

‘LEST I MAKE YOU A TERTULLIAN’: EARLY ANABAPTIST BAPTISMAL NARRATIVES AND PATRISTICS

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ABSTRACT. Anabaptists have long been thought to have been ‘biblicists’ and shunned reading patristic literature. But a close analysis of the debates Anabaptists had with Magisterial Reformers shows that the Anabaptists developed an extensive history of baptism using church fathers. They attempted to show that adult baptism was the norm in the earliest centuries of the church and that infant baptism was the innovation away from the Bible. This debate was about who had inherited the biblical faith around baptism.

KEYWORDS: Anabaptists, baptism, Tertullian, Balthasar Hubmaier, Menno Simons

When looking back to the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation, scholars have often seen the radical reformers as breaking with tradition, eschewing traditional theology, and being primitivists and restorationists. George Hunston Williams, for example, writes, ‘It is not yet possible to assess the extent to which different leaders in the Radical Reformation drew unconsciously on Tradition in one or another degree beyond their adherence to Scripture alone’ (Williams 1992: 1260). In *The Theology of Anabaptism*, Robert Friedmann maintains that the Anabaptists ‘were hardly familiar with the Church Fathers except perhaps to the extent that Sebastian Franck, their trusted contemporary, quoted them’ (Friedmann 1973: 36). Stuart Murray writes that Anabaptists dismiss the church fathers and did not quote church fathers as much as Magisterial reformers (Murray 2000: 45). In other words, to the extent that Anabaptists quoted patristic authors at all, they relied on secondary summaries because they couldn’t imagine taking time to read such superfluous literature when the Bible alone was necessary for salvation. The edited collection, *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, has detailed chapters on major sixteenth-century figures such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin and their use of patristic literature, but

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nothing on the Anabaptists (Backus 1997). The Anabaptists, scholars ostensibly have agreed, held to a distilled and purer version of *sola scriptura*.

Only recently have a few scholars begun to question the previous scholarly consensus. Andrew Klager has studied Balthasar Hubmaier's interaction with patristic literature, but Klager's work is an exception and limited to one sixteenth-century theologian (Klager 2010). The same could be said for Antonia Lučić Gonzalez's dissertation on Hubmaier and patristics (Gonzalez 2008). I published an overview of Anabaptist use of patristic literature in 2011, and since that time nothing new on sixteenth-century Anabaptist use of patristic work has been published (Alexis-Baker 2011). This is still a relatively new area of study where historians and theologians can do detailed and creative work.

In this paper, therefore, I will detail how some of the earliest Anabaptists used patristic literature to argue with other sixteenth century reformers who accused them of being schismatic troublemakers at best and heretics at worst for denying all tradition. The early Anabaptists certainly thought that Scriptures were their final and sole authority for following Jesus. Yet they neither thought that the Holy Spirit had been inactive since the first century CE nor that their own positions were novel revelations unknown to previous generations. They argued, based on detailed historical narratives, that they were in a long line of faithful Christians through the centuries, and argued based on their interpretation of patristic authors within narratives of decline and faithfulness.

Using Patristics for Baptismal Apologetics

According to Geoffrey Dipple, sixteenth-century radical reformers used historical narratives about the fall of the church to support their arguments from scripture that they were reforming and restoring the church to its former faithfulness against contemporary corruption. Dipple argues that radical reformers such as Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld wrote the most complicated histories using patristic authors. But Franck and Schwenckfeld were spiritualists who argued that the rituals and organization of churches was unnecessary and unhelpful to Christian conversion and instead argued for a direct spiritual connection to God apart from ecclesial life. Dipple argues that Anabaptists such as Pilgram Marpeck and Menno Simons often used Franck and Schwenckfeld's histories while debating mainstream reformation adherents as well as turned Franck and Schwenckfeld's histories around on the spiritualist adherents (Dipple 2005). So, according to Dipple, most Anabaptists did not read patristic authors directly. They read Sebastiaan Franck's and/or Caspar Schwenckfeld's summaries of early church authors' positions. Dipple's analysis aligns well with a long tradition of historical scholarship, quoted at the outset of this article,

which sees the Anabaptists as largely uninterested in patristic literature, favoring to read biblical passages alone. Dipple's argument, however, needs correction.

Swiss Anabaptists, I argue, not only used patristic literature in apologetic arguments with mainline reformers, but most likely read some of these authors in newly available editions. Many of the early Swiss Anabaptists had read Beatus Rhenanus's recently collection of Tertullian's works: *Opera Q. Septimii Florentis Tertuliani*, published in Basel in July 1521. This was the only edition of Tertullian's works available at that time. Grebel had a copy and read it.

We know that Grebel had a copy of the newly published edition of Tertullian because not long after Rhenanus published his edition Grebel promised to send a copy to his friend and brother-in-law, Joachim Vadian, in October 1521 (Grebel 1985: 155). And Zwingli likely had a copy in his personal library, to which Grebel may have had access as well. On January 30, 1522 Grebel wrote about how delighted he was that Vadian had finally received the copy Grebel sent, saying, 'Take heed, my Vadian, lest I make you a Tertullian' (Grebel 1985: 162). Rhenanus's edition of Tertullian was hot-off-the-press, being published a few months prior. Rhenanus's edition is one of the most extravagant of the editions from the time. It has numerous fine art engravings and broad margins, which would have made it an expensive book. Yet, Grebel landed a copy very quickly. This might say something about how he viewed Tertullian's importance. If he didn't think Tertullian was important, why did he get a copy of the latest edition of Tertullian's work so quickly after it was published and why would he disseminate this edition to friends and mentors? Why say he hoped to turn his professor into 'a Tertullian'?

Grebel's affinity with Tertullian is likely deliberate and underlines an anti-papal viewpoint from the radicals. At that time, most people believed that Pope Gelasius I (492-496 CE) had condemned Tertullian. Rhenanus's 1521 edition contained summaries and annotations that made the volume popular amongst reformers. For example, in the argument to the *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, Rhenanus used Tertullian to argue against the primacy of the Roman bishop. Rhenanus provided ample commentary on how to use Tertullian (and others church fathers) to demonstrate the gap between medieval practices and theology and patristic practices and theology, which could then be used to directly connect the radical reformers to the ancient church. Grebel clearly thought that Rhenanus's 1521 edition of Tertullian's works could have a major impact on readers. Rhenanus himself seemed unaware of how his commentary might fuel Anabaptist theology in his 1521 and 1528 editions. By his third edition in 1539, however, he added a comment that compared Anabaptists to the undisciplined and opinionated sects

Tertullian opposed, ostensibly aware that Anabaptists had been using his translation and annotations.

Grebel not only had a copy of the first 1521 edition, evidence demonstrates that he read the edition and used it to refine emergent Anabaptist theological understanding and missionary work. In September 1524, a group of Zürich radical reformers—Conrad Grebel, Andreas Castelberger, Felix Mantz, Hans Ockenfuss, Bartlime Pur, Heinrich Aberli—wrote a letter to Thomas Müntzer in which they outlined a brief history of baptismal practices, claiming that in the earliest centuries the church had not baptized infants. They only baptized adults, ‘for we learn through Cyprian and Augustine that for many years after the time of the apostles, for six hundred years, believers and unbelievers were baptized together, etc’ (Grebel 1985: 291). Noting this statement, Dipple claims that Grebel ‘was relatively unconcerned with elaborating on the history of the early church at this point’ (Dipple 2005: 123-24). Yet Grebel and his coauthors took the time to state this history in a letter to a major figure of the Radical Reformation, Thomas Müntzer, whom the Zürich radicals thought it worth trying to discuss church reform and move in the direction they were headed on liturgical reforms, the Lord’s Supper, tithes, discipline, baptism, and violence. Why would the authors attempt to buttress their argument with arguments from patristic history? And as we shall see, a great many Swiss Anabaptists would repeat this historical narrative and elaborate on it in detail. These five men may have made a short statement, but behind this statement there is likely a more in-depth historical narrative as evidenced from other Anabaptist writings. But from where did this historical narrative arise?

The authors mention a six-hundred-year period of faithfulness in baptizing adults rather than children. Rhenanus annotated his edition of Tertullian. Within Tertullian’s *De Militis Corona*, Rhenanus wrote in his *argumentum*, an analysis and summary provided at the outset of each treatise: ‘He [Tertullian] displays the rite of baptism which the ancients used. For at that time, adults were washed in the bath of regeneration. This ancient custom was still being kept in the time of Charlemagne and Louis the Fair’ (Rhenanus 1521: 408).¹ Rhenanus not only claims that adult baptism was the norm at the time of Tertullian, but that from the time of Tertullian, who died around 220 CE, to the time of Charlemagne (d. 814 CE) and his son Louis the Fair (d. 840 CE), adult baptism continued. This is most likely the ‘six hundred years’ to which the authors refer. So here we have some good evidence that Grebel not only had a hot-off-the press edition of Tertullian

1 My translation: ‘*Baptizandi ritum ostendit qui in usu veterum fuit, nam tum adulti fere regenerationis lavacro tingebantur. Qui mos antiquus etia per tempora Charoli Magni et Ludouici Augusti servatus est.*’

which he disseminated to others, but that several years later he and his co-authors used what they learned from Rhenanus’s annotations and Tertullian’s treatises as evidence concerning adult baptism to convert Thomas Müntzer. This letter reflects a desire from the Zürich radicals to create a transnational consensus amongst reformers about restoring a church that would live faithfully according to Scripture as the early church did.

In December 1524—the same month and year of the letter to Müntzer—Mantz wrote a petition to the Zürich city council, refuting Zwingli’s view of baptism, which Zwingli and the radicals were discussing weekly in informal reading groups for months. At the end of the petition, Mantz writes that the then current practice of infant baptism ‘is even contrary to the earliest popes and their constitution as is clearly to be seen from the histories’ (The Mantz Petition of Defense 1985: 315). The idea here is that Mantz and the other Anabaptists renew an earlier tradition, which was faithful to Scripture, and that Catholics and Reformers practice novelty. Mantz’s statement is not proof he read Tertullian directly, but his co-authorship of the letter to Müntzer suggests that his statement in the defense petition has church fathers in the background as well. Yet he lets them stay in the background for the most part, preferring to argue mostly about how to interpret biblical passages.

Five months later in April 1525, Wolfgang Uolimann slightly expanded this historical account in his testimony before the city council in St. Gallen. Uolimann said that adult baptism was practiced almost exclusively, ‘until Cyprian and Tertullian’s time. These gave the water to sick infants and to those who could render the Lord’s Prayer. A person could be baptized during Easter and Pentecost. But Augustine and Theophylact and those who came later baptized more and more from human reason and not from the Scriptures’ (Uolimann 1973: 379. My translation.).² Uolimann seems to accept baptism for dying infants as a harmless practice in the time of Tertullian and Cyprian. He pinpoints the beginning of a change to infant baptism with Augustine and with Theophylact (1055-1107 CE). Even though the latter was an eleventh-century Orthodox bishop, sixteenth-century reformers commonly thought he was a patristic author (Klager 2010: 152). The Letter to Müntzer contains a reference to Theophylact, which suggests the Zürich radicals had read the recently published edition of Theophylact by Johannes Oecolampadius (Oecolampadius 1524).

2 My translation: ‘Das hab gewert zweyhundert unnd etlich jar bis zu zitten Cipriani und Tertulliani; die hand dem wasser zugeben die krancken kindlin unnd denen, die das pater noster hand können, hat man toufft tempore pasce et pentheosten, darnach Augu[stin]us und Philactum unnd darnach für unnd für usß menschen vernunft unnd nit usß der geschriftl.’

Interestingly, none of the Anabaptists cite Tertullian's *De Baptismo*. In this treatise, Tertullian notes that some Christians had begun to baptize infants, but Tertullian rejects this practice as novel and unnecessary. Concerning children, he says, 'It is better to wait, considering a person's circumstances and disposition, as well as age, especially where children are concerned' (Tertullian 1954: 18).³ So Tertullian cautions, 'Let them come, when they have grown older, when they have learned, when you have taught them to know to whom they are coming; let them become Christians when they are able to recognize Christ' (Tertullian 1954: 18). Those who become Christians need to understand what they are getting into, and children do not know this. They are innocent. Tertullian strongly defends adult baptism. Yet no early Anabaptist cited Tertullian's treatise on baptism.

That they did not cite Tertullian's *De Baptismo* is strong evidence that they relied on Rhenanus's 1521 edition of Tertullian's work. His volume did not include *De Baptismo*. *De Baptismo* was first published by Mesnart at Paris in 1545 and then by Gelenius at Basel in 1550 (Evans 1964: xxxvi). So, the earliest Anabaptists were unaware that Tertullian defended adult baptism. Had they known of Tertullian's treatise, they undoubtedly would have used it in their polemics. Many of them had access to Tertullian's writings.

First Magisterial Responses to Anabaptist Baptismal History Using Patristic Authors

The published statements from Grebel, Mantz, and Uolimann caused Ulrich Zwingli to respond with his own treatises to refute Anabaptist baptismal history, which he published in May 1525 (Zwingli 1985: 367-74). He dedicated about 1/7 of this tract to refuting Anabaptist historical narrative that baptism was later medieval development. According to Zwingli, the Anabaptists claimed that Pope Nicholas II (misnamed, he means Nicholas I) had instituted infant baptism in the ninth century, which would make infant baptism a relatively recent innovation rather than an apostolic practice. Zwingli responded that Anabaptists contradict themselves because they also know that Augustine approved of infant baptism in the fourth century: 'You are not uninformed about Augustine's time and teaching' (Zwingli 1985: 368). Zwingli uses this to attack the character of Anabaptist preachers, saying they deliberately lie to people and distort history on purpose. Zwingli recounted confronting certain Anabaptists who claimed they had read papal decrees that would have been part of medieval law books that proved infant baptism was instituted by later popes. But since the person in question could not read Latin, it was impossible that he had actually read these de-

3 My translation: '*itaque pro cuiusque personae condicione ac dispositione, etiam aetate, cunctatio baptismi utilior est, praecipue tamen circa parvulos.*'

crees and when confronted, 'He blushed with embarrassment' (Zwingli 1985: 369). He also mocked another Anabaptist who, Zwingli said, is 'a big, tall fool, yea so rabid that he truly could not read the German Testament before the council' (Zwingli 1985: 373). So, Zwingli attacked several Anabaptists before the city council, claiming they were either illiterate or not literate enough to know what they were talking about when it comes to historical evidence. In these instances, he was not addressing Grebel or Uolimann who both had university educations in classical languages, and most certainly could read Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

In 1525, Johannes Oecolampadius, a close theological associate of Zwingli's, published a book against the Anabaptists. The book is Oecolampadius's account of a conversation he had with Anabaptists in August 1525. He accused the Anabaptists of being schismatics, arrogantly separating themselves from other Christians, to which they responded that they were not bound to church traditions because they recognized only the authority of Scripture. At this point he gave a brief history of baptism, citing Cyprian, Origen, and Augustine, all of whom, he claimed, accepted infant baptism (Oecolampadius 1525).

Zwingli and Oecolampadius saw the burgeoning historical narrative of baptism from the radicals as threatening enough to answer. Both had humanist backgrounds and valued the early church fathers as important resources to think critically about sixteenth-century church practices and doctrines. The beginnings of an Anabaptist historical narrative about baptism had to be answered in the context of their generally humanist outlooks, since the sources could fuel the direction of the reforms. The Anabaptists knew this. In addition to their Scriptural interpretation, they began to call upon the witness of the earliest post-apostolic Christians as allies in their struggle to restore what they viewed as the original practice of baptism instituted by Jesus. Zwingli and Oecolampadius saw that this extra-biblical narrative could play a powerful role in missionary work, so they sought to shortcut it.

Anabaptist Deepening of Baptismal History through Patristics

While Zwingli and Oecolampadius might deride some Anabaptists as unlearned—even though most of the early Anabaptist leaders, such as Grebel, were well-educated—very quickly a different voice entered the debate that was not so easily dismissed. Balthasar Hubmaier had been a priest, educated first at the University of Freiburg where he received his B.A. and then at the University of Ingolstadt, where he received his doctorate in theology and was appointed as a professor of theology. Like Zwingli and Oecolampadius, Hubmaier knew and had discussions with leading humanists of his day. His university training included numerous humanist professors and

training in original languages. On June 23 1522, he wrote a letter to Adelphi chronicling his time at Basel where he had discussions with Erasmus, Rhenanus, Heinrich Glarean (1488-1563), and Hermann Busch (1468-1534). He maintained contact with Rhenanus through letters. It was, probably, his contact with humanists, particularly his friendship with Erasmus, that led him to study Scriptures and early church literature, because he admitted later that throughout his university education, he had not gone to these sources of theology but had a scholastic education (Hubmaier 1989: 343). Hubmaier was a highly-educated humanist, which at least meant he had a commitment to reading the ancient sources in their original languages as a critique of modern practices (See Williamson, 2005). Zwingli had publicly ridiculed some Anabaptists for not being able to read papal decrees in Latin, not knowing the original biblical languages, and barely having the reading skills to read a translation of the Bible in German. Hubmaier could do all of this.

In 1525 and 1526, Hubmaier responded to Zwingli and Oecolampadius specifically. In his *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (July 11, 1525), written as a reply to Zwingli's *On Baptism, Rebaptism, and Infant Baptism*, Hubmaier states that we can learn from much earlier authors like Cyprian and Augustine that the practice of baptism changed to primarily infant baptism from primarily baptizing adults. He criticizes Augustine, who allowed infant baptism, and saying that children would be tortured in hell if they were not baptized as an unscriptural and abhorrent idea (Hubmaier 1989: 224-25). As for Zwingli's repeated claim that Anabaptists thought that Pope Nicholas II instituted infant baptism, Hubmaier responds, 'I have never said that... No one who has read the Decretal says that' (Hubmaier 1989: 212). He exhaustively cites *Decretum Gratiani*—the standard medieval text in canon law—citing the questions to be asked of a person to be baptized, the requirement to fast from animal flesh and wine, and that people who had been instructed in faith could be baptized in emergency situations outside of the Easter and Pentecost. By answering exhaustively from the standard text of canon law, Hubmaier not only answered Zwingli's historical claims, but did so in a way that showed off his own learning, seemingly to also answer Zwingli's mockery of an Anabaptist before the city council in his treatise.

At about the same time he published his reply to Zwingli in 1525, Hubmaier also wrote a reply to Oecolampadius's booklet. However, he was unable to publish his reply until 1527 because he had to flee persecution for being an Anabaptist (Hubmaier 1962: 256-57). Although Hubmaier criticizes Oecolampadius's overuse of church fathers rather than Scripture, Hubmaier repeatedly turns to church fathers in his reply and sees them as his allies in the practice of baptism: 'I want to let their own books be my witnesses' (Hubmaier 1989: 292). In response to Oecolampadius's charge

that the Anabaptists were being 'sectarian', Hubmaier calls up John Chrysostom's homily on Matthew 10:34, in which Jesus says families will divide over him, to argue that sometimes it might be good to be separate, which is not the fault of the 'sectarian' but the people who reject Jesus (Hubmaier 1989: 278). As for Augustine and baptism, he 'greatly erred', Hubmaier charged (Hubmaier 1989: 279). In response to Oecolampadius's citation of Origen, Hubmaier pulls different quotes from elsewhere in Origen showing either that Origen interpreted the passage on letting children come to Jesus spiritually, not literally as does Oecolampadius (Hubmaier 1989: 281).

In response to Oecolampadius's appeal to Augustine, Cyprian, and church councils, Hubmaier states, 'I will trust Cyprian, councils, and other teachings just as far as they use the Holy Scriptures, and not more' (Hubmaier 1989: 280). While many historians have used this statement to suggest Hubmaier did not value patristic theologians, he says nothing here that many other reformers and Catholics such as Erasmus and Beatus Rhenanus had not said previously: the church fathers should be tested in light of Scripture. Yet Hubmaier adds a statement suggesting that in doing so he is actually in line with the larger trajectory of patristic thinking: 'They themselves also desire nothing more than that from me' (Hubmaier 1989: 280). In denying church fathers authority on par with Scripture, Hubmaier thought he was simply in line with the trajectory of their theology. That hermeneutic, Hubmaier argues, is patristic theology at its best.

At around the same time Hubmaier replied to Zwingli and Oecolampadius in mid-1525, he began work on a longer treatise that systematically examined church fathers and conciliary statements: *Old and New Teachers on Believer's Baptism*, which he published in July 1526.⁴ Hubmaier released a second edition of this treatise a year later, showing how important he thought calling upon the church fathers and councils was to the radical reformation.

Hubmaier surveys the baptismal evidence for adult baptism from numerous authors through the time of Augustine, including Origen, Basil, Athanasius, Tertullian, Jerome, Cyril, and Eusebius, adding Clement, Donatus, Cyprian, Pelagius, and Ambrose in the second edition. In the first edition, he had a decided preference for Greek over Latin patristic theologians, which is also his preference in his other writings (Klager 2010: 337-44). This was also Erasmus's general view, and Hubmaier's preference for Jerome over Augustine also parallels Erasmus's inclination, showing how important he was for Hubmaier's theology.

Drawing upon Gratian's *Decretum*, Hubmaier also cited a series of popes to the ninth century, including Pope Siricius, Pope Boniface, Pope Leo I,

4 On the early date for the first edition see Hubmaier, *Schriften*, 225-26.

and Pope Nicholas I, whose statements about baptism supported Hubmaier's view of adult baptism by mandating people wait till Easter or Pentecost, wrote a catechism, or argued about godparents. He may also have read humanist Bartolomeo Platina's *Vitae Pontificum Romanorum* since the numbers he gives for the popes generally correspond to Platina's numbering (See Platina 1485). He cited nine different church councils that took place between 311 and 710 CE, such as the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, which said that heretics and those baptized by them should be rebaptized if they wanted to return to the Catholic Church (Hubmaier 1989: 272).

This was the first large treatise on the history of baptism that anybody had written during the Reformation, to this date. No other reformer had thought to return to patristic sources about baptism in any systematic way. Yet Hubmaier—and other Anabaptists who supposedly had no time for historical narratives outside of Scriptural interpretation—used patristic theologians, church councils, and canon law, to make his case that he was not creating novel practices by baptizing adults. For Hubmaier, the early sources generally conformed to Scripture and in doing so showed themselves to be part of the universal church through the ages, even if they made mistakes as Hubmaier thought all people did. They had authority because they lived extraordinary lives and the Anabaptists were living within this tradition. The Baptists are not heretics. The true heretics, Hubmaier argued, are those who harass, torture, and burn people to death over doctrinal matters.

Magisterial Responses to the More Thorough Anabaptist Baptismal History

Zwingli and Oecolampadius responded to Hubmaier. In July 1527, Zwingli published a 200-page book written in Latin, titled, *Refutation of the Tricks of the Baptists*. In it he once again cites Origen and Augustine. According to Zwingli, Origen said 'The church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants' (Zwingli 1901: 251). He is quick to add that he is not referring to Origen and Augustine 'to give them the authority of Scripture, but on account of faith in history (for Origen flourished about 150 years after the ascension of Christ), that we may not ignore the antiquity of infant baptism, and at the same time that we may attain to certainty that beyond all controversy the apostles baptized infants' (Zwingli 1901: 251). He does not directly respond to all of Hubmaier's patristic research. He simply states that the Anabaptists 'carry around a long document in their church, in which they show from the decrees of the pontiffs that infant baptism was begun under popish rule... I showed them before that in Origen's time, who live about 150 years after Christ's ascension, baptism, was in common use, and afterwards in Augustine's time, who flourished about 400

years after' (Zwingli 1901: 184). Zwingli might be referring to Hubmaier's more recent publications, or probably to his *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* where Hubmaier cites the *Decretum* and does not delve very much into patristic sources. Zwingli simply did not answer Hubmaier's response to Origen or Augustine, and never interacted with the plethora of sources Hubmaier cited. The tone of Zwingli's book is mocking and angry and he makes wild accusations against the Anabaptists (adultery, murder, theft, etc). For Zwingli, the dialogue was over, the time to force the Anabaptists to comply or die had come and passed, and he seems to have had no intent to review the patristic sources Hubmaier brought forward.

In May of 1528, Philip Melancthon wrote a refutation of Anabaptists in his treatise *Adversus Anabaptistas Philippi Melanthonis Iudicium*. He appealed to Origen, Cyprian, Chrysostom and Augustine, claiming that 'It is well known that infant baptism is accepted by the ancient authors of the church' (Melancthon 1864: 962).⁵ He does not interact with Anabaptist interpretations, he simply takes for granted the antiquity of infant baptism and asserts it. But he calls upon the Donatist controversy and canon laws from the Justinian code that meted out death to blasphemers, saying that Anabaptists should be executed like Donatists were executed at Augustine's urging.

Martin Luther, in his treatise 'Concerning Rebaptism' published in 1528, was furious that Hubmaier included Luther's name in his book, *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism*, and Luther claimed that by rejecting infant baptism 'the Anabaptists... act contrary to accepted tradition', and cited Augustine on infant baptism's apostolic origins (Luther 1989: 249). Hubmaier had cited Luther's statement that water does not save anyone, only faith matters. The clear implication that Hubmaier was trying to suggest is that if Luther's statement were followed to its conclusion, it would seem to suggest adult baptism is the best practice (Hubmaier 1989: 256). Luther does not answer Hubmaier's treatise any further than with a short summary dismissal, saying that it is too ridiculous to deserve an answer.

Yet Luther made a surprising concession in 1539 when he published *On the Councils and the Church*. Here he seems to answer Hubmaier's *Old and New Teachers on Believer's Baptism*. Luther says that Anabaptists can correctly call upon church fathers such as Cyprian and church councils like Nicaea. These early sources taught rebaptism (Luther 1966: 44-45). Cyprian, Luther laments, taught that people baptized by heretics must be rebaptized, even though various bishops at the time did not agree with Cyprian. Augustine, Luther says, condemned this aspect of Cyprian, but said it could be forgiven since Cyprian became a martyr. Luther argues that the Council of Iconium and the Council of Nicaea taught rebaptism as well. So, the Nicene

5 My translation: '*Baptismum infantium constat a veteribus scriptoribus Ecclesiae probari.*'

Council, and other councils before it, agreed with Cyprian. Hubmaier was right, says Luther. ‘Thus, Anabaptism tries to justify itself against St. Augustine and us all, because the Nicene council and other earlier councils and fathers agreed with Cyprian’ (Luther 1966: 45). Even the *Apostolic Canons*, an ancient and widely-circulated church manual, condones rebaptism.

Luther argued, however, that the church councils erred when they introduced matters unrelated to faith. The purpose of the Nicene Council was to clarify the divinity of Christ. The appended canons were not grounded in Scripture and dealt with ‘matters pertaining to the temporal, external rule of the church... most of this was sheer clerical squabbling’ (Luther 1966: 59). The canons do not deal with faith, so ‘these we drop’ (Luther 1966: 96). Neither the church fathers nor the church councils have bearing on the question of infant baptism, according to Luther because they do not agree: ‘we both thus cull from the councils and the fathers, they what they like, and we what we like, and cannot reach an agreement—because the fathers themselves disagree as much as do the councils’ (Luther 1966: 47). He repeatedly appeals to Augustine that only Scripture should be held inerrant. To read through all of the councils and church fathers as did Hubmaier is, according to Luther, ‘a great waste of time’ (Luther 1966: 48).

Yet in his previous writing on baptism, Luther conceded that there is actually no direct evidence for infant baptism: ‘You say, this does not prove that child baptism is certain, because there is no passage in Scripture for it. My answer: that is true. From Scripture, we cannot clearly conclude that you could establish child baptism as a practice among the first Christians after the apostles. But you can well conclude that in our day no one may reject or neglect the practice of child baptism which has so long a tradition, since God actually not only has permitted it, but from the beginning so ordered, that it has not yet disappeared’ (Luther 1989: 257). This is an odd appeal coming from Luther. Where Hubmaier tries to ground adult baptism in Scripture and then in church tradition to show that he is not a heretic, a schismatic, or doing anything ‘novel’, Luther suggests that even though Scripture, the sole authority for matters of faith in his view, and the earliest church fathers and church councils do not contain direct justification for infant baptism, that the practice has happened and continues is itself enough grounding to show that the Holy Spirit was involved and it should continue. Luther repeatedly appeals to Augustine on this matter, seemingly justifying Hubmaier’s charge that it is Augustine who is primarily responsible for the shift from adult to infant baptism as normal practice. Luther’s judgment about patristic literature and sources was far more negative than was the judgment of most early Anabaptists, especially Balthasar Hubmaier (see Hubmaier 1989: 248). Later, Menno Simons also noted that

church fathers ‘were not unanimous’ on these issues. Yet Menno’s tenor does not come close to Luther’s sneering and utterly negative tone.

Dutch and South German Anabaptists and Baptismal History

Dutch and South German Anabaptists modified this Swiss baptismal history. While the Swiss Anabaptists generally denied that infant baptism was practiced at all for the first few hundred years of Christianity, Menno Simons answered Magisterial appeals to Origen and Augustine—who, they claimed, proved infant baptism’s ancient origins—by flatly affirming that ‘infant baptism has been practiced ever since the time of the apostles’ just as Origen and Augustine wrote; but the apostles did not institute it (Simons 1956: 276). Unfaithfulness to the gospel has been around as long as faithfulness to it. While some unfaithfully baptized infants in the early church, others faithfully baptized adults.

In various places, Menno pointed to Tertullian, who’s *De Corona Militis* showed that baptismal candidates had to confess and renounce the devil. Menno referred to Beatus Rhenanus’ edition and commented that Rhenanus himself annotated the passage stating that, ‘It was the custom of the [church] fathers that adults, that is, grown persons, were baptized by the washing of regeneration’ (Simons 1956: 137). Geoffrey Dipples claims that Menno’s appeal to Rhenanus’ editorial comments in his editions of Tertullian shows ‘the sophistication of Menno’s historical understanding and research’ (Dipple 2005: 162). And Robert Kreider thinks that Menno read *De Corona Militis* (Kreider 1952: 133). However, it is unlikely that Menno read Rhenanus’ edition, which was the only edition of Tertullian available at the time. Everything Menno says about Tertullian and Rhenanus can be found in Sebastian Franck’s *Chronica* published in 1536 (See Franck 1969: Book 3, fol. CVr).⁶ Menno had studied the *Chronica* and pointed readers to Franck’s works. This seems his mostly likely source. Hubmaier was probably not his source since when Hubmaier quoted Rhenanus he did not connect the quotation to Tertullian as Menno does. Sebastian Frank, however, explicitly cited Rhenanus’ comments within his section on Tertullian. All of this makes it

6 Menno had read the *Chronica*, as evidenced in his comments (which come after those quoted in this essay) that point his reader to the *Chronica* and other secondary works. Moreover, in *Christian Baptism* Menno explicitly cited Franck’s *Chronica* concerning Erasmus. It is possible, but unlikely, that Menno received his knowledge of Tertullian and Rhenanus’ comments from Hubmaier’s ‘Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism’ (270-71). However, while Hubmaier did cite Rhenanus’ comments, he did not say that Rhenanus’ comments had anything to do with Tertullian’s text. Sebastian Frank, however, explicitly cited Rhenanus’ comments within his section on Tertullian. All of this makes it likely that Menno depended on Sebastian Franck’s *Chronica* rather than direct reading of Rhenanus’ *Opera Q. Septimii Florentis Tertuliani* or Hubmaier’s scholarship.

likely that Menno depended on Sebastian Franck's *Chronica* rather than direct reading of Rhenanus' *Opera Q. Septimii Florentis Tertuliani* or Hubmaier's works.

Menno, however, had a more optimistic view of the church than Franck, who had little use for churches. Franck stated: 'I believe that the outward Church of Christ, including all its gifts and sacraments, because of the breaking in and laying waste by antichrist right after the death of the Apostles, went up into heaven, and lies concealed in the Spirit and in truth. I am thus quite certain that for fourteen hundred years now there has existed no gathered Church nor any sacrament' (quoted in Williams 1992: 695). Menno agreed with Franck that the mainstream of Christianity had become corrupted and that this corruption began early. He claimed that in Tertullian's era, baptism had already become 'degenerated' because some people baptized infants. Yet Menno also cited Tertullian to show that the apostles had not instituted infant baptism or else 'the ancestors of Tertullian would not have baptized some infants but all the infants of true believing parents, without question' (Simons 1956: 248). So, in contrast with Franck, Menno saw faithfulness and unfaithfulness throughout Christian history and as a result he could not agree with Franck that the church only exists after Jesus after the Apostles.

Menno also appealed to the fourth-century historian Eusebius. Because Menno cited several aspects of Eusebius' work that neither Franck nor Hubmaier used, it is possible that his source for Eusebius was Rhenanus's 1523 edition of Eusebius's *Autores historiae ecclesiasticae* (Rhenanus 1523). If that were so, this would be direct reading of patristic literature rather than handbooks from others. In any case, Menno cited Eusebius's argument with the anti-Arian bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, who did not baptize infants and used the citation to prove that 'infant baptism was not apostolic' (Simons 1956: 248). The fact that early Christians even had to debate the issue of infant baptism raises doubts about infant baptism's antiquity, Menno argued. Because infant baptism was an innovation not found in the New Testament, early Christian theologians such as Tertullian were forced to make statements about the practice and defend the biblical practice of adult baptism in the face of contemporary practice. Therefore, Simons concluded along with Tertullian, 'We must hear and believe Christ and His apostles, and not Augustine and Origen' (Simons 1956: 137). Menno's backed up his appeal to Scripture in this case with appeals to early church theologians.

The Anabaptist historical narrative related to baptism was widespread and popular among Anabaptist theologians. Pilgram Marpeck cited Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Eusebius and other patristic writers to argue that adult baptism is not only biblical but was recognized as such by early Christians (Marpeck 1978: 197). Like other Anabaptists, Marpeck turned to Ter-

tullian on baptism, and likewise cited Rhenanus in support of his argument: 'Tertullian's *de Corona Militis* also supports this position. Therefore, Beatus Rhenanus, who is an exceptionally experienced historian, shows that, up to the time of Charlemagne and Kaiser Ludwig, only the willing and mature were baptized' (Marpeck 1978: 253-54). His likely source was Franck rather than Hubmaier (See Alexis-Baker 2011: 486).

Marpeck argued that even if infant baptism had been practiced at the time of the apostles, that would prove nothing. Even the apostles had to correct erroneous practices as seen repeatedly in Paul's letters. The antiquity of a practice proves nothing if it is not in line with Jesus. This was a common argument. After citing patristic sources for support of Anabaptist baptism, Hubmaier proclaimed, 'I will trust Cyprian, councils, and other teachings just as far as they use the Holy Scripture, and not more' (Hubmaier 1989: 280). The Magisterial Reformers viewed the church fathers in similar ways. But this critical attitude toward every theologian did not stop Marpeck from appreciating and using post-New Testament literature to make arguments for Anabaptist practices of adult baptism.

The popularity of the Anabaptist baptismal history narrative became most widespread through P. J. Twisk (1565-1636), who wrote a detailed baptismal history similar to Hubmaier's that occupies twenty pages of the *Martyrs Mirror*, a book that would be second only to the Scriptures for Anabaptists until the mid-twentieth century (see van Braght 1987: 153-70). The baptismal history developed by earlier Anabaptists here takes prominence as the introduction to a book of martyrdom that nearly every Anabaptist family would own and study for centuries. This shows the power of the narrative for Mennonites and other Anabaptists.

In the earliest decades of Anabaptism, Anabaptist leaders returned to patristic literature to help develop and hone their message about adult baptism. They developed this historical narrative with the express purpose of defending Anabaptists from the charge of innovation and heresy. The basic charges that were getting Anabaptists killed in those days were that they were unorthodox innovators. So, the Anabaptists tried to demonstrate that they were indeed orthodox Christians, indeed they argued, it is really only the Anabaptists who can claim to be biblically orthodox. For instance, Menno Simons stated: 'The learned ones call us Anabaptists because we baptize upon confession of faith as Christ commanded His disciples to do, and as the holy apostles taught and practiced; also, the worthy martyr Cyprian, all of the African bishops; and besides because we with the Nicene Council cannot accept the heretical baptism which is of Antichrist as Christian baptism... If for this reason we are to be called Anabaptists by the learned ones, then verily Christ and His apostles, Cyprian and his bishops, the Nicene Council and the holy apostle Paul must verily also have been Anabaptists'

(Simons 1956: 570-71). Here Simons draws upon Scripture, patristics, and councils to argue that it is the Anabaptists, not the Magisterial Reformers who have the best claim to antiquity and orthodoxy. They undercurrent of the entire debate was about heresy and orthodoxy, with the threat coming from one side—Magisterial Reformers—to kill those they deemed heretical. So, because the Anabaptists used patristics in their defense, their polemical narrative had to be answered.

The early Anabaptists use patristic sources to find sources about respecting the choices others make. People should be free to accept or reject the gospel. For the Anabaptists, baptism was not really a doctrinal matter dealing with intellectual assent, but a sign of a deep commitment to live a way of life that Jesus taught, which included respecting the decisions others make. None of the Anabaptist leaders argued that Magisterial Reformers should be outlawed or that laws should be passed that would jail, torture, and execute reformers or Catholics for continuing baptism. The Anabaptists were unafraid of that difference. The commitment to live a life in imitation of Jesus was most important. It was this commitment to a way of life that mattered to the Anabaptists, and they thought that the patristic sources provided some fuel and inspiration to live such a life. But they would respect the decision of others to continue in their way. They simply wanted to be able to provide an alternative, without fear of being jailed, tortured, and executed. The Magisterial appeal to Augustine was never going to do much for the Anabaptists, who could clearly see that Augustine called for the deaths of the Donatists, just like Zwingli, Melancthon and others were doing in the sixteenth century to Anabaptists. They could not respect the free decisions of other adults, and so, like their patristic hero, Augustine, they called for suppression. The Anabaptist use of patristics was to call for a tradition that respects what others decide, even if we do not like that decision, and not to outlaw those decisions in the name of some abstracted theology outside the practices of loving one's enemies and neighbors.

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