

**BALTHASAR HUBMAIER:
A Reformer Who Dared to be Strictly Biblical**

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Abstract

Balthasar Hubmaier's life and ministry demonstrate the challenges biblical Christians faced in the early years of the Reformation. One of the most fascinating challenges involved the battles over doctrines that created division between the reformers themselves. Hubmaier's relationship to Ulrich Zwingli depicts just such a challenge. The sola Scriptura stance of the Reformation required the reformers to carefully examine what the Bible says about the doctrines sometimes dividing them. Luther and Zwingli defended infant baptism and the union of church and state; Luther took a consubstantiation view of the Lord's Supper. Both continued to practice unregenerate church membership. However, Hubmaier held a high view of Scripture and devoted himself to a thorough study of the biblical text. Therefore, he stood firm on biblical principles regarding believer's baptism, separation of church and state, and a memorial view of the Lord's Supper, as well as insisting upon church membership for believers only.

Introduction

Why did I select Balthasar Hubmaier for this presentation at the Reformation Conference in Wittenberg? First, I am a Baptist by conviction, so choosing a Baptist theologian seems a natural option. We too often forget that the Baptists and Anabaptists were involved in the Reformation. Second, Hubmaier came to be known as the best of the Anabaptist theologians. Third, *sola Scriptura* colored everything Hubmaier believed. Fourth, Hubmaier's sole instance of weakness when he temporarily recanted under torture intrigues me and challenges me.

In making this presentation about the life and theology of Balthasar Hubmaier, I do not desire to glorify the man—he himself would not wish it so. Instead, the aim consists of giving glory to Christ, who saved Hubmaier and led him into a Reformation ministry that would eventually bring him to the martyr's stake where he perished in its fire. Hebrews 13:1–8 provides a biblical reminder regarding how we all should look to those who preceded us in the faith and who, though gone from this earth, still lead us by their sanctified example:

¹ Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. ³ Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

⁴ Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

⁵ Let your conduct *be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" ⁶ So we may boldly say:

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“The LORD is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?”

⁷ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. ⁸ Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever. (NKJV)

Hubmaier’s Early Life

Balthasar Hubmaier was born in Friedberg, Bavaria, about ten kilometers east of Augsburg, Germany around 1480—the exact date of his birth remains unknown. He often wrote under the *nom de plume* Balthasar Friedberger (sometimes latinized to Balthasar Pacimontanus) in recognition of his birthplace. He attended the University of Freiburg, earning his masters degree in 1511. Although he had been advised to study medicine, he chose theology unaware of the marvelous, though brief, pilgrimage ahead of him. During his formal education, he studied philosophy and theology at Ingolstadt under Johann Eck, Luther’s antagonist. Ultimately, Hubmaier chaired theology at the University of Ingolstadt, where he had received his doctorate in 1512. In 1515 he rose to the position of prorector (vice-rector) over the university.¹

Hubmaier’s Church Ministry

With the encouragement and support of Eck, Hubmaier became vicar of the Church of Our Dear Lady, Ingolstadt’s largest church. From 1516–1520 Hubmaier pastored the Catholic church at Regensburg (Ratisbon) in Germany where he proceeded to drive the Jews from the city. In that endeavor he preached against them, harassed them, and allowed the burning of their synagogue, but did not torture them. However, he went beyond what he would countenance later as a true Christian. On the site of the destroyed synagogue he oversaw the building of the Chapel to the Beautiful Mary (Schöne Maria), where he served as its chaplain. Next, in early 1521 he was called to the pastorate in the cathedral at Waldshut in southern Germany² where he distinguished himself as a preacher. Everything changed in 1522 when he found common theological ground with the Swiss reformers like Ulrich Zwingli. About the same time the Regensburg Council invited him back to once again lead the struggling Chapel. In a letter to his friend Rychard, on January 17, 1523, Hubmaier mentioned that “Christ was starting to sprout” in him.³ Hubmaier attended evangelical services in Laien Blabhans’ home. There he began to develop his evangelical views and join the reformers. He again left Regensburg to return to Waldshut in

¹ For details regarding the life of Balthasar Hubmaier, see H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, trans. and eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, Classics of the Radical Reformation 5 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 15–19 (Kindle ed. loc. 140–206), Graeme R. Chatfield, *Balthasar Hubmaier and the Clarity of Scripture: A Critical Reformation Issue* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 9–24, and Johann Loserth and William R. Estep, Jr., “Hubmaier, Balthasar (1480?–1528),” in *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1990, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hubmaier, Balthasar \(1480%3F-1528\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hubmaier,_Balthasar_(1480%3F-1528)), accessed 11 March 2017; hereafter, Loserth and Estep, “Hubmaier, Balthasar,” in *GAMEO*.

² Waldshut sits near the Swiss border. During Hubmaier’s time in Waldshut it came under the sovereign authority of Austria; Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 35 (Kindle ed. loc. 519).

³ Christof Windhorst, “Balthasar Hubmaier: Professor, Preacher, Politician,” in *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical Sketches from Thomas Muntzer to Paracelsus*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz and trans. Walter Klaassen, 144–57 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982), 147.

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March 1523—he had not resigned from the pastorate there. A convinced evangelical, Hubmaier began to preach openly against Roman Catholicism and to contact Swiss reformers. As a reformer and Anabaptist Hubmaier was the most highly educated of all of the Anabaptist reformers and became known as “the Theologian of the Anabaptists” because of his preaching and his writing.

The Reformer

Hubmaier became a close friend and ally with Ulrich Zwingli and helped him in the great debate at Zurich in 1523. They shared a common cause in seeking the reformation of the Catholic church and its priesthood. At first Zwingli agreed with Hubmaier in opposing infant baptism and Hubmaier attended Zwingli’s group studying the Greek New Testament. The biblical languages played a major role as Hubmaier developed his evangelical theology. He appealed to the Greek editions of Aldus and Erasmus from time to time, as he did in his treatment of Acts 16 with regard to baptism.⁴ While defending trichotomy (body, soul, and spirit) in his first *Von der Freiheit des Willens* (*On the Freedom of the Will*, April 1, 1527) he referred to both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament.⁵

The Pastor-Theologian

From the time of his conversion, Hubmaier was an ardent adherent and defender of *sola Scriptura*. In a conference with Zwingli he insisted, “in all disputes concerning faith and religion, the Scripture alone, proceeding from the mouth of God, ought to be our level and rule.”⁶ In the second Zurich disputation (October 1523), Hubmaier focused on the Scripture’s authority, declaring,

For holy Scripture alone is the true light and lantern through which all human argument, darkness, and objections can be recognized. . . . Thus also the error and the abuses of making images and the mass shall be demonstrated only through the plumb line of the bright clear Word of God, thereby recognized and moderated, and what is built thereupon will remain finally and permanently; for the Word of God is invincible.⁷

Hubmaier’s motto was “*Die Wahrheit ist untödlich*” (“The truth is immortal” or “Truth is unkillable”).⁸ One of his hymns (the only one to be preserved) echoes the motto as its theme. The Hutterite Brethren still sing the hymn,⁹ which begins,

⁴ *Von dem Christlichen Tauff der Gläubigen* (*On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, 1525), see Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 132 (Kindle ed. loc. 2069–70); Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten, eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* 29 (Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), 148.

⁵ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 429–30 (Kindle ed. loc. 8023–44); Westin and Bergsten, eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 382–83.

⁶ Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, the Leader of the Anabaptists* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1905), 59.

⁷ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 23–24 (Kindle ed. loc. 294–300); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 717–18.

⁸ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 42 fn 12 (Kindle ed. loc. 712–18 note 12) discuss the meaning and translation of the motto concluding that “unkillable,” though “less elegant,” is the more literal translation. The ultimate intent was that truth will rise again, “it cannot be kept down.” A Czech Brethren slogan was “Truth conquers” and Menno Simons’ (1496–1561) phrase was “Truth prevails.”

⁹ For YouTube videos recording the singing of the German hymn, see the following links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nGn3AQ6AjQ> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHxKFP0Xvki> accessed 15 March 2017.

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*Freut euch, freut euch in dieser Zeit,
Ihr wahren Christen alle.
Denn jetzt in allen Länder weit
Gotts Wort herdringt mit Schalle.
Es ist kein Mann, ders wehren kann,
Das habt ihr wohl vernommen,
Denn Gottes Wort bleibt ewig betan
Den Bösen als den Frommen.*

Rejoice, rejoice in this time,
You Christians all.
Since now in all lands far
God's Word is ringing with sound.
There is no man who can resist,
What you have heard;
Since God's Word remains forever,
For the wicked as for the devout.

Its eighteen stanzas each conclude with “God’s Word remains forever.”¹⁰

Hubmaier repeatedly confronted those who cited the Church fathers with the necessity of scriptural evidence: “You speak to me much of Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Augustine, councils, histories, and old customs. I must somehow think that you lack the Scriptures, which do not want to come out of the quiver.”¹¹ In other words, he would “trust Cyprian, councils, and other teachings just as far as they use the Holy Scripture, and not more.”¹² In his response to both Erasmus and Luther about the freedom of the will, Hubmaier declared,

Whoever makes a whole judgment and does not lay the counter-Scriptures on the same scale next to it, to him a half-truth is more damaging than a whole lie. For when the half-truth is believed and sold under the appearance of a whole truth, then all sects, quarrels, and heresies result. They are only doing patchwork with the Scripture, not comparing opposing Scriptures and uniting both into a whole judgment.¹³

The fact that the Reformation in Zurich had not made a full recovery of the apostolic model described in Scripture, greatly troubled Hubmaier. The writings of Paul, Erasmus, and Luther influenced him to the extent that he moved to an Anabaptist position. Gradually he embraced Anabaptist principles, rupturing his relationship with Zwingli. In that period of time, Hubmaier practiced open air preaching at Waldshut. When persecution came, he eventually fled to Schaffhausen, Switzerland in 1524.

On Saturday April 15, the day before Easter in 1525, Wilhelm Reublin baptized Hubmaier and sixty members of the congregation in Waldshut. Reublin himself was a member of the Anabaptist group that included Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and Georg Blaurock—all who opposed Zwingli’s defense of infant baptism. Shortly thereafter, Hubmaier formed an Anabaptist church in Waldshut and baptized more than three hundred.

Ultimately, Hubmaier separated from Zwingli. When the Austrian army captured Waldshut in December 1525, Hubmaier sought refuge with Zwingli in Zurich, but Zwingli had him arrested because of their differences on baptism. Luther and Zwingli retained infant baptism and the union of church and state; Luther held to consubstantiation¹⁴ in the Lord’s Supper. In

¹⁰ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 569–71 (Kindle ed. loc. 10503–682). The English translation is my own, since the English in Pipkin and Yoder presents the current English hymn, which is a very loose paraphrase of the original German.

¹¹ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 290 (Kindle ed. loc. 5301–15); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 267.

¹² Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 280 (Kindle ed. loc. 5153–54); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 261.

¹³ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 428 (Kindle ed. loc. 7999–8002); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 381.

¹⁴ Consubstantiation consists of the view that the body and blood of the Savior are present *with* the elements of bread and wine. Transubstantiation views the elements as transformed *into* (becoming) the body and blood of Christ.

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contrast, Hubmaier stood firm on biblical principles concerning believer's baptism, separation of church and state, and a memorial view of the Lord's Supper. Also, Luther and Zwingli continued to allow unregenerate church membership, while Hubmaier stood firmly against it. Caner makes the following observation:

While Erasmus and Luther were busy bludgeoning each other over whether man's sinfulness blinded him to the ways of salvation, Hubmaier changed the tenor from a man-centered debate—an odd form of religious humanism—to a Bible-centered dialogue.¹⁵

Bible Translation

Because of Hubmaier's adherence to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, the first topic of consideration involves his view with regard to making the Scriptures available to common folk in their native tongue. At the second Zurich disputation, during his arguments against the Roman Catholic mass, Hubmaier said,

As the mass should be read in Latin to the Latins, therefore also in French to the French, in German to the Germans; for doubtless Christ did not speak Calcuttish with his disciples at the Last Supper but rather aloud and understandably. Furthermore, to celebrate mass is to read a testament letter. It would be ridiculous to read a Latin letter to a German who cannot understand Latin. For to celebrate the mass quietly and not proclaim is to silence the Lord. Paul wants us to speak understandably in the church. He would rather speak five words with understanding for the benefit of the church than ten thousand which are not understood, so that the people might be instructed and might say, "Amen," 1 Cor. 14:19.¹⁶

Elsewhere Hubmaier refers to the Latin mass as "bear's mass" (*bern Mess* or *Berenmess*) since such an observance could be characterized as just a growling or mumbling that the laity could not understand.¹⁷

In his *Achtzehn Schlussreden* (*Eighteen Theses*, March 1524) the reformer wrote, "It is far better to translate a single verse of a psalm into each land's language for the people, than to sing five whole psalms in a strange language not understood by the church."¹⁸ Although no record survives of Hubmaier's direct involvement in Bible translation, he did baptize Hans Denck who assisted Haetzer in translating the Old Testament Prophets (1527) before Hubmaier's death. One certainly can conclude that Hubmaier would have suggested, encouraged, and defended such enterprises. As for his own use of a contemporary translation, when he responds to Zwingli's

¹⁵ Emir Caner, "Sufficiencia Scripturae: Balthasar Hubmaier's Greatest Contribution to Believers," in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity, Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 101–14 (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 106.

¹⁶ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 28 (Kindle ed. loc. 363–68); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 787. "Calcuttish" refers to something alien. What Hubmaier says about the correct observance of the Roman Catholic mass becomes part of his position in observing the memorial ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Pipkin and Yoder add the verse identification to the scripture reference, since the German edition records only the chapter reference.

¹⁷ In *Eine Summe eines gantzen christenlichen Lebens* (*A Summa of the Entire Christian Life*, 1525), see Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 88 (Kindle ed. loc. 1389–90); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 114. Also, in *Von dem Christenlichen Tauff der Gläubigen* (*On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, 1525), see Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 148 (Kindle ed. loc. 2329); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 162.

¹⁸ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 33 (Kindle ed. loc. 458–60); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 73.

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distinction between baptized “into the name” and “in the name,” he cites Christoph Froschauer’s translation (Zurich, 1524) and, according to Pipkin and Yoder, Hubmaier “occasionally” cited Luther’s 1522 translation.¹⁹

Believer’s Baptism

Hubmaier wrote seven major works on the topic of believer’s baptism. “The opposition of the Anabaptists had made of Zwingli an avowed champion of infant baptism. In reply to Zwingli’s book, *Von der Taufe, von der Wiedertaufe, und von der Kindertaufe* [*About Baptism, Anabaptism, and Infant Baptism*], Hubmaier wrote his booklet, *Von dem Christlichen Tauf der Gläubigen* [*About Christian Baptism of Believers*, 1525], which is correctly regarded as the classic presentation of his teaching on baptism and as one of the best defenses of adult baptism ever written. It was directed against Zwingli, although it does not mention him by name, and made a profound impression on both friend and foe.”²⁰ It seems that Hubmaier wrote his most significant publication in a mere five days.²¹ It made such an impact that even Calvin found it necessary to publish a reply in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.²²

According to Hubmaier,

But I do teach the true baptism of Christ, which teaching and oral confession of faith precedes; and I say that infant baptism is a robbing of the true baptism of Christ and a misuse of the lofty names of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and completely contrary to Christ’s institution and the usage of the apostles.²³

And,

From this every pious Christian sees and grasps that the one who wants to be baptized with water must beforehand have the certain knowledge of a good conscience toward God through the Word of God. That is, that he is certain and sure to have a gracious and favorable God through the resurrection of Christ. . . . Then water baptism follows. Not that the same cleanses the souls, but rather the ‘yes’ of a good conscience toward God which preceded inwardly in faith.²⁴

Hubmaier practiced affusion (pouring) rather than immersion, though his later followers would practice immersion. (Their enemies “immersed” the Anabaptists in rivers with stones tied around their necks as a means to make the punishment fit the crime.)

Caner identifies five major biblical doctrines to which Hubmaier linked baptism: (1) Christ’s “Great Commission” in Matthew 28:18–20; (2) the doctrine of the Church itself—the true church consists of baptized believers; (3) the Lord’s Supper, for which partakers must have already demonstrated faith and obedience to Christ; (4) baptism by the Holy Spirit, which takes place prior to water baptism; and, (5) by baptism believers placed themselves under the authority

¹⁹ Pipkin and Yoder, trans. and eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 112 (Kindle ed. loc. 2400–401 note 22).

²⁰ Loserth and Estep, “Hubmaier, Balthasar,” in *GAMEO*. The date for the publication was November 1525.

²¹ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 95 (Kindle ed. loc. 1493).

²² W. L. Jenkins, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1339–46 (Book IV, chap. xvi, 17–23).

²³ *Eine kurze Entschuldigung (A Brief Apologia*, 1526), see Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier, Theologian of Anabaptism*, 302 (Kindle ed. loc. 5633–36); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 275.

²⁴ *Von dem Christlichen Tauff der Gläubigen (On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, 1525), see Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 117–18 (Kindle ed. loc. 1847–52). Also, see Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 136–37.

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of the local church.²⁵ Zwingli emphasized the role of the church and its authority, but Hubmaier insisted that the church must yield to the authority of the Scriptures. He boldly declared, “I demand from you a clear word out of the New Testament with which you bring to us this infant baptism.”²⁶

Church Membership for Believers Only

Hubmaier’s view of church membership can be summarized with “no baptism, no church; no baptism, no discipleship.”²⁷ For him, baptism is the first step of obedience for the new believer—it is, in essence, evidence of true faith. In Hubmaier’s understanding of baptism, the believer submitting to baptism placed himself under the church’s authority and the commitment of his brothers to maintain his purity—and he, theirs—in other words, submitting to church discipline when the church finds such action necessary for restoring purity.

Separation of Church and State

Hubmaier pled for religious toleration in his booklet, *Von Ketzern und ihren verbrennern* (*Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*, 1524). This writing was Hubmaier’s reaction to Calvin executing Michael Servetus for heresy. “It is well and good that the secular authority puts to death the criminals who do physical harm to the defenseless, Romans 13. But no one may injure the atheist who wishes nothing for himself other than to forsake the gospel.”²⁸ Hubmaier differed from most Anabaptists concerning civil government and its authority. Many Anabaptists would forbid Christians from serving as magistrates, because that position of authority might require them to use the sword to uphold law and order and to secure justice. Hubmaier believed that it would be better for a Christian to hold the position of magistrate than for a pagan to be magistrate. However, he was not an absolute pacifist. He did oppose war and did not permit a Christian to take up arms to overthrow a tyrannical government, but he would permit a Christian to bear arms in defense of his country under certain conditions. This position places Hubmaier more in line with later Baptists than with his contemporary Anabaptists.

The Lord’s Supper

Hubmaier wrote *Ein einfältiger Unterricht auf die Worte, das ist der Leib mein im Nachtmahl Christi* (*A Simple Instruction on the Words, This is My Body in the Supper of Christ*) from Nikolsburg in 1526 to argue “that the breaking, distribution, and eating of the bread is not the breaking, distribution, and eating of the body of Christ, who is in heaven seated at the Father’s right hand, but that it is a memorial of His body, an eating in the faith that He suffered for us. And as the bread is ‘the body’ of Christ in memorial, so is also the blood of Christ a memorial.”²⁹ In the first work Hubmaier published as an Anabaptist (following his own baptism), *Eine Summe eines gantzen christenlichen Lebens* (*A Summa of the Entire Christian Life*, July 1, 1525), he explained the ordinance’s elements as follows:

²⁵ Emir Caner, “Balthasar Hubmaier and His Theological Participation in the Reformation: Ecclesiology and Soteriology,” *Faith and Mission* 21, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 40–41.

²⁶ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 288 (Kindle ed. loc. 5259–60).

²⁷ H. Wayne Pipkin, “The Baptismal Theology of Balthasar Hubmaier,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65 (January 1991): 40.

²⁸ William R. Estep, Jr., ed., *Anabaptist Beginnings (1523–1533): A Source Book*, Bibliotheca Humanistica and Reformatica 16 (Nieuwkoop, Netherlands: B. De Graaf, 1976), 51.

²⁹ Loserth and Estep, “Hubmaier, Balthasar,” in *GAMEO*.

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Here it is obvious that the bread is not the body of Christ but only a reminder thereof. Likewise, the wine is not the blood of Christ but also a memorial that he shed his blood and distributed it on the cross to all believers for the washing away of our sins, as the hoop in front on the tavern is not wine, but a remembrance thereof.³⁰

The later *Ein einfältiger Unterricht* (*A Simple Instruction*) arose out of the disagreement Hubmaier had with Luther's concept of communion as well as Zwingli's.³¹

Hubmaier referred to *Ein einfältiger Unterricht* as his dogmatic presentation of communion. But, in his 1527 writing, *Eine Form des Nachtmals Christi* (*A Form for Christ's Supper*), he described the way he conducted the Lord's Supper in Nikolsburg. At a set time and in an appropriate location the church would be summoned to observe communion. A table was set with ordinary bread and wine. The one leading the observance would remind all the assembled people of their sins and expound the biblical texts speaking of reformation of life and the new birth. Then he would ask each person whether they understood. After further instruction, he then read the biblical text on communion and say, "Let him who would eat of this bread arise and perform his duty of love with heart and mouth, declare his intention to love God and his neighbor, obey the government, submit to brotherly reproof, and desire to eat at the Lord's table."³² A prayer of praise and thanks followed and the elements were taken by the assembled believers. Afterward a closing prayer was offered and everyone was admonished to live their lives as Christians ought—including instruction from Matthew 18 regarding church discipline.³³ Hubmaier focused on the communal aspect of the Lord's Supper—that it was a meal "that one Christian performs toward the other, in order that every brother may know what good deed to expect from the other."³⁴ He goes on to say, "Indeed, to state it bluntly, the Lord's Supper is a sign of the obligation to brotherly love just as water baptism is a symbol of the vow of faith. The water concerns God, the Supper our neighbor; therein lie all the Law and the Prophets."³⁵ For Hubmaier the Lord's Supper "was the visual reminder of the covenant into which one entered at baptism."³⁶ By that covenant he dedicated himself to loving his fellow believers unto death itself and to be subject to discipline should he not fulfill that covenant.

In December 1526 Hubmaier penned *Eine christliche Lehrtafel, die ein jeder Mensch, bevor er im Wasser getauft wird, wissen soll* (*A Christian Catechism, That a Man Should Know Before He Is Baptized in Water*) as a manual for training believers before they were baptized. He

³⁰ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 147–48 (Kindle ed. loc. 1380–82); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 114.

³¹ At first, Zwingli and Hubmaier stood together in establishing an evangelical Lord's Supper in contradistinction to the Roman Catholic mass with its transubstantiation. According to Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 73 (Kindle ed. loc. 1150–51), the evangelical Lord's Supper was introduced by Hubmaier in Waldshut at Easter, 1525—"In fact, Zwingli's service on Maundy Thursday predated Hubmaier's by only a few days."

³² Loserth and Estep, "Hubmaier, Balthasar," in *GAMEO*.

³³ Pipkin and Yoder, *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 404–6 (Kindle ed. loc. 7653–78); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 363–64.

³⁴ Pipkin and Yoder, *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 354 (Kindle ed. loc. 6644–45); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 317.

³⁵ Pipkin and Yoder, *Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 354–55 (Kindle ed. loc. 6650–51); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 317–18.

³⁶ Simon V. Goncharenko, "Balthasar Hubmaier's Integration of Discipline and Theology," in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity, Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 155–80 (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 175.

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had another purpose for this manual and that was to instruct the clergy. Listen to his own testimony in *Eine christliche Lehrtafel (A Christian Catechism, 1526)*:

With my own blush of shame I testify and say it openly, that I became a Doctor in the Holy Scriptures without understanding this Christian article which is contained in this booklet, yea, without having read the Gospels or the Pauline epistles to the end. Instead of living waters, I was held to cisterns of muddy water, poisoned by human feet.³⁷

Hubmaier's Imprisonment and Death

After his imprisonment and torture in Zurich, Hubmaier was released and allowed to leave Switzerland after he recanted publicly in three churches. He went to Konstanz and then to Augsburg in the summer of 1526 and headed to Austria via Ingolstadt and Regensburg. While in Augsburg, he may have baptized Hans Denck. Denck aided Ludwig Haetzer in translating the Old Testament Prophets (published in April 1527 at Worms, and are therefore known as the “Wormser Propheten”). Luther and the Swiss theologians probably used that translation in their German translations of the Bible.³⁸

Early in July 1526 Hubmaier went to Nikolsburg (the German name for the Czech village of Mikulov) in Moravia where nearly 12,000 gathered under his preaching (many who were converted under his preaching) and influence in that Anabaptist stronghold. According to Graffagnino, “Hubmaier had declared Nikolsburg ‘the lighthouse of the Reformation’ in place of Wittenberg.”³⁹ Nikolsburg had become a center of Reformation enthusiasm because many of Hubmaier’s tracts had found wide circulation. In late 1527, he was arrested on the order of King Ferdinand and imprisoned in Kreuzenstein Castle just north of Vienna. His wife Elisabeth (Hügeline, the daughter of a citizen of Reichenau), to whom he had been married just two years, also was imprisoned. They were transferred to Vienna to stand trial. Hubmaier appealed to Zwingli, the Emperor, and the Confederation and Council — to no avail.

Zwingli and others visited him and tried to get him to recant. He would not. Finally, upon the rack, he broke and agreed to recant on some points. They brought him, weakened and frail to the pulpit where he began to read his recantation in a weak and quavering voice. Suddenly, he seemed to straighten and strengthen. He filled the cathedral with his shout: “Infant baptism is not

³⁷ Loserth and Estep, “Hubmaier, Balthasar,” in *GAMEO*. See the translation in Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 342–43 (Kindle ed. loc. 6445–51) and the German in Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 309.

³⁸ See Christian Neff and Walter Fellmann, “Denck, Hans (ca. 1500–1527),” in *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1956, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Denck,_Hans_\(ca._1500-1527\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Denck,_Hans_(ca._1500-1527)), accessed 11 March 2017.

³⁹ Jason J. Graffagnino, “The Lighthouse of the Reformation: Nikolsburg and Hubmaier’s Catechism,” in *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity, Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 137–54 (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 120. Hubmaier had written of Nikolsburg, “For the house is light and built on a solid stone who is Christ”—Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 318 (Kindle ed. loc. 5974–75); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 288. Hubmaier’s reduction of the role of Wittenberg apparently rested on his conviction that Luther’s views of both infant baptism and consubstantiation in the Lord’s Supper ran contrary to the Word of God. He writes that “the light has its luminescence in the Word of God”—Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 318 (Kindle ed. loc. 5966–67); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 288. See also, Martin Rothkegel, “Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia,” in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700*, ed. by John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, 163–216, *Companions to the Christian Traditions* 6 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2007), 169.

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of God, and men must be baptized by faith in Christ.” They dragged him back to the dungeon, where he wrote his confession of faith.

On March 10, 1528, Hubmaier was led out to be executed in Vienna. His executioners stripped him and rubbed sulfur and gunpowder into his long beard. They tied him to the stake, piled the wood around him, and lit it. Three days later his wife was executed by drowning. She was thrown from a large bridge over the Danube River with a stone tied about her neck. Within a short time, Zwingli himself died with battle axe and sword in hand against the Austrian army. Interestingly, in Hubmaier’s petition to the Council of Schaffhausen (October/November 1524) he announces, “But if I should be found to be in the wrong, your Honors have sword, fire, and water that can cut, burn, and drown here as well as elsewhere; . . .”⁴⁰ His statement over three years prior to his martyrdom identifies the means by which both he and his wife died.

Conclusion: Lessons from Hubmaier

Hubmaier left behind an example of a believer adhering strictly to Scripture at all costs—even at the cost of life itself. If the Bible does not teach a doctrine held by or declared by any man or church, that doctrine must not be followed. The Bible alone instructs God’s people in theological truth. “Many have wondered how influential Balthasar Hubmaier would have become in the Anabaptist wing if he had not been killed so young.”⁴¹

Pipkin and Yoder introduce Hubmaier with these words: “Hubmaier’s place in the first generation of the broad [Anabaptist] movement is unique. He is the only figure of his generation with university credentials, the only one with extensive public activity before joining the Reformation, the most skilled in popular expository writing.”⁴² The ministry of Hubmaier displayed faithful preaching of God’s Word throughout his life from his spiritual new birth to his death in the martyr’s fire. This is what he held most highly. At his “Third Appeal to the Honorable Council of Schaffhausen” in late 1524 he showed both his adherence to Scripture and his humility:

I am not aware of having preached even a single letter in these two years that was without foundation in God’s Word. But this I confess and of this declare myself guilty, that I have not expressed everything as perfectly as I knew; I have spared the weak in faith whom I had to bring up at that time with mild and not with stronger food.⁴³

Although he later was to fail, recant under torture, and then return to openly demonstrate his faithfulness to Christ and Scripture by word and deed, Hubmaier spoke with transparent meekness before the Schaffhausen Council:

. . . but if I should by prison, torture, sword, fire, or water be compelled [to speak] differently, or if God in other ways should withdraw his grace from me so that I would speak or confess otherwise than by God’s illumination I am now minded. I hereupon profess and testify before God, my heavenly Father, and before all men that I want to suffer and die as a Christian so that I may cause no one to stumble because of my behavior, whatever God may allow to befall me. Still I herewith cry to God, my

⁴⁰ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 39 (Kindle ed. loc. 563); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 77.

⁴¹ D. A. Carson et al., “The SBJT Forum: Overlooked Shapers of Evangelicalism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 1 (1999): 78.

⁴² Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 13 (Kindle ed. loc. 122–24).

⁴³ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 46 (Kindle ed. loc. 662–66); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 83.

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heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, my only Savior. I also beg all believers in Christ that they may help to pray with me to God that he may impart to me his grace, strength, and fortitude, and grant me a brave, undismayed, and noble spirit that I may persist in his holy Word and finally in true Christian faith commend my spirit into the hands of God, my heavenly Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, who lives and reigns with him in the communion of God's Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Lord, into thy hands I commend my poor little soul.⁴⁴

Let's conclude by reading 2 Timothy 4:6–8 and Hebrews 12:1–3. How do we measure up to the example of Balthasar Hubmaier? What is the measure of our commitment to Christ and to His Word?

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim 4:6–8 NKJV)

¹ Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. (Heb 12:1–3 NKJV)

For further reading:

Bergsten, Torsten. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*. Trans. and ed. William R. Estep, Jr. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978.

Graffagnino, Jason J. "The Lighthouse of the Reformation: Nikolsburg and Hubmaier's Catechism." In *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity, Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 137–54. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013.

McDill, Michael W. "Balthasar Hubmaier and Free Will." In *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity, Essays in Honor of Paige Patterson*, ed. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, 137–54. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013.

William O. Lewis translated all of Hubmaier's extant writings into English and they have been deposited in the William Jewell College Library in Liberty, Missouri. A microfilm copy of Lewis' manuscript resides in the libraries of Bethel College and Goshen College.

⁴⁴ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, 47–48 (Kindle ed. loc. 680–88); Westin and Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften*, 84.