp. 43-46.

<sup>54</sup> *Es ist gemeine christenliche kilchen aller heiligen lut deß artickels im glouben. Die kompt in diser zyt nit zesamen... der gott allein erkendt unnd sich flyßt ze laben nach dem willen unnd maß des heiligen geists; zun Romern 12. Wir begarend noch, das du die kilchen underscheydest oder sagest, das du allein von der allgemeinen heiligen kilchen gesandt syest. QZ Zofingen, p. 98.*

talking point to destabilize the Anabaptists' free-church theory. Interestingly, this critical distinction was offered within the context of the preachers' agreeing with the radicals on other foundational matters of ecclesiology. They reasoned as follows:

In this there is no division. They (the Anabaptists) confess with us a church community of all believers, composed of those who confess Christ. These are scattered throughout the world; for such must not be bound in one place. But, it hangs on this: What makes such a church, namely the foundation, is Jesus Christ... Paul also accepted God's church as a pillar of truth in I Timothy 3. Such a foundation has been commanded by Christ to be set at this time. Therefore, it follows that the general church must divide into a special community, and where the foundation and these things are as stated and established, the Christian church is fulfilled. When the apostles established a special community, a small holy people also called the church is, however, not the entire church.<sup>55</sup>

Here, the preachers stressed that the foundation of the church was Christ and not the separatist ideal expressed via the believers' church. Furthermore, the valid standing of the church was based on a series of right practices within that church, namely through properly observing the sacraments, discipline, correct doctrinal preaching, etc. While affirming their view of the church the preachers at the 1532 debate were also quick to again qualify such a church as a temporal entity. The phrase 'at this time' was used to describe Christ's established church clearly denoted as much. The subsequent assertion, framed via the designation 'it follows', stressed that 'the general church' (*die allgemein*) had to be divided into a 'special (invisible) community' (*sonder gemeinden*); thereby fulfilling the true Christian church established by Christ. So, the preachers were willing to concede the reality of a church composed exclusively of genuine believers, but only if understood as a future reality that was now presently hidden within the general visible church (the *Volkskirche*).

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<sup>55</sup> *In dem ist kein span; sy bekennend mit uns ein gemeine aller gloubigen kilchen, daryn gehorend alle die, die Christum bekennent. Die ist zerstrout in alle welt; solliche mag nit an ein ort bunden warden. Aber daran hanget es: was ein solche kilchen mache, namlich das pfullment, Christus Jesus... Wie ouch Paulus die kilchen gottes ein sul der warheit nempt I Tim. 3. Solich pfulment hat Christus bevolhen den synen ze legen. Deßhalb volget, das sich die allgemein kilchen in sonder gemeinden abteilen muß, und wo das pfullment funden und dise ding, wie abstat, ufgericht, die synd in der christenlichen kilchen vergriffen. Wie apostel etwann ein sonder gemein, ein kleins hüffli volcks ouch die kilchen gnempt, ist aber drum nit die gantz kilchen gsin. QZ Zofingen, p. 99*

Despite the preachers' deference to Zwingli's church distinction, the Anabaptists at Zofingen continued to hammer home the importance of external action as a part of their ecclesiology by rebutting, 'As one in God's church acts upright and honest, punishes evil, preaches change and repentance; as Christ separates (the) community from evil, dividing pure and impure and the Christian church where one acts Christian we recognize and are one with them. The faithful (one), however, is the church where one acts Christian.'<sup>56</sup> In this one argument alone the radicals returned to the well on three separate occasions to underscore the vital role of action, conveyed through the term *handlen*, in identifying the 'faithful church.' In addition to the repeated commitment to the separatist ideal, what remains clearly at issue for the radicals at Zofingen was demonstrating the importance of any one individual's actions for the collective body as a whole, for such action had as much to do with the church's authentication as anything else.

Shifting attention again to the final disputation held in 1538, while a specific discussion relating to the marks of the church did not make its way into the 1538 debate over the church, the Anabaptists' contention for a free-church remained nevertheless. But rather than beginning with the concept of separation, as those at the Zofingen *Gespräch* had done, the Swiss radicals began to explain the importance of gathering a church based on a certain set of criteria. Early in the proceedings of the Bern disputation, Georg Träffer von Ammergöuw, one of three Anabaptists who played a prominent role in the later debate over *die rechte Kirche*, established his understanding for the foundation of the church by declaring,

It is, however, testified by us and shown: First, that Christ is the head of the church and the rock on which it was built. On the other hand, Christ lives according

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<sup>56</sup> *Wie man in der kilchen gotts ufracht und redlich handlen, das boß straffen, von endrung und rüwen predigen, wie Christus [die] gmeind von dem bosen gesünderet, reins von unreinem gescheiden und die christenliche kilch, wo man christenlich handlet, erkennt wirt, sind wir mit inen eins. Die gloubigen sind aber die kilchen, wo man christenlich handlet.* Ibid., p. 100.

to the will of His Father. Therefore, what Christ proclaimed and demanded of His church and all people, was to be morally improved and converted from a sinful life. Also, the apostles, as they received it, presented to all people to obey God's Word. The community of God is made up of those who walk unpunished, (are) holy, unstained, (and) having neither wrinkles nor spots. Those we confess to be a holy community, all believers, who are born-again, doing the will of God.<sup>57</sup>

Instead of working within the context of a discussion regarding the marks of the church, as was the case at Zofingen, the Anabaptists' allegiance to the free-church ideal was manifest here in 1538 through what Träffer understood to be the demands of Christ, as the founder and head over the church, and the example of the apostles in formally establishing the church. Through these first century witnesses, Träffer, following the same basic overarching beliefs expressed by those Anabaptists at the 1532 session, argued that the community of God was to be comprised exclusively of those individuals who acted in accordance with their confession. Here Träffer used concepts such as 'moral improvement' (*bessern*) and 'conversion from a sinful life' (*bekheren von sündlichem läbenn*) to reiterate this point. The notion of 'obedience' (*gehorsam*), readily found in the 1532 discussion, reappears here in 1538 debate, but now with the specific object of the action being God's Word. Träffer's insistence here followed the same line of reasoning first established by Hans Hotz at the outset of the 1538 ecclesiological discussions. Following his explanation of the importance of Paul's second-Adam Christology as the basis for the gospel, Hotz proceeded to emphasize the role of the apostles in the call to salvation. Directly referencing Matthew 3:1ff Hotz reminded the audience of the repentance John the Baptist had called for, all the while emphasizing the need for true Christians to 'bear fruits worthy of repentance.'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Es ist aber von unns bezügett unnd angezeigt: erstlich, das Christus das houpt der khilchen unnd der velsenn sye, uf den sy buwenn ist. Zum anndern das leben Christi, nach dem willen des vatters. Demnach was Christus angebenn unnd vordre von siner khilchenn unnd allen völlckern, wie man sich sole bessern, bekheren von sündlichem läbenn. Ouch die apostell, wie sy es empfanngen, allem volck fürgetragenn, gottes wortt gehorsam ze sin. Das ist die gemeind gottes, die da wannlent unsträfflich, heillig, nitt fleckenn, runtzeln noch masen hatt. Die bekhennent wir für ein gemeinschaft der heilligen, alle glöübigenn, die widergeboren sind, ze thun den willenn gottes. QZ Bern, p. 316.*

<sup>58</sup> Specifically see Matthew 3:1-8 and *QZ Bern*, p. 314.

Expanding on this argument, the concept of obedience, conveyed through the German term *gehorsam*, saturated the radicals' arguments and provided a visible expression of the new life about which they so passionately spoke. Mirroring the sentiments of those given during the Zofingen debate, Hans Hotz declared, 'Thus, the church is justified through one God, one baptism, one Lord, one faith; that they (Christians) should live according to the doctrine of the gospel, according to the will of God. That is the origin of the Christian community following on the foundation of the prophets and apostles.'<sup>59</sup> Hotz continued to stress the theme of *gehorsam* by later stating, 'Therefore, we also confess an obedience of the faith, that the lust-man is crucified and buried through belief into a new life. Those who become believers should be exemplified by good works. Timothy. This is a cause of salvation (to those) who are obedient to Him.'<sup>60</sup> In each of the above instances, the term *gehorsam* was not only directly linked by Hotz with genuine conversion, but it was simultaneously employed to show how true faith functioned in a symbiotic relationship with good works.<sup>61</sup> The act of obedience was considered a natural by-product of the change in nature brought on by regeneration, while the former testified to the authenticity of a person's salvation. In a very real sense, the very basis of the Christian community was deemed to have a direct correlation with the daily activities of those individuals contained therein.

As a point of comparison, the Anabaptists participants at Bern shared with their Swiss Brethren forefathers a belief in a church constituted solely of genuine believers in Christ. Furthermore, these 'true believers' had to provide external visible evidence of regeneration

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<sup>59</sup> *Allso ist die kilch gerechtvertigt durch ein gott, ein touff, ein herrn, ein glouben, das sy sole lebenn nach der gehorsame des evangelii, nach dem willen gottes. Das ist der anfang der christenlichenn gmeind us dem grund der propheten unnd der aposteln.* Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>60</sup> *Darby bekennen wir ouch ein gehorsame des gloubenns, das der möntsch mitt den glüsten begrabenn sin unnd gecrüztiget durch denn gloubenn inn ein nüw lebenn. Welliche glöübig werden, söllennt fürträffennlich sin in gutten werchen. Thimo. Ist denen ein ursach der selligkheitt, die im gehorsam sind.* Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>61</sup> The Anabaptists' use of *gehorsam* in this manner was certainly not confined exclusively to these two quotations, but was a recurring theme for the Anabaptists at the 1538 session. Ibid., pp. 315, 317, 318, and 324.

through life application. Such a position is certainly in keeping with the concerns of the early Swiss Anabaptist movement as a whole. The most prolific Anabaptist theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, in his *Eighteen Theses*, conveyed this conviction when he wrote, ‘Such faith must not be idle, but must break forth in thanksgiving toward God and in all kinds of brotherly love towards other men.’<sup>62</sup> One year later Hubmaier continued this same focus on the natural by-product of genuine faith in his *Summa of the Entire Christian Life*. Describing the work of God in conversion he argued, ‘But by faith the Spirit of God makes them alive so that they start to live, turn green, and bear fruit.’ Thereafter he reasoned, ‘Faith is not idle but is industrious in all good Christian works.’<sup>63</sup> Hubmaier even included this as a part of his *Christian Catechism* while explaining the difference between what he labeled as a dead and living faith. The former, he argued, ‘is unfruitful and without the works of love, James 2:17.’<sup>64</sup> His strongest stance on the necessity of action can be found in his later prison work, *Rechenschaft*. In an effort to combat those he cleverly labeled ‘mouth Christians’ (*Maul Christen*), Hubmaier not only stressed that ‘mere faith is not enough for salvation’, but, as a consequence, ‘good works must truly be added to the faith.’<sup>65</sup> The same ‘fruit analogy’ employed by Hubmaier in these examples, along with his usage of James 2:17 as an

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<sup>62</sup> *Solcher glaub mag nit müssig geen, sunder muß außbrechen gegen Gott in dancksagung vnd gegen den menschen in allerley wreck bruderlicher liebe.* ‘Eighteen These’, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, ed. by Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten, in *Quellen Zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Band IX (Heidelberg, 1962), p. 72.

<sup>63</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, ‘Summa of the Entire Christian Life,’ in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, 1989), pp. 85 and 87.

<sup>64</sup> This differentiation was expressed through a fictitious dialogue Hubmaier presented between Lord Leonhart von Liechtenstein and his nephew, Hans. Balthasar Hubmaier, ‘A Christian Catechism’, in *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>65</sup> *Der ainig vnd bloß glaub ist nit gnueg zu der seligkait and So miessen furwar die guetten werckh zu dem glaubenn gethon werden.* See articles one and two of ‘Rechenschaft’, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, ed. by Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten (*Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Band IX; Heidelberg, 1962), pp. 461-463.

interpretive dictate made up a foundational part of the Anabaptists apology for their 'existential' form of Christianity at Bern.<sup>66</sup>

This focus on external action was certainly even present during the infancy of the Anabaptist movement prior to the first adult baptism in January 1525. Conrad Grebel, in his famous letter to Thomas Müntzer wrote, 'Faith must have fruits, otherwise it is a false or hypocritical faith. If one separates oneself from sin, one may be sure of salvation. Baptism signifies that a man is dead, or ought to be dead, to sin and is walking in the newness of life and spirit. Such a one shall certainly be saved if, according to this idea, through inner baptism he lives his faith.'<sup>67</sup> An anonymous writer and contemporary of Hans Hottinger further articulated the importance of external action to the Anabaptists when stating, 'Now if one wants to be a Christian and called a brother, the requisite is that he learn to know God, that he abstain from sins and wishes to experience 'moral improvement' (*besserung*) that he let it be evidenced by the sign of baptism, moral improvement, and a 'new life' (*nüwen lebens*).'<sup>68</sup> Three years later, Michael Sattler continued this theme by declaring, 'But they are the true Christians who practice in deed the teachings of Christ.'<sup>69</sup> As a part of his famous *Schleitheim Confession*, Sattler went on to contrast those true Christians who 'stand fast in the Lord as obedient children of God' from those false brethren who he believed had mistakenly allowed their Christian faith to proceed from a libertine mindset.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> The Anabaptists' concluding arguments at the Zofingen debate revealed that external action was not simply a basis for their separatist ideology, but that it cut to the core of whether a person really did know God in salvific terms. *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>67</sup> See 'Letter to Thomas Müntzer, 5 September, 1524' Quote from Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism: An Interpretation* (Scottsdale, 1973), p 82. Also see Conrad Grebel, 'Grebel to Müntzer', pp. 284-292.

<sup>68</sup> *LVM*, 'Grundsätze der Täufer', p. 382.

<sup>69</sup> Sattler, 'Sattler's Letter to Capito and Bucer', p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> Sattler, 'The Schleitheim Brotherly Union', p. 35. The specific identity of these 'false brethren' remains in question. The most extensive and thorough treatment of this question was done by Meihuizen, who argued for a

Hotz's use of the term obedience at the 1538 debate brings up the great need to further qualify the Anabaptist's emphasis on one's daily life. Indeed, if this emphasis on external action as it related to church membership is not taken in its proper context it can be easy to miss the heart of the Anabaptists' free-church teaching at Bern. While external activity certainly was valued it definitely was not considered an end in itself by those radicals participating in the Bernese debates. In fact, one need not read too deeply into the aforementioned statements from the 1532 and 1538 protocols to see that the Swiss radicals' commitment to a freely gathered separatist body was based not so much on the wedding of confession and action alone, but more principally on the presence of authentic regeneration in those that gathered.<sup>71</sup>

To reduce this down to its most basic supposition, a member of the church was in fact required by the radicals to be that which they had previously affirmed themselves to be in word verbally and publically via baptism; namely, a true and obedient follower of Christ. Accordingly, the focus on external action was simply a means for the Anabaptists to provide tangible proof that a new inner ontological reality existed for the confessor. To express this principle in biblical language, it was the 'good fruits which give testimony of a good tree.'<sup>72</sup> It was this new found reality that accompanied salvation which the Anabaptists believed ultimately permitted a person's participation in the local church community.<sup>73</sup>

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plurality of people including Hubmaier, Hut, Denck, Bucer, Capito, and Hätzer. H.W. Meihuizen, 'Who Were the "False Brethren" Mentioned in the Schleithem Articles?' *MQR* 41, 1967, pp. 200-222.

<sup>71</sup> Kenneth Davis has correctly recognized that the Anabaptists' ecclesiology was driven here by the conviction that 'ultimate salvation and present holiness of conduct arising from sincere inner intent were inseparable.' Kenneth Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale, 1974), p. 136.

<sup>72</sup> This is a direct quotation from Hubmaier who was attempting to show the logical progression in a person's life following their conversion. Hubmaier, 'Summa of the Entire Christian Life,' p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Franklin Littell has argued for the important role of the concept of re-birth by declaring, 'In Anabaptist teaching, the new birth has Christ alone as foundation and must occur radically in the history of both the individual believer and the true Church. The new beginning was as fundamental for the individual believer as it was for the Church of the Restitution. It was this constitutive element which distinguished the Anabaptists from

To dispel the idea that they had focused attention exclusively on external action as the basis for church membership the Anabaptists at both Bernese sessions skillfully employed certain language, alongside the use of biblical texts, to promote the importance of regeneration as an ecclesiological supposition. Those radicals at the Zofingen debate provided this specific salvific context using a couple of key biblical passages and terms. Returning to the Anabaptists' explanation of the marks of the church, which were not found in the 1538 debate, one finds specific evidence for this important qualification. Here, using unmistakably Pauline language, the non-believer, identified through the biblical designation 'old man' (*alt mensch*) was directly contrasted by the 1532 radicals with those who had shared in Christ's death and resurrection leading to the 'new life' (*nüw leben*) symbolized through the rite of baptism. Through an allusion to Romans 6:1-14 the radicals argued in language strongly reminiscent of earlier Swiss Brethren that only those who had 'put down the old man' (*der alt mensch hingeleyt*) through the act of conversion could participate in the true church gathered on earth.<sup>74</sup>

Immediately after this declaration the radicals at Zofingen referenced Hebrews 5 to reiterate the idea that eternal salvation was somehow directly linked with obedience to Christ.<sup>75</sup> A similar line of reasoning was expressed later by these same Anabaptists when they declared, 'The Word of God is the Kingdom of God and all who wish to enter it must

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both Roman Catholic "work righteousness" and Lutheran *sola fides*.' Littell, *Anabaptist View of the Church*, p. 84.

<sup>74</sup> The use of this allusion to Romans 6 clearly shows that the Anabaptists at Zofingen interpreted Paul to be speaking of conversion when discussing the putting off of the old man. The fact that Paul's words were given within the context of his admonishment to the Romans not to live in sin any longer or embrace what Dietrich Bonhoeffer later famously called 'cheap grace', certainly promoted the importance of the Anabaptists' emphasis on 'acting Christian.' *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 97-98 and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, 1960), pp. 35-36. The comparison of language with the Swiss Brethren was drawn from statements made during the interrogation of Georg Blaurock and Felix Manz in 1525. *LVM*, 'Verhör über Blaurock und Felix Manz', p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 98.

embrace it in their heart.<sup>76</sup> As was the case for many of the Swiss radicals, the embracing of the Word by one's heart was a phrase used synonymously with the act of regeneration and conversion. Quoting Jesus' words from John 3, they subsequently reminded their audience that unless 'man is born anew' (*der mensch vonn nüwem geboren werde*), they could not obtain the Kingdom of God.<sup>77</sup> Once again rebirth and the biblical concept of regeneration are seen by these Anabaptists not only as a requisite to church membership, but the very thing that elicited the good works they so frequently referenced. Finally, working off the dichotomous language used in their interpretation of the wheat and tares parable, the radicals at Zofingen used the concepts of 'walking as the Lord' (*wandlen wie der herr*) and 'holding His commandments' (*syne gebott halten*) as tangible signs pointing to regeneration.<sup>78</sup> Those who merely confess but do not demonstrate true conversion through obedience are but 'liars' according to I John 5:10-12.<sup>79</sup>

Even as the specific context and language of the argument subtly changed from the 1532 debate, the importance of regeneration as a requisite part of one's assimilation into the church remained a dominant theme during the Bernese debate six years later. Yet again, action for these later Anabaptists was not considered an end in itself but a means to determining if genuine faith resided in the confessor. The importance of 'bearing fruit' and the inner aspect of one's heart condition, as it related to salvation, find repeated usages by Hans Hotz in his elaboration on the impact Paul's second Adam Christology had on the life of Jesus' followers. However, Hotz selection of passages from Matthew's Gospel and Acts

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<sup>76</sup> *Das wort gottes ist das rych gottes, und alle, die darinkommen wollend, die mussend das in ir hertz fassen.* Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Regeneration in this instance was equated with that individual's possession of 'eternal life' (*ewig laben*). Ibid., p. 105

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

to clarify these points deviated widely from the John 3 example used by the Anabaptists at Zofingen in 1532.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, Hotz's distinction between a person's life before and after conversion demonstrated the symbiotic relationship faith and works shared in Anabaptist ecclesiology and soteriology.

Through an allusion to Paul's words penned to the Galatians, Hotz used the apostle's imagery of crucifixion and burial (applied to the flesh or old nature) to show how only true regeneration could usher in the 'new life' (*nüw lebenn*) granted by Christ and personified in 'obedience' (*gehorsame*).<sup>81</sup> Strongly reminiscent of the 'old man'/'new life' distinctions made by the earlier Anabaptists in describing the blessing of one's union with Christ, Hotz linked the benefits of Christ's death and burial with Christian obedience. Even the important role 'rebirth' played in this was retained at the later *Gespräch*. Following in the tradition of those at the debate six years earlier, Träffer argued that only those individuals 'who are born-again' (*die widergeboren sind*) were eligible to gather as the holy community of Christ's church.<sup>82</sup> Again, the immediate context, specific language, and supporting biblical passages have varied to a degree, signifying the independent nature of these two groups, but the importance of action as it related to regeneration remained a constant concern for the Anabaptists at both debates.

Returning now to the major content of the 1538 debate one finds the preachers ready to respond to their adversaries' focus on external action and an obedient life. Here, while again ardently opposed to the Anabaptists' free-church ecclesiology, the preachers at the 1538 debate opted for a largely different approach in their rebutting argumentation than their predecessors six years earlier. After initially granting the floor of the ecclesiological debate

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<sup>80</sup> See Matthew 3:1ff and Acts 2:37-41.

<sup>81</sup> See Hotz's statements in *QZ Bern*, 318 and Galatians 5:16-26, especially vs. 24.

<sup>82</sup> See Träffer's statements in *Ibid.*, p. 316.

to their adversaries, the preachers first began to address the Anabaptists' view of the church by questioning the church's ability to be gathered exclusively by authentic Christians. Affirming the importance of a genuine faith which actively yielded good works, Erasmus Ritter was still left saying, '(We) ask you if the church is here without sin or if it still has faults and defects?'<sup>83</sup> After the radicals replied with an appeal to the role of 'obedience' (*gehorsame*) accompanying the burial of sin by those freed through Christ, a key component of the preachers' argumentation against the free-church model was offered. Here again, much like at the Zofingen debate, the preachers began by arguing for their mixed church ecclesiology. However, rather than expressing this view of the church through Zwingli's three sense distinction of the term 'church', as was done at Zofingen, Ritter, along with the other Reformed preachers at Bern, first focused attention on the paradoxical reality that faced all Christians in their present, pre-glorified state.

Responding to Träffer's claim that the true church was without spot, Ritter replied as follows,

That you say the church is without spot we are willing to confess, yet with the differentiation: The believer indeed is without sin, as far as they are regarded so by God. Through belief they are pure and without flaw. However, according to the flesh, and as much as they are flesh, they are sinners. Adam's sin is present with them. Thus, when they (also the faithful) stand before God in court, He (God) is correct and right to damn them according to their sins of the flesh. So according to the flesh they are not without blemish. As said before, other than in the regard of God, as the Psalmist said: All men are liars, that is imperfect sinful.<sup>84</sup>

Again, the purposeful omission of the Zwinglian 'distinction' (*underscheydest*) between the invisible and visible forms of the church was now replaced with a wholly new 'distinction'

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<sup>83</sup> *Fragenn üch, ob die khilch hie gar an sünd sye oder noch etwas vällers unnd mangell habe.* Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>84</sup> *Das du sprichst, die khilch sye an masen, bekhennen wir wol, doch mitt dem unnderscheid: die glöübig sind ja ane sünd, sovil alls sy glöübig sind inn der achtung gottes. Durch den gloubenn sind sy rein unnd ane mackell. Aber nach dem fleisch, sovil unnd sy fleisch, sind sy sunder. Ist die sünd mitt inen von Adam barbracht. Also wenn gott mitt inen (ouch den gloübigenn) inns gricht stan welte, hette er recht unnd fug, von ir sünd des fleischs wegenn sy ze verdammen. So gar sind sy nach dem fleisch nitt an masen. Annderst dann in der achtung gottes, wie vor geseit, wie im psallmen 116 stat: Alle mentschenn sind lunger, das ist prestfaffig, sündtlich.* Ibid., pp. 316-317.

(*unnderscheid*). Using legal imagery and language to offer this distinction, Ritter reiterated the same forensic understanding of justification that had now become commonly accepted by all the mainline Magisterial Reformers. While true Christians certainly had been declared righteous (and therefore pure and holy by God) through the act of conversion, the reality of living in a fallen world prior to the final glorification brought a secondary standing to man. The quotation from Psalms 116:11 was used as a reminder of this standing in light of the residual effects of sin on the believer's present state.<sup>85</sup> Here, Ritter agreed with his opponents that the true believer was presently pure and without flaw, but only with the accompanying qualification that this be understood within the proper theological context, namely man's present state prior to glorification – 'they are flesh' (*sind sy fleisch*). Ultimately, this qualification meant a great divide soteriologically, for it placed Ritter in the camp with others Reformers like Martin Luther who affirmed a paradoxical tension for the true believer who was simultaneously considered both righteous and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*).<sup>86</sup> As Ritter would proceed to reason, even the person whose hope and faith is in Christ, 'still, there remains in him a lust and temptation of the flesh.'<sup>87</sup>

Predictably, the Anabaptists at the 1538 session offered a standard riposte by focusing attention yet again on the external action of a confessing individual. They argued that real faith always constrained a person from remaining in the lustful flesh. Indeed, the believer did have a daily battle to wage against the flesh, but as Träffer would argue, true believers would always stand fast through the power of God.<sup>88</sup> Once again the notion of 'obedience'

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Cunz, a vocal defender of the Bernese church, employed this same passage from Psalms 116 to cleverly accuse, through a blatantly rhetorical question, the Anabaptists of having members in its fellowship who had sinned. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>86</sup> Donald K. McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 105.

<sup>87</sup> *Doch hanngent im nüdtdesterminder an glüst unnd anfectung des fleischs. QZ Bern*, p. 318.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

(*gehorsam*) played a prominent role for the Anabaptists. Here it was seen by Träffer as the determining means of attaining the purification which left an individual holy and without blemish.

Having failed to convince the Anabaptists of the need to recognize man's presently sinful state the preachers returned to the same passage relating to the wheat and tares which they had used to combat the radicals' separatism at the Zofingen debate six years earlier. As was the case for the preachers at the 1532 session, the 'anonymous nature' of a community was, as Ritter clarified, again a key component of their mixed church ecclesiology and axiomatically rooted in the fact that 'we, however, cannot know the heart.'<sup>89</sup> Since there was no empirical or lucid way of discerning the true nature of a confessing individual, Ritter argued, 'we must count all as the adopted and (being) among the church those who confess Christ with their mouth, share the sacrament with us, (and) hear the preaching of the outer Word. If there are several false one's (among these) then we cannot know. Do not false brethren mix among you?'<sup>90</sup>

### **Pure Church**

Although the radicals at the 1532 and 1538 disputations initially focused their attention during the ecclesiological discussions on two different aspects of their free-church ideology (separation at the Zofingen session and composition of the church body during the 1538 debate), both groups eventually expanded the ecclesiological scope of their apologies by later addressing the issue of purity among those gathering as the church. Interestingly, although the radicals participating at these two Bernese debates affirmed the same foundational view of this purity as it related to the church, both groups expressed this concept

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<sup>89</sup> *So wir aber nitt die hertzen behkennent.* Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>90</sup> *müssennt wir alle die annemen unnd unnder die khilchenn zellen, die mitt dem mundt Christum behkennent, die sacrament mitt unns bruchennnt, die predig, das usser wortt, hörennt. Obwol der ettlich valtsch sind, darfür könnennt wir nitt. Mischent sich nitt unnder ouch also valtsche brüder?* Ibid., p. 319.

from notably different perspectives. The Anabaptists at the Zofingen disputation were frequently found highlighting the importance of church purity by distinguishing it against the backdrop of the Swiss church and its passive concession of some sin in the church body, while those at the 1538 debate looked specifically to the holy character of the church to convey the same point.

Responding to the preachers' agreement with the Anabaptists on several key points of debate, except the belief that 'neither vice nor garbage shall be found in the same church', the Swiss radicals at Zofingen argued that 'all evil in the church was forbidden.'<sup>91</sup> Consequently, the church which willingly 'tolerated' (*gedulden*) sin had not only been seduced, according to the radicals, but had committed a grave mistake in light of I Corinthians 5, which stressed that 'a little leaven contaminates the entire dough.'<sup>92</sup> They went on to reason that even though the preachers' church accepted evil into its body, both the Old and New Testaments revealed that sinners would not be allowed to inherit the Kingdom of God.<sup>93</sup> In order to combat the notion that tolerating sin was some catastrophic act for the integrity of the church body, the preachers at Zofingen proceeded to defend their church ecclesiology on two fronts. First, they continually challenged the Anabaptists with a series of biblical passages used in such a way as to promote their mixed church beliefs. Secondly, they sought to biblically defend their position that a church's 'name' was not lost simply because of sin found therein.

Rebutting the Anabaptists' interpretation of I Corinthians 5 the preachers' at the 1532 debate reminded their counterparts of Paul's words to other churches he established

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<sup>91</sup> *Kein laster noch unrat in der selben kilchen erfunden sole werden and Es sind alle laster in der kilchen verboten. QZ Zofingen, p.100.*

<sup>92</sup> *ein wenig surteyg ein gantzen teyg versürt.* Ibid., p. 100. The 'leaven argument' served as a recurring theme during the Anabaptists' free-church formulation at the 1532 disputation. Ibid., pp. 105-106, 110.

<sup>93</sup> The Anabaptists referenced Jesus' re-articulation of the OT command not to murder found in Matthew 5:21 along with I John 3:15 as further proof that one's inheritance was directly linked with a person's purity. Ibid., p. 101.

throughout Europe and Asia Minor. The preachers reasoned, ‘I testify with Paul’s words in Galatians 1; there Paul accepted the Galatians as a Christian church and yet to the same (church) said in chapter 3: “O you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not believe the truth?” Thus, they had fallen from Christ’s true teaching... Still, he accepted this church.’<sup>94</sup> It stood to reason in the minds of the preachers at Zofingen that if Paul directly named the Christian assemblies of Galatia as ‘churches’, knowing full well that they needed to be admonished for sinfully being led astray in matters of the faith, then the mere presence of sin in any one church body could not disqualify that church community as the Anabaptists had challenged.<sup>95</sup> Conceding the Anabaptists’ point in theory alone, the preachers argued that if sin did nullify a church’s validity then Paul’s admonition to the Galatians regarding walking in the Spirit would seem quite odd.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, since similar admonitions to ‘improve morally’ (*besserung*) were included in the other of his epistles circulating to what Paul recognized as ‘churches’, then it stood to reason that the radicals’ free-church ecclesiology was wholly untenable.<sup>97</sup>

Unable to convincingly persuade the Swiss radicals at Aargua with an appeal to Paul, the preachers re-oriented attention at the Zofingen debate onto Jesus’ parabolic words which they believed promoted a mixed church assembly.<sup>98</sup> To further endorse their doctrinal convictions the preachers sited the parables of the sower, wheat and tares, dragnet, and wedding feast as proof that the presence of evil in the general church was an unavoidable

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<sup>94</sup> *Bezüg ich mit dem spruch Pauli Galat I, da Paulus die Galater ein kilchen Christi nempt und aber glich am 3. capitel spricht: O ir dorechtigen Galater, wer hatt ouch verzouberet, das ir der warheyt nitt gloubend? Da sy warend abgfallen von der waren leer Christi Noch nempt er’s die kilchen.* Ibid., pp. 100-101.

<sup>95</sup> The preachers would later reiterate this claim by arguing that Galatians circulated as one of the epistles of Paul despite the sin of its members. Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>96</sup> See Galatians 5:16ff and the preachers’ argument in Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>97</sup> See the preachers’ arguments presented at the close of the day on 2 July, 1532. Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>98</sup> The radicals argued that the preachers’ example from Galatians was fundamentally flawed since the church did, in fact, reform itself after being admonished by the Apostle. Ibid., p. 102.

reality in the present age.<sup>99</sup> The preachers proceeded, ‘we turn to, as said before, further proof that the name of the church is not lost, because evil continually resides in it. Matthew 13 states: A sower went out to sow his seed, etc. Christ described with such a parable the price of preaching, that few bring forth fruit.’<sup>100</sup> This price, in the minds of the preachers, coupled with their interpretation of the ensuing wheat and tares parable, clearly had far reaching implications. Asking the question, ‘shall, therefore, the name of the kingdom of God and the church be lost’, because of the intermingling of the wheat and chaff, the preachers passionately responded, ‘*Nein, warlich.*’<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, at the behest of Jesus’ final admonition from the wheat and tares parable, both the entities ‘bad and good’ (*boß und gut*) were to remain amalgamated as one until the end of time.<sup>102</sup> Here again the Bern preachers were determined to address and confirm the biblical authenticity of a church body where residual sin remained therein. The ‘name’ of a church meant everything in such a context.

In response, the radicals at Zofingen argued that the preachers had misinterpreted the wheat and tares passage by erroneously equating ‘the field’ spoken of by Jesus with the church. Referencing the parable of the leaven from Matthew 13, the Anabaptists clarified that the world was to be understood as the field and not Christ’s church.<sup>103</sup> Moving forward in their emphasis on purity, and cleverly confronting the issue at a place in which they felt the Swiss Reformed church was most vulnerable, the Anabaptists continued their reasoning by

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<sup>99</sup> See the preachers’ arguments in *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103, and 105 and Matthew 13:1-9; 24-30; 47-52, and 22:1-14 for these parables in their entirety.

<sup>100</sup> *Wir wend, wie vor gesagt, wyter probieren, das ouch die kilchen den nammen nit verlüt, darumb das boß darinnen wonend für unnd für. Matthei 13 stadt: es gieng eine sayer uß, sinen somen zu sayen etc. Beschrybt mit solicher glychnuß die thür predig Christi, die aber wenig frucht bringe.* *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>101</sup> *Solt es darumb den nammen des rych gottes und der kilchen verloren haben?* *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103. The preachers’ definition of ‘the end of time’ (*zur der ernd*) was contextually understood as culminating with the final judgment or judgment day (*jüngsten tag*). Also see *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105 and 107-108.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104

later stating, ‘When my brother commits an offense with excessive drinking, brawling, etc. I cannot tolerate this; but instead I should punish him according to Matthew 18.’<sup>104</sup> From these passages it is clear that the radicals at the 1532 debate were simply unwilling to concede any open and unrepentant sin in the body without it being addressed and purged according to Matthew 18.<sup>105</sup> To further emphasize the gravity of this point, the Anabaptists interpreted Revelation 2 as a warning to the apostate church (in this case understood as an impure church), declaring that unless purity was restored through repentance, that church would lose its lamp stand.<sup>106</sup>

The words of the Apostle Paul provided the preachers with yet another example which they believed promoted their mixed ecclesiology. Referencing Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, the preachers contended,

In I Corinthians 10 Paul compared the Jewish people in the Old Testament with the Christians of the New Testament, saying they had been given the same food and accepted (the same) holy Father. However, there are many of these that did not please God as the text reads further. Such is described to us a type, when we shared the same baptism and sacrament; one must also do this when inwardly there is evil and outwardly one is shown as a Christian. Therefore, it does not follow, however, that if we do not all accept the same Lord, that the community, as often said, loses its name as a church.<sup>107</sup>

Paul’s OT/NT parallel typology afforded the preachers the occasion to hammer home an important point in their biblical justification for the *Volkskirche*. Once again, the valid

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<sup>104</sup> *Wenn sich min bruder vergienge mit suffen, schlagen etc.; das ich den dulden, kond ich nit, sonder wurd inn straffen nach der ordnung Matt. 18.* Ibid., p. 105. The ‘tavern’ reference became such a staple attack upon the Swiss Reformed church that the preachers eventually verbalized their weariness at its repetitious use by the Anabaptists during the discussion on the ban. See the preachers’ comments in Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>105</sup> The institution of the ban in Matthew 18 was repeatedly used by the Anabaptists to not only demonstrate the importance of preserving a pure church, but to show the role of Christian discipline in allowing such a community to be realized. See the Anabaptists comments in Ibid., pp. 98, 104-105, 110-111.

<sup>106</sup> See Ibid., p. 106 and Revelation 2:5.

<sup>107</sup> *Paulus I. Corinth. 10 verglicht das volck der Juden im alten unns christen im nüwen testament; spricht, sy habind eynerley spyß gassen, und nempt sy die heyligen vatter. Sind aber vil darunder gsin, die gott nit fallen, wie dann wyter im text lutet. Solichs ist uns zu einer figure beschriben, wenn wir glych toufft sind unnd zum sacrament gond; das mag ouch einer thun, der innwendig boß unnd ußwendig sich erzeigt wie ein Christ. Darumb volget aber nit, ob wir glych den herren nit all annemmend, das darumb die gmeind, wie offt gsagt, den nammen der kilchen verliere.* *QZ Zofingen.*, p. 106.

standing of a church, embodied via the designation 'its name', must not, according to the preachers' parallel typology, rest on the presence of sin in its membership. Israel's relationship with God surely taught as much, for just as the Hebrew people were God's chosen race, the wilderness years following the Exodus revealed that few Jews really pleased God. Therefore, just as God embraced the Jews as a part of Israel, including those who persistently grumbled and rebelled against Him, so too was the church permitted in this era to include those not elect.

Commenting directly on the preachers' usage of the wheat and tares defense, the Anabaptists at the 1532 debate developed their concept of separation even further by referencing Paul's words in his second letters to both Timothy and the church at Corinth.

They reasoned as follows:

In II Timothy 2, Paul compared the children of God with gold and silver vessels and the children of the Devil to vessels of dishonor and said: 'Thus, when somebody purifies himself from such vessels of impurity, they will be a vessel of honor.' Paul spoke further in II Corinthians 6, 'What fellowship has light to do with the darkness? Therefore, draw away from them. You hear that the good seed shall be separated from the dead one and should not have fellowship with them in their deeds of injustice. Then [God says] 'I will accept you and be your Father.' Therefore, this parable does not support the idea that the weed's seed shall be permitted to grow and then at the end of the world, with the sound of the angels' trumpets, it will be uprooted.<sup>108</sup>

Paul's vessel imagery was employed here in such a way as to reiterate the previously discussed notion of the ontological change which the radicals believed accompanied a true conversion experience. It stood to reason, according to their reading of Paul, that those who had been cleansed through conversion now belonged to an entirely different category of

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<sup>108</sup> *Paulus 2. Timoth. 2 verglycht die kinder gottes den guldinen und silberen gschirren unnd die kinder des tufels dengeschirren der uneeren und spricht: So sich yemands reiniget von solichen gschirren der unreinigkeit, wirt syn ein gschirr der eeren. Wyter spricht Paulus 2. Corinth.6: Was hett das liecht für ein gemeinschaft mit der finsternuß? Darumb gond uß mitten uß inen. Hie horned ir, das sich der gut somen von dem ungewachs sol absündern, nit mit inen gemeinschaft han in iren wercken der ungerechtigkeit. Den (spricht got) wil ich üch annemmen und iwer vatter syn. Darumb dise glychnuß nit ertragen mag, das der somen deß unkruts sol gewachsen lassen unnd denn erst am end der walt durch die engel, mit der busounen ußgejatten warden. Ibid., p. 108.*

person. A change in being, therefore, was naturally accompanied by an ensuing change in association. Paul's rhetorical question to the Corinthians (with the implied answer of 'nothing') simply presented this ontological change within a specific context; namely, through the dualistic categories of 'light' (*das liecht*) and 'darkness' (*der finsternuß*).

Once again, as seen in the previously quoted statement, the Bible's portrayal of a battle between 'light' and 'darkness' served as the Anabaptists' illustrative tool in expressing the dichotomy which they recognized existed between the two contradictory realms.<sup>109</sup>

While the radicals at Zofingen spent time arguing that separation from the world was one of the 'marks' of the true church and a purposeful tool (used in conjunction with the ban) which could 'shame' (*schamrot*) a person unto conversion, it was mostly presented as a logical consequence of the dichotomy which existed between two fundamentally different groups of people functioning in two irreconcilable realities.<sup>110</sup>

As the discussion on ecclesiology at the Zofingen disputation came to a close the preachers continued their unrelenting assault on the separatist church by moving the conversation towards an issue of great importance for the Swiss radicals. Referencing Jesus' institution of church discipline via the ban, the preachers clarified that Jesus Himself was the one who had called for the church to be cleansed. Accordingly, the preachers argued, 'that is a sign that weeds are found therein.'<sup>111</sup> In essence, Jesus' admonition that the church be

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<sup>109</sup> This passage from II Corinthians 6:14ff was a key argument for the Anabaptists at Zofingen as it served two underlying purposes. First, contextually, it was offered as a part of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian church to avoid being unequally yoked with non-believers. Paul's words were interpreted to mean not only a re-emphasis of the ontological distinction the radicals had been keen to promote, but also the need for the consequence of separation from such individuals. Secondly, the subsequent references by Paul of Ezekiel 37:26 and Isaiah 52:11 were also reminders of God's covenant with Israel, which set them apart as a holy nation who were to depart from the other nations of the world. In many ways this was the Old Testament parallel of the separatism the radicals argued now extended to the Christian Church.

<sup>110</sup> For the Anabaptists' two alternative arguments for separation see *Ibid.*, pp. 100 and 110.

<sup>111</sup> *Ist ye ein zeichen, das unkrut darinn sye.* *Ibid.*, p. 111. For Jesus' institution of the ban see Matthew 18:15ff.

cleansed implied the very presence of sin in its body, for without such sin; it stood to reason that a subsequent exhortation would not be required.

The preachers questioned further that when a church community admonished one found in sin ‘should it, therefore, stand to reason that this Christian community should not be considered God’s church?’<sup>112</sup> Once again, just as was the case with Paul’s admonition to the churches of Corinth, Galatia, etc., the call to improve and admonish those in sin implied the very presence of sin in the church body. Therefore, instead of coldly addressing those in need, the preachers stressed the importance of following Paul’s prescription to the Thessalonians and ‘not hate (the one found in sin), but admonish (him) as a brother.’<sup>113</sup>

Divisions during the apostolic period, according to the preachers, were a part of the emerging New Testament church ethos. Peter and Paul had once been divided on matters of the faith, Simon Peter had denied Christ on three occasions, and even Judas betrayed Jesus.<sup>114</sup> Still, for all of the sin and misgivings of the time, the church set up by Jesus remained intact.

Considering the aforementioned examples, the final conclusion for the preachers was that the ‘name of a church’ could not be removed simply because sin resided in its membership.

Purity, as a key component of the radicals’ free-church ideal, remained a vital part of their argument at Bern six years following the Zofingen disputation. However, as stated previously, while the Anabaptists at the 1538 session followed their contemporaries lead from six years earlier by using the leaven passage from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and Jesus’ institution of the ban to promote a pure church, their remaining focus shifted

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<sup>112</sup> *Solte darumb ein christenliche gemeynd kein kilchen gottes genempt warden?* Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>113</sup> *Nit lassen, sonder vermanen als ein bruder.* Ibid., p. 111. Interestingly, this statement from II Thessalonians 3:15 appears to be the lens through which the preachers’ read and understood the preceding commands of Paul to separate from others (see vs. 6 and 14).

<sup>114</sup> The Peter/Paul argument, derived from Galatians 2:11-21, and Peter’s denial of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, and John 18:15-18 were only employed in this one instance by the preachers to prove their mixed ecclesiology. Ibid., p. 113. The Judas example, found in Matthew 26:47ff, Mark 14:10-11; 43-46, and Luke 22:1-6 was used on multiple occasions at the close of the discussions over the nature of the church. Ibid., pp. 113 and 114.

somewhat.<sup>115</sup> Instead of arguing for a pure church by contrasting it against the Swiss church's toleration of some sin, the radicals at the later disputation directed attention primarily towards the holy character of the pure church itself and its membership. Rather than allowing their position to be predominately defined in relation to what they considered to be the erroneous position of their opponents, the radicals at the 1538 debate sought, instead, to let the true character of the church speak for itself and on its own merits. Through a veiled allusion to Ephesians 5:27 Träffer first began promoting the Swiss radicals' free-church ecclesiology by initially ascribing to the church an innate level of purity. Träffer, following the lead of Mathiß Wiser, argued that the community of God was composed of those 'who are walking unpunished, are holy, spotless, neither wrinkled nor marked. We confess that all believers, who are born again to do the will of God, are a community of holy ones'.<sup>116</sup> It should be noted how the use of the Ephesians passage and the specific language employed by Träffer not only succinctly expressed the radicals' emphasis on purity during their 1538 dialogue with the preachers, but it also demonstrated how the church's holy character was understood in salvific terms and given an audible voice through its member's individual actions. This purity which Träffer spoke of was not merely some vague overarching ideal. Rather, that purity was rooted in the authentic presence of regeneration for the church's membership and subsequently fleshed out through a life of obedience and submission to God.

In this regard, Träffer was merely expressing his understanding of the church and its members through what may best be describes as an affirmation of 'a Christian theology of

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<sup>115</sup> For examples of this usage see Mathiß Wiser's arguments in *QZ Bern*, p. 319 and Hans Hotz's in *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>116</sup> *Die da wandlent unsträfflich, heillig, nitt fleckenn, runtzel noch masen hatt Die bekennennt wir für ein gemeinschaft der heilligen, alle glöübigenn, die widergeborn sind, ze thun den willenn gottes.. Ibid.*, p. 316. Wiser had previously contended 'that the Christian community should be a community of holy people' (*das die christenlich gemeind ein gemeinsame der heilligen sye*). *Ibid.*, pp. 315-316

holiness.’<sup>117</sup> Such a view of the church obviously created a great deal of tension when compared with the Reformed preachers and what may be best described as their prevailing emphasis on a forensic view of justification.<sup>118</sup> Again, the difference in the end may be rather negligible, but the fact remains that the Anabaptist leaders at the 1538 session looked to the holy character of the church body itself when arguing for a pure church rather than predominately focusing attention on those outside of the church fellowship to make the same point as was done six years earlier.

Before proceeding to the preachers’ response to the Anabaptists’ pure church claims at the 1538 *Gespräche* one would do well to delve deeper into this pure church belief. If nothing else, the radicals’ affirmation of a pure church certainly begs a number of questions relating to the groups’ self-perception and the practical reality behind such a system. Chief among these is the question, did the Swiss radicals believe in the notion of Christian perfectionism and, if so, was this not an unattainable reality based on the human condition and the residual affect of the fall recorded in Genesis 3?

While these questions certainly are legitimate ones to ponder, Anabaptist scholarship remains largely agreed that this branch of Anabaptism did not teach and believe in perfectionism proper.<sup>119</sup> The Swiss Anabaptists were not merely idealists or self-deluded

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<sup>117</sup> Kenneth Davis has succinctly argued that at a minimum, there are three primary features of holiness theology: 1) ‘A conviction that the development and attainment of actual sanctity, of Christlikeness in inner spirit and outer conduct... is both a possibility and at the same time the supreme object of the redemptive purposes of God.’ 2) Those desiring salvation are ‘required to actively pursue and, in some measure, attain in this life some similitude of this otherworldly perfection.’ 3) The pursuit of holiness ‘must be demonstrably the determinative interpretive principle for understanding and expressing all other aspects of Christian doctrine and practice.’ Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>118</sup> For a more detailed examination between the Reformers’ forensic view of salvation versus the Anabaptists see Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop, 1977), pp. 70-73. For further reading on the concept of forensic justification, including Martin Luther’s break with Augustine’s traditional view, reference Alistair E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Oxford, 2001), pp. 119-122.

<sup>119</sup> See an important article by Harold S. Bender entitled ‘Perfectionism’, in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV, 1114-1115. Fischer has also effectively rebutted the perfectionist label by examining the Anabaptists’ soteriological convictions against the backdrop of Luther’s *Sole Fide* theology. Hans Georg Fischer, ‘Lutheranism and the Vindication of the Anabaptist Way’, *MQR* 28, 1954, pp. 31-38. Caner stressed the lack of a perfectionist motif

fanatics who believed a pure church naturally implied a perfect church. On the contrary, the Anabaptists were fully aware of the constant danger of ‘backsliding’ and reverting back to the old Adam. That was precisely why God had instituted the ban according to Matthew 18. However, rather than being preoccupied with the prospect of apostasy or being driven by a fatalistic outlook because of original sin, the Anabaptists let their ecclesiology be dictated by the transforming power of the cross of Jesus. The new birth, which the Anabaptists at both Bern debates spoke so passionately about, brought with it the transformation of the individual, thereby removing the governing corruption of sin which so enslaved the unregenerate. New life ushered in a new outlook and a new reality for the believer.

Robert Friedmann has correctly described such individuals by stating, ‘These men and women knew themselves to be redeemed persons who had attained a certain consciousness of salvation or divine grace in the here and now. They felt as if they were already in God’s womb; hence they were no longer worried about man’s constitutive corruption and lostness.’<sup>120</sup> Man still had a daily battle to wage against personal sin, but, according to Traffer at the 1538 session, true believers would always stand firm through the power of God.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, what was revealed by the Swiss Anabaptists’ pure church concept was not a belief in perfectionism, but rather a strong emphasis on sanctification over and against the importance of justification for the Reformed party.<sup>122</sup> Consequently, the differing ecclesiologies of the Anabaptists and Swiss Reformers remained largely tied to their divergent and incompatible soteriologies.

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in the writings of Hubmaier. Emir Fethi Caner, *Truth Is Unkillable: The Life and Writings of Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism* (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Ph.D. Dissertation; Wake Forest, 1999), pp. 192ff.

<sup>120</sup> Friedmann, *Theology of Anabaptism*, p. 32-33.

<sup>121</sup> See Ammergouw’s statements in *QZ Bern*, p. 317.

<sup>122</sup> This concept is briefly touched on in Steve Holmes, ‘Of Babes and Bathwater’, *European Journal of Theology* 16, 2007, pp. 93-106.

Returning again to the preachers' 1538 rebuttal of the pure church notion one finds the group, as they did at Zofingen, referencing several Matthean parables as biblical validation for their mixed church ecclesiology. Erasmus Ritter, once again spearheading the Bernese church's attack argued, '(In) Matthew 13 Christ spoke of the weeds, that had been sown among the good seeds; which man should let remain until the end.'<sup>123</sup> The wheat and tares passage, along with the dragnet parable and Jesus' visual description of His judgment following the second coming, all were interpreted to make a now well established point in the preachers' verbal arsenal against the radicals' pure church.<sup>124</sup> Each was used to demonstrate that while a mixed church body was an acceptable temporal concession because of man's inability to know the human heart, still, a future division would come with the return of Messiah.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, the presence of sin prior to the *Parousia* did not nullify a church's standing before God.

A second line of argumentation for this same point was then put forward by Simon Sultzer in strikingly similar tone and content to one made at Zofingen. Sultzer reminded the radicals, 'Paul reprimanded the Corinthians in chapters 3, 4, and 6 for their error in being puffed up, nevertheless, the apostle still named them believers in Christ in chapter 15.'<sup>126</sup> Sultzer's quotation from I Corinthians was subsequently followed by repeated examples from Galatians and Acts which he believed showed indisputable evidence that a mixed body was in

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<sup>123</sup> *Mathe 13 rett Christus von dem unkrutt, das under den guttenn samen der viennnd geseitt hatt, das man es sollt lassenn stan biß zur ernnd. QZ Bern, p. 319.*

<sup>124</sup> See Matthew 13:47ff and 25:32ff for these parables in their entirety. The preachers also further qualified their understanding of the wheat and tares parable by later stressing the need to avoid dealing too harshly via the Anabaptists' divisive acts of exclusion (*ußschliessen*) and shunning (*schüchenn*). Those who refrained from such activity and built a church on the basis of love were deemed 'smart builders' (*witzig buwman*). *Ibid.*, p. 321-322.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>126</sup> *Paulus verwyst den Chorinthern im 3., 4. unnd 6. Capittel ire väller, das sy uffblasenn syent, nempt sy doch nütdesterminder am 15. capitel Christo ingelibet. Ibid.*, p. 321.

place (and readily accepted) during the Apostolic Era.<sup>127</sup> Claiming yet again that the comingling of false Christians with genuine followers of Christ in any one church body did ‘not slaughter the name’ (*den namen nitt abgeschlachenn*) of that church, Ritter offered two further examples. Not only was the church in Acts not to be rejected because of its association with Simon the Sorcerer, but also Jesus Himself permitted a devil among His inner circle of twelve disciples.<sup>128</sup> As they understood, the biblical evidence against the radicals’ audacious affirmation of a pure church was overwhelming.

### Conclusion

When one places the protocols from the ecclesiological discussions at the 1538 debate next to those from the Zofingen session held in 1532 there is no doubt that the major suppositions and theological convictions preserved in each are retained in their entirety for both parties. For the Anabaptists this meant a strong and unwavering commitment to a separatist free-church ecclesiology and for the Swiss preachers a firm devotion to a mixed church construct embodied through *die Volkskirche*. However, while the overarching apriorisms remained substantively unchanged for both the Anabaptists and Swiss preachers collectively, subtle differences in the context of reasoning and formation of their arguments and apologies cannot be denied. Ultimately this leaves two distinct conclusions regarding the Anabaptists’ ecclesiology at Bern.

First, it must be conceded that there was relatively no noteworthy development to the core of the Swiss radicals’ separatist free-church ideology. The specific contexts and participating protagonists certainly had changed when the ecclesiological discussions resumed six years later, but the residual impact of the radicals’ theology at Zofingen on their later brethren remained palpable. Second, while the Anabaptists at Bern maintained identical

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

convictions in their view of the church for both disputations, there was no normative template with which to articulate and defend said beliefs. A stamp of individuality remains, therefore, a key distinction for the radicals in these disputations. In a strikingly similar manner, parallel conclusions may be drawn regarding the preachers participation at Bern as well. Here, one finds both groups of preachers safeguarding *die Volkskirche* through comparable mixed church formulae. Moreover, although the Swiss preachers at both sessions had a mutual affinity for a mixed church, the position of those at the later 1538 session was definitely modified to a degree from their predecessors at Zofingen. These adjustments in argument help to verify just how deeply the move away from Zwingli and towards Bucer's Strasbourg theology was entrenched in the Bern State during the later 1530s.

In his brief 1948 assessment of the Bern Disputation of 1538 Jan Matthijssen argued for the limited value of these debate protocols. This is derived not only from his implied agreement with the Bern State Archives' choice to catalogue these debates in a band labeled 'useless documents' (*Unnützen Papiere*), but also through Matthijssen's conclusion that the debates offered nothing new theologically to the Anabaptist/Reformed dialogue of the period.<sup>129</sup> Such an assessment is certainly true in one sense and yet blatantly perfunctory in another. Matthijssen's conclusion is admittedly correct if one is simply looking to the basic underlying ecclesiological convictions of both the Anabaptist radicals and Swiss preachers. As concluded above, such a point must be conceded in light of the disputation protocols. However, what Matthijssen has completely failed to recognize is the independent voices of expression both groups offered to the ecclesiological debate of the day. In the end, these individualist voices help remind the historian that these ecclesiological debates were not merely cold lifeless words of theory and conjecture, derived from a series of 'talking points' and based on a standard set of proof texts indigenous to each party. On the contrary, they

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<sup>129</sup> Matthijssen, p. 24.

were the personal expressions of men seeking to vigorously defend their understanding of the church and, as such, brought with them their own distinct impression. To this end it would be much stranger if the various approaches of argument, language, imagery, and biblical passages of support used by these two groups were offered *literatim*. Furthermore, these voices help to demonstrate how one's preconceived theological agenda could dramatically shape and direct their subsequent biblical focus and personal hermeneutic. As seen in Chapter Two on hermeneutics, something as significant as Bern's theological move towards Strasbourg would have deep reaching implications on the preachers' mixed church apology.

When trying to examine the radicals' commitment to the free-church ideal expressed at Zofingen and Bern within the greater context of the development of Anabaptist theology among the Swiss radicals of the 1520s and 1530s one must tread extremely cautiously. For the better part of the last half century Anabaptist historiography has witnessed an ongoing shift in understanding regarding the origin, intentions, and proliferation of the free-church movement among the radicals of Switzerland and South Germany.<sup>130</sup> And while the portrait of Swiss Anabaptism has been altered by the brush strokes of confessional, social, and religious historians alike, the protocols from the Bernese disputations offer an interesting voice to this ongoing and unresolved conversation. Ultimately, the records of these

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<sup>130</sup> Following centuries of being carelessly categorized under the broad term *Schwärmer*, the vigorous nature of the debate over the origin and intentions of Swiss Anabaptism first emerged in the 1970s. Here, the monogenesis theory that had now become the traditional conclusion of Mennonite scholarship was properly corrected by an ever-growing polygenesis theory, which argued against viewing the Swiss Brethren as 'normative Anabaptism.' Harold S. Bender, 'The Historiography of the Anabaptists', *MQR* 31, 1957 and Stayer, 'From Monogenesis to Polygenesis', pp. 83-121. By 1972 the dialogue concerning the specific intention of Anabaptist nonresistance was continued, as James Stayer argued that separatism placed the radicals in the 'apolitical' ethical category. He also argued that while remnants of this ideal were present in the earlier Anabaptist sources at Schleithiem, not only was this Michael Sattler's personal contribution to the movement, but 'it (nonresistance) was now the common property of the sect.' Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, pp. 3-4 and 130. Rather than viewing the Anabaptists' separatism as mere quietism or societal withdrawal, one year later Yoder argued that their position was one of engagement, as they sought to directly challenge the status quo with an alternative form of church/world relations. John H. Yoder, 'Anabaptists and the Sword Revisited: Systematic Historiography and Undogmatic Nonresistance', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 1974, p. 135. This opinion is also shared by Biesecker-Mast. See Biesecker-Mast, pp. 103-104. Most recently Andrea Strübind argued that Swiss radical Separatism did not just trace back to Schleithiem exclusively, but was previously entrenched in the works of Grebel and Manz. Strübind, pp. 558-568.

important events help to add two critical insights into Anabaptist/Reformed studies of the period. First, they help to reveal just how uniformly held several key ecclesiological convictions were for this particular form of Swiss Anabaptism. Strictly speaking, the movement had now matured greatly in its theology and had come to a general consensus of commitment regarding a separatist free-church ecclesiology. Secondly, these debates over the nature of the church clearly established a strong link of dependence between the Anabaptism expressed in 1530s Bern to earlier manifestations emanating from Zürich and through Schleithem a decade earlier. Indeed, some minor changes in the Reformed apology reflected the religious winds of change in Bern and the city's subtle disassociation with Zwingli following his death at Kappel. Indeed, the essence and heart of the debate between the Swiss Reformers and their radical compatriots remained strikingly similar in content and language to the previous decade.

## CHAPTER 4 - Vom Bann

### Introduction

As was the case in many of the discussions between the Anabaptists and the Swiss Reformers during the 1520s and 1530s the topic of the Christian ban served as a major point of contention between the two groups in their attempts to establish and flesh out an authentic form of Christianity during the tumultuous early years of the Reformation. From the very infancy of the Anabaptist movement in the Swiss Confederation the notion of church discipline quickly rose to the fore as the radicals sought to implement what they believed was the Bible's prescribed means for preserving and protecting the pure church which they were attempting to re-establish.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the inclusion of lengthy discussions relating to the ban found in the protocols of both the 1532 and 1538 Bernese disputations are in no way out of step with the religious dialogue of the day. However, what remains to be considered is whether the preserved discussions on church discipline during the two sessions from Bern contributed anything new to this ongoing dialogue between the Anabaptists and Swiss Reformers. For instance, did any of the participants at the 1538 *Gespräch* amend their positions relating to the ban from what was previously stated at the earlier session in Zofingen or were the same stances merely restated? Moreover, how did all of the arguments relating to the ban at both disputations compare with those made by earlier participants in the respective movements from the inception of the divide?

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<sup>1</sup> Specific attention was given to the ban quite early by the Swiss Anabaptist, Conrad Grebel, in a September 1524 letter to Thomas Müntzer. See Grebel 'Grebel to Müntzer', pp. 284-292. This was followed by treatments in Article II of Sattler, 'The Schleithem Brotherly Union', and by Balthasar Hubmaier, 'On Fraternal Admonition' in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, 1989), and idem, 'On the Christian Ban', in *Ibid.*, pp. 372-385 and 410-425. The most useful treatment that considers the place of the ban in early Swiss Brethren thought is found in Ervin A. Schlachach, *The Rule of Christ among Early Swiss Anabaptists* (Chicago Theological Seminary Ph.D. Dissertation; Chicago, 1977). John Roth has correctly recognized that following the Zürich radicals embrace of a separatist church 'discipline quickly became one of the distinguishing features of the nascent Anabaptist movement. 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. by Karl Koop and Mary H. Schertz (Occasional Papers, no. 21; Elkhart, 2000), p. 10.

In answering these questions it is hoped that not only a fuller understanding of the events of the Bernese disputations will be offered, but also that their place in the continuing Anabaptist/Reformed dialogue of the day will be more clearly defined. As will be shown through the following analysis, while the independent nature of these two Bernese debates may be seen in that some of the language, imagery, and biblical passages used to articulate and convey each of the contradictory positions at both varied dramatically, no major changes to the core foundational or theological understandings of the ban can be discerned. Nothing fundamentally new has been added to the basic argument whose roots go back over a decade, only the way in which some of the arguments were made and the context from which they were given has been altered. Furthermore, while historians have ascribed to these debates countless influences upon the people and positions at Bern, what will ultimately be revealed by this examination of the disputation protocols is a strong and overwhelming dependence upon positions and ideas previously articulated by Zwingli and Bullinger, as well as the early Swiss radical leaders from the cradle of evangelical Anabaptism in Zürich.

### **Context / Inception**

When looking at the dialogue relating to the ban during the 1532 and 1538 Bernese disputations the specific ways in which this topic was originally introduced (and by whom) had a profound and direct relationship on not only the choice of words utilized to open these wars of words surrounding the ban, but they also helped to establish the subsequent linguistic battlefield upon which each of the two respective debates were waged. At the very outset of the discussions relating to the ban first initiated by the preachers during the 1532 debate, the impetus for the transition from the previous discussions over *die rechte Kirche* centered on an acceptable understanding of Judas' place among Jesus' disciples. Here the preachers argued,

‘Since Christ and His apostles are a church and Judas, nevertheless, is found therein, therefore, also will our churches as we have often said, not lose the Christian name, although Judases are found in them. We now desire, because you must

concede that point, that you show us further defects in our churches, primarily so that we know how to apply the ban and can uproot such evil.’<sup>2</sup>

As may be discerned by the above statement, the debate over the ban at the 1532 session commenced within the context of the preachers’ questioning of the Anabaptist’s church and its implied free-church concept.<sup>3</sup> As a part of their closing comments relating to *die rechte Kirche* the preachers wanted to make clear that they believed the Swiss Reformed church had not lost its valid standing as an authentic manifestation of Christ’s body on earth simply because of the presence of some reprobate within its membership. The mere mention of a parallel between what may best be described as the ‘literal Judas’ of the New Testament and the ‘figurative Judas’ who may be found in the preachers’ church cleverly served to highlight this point. On the basis of this qualifying affirmation the preachers, therefore, afforded the Anabaptists the first word in attempting to prove that their radical notion of uprooting evil from the church body as a part of their free-church establishment was in fact both biblically justified and feasible on a practical level.

Responding to the preachers’ concluding comments relating to the true church, the fourth article of the 1532 session, appropriately entitled *Vom Bann*, formally began with the Anabaptists’ declaration,

We by no means surrender that point. Since we, however, have been challenged to state another article we will move on to discuss the ban. And I lament that in your congregation, which I must testify is not a congregation of God; pride, avarice, excessive drinking, envy, hatred, and other vices are found and yet not excluded. Now, since bad and good are not separated from one another I cannot

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<sup>2</sup> *Diewyl Christus und sine apostel ein kilchen unnd nütdestminder Judas darinn gsin, also wirt ouch unsere kilchen, wie offft gesagt, den nammen christenlich darumb nit verlieren, obglych Jude darinn sind, Begarend nun, diewyl ir in dem gefangen mussend sin, uns anzezeigen, was üch wyter mangle in unserer kilchen, als fürnemlich den bann, wie man soliche laster ußrüten und dem bruchen solle, diewyl ir den vor offft angezogen. QZ Zofingen, p. 114.*

<sup>3</sup> For specifics on and usage of the term ‘free-church’ see pp. 99-100 of Chapter Three. For additional reading relating to the continuing debate over the origins of the free-church concept see Durnbaugh, pp. 85ff, Littell, ‘The Historic Free Church Defined, pp. 78-90, and Garrett Jr.

recognize yours as a Christian church, until such things have been excluded, changed, sanctified, and cleaned.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, rather than delving into the specific justification for their own position regarding separation, the Anabaptists cleverly chose instead to return the onus of proof back onto the Reformed preachers and their implied mixed church ecclesiology.<sup>5</sup> In essence, the real question presented through this opening statement related to legitimacy.<sup>6</sup> Based on the constitution of both the Anabaptist and Swiss Magisterial church, the question remained; which church represented the true and genuine form of ‘God’s community’ (*gemeynd gottes*)?<sup>7</sup> By affirming their place as such a community, the Anabaptists believed that the Bernese preachers had to offer some kind of explanation for the acceptance of unrepentant sin in their church body. The dichotomy that the radicals believed existed between good and evil demanded as much. As seen from this opening statement, the Anabaptists were careful here to frame the opening of this article within the context of both the perceived unholy character of the magisterial church and what they affirmed to be Scripture’s call for the total consecration of the church body.

From this point the debate over the ban continued forward, the contextual parameters of the dialogue having been established. At the heart of the matter was the question of the presence of sin in the church and did such constitute a forfeiture of its standing. As will be seen shortly, from the Anabaptist perspective, the fulcrum of their argument centered on a

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<sup>4</sup> *Wir bekennend unns keinswags an dem ort gefangen sin. So wir aber erforderet werdend, ein anderen artickel anezüchen, wellend wir den bann ann die hand nemmen. Unnd beklag mich desse, das inn iüwer gemeynd, die ich nit ein gemeynd gottes bezügenn mag, hoffertig, gyttig, suffer, nyd, hasß unnd andere laster erfinden und dieselben nit ußgeschloßen. Dwyll nun die bosen und guten nit von einandern gesündert, kan ich sy nit ein kilchen Christi erkennen, byß soliche ußgeschloßen geandert, geheyliget und geryniget warden. QZ Zofingen, p. 115.*

<sup>5</sup> This was a similar tact employed by these same Anabaptists during the discussions over the nature of the true church. In that case the Swiss radicals, as they did here as well, assumed their own position and left the requirement of validating the Swiss church clearly at the preachers’ feet. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95

<sup>6</sup> This notion of legitimacy, as related to the use of the Christian ban, was expressed as early as 1527 through the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier, specifically his understanding of ‘the keys’ (*die schlüssel*). Hubmaier, ‘On the Christian Ban’, pp. 410-415.

<sup>7</sup> *QZ Zofingen, p. 115.*

desire to preserve the purity of the church body; such was maintained via the ban. Based on this understanding the focus of the Anabaptists' arguments during the 1532 session on the ban were firmly affixed on establishing the need for a pure church. The language and biblical imagery employed to convey this idea was expressed through an emphasis on the dichotomy that the radicals believed existed between good and evil, a strict obedience to the teachings on the ban from Christ, and God's entrusting of the church with the 'keys to heaven.' Still, for all of the ideas conveyed and the biblical examples found scattered through the 1532 protocols, the overarching emphasis of the Anabaptists' understanding of the ban centered on preserving the purity of Christ's church on earth.

With the context of the 1532 discussions on the ban having been set on the issue of a pure church by the Anabaptists, the remaining body of the subsequent arguments presented and explored by the Swiss preachers was directed towards dispelling the possibility of such a church. Rather than addressing the ban from a wholly different linguistic point of view, the preachers chose to work from within the context of the Anabaptists' free-church concept by offering a variety of arguments to undercut the Swiss radicals' understanding of church discipline. As will be seen, while the preachers certainly did affirm the need and make provisions for the implementation of church discipline, this was clearly understood in a much less stringent way than the Anabaptists and applied from an entirely different perspective. According to the preachers, certain concessions had to be made when considering the use of the ban as a part of the ecclesiastical order for a church functioning in a pre-glorified era. Based on this reality the arguments used to express the preachers' position on the ban in 1532 were directed towards demonstrating the impossibility of the radicals' free-church model in such a world. These included a strong emphasis on the anonymous nature of the true church according to their mixed church ecclesiology, an affirmation of the human condition prior to

the return of Christ, and a more positive view of and focus upon the redemptive purposes behind the ban.

When moving to the debate over the ban as recorded in the 1538 protocol, although the specific language and focus of the two sides' views of the ban were subtly different than those seen six years earlier, the overarching premise behind the two positions on discipline remained strikingly similar. Again, much like the 1532 session, the 1538 dialogue on the ban was first introduced by the Anabaptists. In this instance, Mathiß Wiser, a prominent Anabaptists protagonist argued, 'As we so far spoke of the difference which must exist between the world and Christianity, yet we recognize that the word world has different usages, as John 17: 'I pray not for the world', according to John 14 which refers to the comforter who the world cannot receive, or I John 3: The reason the world does not know us is that it also did not know Him. These are the causes so the distinctions are given.'<sup>8</sup>

As can be seen by Wiser's statement, while the explicit mention of a pure church first utilized by those at the 1532 Zofingen debate was blatantly absent from the article's introduction, the use of language which emphasized the 'difference' or 'distinction' (*unnderscheid*) which he believed existed between the world and Christianity remains very much in the same vein. Following in the same tradition as that which was codified at Schleithem in 1527, the perceived binary or dualistic reality, which the Anabaptists believed existed between light and darkness, served as the primary supposition upon which the radicals' view of the ban was based during the 1538 session.<sup>9</sup> In actuality, therefore, the focus on this dichotomy found in the 1538 protocols was merely an alternative way of expressing the pure church ecclesiology which permeated the 1532 debate. In this regard, the

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<sup>8</sup> *Wie wir bißhar geredt vom unnderscheid, der zwüschent der wellt unnd dem christennthum sin muß, hatt das wörtli welltt dennoch sinen unnderscheid funden, wie Johannis 17: Ich bitten nitt für die welltt. Item Johannes 14 vom tröster, wellichen die welltt nitt empfachen mag. I. Johan. 3: Darumb khennt unns die welltt nitt, sy kennt ouch inn nitt. Das sind die ursachenn, so unns den unnderscheid gebennt. QZ Bern, p. 439.*

<sup>9</sup> For further insight into this dualistic theology see Article IV in Sattler, 'The Schleithem Brotherly Union' and Biesecker-Mast.

two arguments from the 1532 and 1538 disputations were simply two sides of the same coin, both of which placed a strong emphasis on the holy character of the church as it functioned in a fallen and sinful world. For this reason, as was the case six years earlier, those Anabaptists at the 1538 session stressed that sin within the body had to be addressed and ultimately removed. Again, the ramifications of allowing sin to remain were simply too devastating, especially since actions on earth were understood to have eternal and immediate impact upon one's eternal standing.

With the contextual setting of the 1538 debate over the ban having been again centered by the Swiss radicals on the issue of the church's purity, the preachers followed suit by making every effort to highlight the various fallacies they believed befell such an idea. Again, this was in large part based on humanity's present condition and was conveyed through a number of different arguments. Much like their predecessors at the 1532 *Gespräch*, the preachers who took part in the 1538 session not only reiterated the anonymous nature of the church body here on earth, but they also rearticulated the redemptive facet behind the use of church discipline. Each of these realities would be used by the preachers to show how their counterparts perceived correlation between an association with the world and eternal damnation was totally unfounded. However, as will be seen, variations in each of their rebutting arguments against the radicals remained nevertheless.

### **Purpose for the Ban**

Having explored the unique introductory contexts around which the dialogue on the ban for both the 1532 and 1538 Bernese disputations took place, attention must now be given to the specific purposes behind the use of church discipline in the minds of both the Anabaptists and Swiss preachers during both events. While there was an overarching consensus between the two groups at each of the Bernese disputations relating to the need for some form of discipline within the church body, as will be seen, the two sides could not have

been further apart as it related to the specifics of the ban. Working on the basis of the introductory premise that no major doctrinal changes relating to the ban occurred for either the Anabaptist or Swiss preachers between the two Bernese sessions, the following examination of the purposes for church discipline will be conducted with two specific ends in mind. First, by looking carefully at the arguments for the use of the ban during both Bernese debates it will be demonstrated just how in keeping those from the 1538 session were not only with the earlier account from the 1532 *Gespräch*, but also with those conveyed through Anabaptist and Reformed works prior to 1538. Secondly, it will be shown that while the two sides were essentially offering nothing innovative or new to the discussion on the ban, the way in which they presented their convictions did in several instances show a level of independence. While the foundation of the arguments remained intact the imagery, biblical texts, and language used to convey said positions were at times unique. In order to most effectively accomplish these two tasks the views and ideas conveyed during the 1532 *Gespräch* will be first examined in isolation. A comparison between the two Bernese disputations, along with their respective places in the ongoing dialogue of the day, will then be offered over the course of presenting the differing purposes found at the 1538 debate.

### 1532

As demonstrated by their introductory statement regarding the ban from 1532, the Anabaptists' view of church discipline at Zofingen was formulated in light of the need to maintain and preserve the sanctity of Christ's bride here on earth. The Anabaptist protagonists at the 1532 *Gespräch* further characterized this position by stating,

The ban or keys to heaven shall therefore be applied (as in) II Corinthians 10. 'I, Paul, however, admonish you by the gentleness of Christ, etc.' There you hear that one even has the power to punish the disobedient, so that our obedience is fulfilled. Romans 2, "How, O man, do you judge people who do something when you yourself do that same thing. Also, Christ in Matthew 7, 'Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and first not consider the plank in your eye?' Also, to the Ephesians Chapter 5: it shall be a holy community without offense. It has the same power to punish the disobedient, to apply the ban, and to expel. Because, however, they do not

stand obedient and bad and good will be joined until the end of the world, they do not have the power to apply the keys of the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

Relying heavily upon certain proof texts which they felt endorsed a proper view of the ban, the Anabaptists revealed a great deal about their understanding of church discipline through this statement. First, the closing reference to Ephesians 5 allowed for the Anabaptists to continue promoting the idea that the true church was understood as ‘a holy community without offense’ (*ein heylige unstraffliche gemeynd*).<sup>11</sup> When the Anabaptists looked at this chapter in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians they saw a Pauline distinction between those who walked as children of light and those who had forfeited their heavenly inheritance because of unrepentant sin. The radicals affirmed what they saw as this ‘distinction’ and took quite literally Paul’s subsequent admonition to avoid having ‘fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness;’ hence their view of the ban which emphasized separation.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, by astutely associating the ban with the ‘keys to heaven’ (*schlüssel des himmels*), the Anabaptists at Zofingen provided a rather limited and well-defined understanding of the nature of the ban that came loaded with dramatic ecclesiological consequences. Following in the Swiss Anabaptists’ position on the ban most explicitly outlined in the theological writings of Hubmaier, the Zofingen radicals contended through this statement that the ban, as one of the ‘keys’ of the church, provided the local congregation

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<sup>10</sup> *Der bann oder schlüssel des himmels sollend also gebrucht warden: 2. Corinth. 10. Ich aber, Paulus, ermanen üch durch die senfftmutigkeyt Christi etc. Da horned ir, das man eben macht hat die ungehorsame ze straffen, so unsere ghorsame erfüllt ist. Rom. 2: Was richtest du die, o mensch, die solichs thund und thust du es selbs? Ouch Christus Matth. 7: Was sichst du den sprysen in dem oug dines bruders unnd wirst nit gewaar deß balcken in dynem oug? Ouch zun Ephes. 5: Es sol sin ein heylige unstraffliche gemeynd. Dieselbig ist denn gwalting ze straffen die ungehorsamen, den bann ze bruchen und usßhinzeschliessen. Diewyl sy aber nit in der gehorsame stond unnd yemerdar boß und gut biß zu end der walt werdend sin, hand sy nit macht, die schlüssel ze bruchen. QZ Zofingen, p. 123.*

<sup>11</sup> It must be clarified that although the Swiss Anabaptists placed a strong emphasis on the purity of the church community, this in no way was accompanied by the ideal of Christian perfectionism. Bender, ‘Perfectionism’, p. 115. And while purity was considered the ‘high calling’ of being a Christian for the Swiss radicals, as Snyder has stressed, such a calling was not always achieved or attained. C. Arnold Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed: Exploring the Historical Center of Anabaptist Teachings and Practices* (Intercourse, 2007), p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 5:1-13. Direct quotation is from the NKJV.

both the means and power to exclude those members who indignantly refused repentance of sin.<sup>13</sup> Setting this position on discipline next to the previously outlined views on the voluntary nature of the free-church, one can see that the logical consequences of such a view, soteriologically speaking, are quite profound. For in such a construct the church assembly played a monumental role in salvation history; directly impacting the efficacy of one's eternal standing before God. Conveying how this same position was understood by Hubmaier in his correspondence with Zwingli, Christof Windhorst stresses,

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.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, membership in the visible church became essential based on the aforementioned views relating to the ban.<sup>15</sup>

Third, tucked neatly between the aforementioned affirmations, the Anabaptists' at Zofingen contended that the authority to punish according to the ban was a power given

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<sup>13</sup> The precise way in which these 'keys' functioned according to the Swiss Anabaptists has been outlined most clearly by McMullan. He explains, 'The first key, binding, empowered the church to receive repentant sinners into the congregation through water baptism, and subsequently, by readmitting those previously under the Ban. The second key, loosing, primarily functioned through the Eucharist, where those who openly professed faith in Christ continually renewed their pledge first made at baptism to live according to the Rule of Christ. Subsequently, as the key to the purity of the church, the second key gave the congregation the authority to exclude obstinate sinners from the fellowship of the Lord's Supper through the ban.'<sup>13</sup> McMullan came to these conclusions largely through a study of Hubmaier's position on the ban. William E. McMullan, *Church Discipline as a Necessary Function of the Visible Church in the Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Ph.D. Dissertation; Wake Forest, 2003), pp. 76-77.

<sup>14</sup> *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: Balthasar Hubmaiers Lehre zwischen Traditioneller und Reformatorischer Theologie* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. 16; Leiden, 1976), pp. 126-127.

<sup>15</sup> Consequently, as Armour has contended in regard to this position, 'Hubmaier has preserved, in attenuated form, the Catholic doctrine of the keys by insisting that one must belong to the visible, universal church in order to receive salvation.' Rollin Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 11 (Scottsdale, 1966), p. 46 (quoted in McMullan, p. 85).

directly to the church in order that its holy character might be fulfilled. Their citation and reading of Romans 2 and Matthew 7 in no way suggested that Christians should be restrained from meddling in the sinful affairs of other confessing Christians; rather, both passages were interpreted as additional biblical evidence of the need for members in the church body to intervene when sin was exposed within the fellowship. The church had been entrusted with such a ‘power to punish’ (*denn gwaltig ze strafffen*).<sup>16</sup> Of course in light of these two passages from Matthew and Romans this meant that the same standard of holiness had to be observed by the one confronting the wayward individual, but that, of course, was the point of the use of discipline. In the end, purity remained paramount for the Anabaptists at Zofingen. Since the preachers had not been obedient in honoring this high calling of the church, through their acceptance of the commingling of evil and good, they were viewed as having lost ‘the power’ (*die macht*) to exercise ‘the keys’ (*die schlüssel*) known as the ban.<sup>17</sup>

Upon hearing the above arguments, which contained the Anabaptists’ purity driven motives behind their understanding of the ban, the preachers retorted by emphasizing the impractical nature of their radical counterparts’ use of discipline. This was conveyed in a number of different ways, most notably by referring to the human condition of man in a pre-glorified state of being. Because the Anabaptists had chosen to base many of their previous arguments around the words of Paul, the preachers shrewdly took this opportunity to turn the Apostle’s words back against the radicals. Here, the ministers reminded their counterparts

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<sup>16</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 123. A similar argument was explored in greater detail by Balthasar Hubmaier in his treatise, *On the Christian Ban*. There Hubmaier used the Matthew 16 and 18 passages to argue that Jesus had ‘hung this power [of the ban] and these keys at the side’ of His church (*disen Gewalt vnd Schlüssel an die seytenn gehennckt*). The church which deviated from the truth of God [equated in Hubmaier’s case with the improper application of the Lord’s Supper] ‘must not be tolerated’ (*Sein mag nit erleiden*) and ‘He [the unfaithful church] unbuckles the keys from the side’, (*Er gürtet auch ab die Schließlen von seiten*) thereby removing the church’s authority to ban. Balthasar Hubmaier, ‘Von dem christlichen Bann’, in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, ed. by Gunner Westin and Torsten Bergsten (Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, Band IX; Heidelberg, 1962), pp. 368-369. In both instances, therefore, the validity of the ‘true’ church was directly linked with the holding and authorized use of the keys.

that even ‘Paul himself confessed that he was still flesh, sinful, (and) imperfect.’<sup>18</sup> The adverb ‘still’ (*noch*) was the critical word which not only highlighted what the preachers understood as the incomplete (and sinful) aspect of humanity prior to the *Parousia*, but it also showed the tension that existed for the believer presently living in this paradoxical reality.<sup>19</sup> With reference to this statement of self-awareness by Paul, the prior claims of the Anabaptists’ reading of the apostle, it was hoped, would sound quite shallow. At the very least the preachers must have been convinced that this tact would bring into question the veracity of the Anabaptists’ interpretation of those New Testament passages pertinent to the discussion. Although the preachers undoubtedly believed that Paul had lived his life from a wholly eschatological perspective, with both his eyes affixed on heaven and his ears tuned for the final trumpet blast, the preachers simultaneously affirmed the struggle that was present even for such a godly man as the great apostle.<sup>20</sup>

This reference to Paul’s self-proclaimed ‘sinfulness’ also provided the preachers with the perfect context with which to argue for a redemptive focus for the ban. The Bern ministers at the 1532 debate attempted to make this point plainly clear by contending,

As is spoken, you must not only see the surface. Do not judge me according to how I have acted before you. Not everything in this manner is established as sin. Whoever is of Christ also thinks that we are of Christ. When I further boast of my power which God has given to me, indeed, to the building up and not to the breaking

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<sup>18</sup> *Hierinn bekennt Paulus sich selbs, das er noch fleisch, prasthafft, unvolkommen sye. QZ Zofingen*, pp. 123-24.

<sup>19</sup> The implied mention of this ‘tension’ diverted the discussion towards the realm of soteriology. Paul’s statement revealed this tension in that the Anabaptists certainly were never vocal in their suspicion regarding the question of the Apostle’s salvation. While not directly demonstrating dependence, the preacher’s argument here placed them alongside Luther in affirming the co-existence of sin and righteousness; most frequently conveyed via the Latin phrase, *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and a sinner). The importance of this tension as associated with and expressed through Luther’s doctrine of justification is acknowledged by McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, pp. 119-122.

<sup>20</sup> Zwingli put forth a similar argument regarding the human condition within the context of his attack upon the Anabaptists views on separation. He contended, ‘What they (the Anabaptists) allege from Scripture about separation is not said in the sense to which they wrest it. For otherwise we should be compelled to retire not only from the world, as Paul says, but also from the church. For there is nothing human so holy and blameless that it does not fail in some part... according to this we do not seek to be separate from those who have infirmities in common with us.’ Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, pp.189-190.

down. In this way, if it had served edifying purposes, I would have punished the adulterous ones among you. However, as it is served more to bring ruin, I have refrained from it. With it he understands that violence is not always to be applied, but only as it serves to building up our first principle of love. As Christ also spoke, let both grown until the end of the harvest. Based on this the ban should be carried out according to the rule of faith and love and for the improvement of the willing ones and for the destruction of the others.<sup>21</sup>

Relying on Paul's words from II Corinthians 10, the preachers used this admonition as evidence that pronouncements of judgment, based alone on what was seen on 'the surface' (*das usserlich*) or on account of how one 'has acted' (*gehandlet hab*), needed to be reserved because such was not always an accurate gauge of the true person.<sup>22</sup> Obviously this reading of Paul brought with it the implication that the Anabaptists had failed to recognize the reality of living in a fallen world and the residual sin that remained a part of the believer's daily struggle in the sanctification process. Just as Paul had encouraged the Corinthian church to understand the limits of properly discerning one's heart, the preachers' veiled accusation against the Anabaptists along this same line of reasoning is not hard to detect.

While the preachers' refusal to directly associate one's earthly action with their eternal status was an important point in opposition to the Anabaptists its greatest value may have been in serving as the impetus for presenting their redemptive view of the ban. Reading on in II Corinthians 10 the preachers came to verse eight. Here, the preachers linked the authority given to the church via the ban as being properly applied only when done 'to the building up' (*es zu erbuwung*) of the church body.<sup>23</sup> In this case the preachers looked to the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ist sovil geredt: Ir mussend nit nun das usserlich ansahen. Urteylend mich mit nach dem, [das] ich by üch gehandelt hab. Es ist nit alles damit ußgricht farfel sin. Welcher Christi ist, der dencke, das wir ouch Christi sygind. Wenn ich mich schon wyter rummte mines gwalts, den mir gott gaben hat, ja zur erbuwung und nit zu brachen. Als wolte er sagen: Wenn ich gewüßt, das es zu erbuwung gedienet, hett ich den hurer by üch gegenwürtig gestraafft. So es aber mer zu verderben gereicht, hab ich us underlassen. Damit verstadt er, das der gwalt nitt alwagen zu bruchen sye, sonder sowyt es zu erbuwung nach der liebe unnsers ersten grunds dienet. Wie ouch Christus geredt: Lassend es wachsen byß zu der ernd. Dienet daruff, das der bann nach der regel der liebe sich stricken, den gutwilligen zur besserung und inn zur verderbung. QZ Zofingen, p. 124.*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The preachers made mention of this distinction in order to highlight their redemptive notion of the ban and to further underscore what they perceived as the callous and harsh view of the Anabaptists. Although this is a

example of the unfaithful woman to make their point. Since church discipline for the adulterous woman according to the radicals' ban would have brought expulsion, which the preachers equated with the breaking down of the church body, it could not be deemed valid.<sup>24</sup> Rather than casting out such a woman, the redemptive role of the ban, which was viewed by the preachers as a primary measure to aid the fallen Christian in recognizing their error and subsequently facilitate a move towards repentance, took priority over any misguided notion of church innocence.<sup>25</sup>

As the argument proceeded, because Christ had declared that both the wheat and the tares were to be allowed to grow together until the final harvest, and since the Anabaptists had no way of truly policing that which they could not perceive when it came to sin, only the ban which lovingly sought to restore to the fellowship those ensnared in sin was, according to the preachers, in line with what was taught by the Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, 'according to love' (*nach der liebe*), one was required to temper personal judgment regarding discovered sin and tolerate evil to a degree with the ultimate hope of repentance.<sup>27</sup> Such was the redemptive requirement of the ban.

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rather intriguing idea there is no further mention of a need for clarification of terms in what is clearly not an instance of mere semantics. Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that the Zofingen Anabaptists' understanding of the ban was not wholly devoid of a redemptive element in their use of the ban. By later presenting an illustration of a father punishing his son the Anabaptists clearly implied that the use of the ban as a discipline tactic was employed with the end goal of producing an amendment in behavior. See the Anabaptists' statements in Ibid., p. 129. The redemptive element of the Anabaptists' ban has also been explored in Roth, 'The Church "Without Spot or Wrinkle" in Anabaptist Experience', p. 13, McMullan, pp. 86ff and Michael W. McDill, *The Centrality of the Doctrine of Human Free Will in the Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier* (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Ph.D. Dissertation; Wake Forest, 2001), p. 203-204.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> The preachers later use Paul's instruction to Timothy from II Timothy 2:24-25 as the basis for their concession of sin. The preachers' reading of this passage deemed it appropriate that one 'should tolerate wickedness with gentleness according to the teaching of Christ' (*sol die bosen dulden mit sanfftmütigkeit nach der leer Christi*) since it was possible that they might 'through penitence again turn from the snare of the devil (*durch bußvertigkeit widerumb kartind vonn dem strick des tífels*). Here, the use of the term 'uproot' (*ußrüten*) to describe that which should not be undertaken via the ban brought with it a veiled reference to the wheat and

The notion of conceding some sin in the church body for the sake of a possible future restoration through repentance was not only too risky of a proposition for the radicals trying to preserve the purity of the church at the 1532 debate, but it also went directly against their reading of the New Testament Scriptures. As the Anabaptists looked to Paul's instruction for the Corinthian church regarding sexual immorality, they interpreted the text to offer a stern admonishment for the removal of such individuals from the church fold.<sup>28</sup> That, after all, was why the Apostle had used the analogy of the leaven bread, since sin was never understood to function in a vacuum. Furthermore, their reading of Galatians 5 was accompanied by the reminder that 'neither the adulterer, fornicator, the conjurer, etc. would inherit the Kingdom of God.'<sup>29</sup> The Anabaptists' reading of these two texts led them to conclude that separation from the unrepentant sinner was the clear calling of the true church. Nevertheless, for all of the biblical passages that were brought as proof texts for the requirement of a strict implementation of the ban through separation, the preachers were continually left sarcastically asking their Anabaptist counterparts who has a pure church?<sup>30</sup>

Although the Bernese ministers at the 1532 debate were unwilling to recognize a pure church here on earth, it must be noted that they did point out that their ecclesiology embraced such a concept if understood properly. In this case the preachers emphasized the need to delineate the understanding of time based on a specific and fundamental distinction. Strictly speaking, the preachers were greatly concerned that there be a clear differentiation between

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tares passage from Matthew 13, a cornerstone of the Reformed argument for a mixed view of the church. See the preachers comments in *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>28</sup> See I Corinthians 5:1-13 and the Anabaptists statements in *QZ Zofingen*, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> *das weder die eebrecher, hurer, zouberer etc. das rych gottes nit erben werdent.* *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> One such example of the preachers implying the impossibility of the radicals' pure church can be found in *Ibid.*, p. 125

what may best be characterized as an ‘it shall be’ and an ‘it will be’ mentality. This idea was conveyed during the 1532 debate in the following manner:

We remain with the church which Christ has redeemed. Also, we confess that the people of God are eager to do good works. However, in this time there are always deficiencies. As diligent and eager as people always are, still no one comes into perfection while in the flesh. Thus, will evil not be found in the church? Yet, one person falls, now the other and rises up again. It lies alone on two lines of speaking; it shall be and it will be. That is the distinction. We do not speak about it shall be but about it will be. Now, however, it must be examined whether one must be tolerated and how one shall uproot. There is much in the church that does not belong in it.<sup>31</sup> In this statement is found one of the primary reasons why the preachers at the 1532

disputation were more than skeptical of the Anabaptists’ notion of a free-church. Regardless of the extent to which believers were ‘eager to do good works’ (*yferig sye zu guten wercken*) they were always going to fall short in some way because of the present ‘deficiencies’ (*mangel*) that were part and parcel of living in a pre-glorified era. Here, the preachers used the designation ‘in flesh’ (*im fleysch*) as a term to emphasize the finite and incomplete aspect of humanity prior to the second coming of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Still, humanity was not doomed to a permanent life of imperfection according to the preachers, for with the return of Messiah would come the completion of man. This was implied by the preachers’ distinction between an ‘it shall be’ and an ‘it will be’ mentality. Here, the preachers wanted to set apart that pure church which was a future promise (identified by the designation ‘it will be’) from the present imperfect church. As seen by this distinction, it was clearly not that the preachers

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<sup>31</sup> *Wir blybend by der kilchen, die Christus erloft hat. Bekennend ouch, daß das volck gottes yferig (eifrig) sye zu guten wercken. Aber inn diser zyt ist für und für mangel. Wie flyßig und yferig man yemer ist, so kompt man doc him fleysch niemmermer uff die volkommenhey. Also das in der kylchen nit boß erfunden werden? Yetz falt der, yetz yaner (jener) und stonwider uf. Es lyt allein an zweyen wortlinen: Es soll syn unnd wirt syn. Das ist der underscheyd. Wir sprachen nit, es soll syn, wirdt aber syn. Nun muß man aber lügen ob man’s darin musse dulden unnd wie man’s ußbrüten sole. Es ist vil in der kilchen, das nit darin gehort. Ibid., p. 127.*

<sup>32</sup> The context of this term as it related to man’s deficiencies and his inability to obtain ‘perfection’ (*volkommenhey*) revealed the preachers’ understanding of the phrase ‘in flesh.’ See Ibid., p. 127. It should be noted that the preachers’ usage of the word flesh here is completely different from the Anabaptists’ who used the word primarily as a designation for evil. The Anabaptists, relying on Pauline language from Galatians 5, understood ‘flesh’ (*fleisch*) in relation to man’s sinful works and activity or ‘the fruit of the flesh’ (*die frucht des fleisch*). See Ibid., p. 130. The same holds true for the Anabaptists at the 1538 disputation. There, the radicals relied on the aforementioned Galatians 5 passage for their negative view of ‘flesh’ along with I Corinthians 6. See *OZ Bern*, p. 439

rejected the Anabaptists' free-church concept in its totality; rather, they wanted to make sure that such an ecclesiological idea was understood only as a future possibility following the *Parousia*. The radicals it was felt were, strictly speaking, putting the cart before the horse in their ecclesiological understanding. Considering this delineation of time the primary intention behind the use of the ban, practically speaking, simply could not be to promote the idea of separation as the Anabaptists had suggested.

As the 1532 dialogue over the ban continued forward one final key component of the preachers' argument remained to be addressed in its entirety. While the preachers' affirmation of an anonymous element to the constitution of the church had been alluded to during both their reminder of the incomplete aspect of humanity prior to glorification and as a part of recognizing man's limitations in making accurate judgments based on external actions, a full explanation of the idea had yet to be explored. This eventually came in the form of the preachers' clarification between what they deemed the 'outer and inner church' (*die usserlichen unnd innerlichen kilchen*) and eventually bled over into a detailed discussion of two types of parallel (inner and outer) bans. Here, using concepts previously employed by both Zwingli and Bullinger, the preachers argued,

To begin one must distinguish the outer church from the Christ believing one, which is now assembled that the foundation is set, from the inner invisible church, which in this time is not discernable; so also the outer and inner ban. Indeed, the Kingdom of God is not possessed by those who following being disciplined and punished were not converted and yet remained in their sins to the end.<sup>33</sup>

Through this designation the preachers contended that the Anabaptists had failed to recognize and properly differentiate between the two distinct forms of the church which existed prior to

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<sup>33</sup> *Man muß anfenglich underscheyden die usserlichen kilchen, so ye von christgloubigen, da das pfullment geleyt ist, zusammenkumt, vonn der innerlichen unsichtbaren allgemeynen kilchen, die in diser zyt nit geoffnet wirdt; [so] ouch den usserlichen unnd innerlichen bann. Ja, soliche werdend das rych gottes nit besitzen, die nachder ordnung und straff sich bekeerend und also biß an das end in iren sünden verharrend. QZ Zofingen, pp. 131-132.*

the *Parousia*, the inner and outer church.<sup>34</sup> The first of these two types of churches, *die usserlichen*, referred to the visible manifestation of the church, which was a mixed body simultaneously composed of the elect and the reprobate, the wheat and the chaff.<sup>35</sup> The second form of the church, *der innerlichen*, on the other hand, was comprised exclusively of genuine regenerate believers whose place was secured in heaven. This ‘inner church’, while considered but a part of the outer visible church, was fundamentally unknowable apart from the divine.<sup>36</sup>

As stated earlier, this inner versus outer distinction did not remain confined to the preachers’ understanding of the church at Zofingen, but also extended to their convictions relating to the ban itself. Eventually these inner versus outer distinctions, coupled with the Anabaptists’ interpretation of the ‘keys to the Kingdom’ passage, helped incite the Swiss

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<sup>34</sup> This is an idea expressed by Zwingli just one year prior to the convening of the 1532 Bernese *Gespräch* and as a part of one of Bullinger’s influential sermons over a decade after the close of the Bern debate. However, while this was a shared idea with these influential Reformed leaders of the Swiss Confederation, the use of the terms ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ to mark this distinction appears a unique contribution from those at Bern. Zwingli, in his 1531 treatise entitled, ‘An Exposition of the Faith’, made mention of this distinction in his brief section addressing the church. There he used the terms ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ to convey the distinction which he believed divided those two forms of the church which comprised the ‘one holy, catholic, that is, universal church.’ The ‘visible’ church, Zwingli acknowledged, contained all those who made a profession of faith, admittedly included some who were not truly the elect. To the ‘invisible’ church belonged all those who truly believed across the world; a group known only to God. Zwingli, ‘An Exposition of the Faith’, in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. by Rev. G.W. Bromiley (London, 1953), pp. 265-266. Bullinger continued his predecessor’s traditional use of the ‘visible/invisible’ designation in his sermon, ‘Of the Holy Catholic Church’, and added the like designation ‘inward/outward’ to the discussion as well. Like Zwingli, Bullinger emphasized God’s exclusive knowledge of those whose place was in the ‘invisible’ church, specifically because of the Lord’s unique ability to judge the heart of men. The ‘visible’ church was still deemed a viable church, and as with Zwingli, included some who were hypocrites. See ‘Of the Holy Catholic Church’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 289-299. It should be noted that while the preachers at the 1532 debate predominately used the ‘inner/outer’ term as a part of making this important theological point they did sparingly use Zwingli’s terminology of ‘invisible’ (*unsichtbaren*). *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 131 and 135.

<sup>35</sup> The preachers at Zofingen contended that this type of church was precisely what Jesus was talking about in His parable of the wheat and tares from Matthew 13. See *Ibid.*, p. 134. Later the preachers also argued that Paul spoke about this ‘outer church’ when he addressed the Corinthian Church as a ‘holy community’, (*ghelgete kilchen*) but knowing full well that the assembly included an adulterer (*der hurer*). See I Corinthians 1:2 and *QZ Zofingen*, p. 137.

<sup>36</sup> This ‘inner church’ was recognized by the preachers as that church which Jesus spoke about during His commissioning of the apostles in John 20:19-23, as opposed to the visible form of the church which they argued was the focus of attention in the wheat and tares parable from Matthew 13. According to the preachers, participation in the ‘inner church’ was directly tied to one’s belief or rejection of the gospel. *Ibid.*, 134-135.

preachers to chastise the Anabaptists and even pejoratively compare them to the despised Papists. The preachers argued,

That misleads the good brethren just as the Pope has done; this one (the Pope) has applied the inner ban in the outer church, the outer (ban) becoming ruined. There is one holy, true, lone Christian church, which is the community of all who believe themselves to be saved through Christ. It is scattered throughout the entire world, in Turkey, in India, etc. and known only by the one God. This church has no other ban and keys other than of the proclamation of penance and the gospel. Who accepts it is kept in it and its member; whoever does not is damned.<sup>37</sup>

Here, using calculated polemical language in their attacks upon the Anabaptists, the preachers contended that their opponents had grossly confused the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ forms of church discipline. Just as the papacy had erred in ascribing to itself the right to make pronouncements of judgments related to salvation, so too had the Anabaptists in the same manner mistakenly assumed to itself a power which the preachers argued was exclusively the right of God alone.<sup>38</sup> The invisible church certainly played a part in salvation, but according to the preachers, it played much more of a peripheral and indirect role. In this case the power of the church, through its use of ‘the keys’ (*die schlüssel*), was portrayed through the church’s proclamation of the gospel, which the hearers either received or rejected.<sup>39</sup> In the

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<sup>37</sup> *Das yrret die guten bruder, wie ouch der bapst gethon; [dieser] hatt den innerlichen bann inn die usserliche kilchen gezogen, den usserlichen aber lassen zu grund gon. Es ist ein heylige, waare, eynige christenliche kilchen; das ist die gmeind aller deren, die vertrauend, durch Christum salig ze werden. Die ist zerstrouwet in alle walt, in der Türkey, in India etc. unnd allein dem einigen gott bekannt. 2 Timoth. 2. In diser kilchen ist nüt anders der bann unnd die schlüssel dann verkündung der buß unnd deß evangeliums. Der es annimpt, ist behalten und ein glid derselben; war nit, ist verdampft.* Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>38</sup> A position also highlighted in D. Carl Sachsse, *Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe* (Neue Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirch, no. 20; Berlin, 1914), p. 190. This parallel with Rome has also been identified by Windhorst, who cleverly labeled Hubmaier a ‘Reformed Catholic’ because of the Waldshut Anabaptists’ position on the visible church. Windhorst, p. 168.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 133. This understanding of the keys was certainly not a new idea but had been expressed in like terms by Martin Bucer as early as the mid-1520s in his work, *Handel mit Cunrat Treger*. Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirksville, 1994), p. 28.

end, and as a consequence of these inner versus outer distinctions, the preachers at the 1532 convention contended that the radicals' ecclesiastical construct was irreparably flawed.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of how logical or persuasive the preachers' arguments were the Anabaptists still could not see past nor were they willing to concede their opponents the necessary distinctions which made up the inner and outer divisions. Looking to Paul, the Anabaptists reasoned, 'How can one speak of two churches, about which Paul said in I Corinthians 1: they shall be as one body, having many members clinging to each other; and as there is no division within the body, so Christ is also not divided in pieces. Similarly, the church shall also not be divided in form.'<sup>41</sup> Because God designed the church in a way that was to reflect the human body and typify the person of Jesus, in the radicals' eyes, the preachers' distinctions were not only unwarranted biblically, but they had also been artificially applied to a clearly divisive end.<sup>42</sup> Unity of the body required separation from those acting independently of the body. This not only served to nullify the spreading of the unrepentant sin to the other members of the body, as in the case of the leaven, but it also helped to preserve the sanctity of the body, thereby fulfilling the church's holy calling.

Regardless of the church's divine calling the preachers were still unwilling to surrender the need for a distinction between the inner and outer churches. Although a unified

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<sup>40</sup> Now it must be recognized that the participants at the 1538 *Gespräch* did make reference to an inner versus outer distinction. In that case, Erasmus Ritter drew attention to the sacrifices of the Old Testament to show how God, even prior to the incarnation event, was not just concerned about the external acts of an individual, but also placed a priority on the importance of that person's inner heart motivations as well. In this instance Ritter, a holdover supporter of the now deceased Zwingli, retained some trace elements of the Zürich Reformer's theology. See *QZ Bern*, p. 442. However, while this isolated statement demonstrated a shared affinity with those at the 1532 session in the distinction between external acts and heart intentions, Ritter's statement came nowhere close to the unique language and detailed system of inner versus outer distinctions presented six years earlier. That remains the sole contribution of those Bernese ministers at the 1532 debate.

<sup>41</sup> *Wie kan man von zweyen kilchen reden, so Paulus 1. Corinth 1 spricht: Sy sol sin wie ein lyb eins menschen, hat vil glider, hangend alle aneinandern und wie der lyb kein zerspaltung, als ouch Christus nit in stuck geteylt. Glycher gestalt sol ouch die kilchen nit zerteylt syn. QZ Zofingen*, p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> Later in the debate the Anabaptists used a veiled reference to the I Corinthians 12:25 passage in an effort to re-emphasize the futile and dangerous inclusion of two groups of people in one church community. See *Ibid.*, p. 148.

body was considered ideal, based on the limitations with which the contemporary church was forced to function within a pre-glorified era, the preachers remained convinced that there had to be an anonymous element to the nature of membership in the true church of Christ.

Further on in the 1532 *Gespräch* they reasoned, ‘We have in the book of wisdom: No person knows regarding another whether he has the favor or hatred of God. The prophet spoke in the Psalms; I [the Lord] am a searcher of the hearts and minds.’<sup>43</sup> Harkening back to the wisdom found in the Old Testament, here again the Bernese preachers emphasized that the Anabaptists’ pure church concept was not viable because of the uncertainty which surrounded every individual’s eternal standing before God. One could provide some level of judgment on the basis of external actions. However, because God remained concerned about the totality of a confessing individual, including the heart and mind, a final conclusion from a finite perspective was considered speculative at best. To further emphasize this point the Bernese ministers looked to a New Testament example and argued, ‘In Acts 8 Simon the Sorcerer was in the church, yet also an unbeliever, willing to purchase a miracle sign, but they (the church) must tolerate (him) until his insincerity was brought to light.’<sup>44</sup> Clearly if such an individual’s apostasy was unknowable to even the apostles themselves, how, then, could such a standard be applied for any church? Therefore, just as ‘Paul also called those from Corinth a holy church and, yet, knew that adulterers were found therein’; an ecclesiological distinction was most certainly required.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, the proposed separation of the Swiss radicals was deemed wholly flawed from the start.

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<sup>43</sup> *Wir hand in dem buch der wyßheyt: Kein mensch weyßt von dem andern, ob er des gunst oder haß gottes genöß sie. Der prophet spricht Psal: Ich [der Herr] bin ein erfarer der hertzen und nieren.* Ibid., p. 135. It should be noted that the Swiss German term ‘nieren’ is literally translated as ‘kidneys.’

<sup>44</sup> *In geschichten der apostelen am 8. was Simon, der zouberer, ouch in der kilchen ein ungloubiger, wolt wunderzeichen kauffen, den mußend sy denocht duldend, byß sye falsch ußbrach.* Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>45</sup> *nempt Paulus die von Corinth ouch ein ghelgete kilchen und wußt doch den hurer darinn.* Ibid., p. 137. Also see I Corinthians 1:2 and 5:1ff.

Having recognized the differing ways in which the Anabaptists and Swiss preachers viewed the purpose for the ban during their 1532 debate, our attention must now shift to both groups' views on church discipline during the 1538 session, along with both disputations places in the ongoing dialogue of the period. During this debate, as had taken place six years earlier, the Anabaptists were first afforded the opportunity to begin the proceedings on the ban as they deemed appropriate. However, rather than focusing initially on the pure character of the church in isolation, the radicals at the 1538 session began by drawing a point of comparison between the true church and a dangerous external entity. Making reference to earlier statements made at the 1538 session Mathi Wisser began by re-emphasizing the substantive 'difference' (*unnderscheid*) he and the other radicals believed existed between the world and the church.<sup>46</sup> Through the repeated use of such terms Wisser made it plainly clear that the Anabaptists' understanding of the ban at the 1538 disputation had been constructed in light of their affirmed dualistic world view.<sup>47</sup> According to this position, everything in the world fell into two mutually exclusive categories; namely, those things which were of God and associated with Christianity and those things deemed to be of the world and outside of the divine.<sup>48</sup> Drawing heavily from the Johannine tradition, which he cited, Wisser wanted to

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<sup>46</sup> *QZ Bern*, p. 439.

<sup>47</sup> The use of the term 'distinction' or 'difference' (*unnderscheid*) was a personal staple of Mathi Wisser's argument throughout the 1538 debate and was most often used in conjunction with Scriptural passages from the fourth Chapter and the book of I John, specifically chapters two and three. See *Ibid.*, pp. 439-440 and 443-444. Wisser later used the term, not in a categorical sense through light/dark and Christ/world designations, but as it related to specific actions taken by those in the preachers' church. In that one instance he acknowledged the difference as it related to the understanding and application of the mass and the use of idols. See *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>48</sup> This dualistic world view recognized an ontological distinction between those things identified with Christ and those associated with 'the world.' The two functioned in their own isolated realities and were radically distinct from one another; therefore, the two could not be mingled. Robert Friedmann, in arguing that this cosmic dualism was one of the main suppositions at the heart of Anabaptist theology, addressed this concept through the designations 'the doctrine of two worlds' and 'kingdom theology.' Robert Friedmann, 'The Essence of the Anabaptist Faith: An Essay in Interpretation', *MQR* vol. 41, 1966, pp.260-265; and *idem*, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, pp. 36-46. Bender also considered the Anabaptists' dualism as one of its chief theological cornerstones in Harold S. Bender, 'The Pacifism of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists', *CH* 24, 1955. Although Friedmann argued for the primacy of this kingdom theology as it relates to understanding the Anabaptists,

demonstrate that the aforementioned distinction (between Christ and the world) extended to individuals as well. This was accomplished by referencing John chapters 14 and 17 and interpreting them to distinguish those individuals who were united with Christ and rejected by the world from those who were associated with the earthly realm.

Following his efforts to establish the importance of the dichotomy which the group believed existed between the sacred and the secular in the world, Wiser then proceeded to introduce the importance and origin of the ban as a means for dealing with sin among the believing church.<sup>49</sup> To this end Wiser argued,

Now Christ has established a discipline, which one shall apply in Christ's church. (This is from) Matthew 18 (and) Paul has applied it in I Corinthians 5. We would approve of you if you were who you pretend to be; however, that is not as it is. In Galatians 5 and I Corinthians 6 Paul tells of the evil of the flesh, those that will not inherit the Kingdom of God. The ones who practice such evil and are involved in adultery, honor breaking, pride, etc. will be bound in heaven and shall be punished according to the disciple, as Paul in I Corinthians 5 did to the adulterer who took the wife of his father. Since the community did not observe to this case, punish and exclude (that one), Paul has written a discipline for them.<sup>50</sup>

In this instance, not surprisingly, Wiser chose to articulate the ban's ecclesiological significance through the lens of the Anabaptists' separation perspective. It appears that each of the Pauline passages used to clarify the use of the ban had been carefully selected to promote two very important points for the radicals as it related to the ban.<sup>51</sup> First, the

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Kenneth Davis has correctly recognized the subsidiary role this theology played (because it is only 'implied' in the sources) in directing the emerging radical movement. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, pp. 140-142.

<sup>49</sup> The use of the terms 'sacred' and 'secular' have been chosen by the author to denote what may be best considered the modern designation for those things associate with God (sacred) and those aligned with the world (secular).

<sup>50</sup> *Nu hatt Christus ein ordnung angericht, was man bruchen soll inn der khilchen Christi. Mathei 18: Die hett Paulus brucht I. Cor. 5. Sölliche wir billich by üch ouch funden, wo ir die werennt, die ir üch rüment; alls aber nitt ist. Zun Galatern 5, ouch I. Cor. 6 erzellt Paulus die laster des fleischs, so das rich gottes nitt erben. Welliche mit sölichenn umbgannd unnd darin begriffen alls inn hury, eebruch, hofart etc., die sind im himell bunden unnd söllent gestrafft werdenn nachder ordnung, wie I. Cor. 5 Paulus dem hurer thet, der sins vatters wib hatt, wie die gemeind nitt daruff geachtett, gestrafft unnd ußgescholossen, hatt inen Paulus ein ordnung geschribenn. QZ Bern, pp. 439-440.*

<sup>51</sup> The Pauline passages used by the Anabaptists here included I Corinthians 5:1ff, 6:18, and Galatians 5:19ff.

institution of the ban from Matthew 18, coupled with the vivid descriptions painted by Paul describing the breadth of humanity's potential carnality, now gave sin a very specific face. It was no longer some vaguely understood or indescribable thing; rather, sin was seen and understood as humanity's willful disobedience to God enfleshed in the actions of everyday life.

Secondly, the citation of Paul's words from Galatians 5 was understood and subsequently used by Wiser to promote the radicals belief in the existence of a cosmic parallel between an individual's actions on earth and their eternal standing before God in heaven. The specific sins Paul mentioned in the Galatians passage, such as adultery, fornication, etc., all were understood by the Anabaptists to be accompanied by the logical consequence of an eternal separation from God. As Wiser and the other radicals at Bern looked to this text they saw an equation of sorts; commit sin without an act of repentance and that individual would 'not inherit the Kingdom of God' (*rich gottes nitt erben*).<sup>52</sup>

Recognizing this link between action and inheritance, Wiser then reminded those at the 1538 debate that, through a reference to the sexual immorality found in I Corinthians 5, expulsion from the Christian community was the prescribed response to those whose sins were exposed and yet remained unrepentant.<sup>53</sup> It was to this end that the ban from Matthew 18 was first instituted according to the Anabaptists. Because sin was not only a discernable entity, but one which dwelt wholly outside of the divine, a mechanism had to be put in place that would allow the church to address sin when it was encountered. The ban served as the perfect means to accomplish this task.

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<sup>52</sup> *QZ Bern*, p. 440.

<sup>53</sup> According to Wiser, participation in the Christian community via baptism subjected the confessing believer to the discipline of the church if and when the time was ever deemed appropriate. *Ibid.*, p. 440 and Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, 2004), p. 210. This idea mirrors rather closely Balthasar Hubmaier's suggestion that baptism served as the candidates willing submission to the church's admonishment when his/her life strayed from the Holy Word. Hubmaier, 'On Fraternal Admonition', pp. 381 and 383.

While the Bernese preachers certainly did not promote turning a blind eye to sin and its devastating effects in the church they did contend that their Anabaptist counterparts had been erroneously presumptuous in assuming a direct correlation between action and inheritance. Erasmus Ritter, the primary voice for the Bernese church's position on the ban during 1538, began his opening rebuttal by not only attacking what he believed to be the flawed supposition behind this link, but also by highlighting the gross fallacy promoted by the Anabaptists' dualistic mentality. Ritter reasoned as follows:

John 17 states, I pray not for the world. That is for the unbeliever. Then in the same chapter it follows, I pray, however, not for the apostles alone, but also for those who through their (the apostles) word will believe in me. These same people who were still in the world and did not believe, however, shall be believers, then soon thereafter it follows that the world believes you have sent me.<sup>54</sup>

From this statement it is apparent that Ritter was unwilling to simply admit that the radicals' perceived correlation between being 'in the world' and being eternally rejected was in any way a foregone conclusion. It was conceded, according to John 17, that those Jesus deemed to be in 'the world' (*die welltt*) were properly understood as 'unbelievers' (*die unglöübigen*); however, as Ritter reminded those at the 1538 session, such was not the end of Jesus' prayer. Later in chapter seventeen Christ offered an additional prayer for those who He recognized 'will believe' (*gloubenn werdennt*) through the word of the apostles. The subsequent inclusion of this group of individuals, as Ritter understood, dramatically hindered the Anabaptists claims, for now Jesus had further qualified the previous distinction made between those He was praying for and those He associated with the world. Based on Ritter's interpretation of the John 17 passage, the radicals' willingness to make affirmations of judgment based on specific actions of individuals at the present time failed to take into

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<sup>54</sup> *Johannes 17: Ich bitt nitt für die welltt. Das ist: für sy, die apostell, allein, sunder ouch für die, so durch ir wortt inn mich gloubenn werdennt. Dieselbenn warennt noch in der welltt unnd gloubten nitt, sollten aber glöübig werdenn, dann bald hernach vollgt es uff, das die welltt gloube, du habest mich gesent. QZ Bern, p. 440.*

consideration Jesus' later distinction and completely ignored the fact that the church had no present way of discerning who was and will be saved from those who were eternally resigned to hell.<sup>55</sup> Ritter, further reminded the Anabaptists of the practical limitations of the contemporary church by stating, 'Here again who, however, shall be saved and who will not believe and will remain in the world are not understood.'<sup>56</sup> Although not explicitly stated, the implied consequence of such a limitation naturally implied that the church had to assume an anonymous element as a part of a gathering body prior to the second coming of Christ.

Following this explanation, and almost certainly in anticipation of an Anabaptist counterattack, Ritter then proceeded to emphasize that an anonymous aspect to the church's constitution in no way presupposed a casual approach to sin. According to Ritter, sin was deemed an extremely serious matter which needed to be purged from the church body because of its longstanding effects when unaddressed. To convey the gravity with which sin was understood by the preachers' Ritter declared, 'we also say and preach daily that one should abstain from it (sin) or fail to inherit the Kingdom of God.'<sup>57</sup> Although Ritter was in agreement here with the Anabaptists on the dangers of and need to address sin they could not agree on exactly how to proceed forward on a practical level with the ban. In order to elaborate further on this pragmatic discord, Erasmus Ritter chose to offer a brief survey of the origin and source of the ban from a historical perspective. Naturally, the Anabaptists were given an unfavorable portrayal, as they were compared directly with the Jews who were

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<sup>55</sup> Ritter's usage of the John 17 text to promote an anonymous aspect to the earthly manifestation of the church body is almost certainly his own unique interpretation of this text. Zwingli had previously commented on this passage and understood it in terms of the basis of salvation. See Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, p.153-154.

<sup>56</sup> *Hinwiderumb die aber sällig söllent werdenn unnd woll nach nitt glöübig unnd in der welltt, sind darin nitt begriffen. QZ Bern*, p. 440.

<sup>57</sup> *Sagennt wir ouch unnd predigennt's täglich, man söll darvon abstan, oder das rich gottes werde man nitt erbenn. Ibid.*, p. 440.

understood as having ‘abused all things’, (*alle ding misßbrucht*) including the ban.<sup>58</sup> The preachers, on the other hand, Ritter equated with the apostles who had constructed a ‘friendly’ (*fründtliche*) church in contrast to the abusive one of the Jews during the first century.

In this description of the preachers’ understanding of the ban at the 1538 session, Ritter wanted to make sure that two important elements were recognized as a part of any proper implementation of church discipline. First, referencing passages from both testaments of Holy Scripture, Ritter made it unmistakably clear that it was not merely the external acts of an individual which the ban sought to amend, but also the inner heart condition of the sinner as well. This was done by referencing the words of the prophet Jeremiah from chapter seven and interpreting them in such a way as to separate Israel’s external act of sacrifice from the wicked intentions of their hearts.<sup>59</sup> With this distinction firmly established Ritter then stressed the need for a ‘circumcision of our hearts’, (*beschnident die vorhutt üwers hertzenss*) thereby highlighting the innermost part of humanity which church discipline was most purposely directed.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, while Ritter’s focus on the inner ‘heart condition’ of the individual indirectly supported the anonymous element of the church he and those at the 1532 session had been so eager to highlight, different passages from the book of Jeremiah were used during each of the two Bernese debates to stress this same point.<sup>61</sup> Once again, while

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 441. Ritter, basing his position on John 9:13-22 and Acts 5:34ff., argued that the ban was not originally a part of the Hebrew tradition but was a later innovation of groups like the Pharisees who applied it to those who unwaveringly confessed Christ.

<sup>59</sup> See Jeremiah 7:21-27 and *QZ Bern*, p. 442.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 442-443. The prominent role of a circumcised heart became a foundational element of the preachers’ argument against the Anabaptists, as it struck a crucial blow to the radicals’ accent on external behavior as a means of recognizing one’s ultimate affiliation with the Lord.

<sup>61</sup> While Ritter looked to Jeremiah 4:4 and 7:21-27 to make this point, the preachers at the 1532 debate relied solely on Jeremiah 17:10 to stress the anonymous aspect of the church’s constitution. See. Ibid., pp. 135 and 442-443.

the basic underlying concepts remained the same, these two groups approached the matter with slightly varying positions of defense.

Secondly, Ritter provided a simple measure to determine if the use of the ban was being applied in a proper biblical manner; namely, did it promote the ‘edification/ building up of the church’ (*nach erbuwung der khilchenn*) or did it lead ‘to the ruin and breaking down’ (*zu zerrüttung unnd abbrechung*) of the body?<sup>62</sup> Drawing primarily from Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth, Ritter argued that the only ban which was considered acceptable to the preachers was that one which promoted unity and reconciliation in the church body. Naturally, the Anabaptists view of the ban, with its emphasis on expulsion of the unrepentant sinner, could not stand up to such a criterion.

Unfazed by Erasmus Ritter’s lengthy attacks on the Anabaptist’s use of the ban, Wisser proceeded to further articulate the Anabaptists’ position by re-emphasizing the importance of implementing church discipline in light of a dualistic theological view. Wisser argued,

I say regarding Christ’s order, however, that there is a difference between the arrogance of the world and the Christian, between light and darkness...What has Christ to do with Belial and how is light to be associated with the darkness? Now, whoever does not walk according to the rule of Christ is in the darkness and cannot be a Christian. This we find even applies to you (the preachers). Therefore, we cannot consider you as Christians.<sup>63</sup>

Using language strongly reminiscent of earlier Swiss Anabaptist works, Wisser reiterated the Anabaptists’ 1538 position that the preachers’ stance on the ban was wholly untenable because of its failure to deal with the unmistakable distinction that existed between the sacred and the secular.<sup>64</sup> As a result of the preachers’ reticence to embrace the binary dualism the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>63</sup> *Ich sag aber von der ordnung Christi, das ein unnderscheid soll sin zwüschent dem hochmutt der welt unnd den christen, zwüschem liecht unnd finsternus... Was hett Christus mitt Belial unnd das liecht für ein gemeinschaftt mitt der finsternus? Welliche nu nitt nach der regell Christi wannndlent, sind inn der finsternus unnd können nitt christen sin. Das findent wir eben by üch. Darumb wir üch nitt für christen können achten.* Ibid., pp. 443-444.

<sup>64</sup> Wisser’s use of the contrasting archetypal terms ‘light/darkness’ (*liecht* and *finsternus*) and ‘Christ/Belial’ (*Christus* and *Belial*) are not only drawn from the Scriptures but are the exact distinctions used by Michael

Anabaptists believed was contained in the Scriptures, the Bernese ministers were not only deemed by Wisser to have been functioning on the basis of an improper theological foundation, but it was also assumed that they had simultaneously surrendered their standing as genuine Christians in the minds of the radicals.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, for the Anabaptists at Bern, this was not merely a difference of opinion relating to openly debatable issues of doctrine; rather, it spoke directly to those uncompromising core theological truths of the faith. In their minds the divide was infinitely more unbridgeable than initially understood by the Bernese Reformers.

Offering his opinion for the first time on the issue of the ban, Han Hotz continued the dialogue by further explaining the hopeful nature of the separation with which his Anabaptist brother, Mathiß Wisser, had been so adamant in affirming. Hotz contended, ‘When one does such evil as found in I Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 5 he shall be expelled and his sin and evil put forth before the community to his shame so that he be shamed, repentant, and expressing sorrow, and asks God for forgiveness. If (as is hoped) he then demonstrates repentance, becomes obedient and submissive, and does not return to his ways previously found, he shall again be accepted.’<sup>66</sup> The act of separation, according to Hotz, was deemed a redemptive instrument which, if used properly and in accordance with brotherly love, could bring about a restoration of the wayward sinner to the fellowship. The ban for the Anabaptists, therefore,

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Sattler in his letter to Bucer and Capito from the end of 1526/early 1527 and as a part of the fourth article of the Schleithem Confession from just a few weeks later. See these number twenty of Sattler, ‘Sattler’s Letter to Capito and Bucer’, p.23 and Fast, *Der linke Flügel*, p.64-65. That these binary terms were being used by the radicals during the emergence of the Swiss Anabaptist movement that emanated from Zürich is understood through Zwingli’s summary of the radicals’ position on separation in 1527. See Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, p. 188.

<sup>65</sup> Arnold Snyder has recognized the importance of this ‘dualism’ and has traced its roots back to earlier Swiss Anabaptist sources, most notably the fourth article on separation in Michael Sattler’s *Schleithem Confession of Faith*. Snyder also argues that the roots of this dualism are to be found in Sattler’s Benedictine past. See Snyder, ‘The Monastic Origins of Swiss Anabaptist Sectarianism’, pp. 15-16.

<sup>66</sup> *Alls wenn einer ein söllich laster wie I. Corin. 6, zun Ephe. 5 thutt, das er ußgeschlossen sölle werdenn unnd im vor der gmeind sin laster unnd übell angezöügt zur schand, das er schamrott werde, riüw unnd leid thüege, gott umb verziehung bitte. Wenn er dann bußvertigkeheitt wurckt, sich gehorsam unnd unnderthännig macht (das zu verhoffen) unnd er nitt mer darin funden, soll er wider ufgenommen werdenn. QZ Bern, p. 444*

was not merely provided to preserve and protect the integrity of the church body itself, but also served the secondary purpose of confronting the sinner.<sup>67</sup>

Surprisingly, while almost the entire first half of the proceedings on the ban at the 1538 debate were focused on the issue of separation, discussions relating to the problem of interpretation did not come to the fore until much later. Initially addressed during the dialogue between Hans Lüti and Erasmus Ritter, the issue of biblical hermeneutics, which was almost entirely absent from the dialogue on the ban at Zofingen, was finally introduced when the Anabaptists' literalism was cast by Ritter as 'the dead letter' of Scripture.<sup>68</sup> With a strong appeal to the rule of faith and love, Ritter argued that the Anabaptists' strict literal interpretation of Scripture was not only an improper way of understanding the Bible, but, in the end, could result in eternal death for those who were misguided by it.<sup>69</sup> Referencing two Old Testament examples, including David's partaking of the showbread and Moses' allowance of the certificate of divorce among the Jews, Ritter skillfully presented two examples as proof that exceptions to strict obedience could be made within the context of serving the greater good.<sup>70</sup> Both instances were classic examples for the preachers of how certain actions that were deemed to be 'against the letter' (*wider die buchstabenn*) of the Law could, in fact, be permissible when done according to the rule of faith and love.<sup>71</sup> Blindly

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<sup>67</sup> This dual purpose had previously been affirmed and explained in detail by Hubmaier in, 'On Fraternal Admonition', pp. 379-380. In that instance Hubmaier skillfully portrayed the redemptive aspect of the ban by ascribing to Christian discipline the illustrative designation 'healing plaster.'

<sup>68</sup> *QZ Bern*, p.449.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 449-450. For details relating to the role of the Rule of Faith and Love in the Bernese preachers' theology refer back to Chapter Two, pp. 75ff.

<sup>70</sup> See Leviticus 24:5-9, I Samuel 21:1-6, and Matthew 12:3ff for references to David's eating of the showbread and Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Matthew 19:7-8 for those dealing with the allowance of divorce. Further exceptions were later given by Ritter where the ban was not strictly applied by the apostles in the book of Acts. These included the immediate deaths of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 and the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer from Acts 13:8ff. *QZ Bern*, 451. These same two texts from Acts were used by those preachers at the 1532 debate to highlight a similar point against the Anabaptists. *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>71</sup> *QZ Bern*, 449. The preachers' use of these examples (specifically divorce) follows rather closely Bullinger's earlier advice to confront the Anabaptists' literalism by appealing to those instances in Scripture where a literal

following the literal ‘dead letter’ of Scripture in every instance, as Ritter would later contend, left the Anabaptists in an oppressed state and ultimately, deceiving the truth.<sup>72</sup>

Lüti, in response to Ritter’s allegations, contended that a more liberal and open interpretation of Scripture according to the proposed ‘Rule’ did not necessarily make a person more predisposed towards truth and eternal life. Directly quoting Jesus’ words from John 12, Lüti argued that it was precisely because the Word served as judge that Scripture, understood from an Anabaptist frame of reference, brought life and not death, as the preachers had argued. Lüti asserted, ‘So now it is not thus a dead letter, but that which is the power of life, (to those) who hold trust and are consoled. And in it (the Word) must be learned the way to death or the path to life.’<sup>73</sup> Consequently, the Word provided life in that it not only testified to the work of Christ, but also that it provided the standard by which the Christian (and in turn the church community) should live. Since, as Lüti proceeded to remind the preachers, Jesus provided the ban as a means for rejecting evil in the church, any means of interpreting Matthew 18 in another manner was strictly forbidden. In the radicals’ eyes, any attempt to do so was seen as promoting another gospel and those who did such were to be condemned.<sup>74</sup>

### **Evaluation/Comparison**

After careful examination of the disputation protocols relating to the issue of the ban at Bern, our introductory premise remains affirmed; there is simply no indication that either the Anabaptists or Swiss preachers at the 1538 debate modified their views on the nature and purpose of Christian discipline to any significant extent from those previously offered six

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interpretation simply did not suffice. Bullinger promoted a hermeneutic that included the primacy of allowing ‘clearer’ passages of Scripture to shed light on more obscure texts while the remaining unclear passages were to be ‘straightened out by the rule of faith and love.’ Bullinger, ‘How to Deal with Anabaptists’, p. 90.

<sup>72</sup> *QZ Bern*, 451. Because of this deception Ritter placed these Anabaptists alongside those Paul condemned in Galatians 1:8 for their proclamation of another gospel.

<sup>73</sup> *So nu allso, so ist es je khein todter buchstab, sunder das, das lebendig machett, die daruff vertruwen halltten unnd vertrusten sich. Unnd darinn erlernett mag werdenn der weg zum tod oder läbenn.* Ibid., 450.

<sup>74</sup> The biblical basis for Lüti’s argument is found in Galatians 1:8.

years earlier at Zofingen. While the language, concepts, imagery, and biblical references may have varied, the fundamental core beliefs relating to each groups' views of the ban remained almost entirely intact through the course of the dialogues. Moreover, even as the heart of the two conflicting stances offered through the Bernese disputations remained intact, the way in which each group formulated and proliferated their arguments shows a heavy and clear dependence upon historical positions formerly manifest through earlier Anabaptist/Reformed dialogues in the Swiss Confederation.

As it relates to the Anabaptist participants at the 1532 and 1538 sessions, the concepts of purity and separation played the dominant role in describing the radicals' understanding of church discipline. Interestingly, while both groups allowed for each of these ecclesiological concepts to enlighten and further define their views on the ban, each were conveyed in two distinct ways by those Anabaptist contributors at Bern. In the case of those at the 1532 session the focus was predominately placed upon the purity of the church expressed in individualistic terms. Relying on biblical passages such as I Corinthians 5, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 5, the Anabaptists at the earlier Zofingen disputation argued for the need for separation based on the pure and holy character of the church. Only those individuals who acted according to their confession of faith would be fully embraced by the church community. The requirement to separate from those whose lives did not meet the standard of obedience set forth in the Scriptures was merely the means to preserve the purity of Christ's body. The daily activities of these precluded them from involvement, for action was always linked with inheritance and revealed the true character of an individual.

When it came time for the Anabaptists to present their position on the ban six years later, rather than expressing their attitudes through individualistic concepts, as outlined above, they chose to express their understanding of the ban through general terms and via broad categories. Using language and concepts that stressed the dichotomy it was believed

existed between those things identified with Christ and those affiliated with the world, Anabaptists like Mathiß Wiser argued that the church had to function in light of these two disparate realities. Referencing many of the same passages of Scripture, the radicals at the 1538 disputation subtly moved the emphasis away from an individual's actions as it related to personal purity towards that person's place in the scheme of this dualistic reality. Regardless of whether the focus was placed on an individual and their actions or on the two contrasting cosmic realities expressed in light/dark categories, the themes of purity and a need for the church to preserve its holy character through separatism reveal an unmistakable link with the theology conveyed by earlier Swiss Brethren such as Grebel, Hubmaier, and Sattler.

Shifting our attention to the preachers' views on the ban from 1532 and 1538, the two overarching convictions that were prevalent at both disputation gatherings was a firm belief in the redemptive role of the ban as a part of Christian discipline and the anonymous constitution of the church in a pre-glorified era. Much like their radical adversaries, although there was much common ground in the promotion of these two tenets, understated variations remained between the two sessions. The most prominent of these was the rather glaring absence of both the 'inner/outer' view of the church and distinctions of the ban previously employed by Zwingli. Once again, while it appears that the core rebutting approach remained the same at the later 1538 Bern debate, the move away from Zwingli has at least manifest itself in attempts to move away from argumentative constructs which were deemed to closely aligned with the now deceased Zürich Reformer.

### **Hermeneutics**

As one follows along the course of the dialogues relating to the issue of the ban at both the 1532 and 1538 disputations it becomes clear that the two sides understood the nature of and application of Christian discipline from two entirely divergent theological foundations. While both the Anabaptists and Bernese preachers held a shared belief throughout relating to

the need for some form of church discipline, what remains unanswered is how exactly these two groups came to such differing conclusions regarding its purpose and application. Were they not, in the end, forming their convictions relating to the ban from the same authoritative fount, the Bible? While the immediate answer to this question may be resoundingly affirmed, that only tells part of the story. Ultimately, it was each of the two groups' particular readings and interpretation of Scripture that shaped their views in contrasting directions. As stated in Chapter Two, hermeneutics remained at the heart of the divide between the Anabaptist radicals and their Reformed counterparts; this certainly held true as it related to the ban. The remaining portion of this chapter will be used to show how hermeneutics drove the course of the discussions at Bern and ultimately served as that one thing which created the two irreconcilable views of the ban found in the disputation protocols.

### **Matthew 18: The Ban**

Quite obviously Jesus' institution of the ban offered during an exhortative time with his disciples as recorded in Matthew 18 served as the critical text in the ongoing dialogue at both Bernese sessions regarding the use of the ban.<sup>75</sup> Although both groups who participated at the Bernese debates recognized the importance of this text as it related to the ban, as will be shown, their alternative readings of this passage only served to widen the theological divide between the two. For their part, the Anabaptists at both disputation sessions found in this text the unambiguous institution of a means for dealing with sin in the church body. In a way, the words of Christ from Matthew 18 served as a formula of sorts. When a sin became known it was 'the command of God' (*der bevelch gottes*) that the offending party was to be confronted in the manner directly expressed in Scripture.<sup>76</sup> This, as the Anabaptists

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<sup>75</sup> See Matthew 18:15-17

<sup>76</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 115. As a part of the opening of this argument at the 1532 debate the Anabaptists specifically quoted only the initial command for the recipient of the sinners fault to address him/her in private. It is to be understood that the audience knew this text and assumed the continued confrontation of the sinner by multiple witnesses prior to the issue being brought before the entire church congregation.

understood, was Christ's prescribed measure for preserving the purity of the church community. Operating on the basis of a literal interpretation of the Matthew text, they contended that sin simply could not be tolerated within the church under any circumstances.<sup>77</sup> Once confronted, if the sinner persisted in refusing to repent of that sin then the individual was to be placed under the Christian ban. Here, the Anabaptists looked to the sinner's comparison to a pagan and tax collector as authorization for their exclusion from the church body.<sup>78</sup> Because the Christian church was a community set apart by and for God, sin was not and could not be tolerated within its membership. To allow for sin to reside within the church, they argued, was to divide the body of Christ and such was impossible according to Paul in I Corinthians 1.<sup>79</sup>

That the Anabaptists had an extremely high view of church discipline is not in question. In essence, it was the very thing that helped the church to fulfill its heavenly calling. Such a simple, plain, and literal reading of Matthew 18 not only made perfect sense in view of the radicals' ecclesiological focus on purity, but it also, in direct relationship to the subsequent 'binding and loosing' passage from versus 18-20, allowed for the church to correctly serve as an earthly shadow of its parallel reality in heaven.<sup>80</sup> This was precisely

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<sup>77</sup> This is clearly understood as the attention to the specific commands from Matthew 18 came immediately after the Anabaptists had argued for the importance of a pure church community. See the Anabaptists' opening comments from *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>78</sup> For those Anabaptists at the 1532 session the Matthew 18:17 passage was seen as a clear validation of their expulsion tactics. The overriding emphasis was on the fact that the refusal of the sinner to repent brought with it the implied connection with unbelief. For the pure church gathered as a confessing community such a person simply could not remain. The use of terms and phrases such as 'exclude' (*schlissend*), 'do not hold him as a brother' (*haltend in nit me für ein bruder*), and 'consider him as a pagan and tax collector' (*haltend in wie ein heyden und zoller*) all embodied the Anabaptists' notion of expulsion for the one unwilling to recognize and move away from their error. See the Anabaptists use of these ideas in *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116, 118, and 141. During the 1538 debate, Mathiß Wisser recognized this same connection between sin and unbelief, but conveyed them through the use of broad categorical terms. There, failure to live according to one's confession of faith placed that person in the dualistic category, 'the world' (*die welltt*), thereby providing the justification for that person's expulsion from the church community. See *QZ Bern*, pp. 439-40, 442-445.

<sup>79</sup> *QZ Zofingen*, p. 118.

<sup>80</sup> The Kingdom of God, in this regard, was not merely a future reality, but was to be presently realized through the pure church. Davis, *Anabaptism and Acetivism*, pp. 141-144.

why the Anabaptists had such a strong disdain for the unsavory activities of those in the Swiss church and why they remained persistent in their rejection of the Bernese church's validation.

In direct contrast to the Anabaptists strict reading of the Matthew 18 text, the Bernese ministers at the 1532 debate chose to interpret that same passage in light of Matthew's recorded words immediately preceding and following it. While the preachers' elaborate exegesis of this passage included a prescribed division of chapter 18 into three specific sections, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant served as the primary lens through which Jesus' institution of the ban was to be understood.<sup>81</sup> Relying on these two texts which emphasized the great depth of biblical forgiveness and the heart of God to pursue those who had gone astray from the faith, the preachers opted for a less stringent reading of the passage, ultimately resigning themselves to temper their judgment of sin in order to promote the building up of the church body in love.<sup>82</sup> They conceded that such was not the ideal for the church, but operating on the basis of the rule of faith and love and with an eye towards the Parable of the Wheat and Tares from Matthew 13, they did acknowledge that this concession was the required course of action until the return of Messiah.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See the preachers' argument in *QZ Zofingen*, p. 119.

<sup>82</sup> The preachers at the 1532 debate argued that when the edification (*erbuwung*) of the church was accomplished through punishment it would apply discipline, however, such a power (*gwalt*) is not always to be applied, but as it promotes edification through love. The fact that this argument was followed by specific mention of the need to allow both the wheat and tares to grow until the harvest, according to Matthew 13, clearly reveals a strong allusion to the rule of faith and love. See Chapter Two, pp 75ff.

<sup>83</sup> Later in the discussions the preachers, citing Paul's words in II Timothy 2:24-25, even referenced the need to 'tolerate the wicked with gentleness' (*die bosen dulden mit senffmutigkeit*) since there remained the possibility of repentance. See *QZ Zofingen*, p. 128.

### Matthew 13: Wheat and Tares

While the Matthew 18 passage certainly served as the central text around which the discussion on the ban focused, it was Jesus' Parable of the Wheat and Tares, from Matthew 13, which the preachers utilized as a key passage in support of their mixed church ecclesiology. Commenting on Paul's words regarding divorce, and giving specific attention to Jesus' exhortative words from Matthew 19, the preachers continued their line of reasoning during the 1532 debate with the following declaration: 'Thus reports Christ regarding the weeds that must not be pulled out without destruction. Yet, it is not his desire that it (the weeds) be permitted to grow. However, because pulling out (the weeds) is detrimental and corrupting to the good (wheat), he called for them to remain among one another until the day of the harvest; And thus, faith and love constitute the Rule of Christ.'<sup>84</sup> Clearly this statement demonstrated that the preachers knew full well the extent of the danger that existed for the church which permitted 'the chaff' among its body; they were not altogether naive to such a potentially damaging relationship. Nevertheless, the mere possibility of winning a wayward Christian back to the fold meant that the toleration of certain sin was a concession whose potential reward was too great, thereby requiring such an admission be made.<sup>85</sup> Granted, toleration was not the ideal, as seen by the parallel situation with divorce, but it was an

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<sup>84</sup> *Also referiert sich ouch Christus uff das unkrut, das nit mag ußgejatten warden on verderbnuß. Wil darumb nit, das man es musse wachsen lassen. Aber diewil das ußrüten ouch dem guten nachteylich ware und verderblich, heyßt er's under einandern lassen stan, biß uff den tag der ernd; unnd das, sovil ouch glouben und liebe die regel Christi ertragen mag. Ibid., p. 128.*

<sup>85</sup> This concession was considered by the preachers at the 1538 session when they argued that the mixed body had to be maintained 'until a better opportunity/occasion' (*biß zu merer komlicheitt*) arose in which the two entities might be separated. See *QZ Bern*, p. 454. The preachers at the 1532 session even went so far in their understanding of this concession that they, referencing Paul's words to Timothy, used the phrase 'tolerate evil' (*die bosen ulden*) in their explanation of Matthew 13. It must also be noted that this idea had already been considered by Zwingli in his earlier dealings with the Anabaptists. There, referencing the wheat and tares passage and the parable of the unforgiving servant from Matthew 13 and 18, Zwingli contended that the Lord had clearly demonstrated that 'there are some things at which fraternal love may wink.' In determining precisely whether a sin warrants expulsion from the community or the aforementioned 'wink,' Zwingli urged 'moderation...with the greatest diligence.' Zwingli, *ELENCHUS*, p. 182.

allowance that had to be made in order to aid the wayward brother.<sup>86</sup> Love for one another demanded as much. That was precisely the point of the faith and love principle and why the preachers relied so heavily upon this Matthew 13 passage as justification for their mixed church.<sup>87</sup> With the eternal standing of so many individuals hanging in the balance the minds of the Bernese preachers were firmly convinced that the end truly did justify the means.

With the Anabaptists' strong affirmation regarding separation during both Bernese disputations, it is not at all surprising to find that they did not agree with the preachers' interpretation of the Matthew 13 passage. However, what is most striking in their rejection is the fact that they did little to offer an alternative interpretation of the passage when it was used in conjunction with the preachers' contention for a mixed church.<sup>88</sup> In the face of numerous references to and explanations of the wheat and tares passage by the preachers, the Anabaptists at both the 1532 and 1538 debates are found frequently retreating back into their own arguments for separation.<sup>89</sup> The only semblance of an attempt by the Anabaptists to directly address the Matthew 13 text was brief and took place exclusively at the 1538 debate.

There, in an attempt to rebut the preachers' use of the text in tandem with the rule of faith and

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<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that while the preachers at Bern were resolved in affirming the church's reluctance to divide the wheat from the chaff based on the Matthew 13 text, they did contend that this passage of Scripture did not speak to, nor was it binding upon the civil authorities, a group which they identified by the designation 'worldly sword' (*weltlichen schwert*). See *QZ Bern*, p. 453.

<sup>87</sup> The preachers at the 1532 session made the direct connection between the application of the rule of faith and love with the wheat and tares passage from Matthew 13 as a part of their acceptance of a mixed church. See *QZ*, p. 124. Wisser, at the 1538 session, used the same passage in view of Paul's words from II Corinthians 10:8 and 13:10, as reason for the preachers' reticence to affirm the radicals' separatist ideology. See *QZ*, p. 454.

<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, as John H. Yoder has shown through his examination of the 1531 disputation with Hans Pfistermeyer, the Swiss preachers employed this same tact of refusing to provide an alternative exegesis for a passage of Scripture when confronted by a divergent understanding. Yoder, *ABRS*, pp. 179-180. The prevalence of both sides in refusing to directly rebut contending interpretations of Scripture further supports the previously affirmed theory in Chapter One which emphasized that the Bernese disputations were not 'dialogues' in the true sense of the word. Rather they may best be understood as public platforms from which the two sides could better offer their opposing points of view before a larger late-Medieval audience. See Chapter One, pp. 49-50.

<sup>89</sup> In most of these instances the radicals either simply verbalized their strong rejection of the preachers' exegesis of the Matthew 13 text or they merely reiterate previously affirmed arguments for the purity of the church and/or the need for what they deem to be the Bible's call for separation. *QZ Zofingen*, pp. 122, 127-128, 135, and *QZ Bern*, pp. 454-455.

love to promote toleration, the Anabaptists alluded to Paul's words from I Corinthians 5. Emphasis here was placed on Paul's declaration that he cared little about those who were outside of the church body.<sup>90</sup> Following this affirmation the Anabaptist, Mathiß Wisser, then argued that it was precisely because of the introduction of the bad seed mentioned in Matthew 13 that Jesus had instituted the ban later in Matthew 18. In essence then, the Anabaptists did not believe that the wheat and tares parable had any application within the context of the local church body.

Despite the preachers' appeal to the rule of faith and love and their strong reliance on Matthew 13, the Anabaptists simply were not persuaded to embrace the preachers' mixed church concept in view of other Scriptural passages that ostensibly called for a separation. The Anabaptists at the 1532 debate reasoned as follows:

It is written in II Thessalonians 3, you should withdraw from a brother who disobediently does not walk according to the Word of God. In this way it is demonstrated because we shall withdraw from such a one, that such a person is not in the community of the brethren, as Christ also said: 'Teach them to observe to hold all things which I have commanded you.' According to Paul, they shall not be sullen of doing good works, Titus 3. Thus, anybody who is not obedient to the holy word of Christ, have nothing to do with them. Christ himself confessed in Matthew 13, that whoever does the will of His Father is His (Christ's) brother and sister. Paul also says, yet, however, do not hold him as an enemy, but admonish him kindly as a brother.<sup>91</sup>

Here, rather than embracing a mixed body with restoration as the end goal, the Anabaptists at the 1532 *Gespräch* were content to strictly follow what they saw as the letter of both Paul and

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<sup>90</sup> Clearly the Anabaptists interpreted Paul here to mean that the church did not need to concern itself with those who were outside of its body, those deemed to 'not walk according to the gospel of Christ (*der nit nach dem evangelio Christi*), for such individuals, in the radicals' understanding, were not a part of the community of faith because of their previous expulsion. Later, Wisser contended that those who were outside the church body were now exclusively under the authority of 'the civil authorities' (*die oberkheit*) when it came to discipline. See I Corinthians 5:11-12 and *QZ Bern*, p. 454.

<sup>91</sup> *Es stat geschriben 2. Thes. 3: Ir sond üch entzühnen vonn eim yetlichen bruder, der unordenlich wandlet nit nach dem wort gottes. Daruß wirt bewart, diewyl man sich solicher entziehen sol, das solliche nit synd in der gemeinschaft der bruderen,, wie ouch Christus spricht: Leerend sy halten alles, was ich üch bevolhen han. Item Paulus: Sy sollend nit verdrossen syn guts zu thun, Tit. Am 3. So aber yemand nit gehorsam ist nach dem heiligen wort Christi, mit dem habend nüt ze schaffen. Christus selbs hett bekendt Matth. 13: Die syne bruder und schwestern ze syn, die den willen syns vatters thund. Es sagt ouch Paulus: Doch aber so haltend in nit für ein fynd, sonnder vermanend in als ein bruder, früntlich. QZ Zofingen, pp. 128-129.*

Jesus' teachings regarding separation and the need for individuals to walk in accordance with their confession. The references to Matthew 28:20, Titus 3:8, and Matthew 12:50 were used by the Anabaptists to demonstrate the qualitative difference which they affirmed existed between those who obediently acted and lived according to the commands of Scripture and those who did not.<sup>92</sup>

In essence, the external action, or visible fruit of one's faith, was understood by these radicals as the sole determinative factor in identifying those who truly belonged in the church community. The use of the II Thessalonians 3 text was then used to show how the church must withdraw from those 'who walk disorderly (and) not according to the Word of God.'<sup>93</sup> The passages emphasizing the importance of one's 'walk' and those prescribing separation from the sinner, therefore, became the textual lens through which Matthew 18 was viewed by the radicals in 1532. Interestingly, the act of casting out the unrepentant one was even viewed as a merciful and kind act, which it was hoped would usher in a genuine shame over one's sin and an eventual obedience to Christ.<sup>94</sup> Again, the purity of the body was paramount and considered a fundamental ecclesiological tenet prescribed by the New Testament.

### **Matthew 16 and 18: Binding and Loosing**

At the heart of the Anabaptists' rejection of the preachers' interpretation of the Matthew 13 passage was a strong belief that the proposed mixed church body caused irreparable harm to the heavenly realm, for, as has already been seen, the radicals affirmed a definitive equivalence between the affirmations made by the church on earth with those

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<sup>92</sup> It should be noted that in the recorded 1532 protocol itself the Anabaptists actually referenced Matthew 13 here, but the following quoted portion of Scripture clearly shows that they mistakenly erred in ascribing the Matthew 12:50 passage to the following chapter. See *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> The German term used to describe this shame, *schamrot*, carries with it the imagery of one blushing or becoming literally red with shame. In this sense the Anabaptists hoped that the act of expulsion would be accompanied by such a degree of embarrassment and disgrace that the sinner would eventually amend his or her life and heart. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

eternally pronounced in heaven. This rejection was largely based on their readings of Matthew chapter 16 and 18. Here, the Anabaptists at the 1532 session reminded the preachers,

Thus, Christ spoke in Matthew 16 and 18: What you bind on earth will also be bound in heaven. This is a clear witness that whoever is fairly and of their own fault excluded from the church, as a recalcitrant and disobedient, that to such a one heaven will also be closed.<sup>95</sup>

As the Anabaptists argued, what the Swiss preachers had failed to see through their misguided interpretation of the wheat and tares text, was the fact that the contemporary Christian church had been empowered through Matthew 16 and 18 with the authority to make definitive pronouncements of judgment on behalf of the Lord. Relying on a much more literal reading and direct application of Matthew 16 and 18 to the local church setting than their magisterial counterparts, the radicals reasoned that the church, as Christ's body on earth, was the institution set apart and consecrated for such a purpose. Consequently, it did matter what the church decided with regards to the use of the ban. There was, as Jesus had told Peter in Matthew 16, a direct link between the pronouncements of the church on earth and those of God in heaven.<sup>96</sup> Those individuals who had been removed from the local community fellowship via the ban needed to take seriously their exclusion from the church body, for they had simultaneously forfeited their eternal fellowship with God through their lack of repentance.

Such a view was not only considered anathema by the preachers, but they recognized that the Anabaptists, much like their adversaries in Rome, had fundamentally distorted the

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<sup>95</sup> *Also spricht Christus Matth. 16. Und 18: Was ir bindend uff erden, sol ouch bunden sin im himmel. Ist offenbare zügnuß, welcher mit billigkeyt unnd verschuldt von der kilchen abgeschnitten wirt als ein widerspanziger und ungehorsamer, das ein solicher ouch im himmel verschlossen.* Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>96</sup> As Thomas Finger has correctly recognized, the authority of the church to make definitive judgments had been established by Christ since He was, following His ascension into heaven, no longer present to make such a pronouncement or to reside in the elements of the Supper. Finger contends that for the Swiss Anabaptists 'in both ways the church tended to become Christ insofar as he was active in this world.' Finger derived his conclusive understanding of the Anabaptists' views on 'the keys' based largely on his work with the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier. Finger, pp. 210-211.

binding and loosing passages to a devastating end. Responding directly to the Anabaptists' interpretation of Matthew 16 and 18, the preachers boldly declared, 'That misleads the good brethren just as the Pope has done; this one (the Pope) has applied the inner ban in the outer church, the outer (ban) becoming ruined... The winnowing fork is in His hand (according to) Matthew 3.'<sup>97</sup> Put simply, the pejorative parallelism expressed by the preachers between Anabaptism and Catholicism revealed just how perilous and misguided they believed the Anabaptists' literal interpretations of Scripture to be if unchecked. In fact, this tact of associating the radicals' interpretation of the binding and loosing passages from Matthew with those of the Papacy in Rome was employed by the Bernese preachers at both sessions.<sup>98</sup> Just as the Swiss Reformed church had viewed the papacy as a tool of Satan that was used to blindly lead the Christian community towards its own demise, so too were the efforts of the Anabaptists considered to be just as damning. There was much at stake in this regard. Ultimately, the great concern for the Bernese preachers centered on the Anabaptists' use of the ban from a soteriological perspective. Here, it was argued that the Swiss radicals, much like their Catholic contemporaries, had arrogantly sought to afford themselves the duty of determining one's eternal standing in heaven. In both instances, it was contended, this was directly the result of an erroneous interpretation of the 'keys to the kingdom' passage from Matthew's gospel. The Anabaptists, much like the Papacy, felt they had been given the authority to pronounce eternal judgment on the basis of Matthew 16. As the preachers believed, both had through their theological affirmations mistakenly tried to set themselves

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<sup>97</sup> *Das yrret die guten bruder, wie ouch der bapst gethon; [dieser] hatt den innerlichen bann inn die usserliche kilchen gezogen, den usserlichen aber lassen zu grund gon... Er hat allein die warffschufflen in der hand, Matth. 3. QZ Zofingen, p. 133.*

<sup>98</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 134, and *QZ Bern*, p. 446.

on the throne of judgment as the final arbiter of humanity; such an action, as they understood from Matthew 3, was strictly reserved for the Almighty One.

### **Conclusion**

Having explored the subtleties of the debates over the ban between the Swiss preachers and the Anabaptists at Bern what remains conveyed by these two Bernese protocols relating to the ban was the very clear manifestation of two important theological distinctions for each of the groups. First, through the course of both disputations two entirely different understandings of the fundamental purpose for the ban within the Christian community became quickly manifest. This may best be described as a restoration versus consecration model relating to the ban. Here, the Swiss Reformers, staunchly committed to the rule of faith and love, refused to accept any form of the ban which did not stress the overarching goal of redeeming the wayward brother and restoring him back to the fold. On the other hand, the Anabaptists' view of the ban focused attention predominately upon a literal interpretation of Matthew 18 and preserving the purity of the freely gathered church body.

While these differing views regarding the purpose for the ban manifested what was at the heart of the hermeneutical problem, a second, even more fundamental distinction was revealed during the Bernese debates. The differing ways in which the ban was applied exposed two distinct ecclesiologies which helped shape and direct both groups' exegesis of Matthew 18 and, in turn, their understandings of the ban. From as early as the Schleithem Confession of Faith, the Swiss Anabaptists' doctrine of the church emphasized separation and a church composed exclusively of genuine regenerate believers in Christ.<sup>99</sup> Formed within the context of this free-church ideology, the radicals, consequently, understood the ban as the means of filtering out those who did not belong to Christ, thereby allowing the church to

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<sup>99</sup> For further insight into the Anabaptists' views on separation see Sattler, 'The Schleithem Brotherly Union', Biesecker-Mast, Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, pp. 13-18, and Haas, 'Die Weg der Täufer in die Absonderung.'

directly mirror what would one day be realized in heaven. Likewise, the Swiss preachers' acceptance of a mixed church structure, alongside their unwavering commitment to the *corpus Christianum*, was a direct consequence of their opposition to Anabaptists separatism and imbedded in the interpretation of the Scripture according to the rule of faith and love.

Looking at the two groups' understandings of the ban at Bern one can clearly see that each saw a place for some form of discipline within the church and that both strongly affirmed a repentant element to the work of the ban. However, exactly how the ban was applied remained a major point of division. In the end the hermeneutical divide on this point really reduced down to a matter of emphasis and timing, each of which revealed some very basic and distinct theological tenets. Regarding the purpose for the ban, emphasis was either placed on the letter of Scripture and exclusion for the sake of purity or on a much broader (and less literal) interpretation and toleration for the sake of restoration. Church discipline was considered an opportunity by both, but to completely different ends. Moreover, returning to the question regarding sin in the church, the timing of the ban really hinged on an 'it shall be' or 'it will be' understanding, each of which depended on the two sides respective ecclesiologies. Either the church through a strict and uncompromising application of the ban would retain a holy and consecrated character or it would see the toleration of some sin in its members as a concession until the bride of Christ was made ready for her groom on the Day of the Lord. Consequently, while it is true that the two groups at Bern were close in their general understandings of the ban, they were really light-years apart in its particular application.

## CONCLUSION

The 1530s were clearly a tumultuous time for Bern following the formal introduction of the Reformation in 1528. In fact, the terms ‘unstable’ and ‘unsettled’ may perhaps best describe the overall landscape of Reformation Bern during the decade. Strictly speaking the Bernese magistrates found themselves in the rather precarious position of having to maintain civil peace in a region rife with religious unrest and political uncertainty. The threat of the Habsburgs to the East remained an ongoing concern for the Bernese State and the threat of a relapse into Catholicism, especially in the rural lands and Bernese Oberland, remained a genuine prospect. Moreover, the financial repercussions placed on Bern for its culpable role at Kappel stood as a painful reminder that every choice the City Council made was accompanied by longstanding consequences. Even the newly embraced Reformation offered its own set of religious challenges to Bern. The clear move away from Zwinglianism and towards the theology emanating from Bucer’s Strasbourg spoke of the religious volatility facing the region and was symptomatic of the overall instability that reigned in the region during the 1530s.

But for all the religious unrest, Zwingli’s influence over the ecclesiastic climate in Bern remained quite palpable, especially during the years leading up until the Bernese disputations in question. In fact, the latter portion of the 1520s found Zwingli’s footprint on the religious affairs of Bern to be quite deep. Not only was the urban center of Bern inundated with Zwingli’s evangelical writings in those early years, but the religious houses saw mass renunciations of the vow of celibacy by those clerics following the Zürich reformers’ teachings on Christian freedom. And since type printing was not to surface in Bern until 1537 at the earliest, the vast majority of evangelical works present in the region came from the press of Zwingli’s publisher and ardent supporter, Christoph Froschauer. Zwingli’s presence at the formal introduction of the Reformation at the 1528 *Gespräch* also

helped him to assure that the reform emanating from his Zürich would find a home in the churches of Bern. Likewise, he and his later successor, Heinrich Bullinger, remained in close contact with Berchtold Haller, offering instruction and advice on the spread of the evangelical cause in Bern during the formative years of the late 1520s and early 1530s. Following the acceptance of the Reformation Zwingli also sent his close supporter, Caspar Megander, to Bern in order that the churches from each Swiss region might remain in step with one another. Therefore, Zwingli played a crucial role in Bern's acceptance of evangelical ideas and his direct role in its formal acceptance of the Reformation remains undeniable.

Yet, a change loomed on the horizon and the move towards Strasbourg, specifically Martin Bucer's attempts at a broadly based and unified evangelical front, characterized Bern during the 1530s. At its core, two overarching realities made this shift possible. First, the overall mindset of the Bernese magistrates made the move towards the theology of Strasbourg highly attractive. During the 1520s and 1530s the focus of concern for the civil authorities in Bern was to quell unrest and division – both political and ecclesiastical. Frequently the magistrates were left taking ostensibly contradictory positions in order to seek out peace and any cost. Countless mandates and resolutions were passed during this time that either waffled on previous decisions or attempted to institute findings written in vague and imprecise language so as to appease competing parties. Examples of these may be seen in the shifting decisions that took into account both the evangelical sympathies in the urban centers and the residual Catholic following that persisted in the rural territories. These rural lands, it must be remembered, did not share the evangelical fervor of their city dwelling compatriots. With a greater concern for the daily difficulties of sustaining life in the more modest agrarian regions of Bern, those in the rural territories simply did not have the time or the educational acumen to understand the new evangelical faith of Luther and Zwingli. In the latter 1530s, the magistrates, in a further attempt to downplay division among evangelicals, also made

attempts to remove the inflammatory and emotive language prevalent in discussions over the Supper among followers of Zwingli and Bucer. In Bucer's attempts to bridge the gap of division between those in the Swiss Confederation and other evangelicals like the German Lutherans, all for the sake of unity and peace, the civil authorities in Bern found a kindred spirit.

Second, Kappel really changed everything for the Bernese. Although Bern had initially followed many of the reform ideas set forth by Zwingli, his insistence on going to war with the Catholics and the subsequent defeat in 1531 left relations even further strained between the two Confederate lands. Bern was quite reluctant to enter into such a conflict as their territorial eyes of expansion were set to the West and not to the North and East as Zürich's were and as they sought to maintain peaceful relations with the Catholic contingent in their rural areas. Although the magistrates were removed geographically from the rural peasant lands, they were not naïve as to their importance relating to the political stability of the region. Thus, the magistrates were also keen to remain sensitive, at least to a degree, to those clinging to the old religion. And since the Catholic followings of the Swiss remained quite strong in Bern's own rural holding and in those areas directly West, East, and North of Bern, the civil authorities were not inclined to take such a hard and combative stance against them as was Zwingli. The subsequent blame leveled against Bern for the defeat at Kappel and the financial repercussions felt for its involvement in the conflict helped move Bern even further away from Zürich and added more fuel to their rivalry. Moreover, personalities led Bern away from Zürich and toward Strasbourg. The firebrand Megander, a staunch Zwingli supporter, not only repeatedly and publicly pointed the finger at Bern for their tacit responsibility for the loss at Kappel, but he stirred controversy in the subsequent discussions over the Supper in 1537. At the same time Capito, setting forth Bucer's Strasbourg views on reform, was finding tremendous acceptance and growing support among the Bernese

magistrates for his role in pursuing a unified front with the German and Swiss Lutherans. Given the old rivalries with Zürich and the shared pursuits of Strasbourg, Bern's religious shift was not at all surprising.

In many ways the shifting sands Bern faced through these unique circumstances were paralleled by an internal concern for the rapid spread of Anabaptism throughout its lands. Certainly the separatist church of the Swiss radicals remained a constant irritation to the Reformed Swiss church. And, while the radicals' free-church stood in direct opposition to the *Volkskirch*, the grave threat such an ideology presented to the integrity of the *corpus Christianum* was ultimately what drove both the Swiss magistrates and Magisterial Reformers to steadfastly oppose Anabaptism in the region. The magistrates were keen to seek unity above all things, however, there were limitations to what they would embrace and accept. There was much to be lost, in the minds of both the civil and ecclesiastic authorities in Bern, if the radicals' cause was not thwarted and their seditious ideas were able to gain a solid foothold in the Bern State.

Amid such a unique and unsettling backdrop this research project has focused attention on two events at the heart of such turmoil, the Bernese *Gespräche* of 1532 and 1538, in an attempt to provide a clearer picture relating to the standing of the Swiss Anabaptist movement and Reformed State church during this time period. To strip away the outer veneer of the disputation proceedings and, by unpacking the ecclesiological discussions at the two sessions of debate within the larger context of the historical record of the 1530s, to paint a more accurate portrait of what was actually taking place through these sessions. To move beyond the mere words of the disputations and identify the heart of the divide between the two parties in order to more fully understand the goals of each in their willing participation.

In seeking to provide deeper insight into the place of these *Gespräche* within the overall landscape of Reformation Bern in the 1530s several points of emphasis have been concluded. First, there remains little doubt that any modern conceptions of what a debate actually looks like almost certainly do not coincide with the events at Bern in 1532 and 1538. For all the back and forth conversation that took place at these two respective sessions little actual discussion took place. There was more talking past one's opponent than there was talking to and with the other in the hopes of finding an accord. Each of the participating groups had their own agendas and all were not going to be dissuaded in seeking out their own personal concerns. Accordingly, these two *Gespräche* were little more than an early modern stage from which the protagonists of each group could present and disseminate their religious convictions before a wider Swiss audience. Any hope for a genuine accord on the religious matters discussed, even when stated as an offering, was blatantly and most assuredly absent from these 'theatre debates.'

This failure to reach agreement at both sessions really sheds a greater light on an additional point highlighted by these proceedings. While the Swiss preachers and Anabaptists affirmed certain core doctrinal matters relating to the faith, the divergent views of the nature of the church and the differing hermeneutical convictions found in these two disputations really set these opposing groups on an irreconcilable course from the outset. It should be remembered that both the Swiss Anabaptist and Reformed positions by this time had developed and matured in not only their core ecclesiological convictions, but the interpretive and apologetic apparatuses by which they defended said positions. Ultimately, the way in which Scripture was read and used by both groups, along with their respective ecclesiologies, each worked in tandem to create the competing positions found in the Zofingen and Bern *Gespräche*. These functioned in a symbiotic circle of influence, with the one simultaneously directing and supporting the other and vice versa. Therefore, just as the

interpretive rules affirmed by each party helped to direct and formulate their convictions and beliefs regarding the constitution of the true church, so too did their views on ecclesiology dictate the way in which each read, understood, and applied the Bible. Each worked to direct the other. This meant that not only would the two remain inextricably linked with the other, but also that any attempt to discern precisely how much one influenced the other highly difficult and arguably unnecessary.

And what is most interesting and indicative of the independent nature of these two debates is how these foundational beliefs were packaged and presented by both groups represented at each of the two sessions. From the Anabaptists' perspective, without question, all of the ecclesiological suppositions previously developed by the earlier Swiss Brethren have been retained without notable variation. The move towards a separatist free-church first begun by the early Swiss Brethren leaders such as Grebel, Manz, and Blaurock, along with those principles affirmed at Schleithem, have all been retained in a pure and unaltered form. Still, the radical participants at the Zofingen and Bern debates were not merely parrots in presenting their positions. Certain language, imagery, and usages of Scripture clearly indicate a strong dependence on the aforementioned. Yet, subtle changes to the way in which many of the core convictions at the center of the Swiss Anabaptists' view of the church denote an undeniable element of independence for both groups of radicals. The same underlying ideas were retained, but the individual element of each session of debate was manifest in differing ways in which the Anabaptists at the two debates articulated their position.

In a similar manner the Swiss preachers at Bern retained an unwavering commitment to the recently organized Swiss Reformed church and their acceptance of the limitations from both a religious and practical standpoint a key component of their doctrinal views on the church. Like the City Council, the preachers understood the fragile nature of the relationship

between the church and civil authorities and they were committed to retaining the *corpus Christianum*, much like Zwingli had done, even if it meant compromise in certain areas. Bern's move away from Zwingli and towards the theology of Strasbourg testifies to such a desire and further demonstrates the unique and independent nature of these two important events in Bern's history. While this shift had begun through the 1532 Berner Synodus it was clearly too fresh, so little change in the program of apology against the Swiss radicals was offered or can really be detected. But six years later the ideas that prompted this shift for Bern had now had time to germinate; ultimately leaving at the very least a discernable move away from some of Zwingli's classic rebuttals of the radicals' position as part of the 1538 record at Bern. And while the role of the Lord's Supper played a major role in the division between the Bucerian and Zwinglian contingents in the latter 1530s, the shift towards Strasbourg remained much more veiled in the ecclesiological discussions at Bern. Instead of being manifest in dialogue relating to one's understanding of the presence of Christ in the elements of the Supper, the shift in these disputations is really seen elsewhere; mostly in the almost complete absence of Zwingli supporters at the 1538 session (with the exception of Erasmus Ritter), but even more in the omission of arguments against the Anabaptists that were thoroughly Zwinglian in nature. Once again, as it was for the radicals, nothing substantial to the foundation of the Bernese church's position at the later session can be detected. But a distinct way in presenting the Reformed position at Bern testifies to the independent nature of these proceedings.

Following the close of the 1538 debate relations between the two groups ceased to improve, providing further evidence that these disputations did little, if anything, to provide a theological accord between the Swiss church and the Anabaptist radicals. Although the magistrates honored their passage of safe conduct, thereby allowing the Anabaptists to take shelter immediately following the 1538 Bern Disputation, strong measures, including the

death penalty, were once again instituted in the region. Over the course of the next few decades there were spells of time in which the vigorous pursuit of the Anabaptists and strict application of harsh punishment were set aside. Individuals such as the prominent Bernese official, Hans Franz Nægeli, were instrumental in procuring a cessation of hostility during the years following 1538 and allowing for the Swiss church to take a more introspective look at their own culpable role in pushing Bernese citizens towards the radical group. However, times like these were sporadic and often very short lived. For roughly the next fifty years following the final Bernese *Gespräch* the civil authorities implemented and ratified an array of measures in its territories intent on punishing those unwilling to recant their Anabaptist beliefs, along with those citizens that harbored them. This unrelenting opposition to Anabaptism ultimately led many in the radical assemblies toward two differing positions. While a few returned to Bern by swearing the oath, many remained steadfast to their faith, living their lives on the run and doing all they could to avoid capture. Yet another group opted for migration. Most headed towards places in the Germanic lands where they lived as refugees, quickly being integrated into groups such as the Hutterites. Either way those radicals at Bern chose, the one thing that was certain following the close of the 1538 session was that the land which many called their native home was in no way going to be tolerant of them.

There certainly were a lot of layers to the events surrounding the disputation protocols from Zofingen and Bern. Ideas, imagery, and language all found in the discussions between these two groups seeking to articulate their understanding of what it meant to be a Christian in the early modern world. And again while the proceedings did not bring about a resolution or provide any sort of unity among its participants there is much to be gained from the record of their dialogues. It must be remembered, after all, that the words preserved in the disputation records are so much more than theology and ideology encased in dull and often

times redundant and contentious words. Rather, they are the vibrant expression and heartfelt appeals of individuals seeking to live out their faith amid the shifting landscape of Reformation Europe. They speak to the human struggle for right and truth in relation to Christ. And as such, these words carry with them a significant weight and must be granted their own distinct voice.

# The Swiss Confederation c. 1536

