

CLASSICS
OF THE
RADICAL
REFORMATION

The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck



The Writings of
Pilgram Marpeck

This is a preview. Get the entire book here.

Classics of the Radical Reformation

Classics of the Radical Reformation is an English-language series of Anabaptist and Free Church documents translated and annotated under the direction of the Institute of Mennonite Studies, which is the research agency of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, and published by Plough Publishing House.

1. *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*. Trans., ed. John Howard Yoder.
2. *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*. Trans., ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen.
3. *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*. Trans., ed. Walter Klaassen.
4. *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*. Ed. Leland Harder.
5. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. Ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder.
6. *The Writings of Dirk Philips*. Ed. Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachy.
7. *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris: 1535–1543*. Ed. Gary K. Waite.
8. *The Essential Carlstadt: Fifteen Tracts by Andreas Bodenstein*. Trans., ed. E. J. Furcha.
9. *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith*. Ed. John J. Friesen.
10. *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*. Ed. C. Arnold Snyder, trans. Walter Klaassen, Frank Friesen, and Werner O. Packull.
11. *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition: 1527–1660*. Ed. Karl Koop.
12. *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*. Ed. John D. Rempel.
13. *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists: 1529–1592*. Ed. C. Arnold Snyder.

This is a preview. Get the entire book here.

The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck

Translated and edited by
William Klassen
and
Walter Klaassen



PLOUGH PUBLISHING HOUSE

This is a preview. Get the entire book here.

Published by Plough Publishing House
Walden, New York
Robertsbridge, England
Elsmore, Australia
www.plough.com

Plough produces books, a quarterly magazine, and Plough.com to encourage people and help them put their faith into action. We believe Jesus can transform the world and that his teachings and example apply to all aspects of life. At the same time, we seek common ground with all people regardless of their creed.

Plough is the publishing house of the Bruderhof, an international community of families and singles seeking to follow Jesus together. Members of the Bruderhof are committed to a way of radical discipleship in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Inspired by the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 2 and 4), they renounce private property and share everything in common in a life of nonviolence, justice, and service to neighbors near and far. To learn more about the Bruderhof's faith, history, and daily life, see Bruderhof.com. (Views expressed by Plough authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Bruderhof.)

Copyright © 2019 by Plough Publishing House
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-0-87486-258-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Marpeck, Pilgram, approximately 1495-1556, author. | Klassen, William, translator, editor. | Klaassen, Walter, 1926- translator, editor.

Title: The writings of Pilgram Marpeck / translated and edited by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen.

Description: Walden, New York : Plough Publishing House, 2019. | Series: Classics of the radical Reformation ; 2 | Originally published: Kitchener, Ont. ; Scottdale, PA : Herald Press, 1978. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "This early Anabaptist theologian stood up to the ruling powers, calling for freedom of religion and separation of church and state."-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019045731 (print) | LCCN 2019045732 (ebook) | ISBN 9780874862584 (paperback) | ISBN 9780874862591 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Theology--Early works to 1800. | Anabaptists--Early works to 1800.

Classification: LCC BT15 .M28 2019 (print) | LCC BT15 (ebook) | DDC 230/.43--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019045731>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019045732>

This is a preview. Get the entire book here.

To

*Jarold Tyler Klassen
Kirsten Leigh Klassen
Karis Lynee Klassen*

*Frank Frederick Klaassen
Michael Walter Klaassen
Philip John Klaassen*

Preface to the New Edition

Pilgram Marpeck made a distinctive contribution to the flourishing of sixteenth-century Anabaptism in German-speaking Europe. On the one hand, he saw the need for radical reform of the church. In the New Testament he discovered baptism on confession of faith as the entry point into a church of believers who pledged themselves to a common life. On the other hand, he was more open than some of his fellow radicals in taking theological constructs from the patristic and late medieval church to provide scaffolding for the building of a radical church. For Marpeck, the foundational level of the scaffold was the teaching of the incarnation. The paradoxical outcome was a radical ecclesiology grounded in the long Christian tradition.

Marpeck became the formative leader of a network of Anabaptist congregations that stretched from Moravia (in present-day Czechia) to the Alsace (in present-day France). As the first among equals, Marpeck guided the congregations with theological discourses, pastoral letters, and personal visits. His ministry was characterized by patience while others were hastening to judgment. This stance arose from his conviction that the Holy Spirit dwells in each believer and the church at all levels. Such a strong sense of the Spirit allowed him to be a nonconformist without needing to take refuge in separatism.¹ His approach attracted seekers primarily in urban settings in which religious dissenters were outlawed but seldom openly persecuted. Believers in settings where Anabaptists were persecuted to the point of martyrdom were drawn to more stringent and uncompromising forms of church life, as found among the Dutch and Swiss Anabaptists and the Hutterites.

With the death of Marpeck in 1556, and other leaders soon thereafter, this more pliable form of church lost its coherence. The last references to Marpeck Circle congregations come from Moravia in the 1620s, during a time of open persecution. It is noteworthy, however, that in the second half of the sixteenth century the Swiss Brethren turned to Marpeck's thought and spirit to address a situation between tolerance and persecution not unlike conditions congregations in the Marpeck network had faced a generation earlier.²

While aspects of his theology were taken up by the Swiss Brethren, Marpeck as a person disappeared from history. He was slowly rediscovered beginning in the 1860s, when Marpeck manuscripts came to light.³ Gradually German-speaking scholars, of whom Johann Loserth was the most prolific, identified and published Marpeck's writings in the early decades of the twentieth century. The first comprehensive analysis of Marpeck's thought in English was William Klassen's *Covenant and Community*,⁴ which made a compelling case for expanding the number of texts that could be attributed to Marpeck to include *A Clear Refutation* and *A Clear and Useful Instruction*. These texts articulated an incarnation-based interpretation of the as-yet-fluid radicalism in Strasbourg, contrasting it to a Spiritualist approach.

Klassen's argument has been accepted by later scholarship. Seeing Marpeck as the author of these foundational texts completed the heretofore fragmentary biography of Pilgram's person and authorship. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen's outstanding translation and commentary in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* brought him into the center of the Radical Reformation. With these and other discoveries, Marpeck's body of writing became larger than that of any other Anabaptist. Walter Klaassen entered Marpeck studies through his research into sixteenth-century Spiritualism. Both scholars continued to work with Marpeck and his community, crowning their accomplishments with the definitive biography of the man and his times.⁵ Those in search of a nonconformed but not separatist church have found the Marpeck legacy to be an able companion as well as a cautionary tale.

Marpeck was born about 1495 in the southern Austrian mining town of Rattenberg, in the Inn Valley, fifty miles east of Innsbruck.

His parents were prosperous owners of silver mines; his father was active in local politics. Marpeck's parents were devout Christians who remained in the Catholic Church. Their parish priest, Stefan Castenbauer, preached radical reform that left an early mark on Marpeck. His patrician status afforded him a good basic education. There is no evidence that he studied theology, but we do know that he had conversations with followers of Luther and read writings by radical mystics. His considerable skill in thinking theologically suggests that he was an autodidact. He married Sophia Harrer in his early twenties; they had a daughter of their own and adopted three children. In 1520, Pilgram and Sophia joined the local guild of miners. He learned the skills of a water engineer. Soon he was appointed as the regional mining magistrate, commissioned to oversee the laws governing mining. Pilgram became a member of the Lower and then the Upper Council. All we know of Sophia is that she died soon thereafter, probably from the plague.

During the 1520s the Radical Reformation spread like wildfire through the Inn Valley and beyond, leading many to martyrdom. The first inference we have of Marpeck's changing religious loyalty is that his mining magistrate's office is criticized for not reporting dissenting political and religious views among the miners. It is possible that he came into contact with the two best known Anabaptists in the region, Leonhard Schiemer and Hans Schlaffer. When the emperor's office demanded that Marpeck prosecute the Anabaptist rebels, he replied that this duty did not belong to his office. When others carried out the imperial order to execute Schiemer and Schlaffer on January 15, 1528, Marpeck realized he had to choose between his career and his conscience. He resigned his office and left his daughter and adopted children with other family members. Leaving friends, possessions, and reputation behind, he fled north and east to seek refuge with the emerging Anabaptist movement in Krumau (now Cesky Krumlov), Moravia. There he met and married Anna, whose maiden name is unknown.

Southwestern Moravia was briefly a place of religious tolerance. Slavic, Italian, and Germanic radicals took refuge under tolerant local rulers there. During their months in Krumau, Pilgram was baptized into the Anabaptist community, likely in Austerlitz (now

Slavkov). This is suggested by the fact that he maintained contact with the Austerlitzers throughout his ministry. It is likely that he read mystically influenced theologies of the cross—like the late medieval *Theologia Deutsch* as well as Schiemer’s writings—during this time, because their themes are evident in his emerging theology. Marpeck was ordained as an elder, and he and Anna were commissioned to pastor an emerging Anabaptist community in one of the few other places of tolerance in the mid to late 1520s, Strasbourg, an imperial and therefore semi-autonomous city whose economic base was mining and logging.

Already in the first five years of the Radical Reformation there were different approaches to reform. This is not surprising, since all its leaders brought their past—both theological and geographical—with them. For example, Wilhelm Reublin and Michael Sattler, erstwhile monastery prior, were biblicists. Hans Denck, Casper Schwenckfeld, Hans Buenderlin, and Christian Entfelder—all mystically inclined—took their radical leaning in a spiritualistic direction. The prophets Melchior Hoffmann, Ursula Jost, and Barbara Rebstock gave this leaning an apocalyptic orientation. Marpeck’s challenge was to hold all these inclinations accountable to one another while prudently challenging the Magisterial Reformation that had taken hold in Strasbourg in stages. For most of a decade, its outstanding leaders, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, were willing to debate disputed aspects of the gospel with the dissenters, including Marpeck.

In September of 1528, Marpeck purchased citizenship in the city. This must have been a step toward a hoped-for job; his training as a water engineer was directly relevant to the mining and logging on which Strasbourg’s prosperity depended. He was hired by the city, living the life of an engineer by day and a minister by night. He oversaw construction of a canal for floating logs from Schiermeck to Strasbourg that still exists.

He took the oath of citizenship but skirted the oath citizens normally took to defend the city in case of attack. Strasbourg’s tolerance of dissent lasted just long enough for the outline of a less separatistic Anabaptist stance toward the state to emerge. Marpeck found a way of combining his duty to his profession with the vision

of a church shaped by believer's baptism and nonretaliation to evil. Despite warnings from the city council against public meetings of Anabaptists, Marpeck and others discreetly led services on Sundays in their houses. Early on Marpeck realized that he stood "between the devil and the deep blue sea" – that is, he discerned that his understanding and practice of the emerging radical movement contended not with one but two opponents: Magisterial Protestantism and its mass church including all citizens, on the one hand, and Spiritualism and its confinement of the holy to inward experience, on the other. His disagreement with Magisterial Protestantism was epitomized by their divergent views on baptism – and, by implication, on the nature of the church. The climax of this opposition was Marpeck and Bucer's debate on baptism before the city council in early 1532. Bucer accused his debating colleague of setting aside the Old Testament to arrive at his conclusions. Marpeck's final word was the *Confession of 1532*. He had defied the council's order to desist from teaching against infant baptism, so he and Anna were forced to leave Strasbourg in early 1532.

Marpeck's disagreement with Spiritualism was epitomized by the two parties' different views of the Lord's Supper. Marpeck was persuaded that God used the elements of the created order to reach us; in the Supper inward and outward become one. He grounded this conviction in the incarnation. His fellow radicals were so disillusioned with the historic church that they sought God mystically, beyond and over against all outward things. His fellow radical, Hans Buenderlin, captured the Spiritualist argument in *Explanation through Comparison of Biblical Scripture of 1530*. He argued that Christ gave sacramental forms to the first generation of believers as a concession to their weakness. But once the Holy Spirit held sway in their lives, they outgrew the need for externals, which were suspended by the Spirit. The only reason the church might practice them again would be a revelation from Christ in the present commanding their use. In bold strokes, this was the logic of the emerging Spiritualism of the Radical Reformation. It would continue to confront Marpeck (and other biblically oriented Anabaptists) throughout his career. Because of Marpeck's theology of the incarnation, he was the best prepared in the emerging Anabaptist

movement to lay out an alternative consistent with a radical view of the church. In pursuit of this alternative, Marpeck addressed both Magisterial Reformers and Spiritualists in three treatises published in 1531. *A Clear Refutation and A Clear and Useful Instruction* were his response to Spiritualism, and he is the probable author of the *Exposé of the Babylonian Whore*, which critiqued the alliance between church and state.

After Strasbourg, the Marpecks lived and labored among the Swiss Brethren, known for their separatist, biblicist approach to Anabaptism. Marpeck continued working as a water engineer in the Swiss canton of Grisons, in towns such as St. Gall and Appenzell. From his pastoral letters *The Unity and the Bride of Christ* (1540) to all the Alsatian congregations and *Judgment and Decision* (1542) to the Appenzell congregation, we realize that Marpeck continued and expanded his role as an itinerant overseer while he lived in Switzerland. Both epistles make the case for patience and unity. *Judgment and Decision* is perhaps Marpeck's most spiritually insightful treatise. In it he argues that the church is a community of mutual discernment (the priesthood of all believers) and that love is the end of the law, though he admits his own shortcomings in living out this vision. During this time Marpeck was also in correspondence with the Spiritualist Helene von Streicher of Ulm, in southern Germany (*To Helene von Streicher*). He engaged her as an equal, someone worth taking seriously. At the same time, he wrote to her with conviction about the believer's participation in Christ and the concrete nature of Christian community.

In 1542, Marpeck and his fraternity took the 1533 *Confession of Two Sacraments* by Bernard Rothmann – a Dutch Anabaptist Bible expositor who later became the chief apologist for the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster – translated it into German, and published it as *The Admonition of 1542*. They inserted about forty pages into various parts of the 110-page text, expanding the sections on the old and new covenant, baptism, the nature of a sacrament, and the innocence of children.

The Dutch historian Jan Kiwiet speaks of the “Marpeck Circle.” By this he means that Marpeck was the central figure in the emergence of a coherent South German Anabaptism (extending from

Moravia to the Alsace).⁶ *The Admonition* is evidence for the appropriateness of the term “Marpeck Circle”: Marpeck had continued his relationship with fellow leaders and further developed themes they had come to share. *The Admonition* has two purposes: it guides the network of congregations in theological discernment, and it once again lays out an Anabaptist identity grounded in biblical commands more than in mystical experience. This approach provoked an explosive response from Caspar Schwenckfeld, the Spiritualist theologian. In a book called *Judgment*, he attacks Marpeck’s focus on the Bible as the physical vessel of God’s revelation and the church as the outwardness of the body of Christ. In 1544, the Marpeck fraternity responded with a vindication of their position called the *Response*, the first draft, one might say, of a systematic theology. It became the occasion for the Marpeckites to refine their understanding of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ and the incarnation and its expression in the church. This 592-page tome was written in two parts over a three-year period.

In the midst of this flurry of activity Pilgram and Anna moved to Augsburg. It was a Magisterial Protestant island in a Catholic sea, intolerant of dissent in favor of Catholicism or in favor of a Free Church. In the 1540s Augsburg had only one small, underground Anabaptist congregation. Thus, it is puzzling why Anna and Pilgram would consider moving there. The closest we come to an answer is that in 1544 he applied for the position of Augsburg’s water engineer. He was hired on the condition that he not engage in open church work. Anna and he moved into a house that was built into the city’s water works. Both the water works and house are standing today.

We have two snapshots of what the Augsburg congregation was like. One member, Helena von Freyburg, freely offered her *Confession of Guilt* to the congregation, making special mention of Pilgram and another leader.⁷ She was sincerely repentant for her transgression against God and her community. Another member of the Augsburg congregation was Joerg Maler. He challenged Marpeck both on matters of theological orthodoxy and submission to the city council. He was less cautious than Marpeck in criticizing the alliance of church and state. At the same time, five years after his mentor’s death, Maler undertook the massive project of gathering

the “library” of the Marpeck Circle into a single manuscript called the *Kunstbuch*.⁸ Most of Marpeck’s pastoral letters are included in it, but it also made room for writings of other Anabaptist, as well as Spiritualistic and Lutheran, authors the community had found nourishing.

It is striking that the *Exposé of the Babylonian Whore*,⁹ the treatise in which Marpeck is most critical of the over-reaching of the state and most clear about the nonviolence of the church, was republished in Augsburg during the 1540s. Did Marpeck have a hand in this undertaking? One can imagine that the dissemination of this radical text might have been his way of compensating for his conformity to Augsburg’s strictures against dissent. In his last known pastoral letter from January 1555, *Concerning the Humanity of Christ; Concerning the Son of Man*, Marpeck counsels beleaguered congregations not to confuse their voices with the voice of the Spirit. He goes on to caution them against a visible ministry, lest they provoke the authorities. Here Marpeck’s prudent response falls short of his own vision that the resurrection of Christ puts the existing order of things into question.

Although Marpeck was not cut from martyr cloth, he was ready to take risks for the gospel, personally and theologically. When he encountered a radical vision of Christian faith in Rattenberg, he was willing to give up profession, family, and security to follow it. When the Strasbourg Council decreed that he renounce his conviction concerning baptism and the church or be banished, he accepted banishment. When his erstwhile fellow seekers turned their backs on a visible church and its signs, Marpeck applied an orthodox Christology to the crisis of the day, compellingly arguing for the church as the prolongation of the incarnation and sacraments as the prolongation of the church.

What is the state of Marpeck scholarship now? The 2004 article by William Klassen, noted at the beginning of this preface, lists key scholars and their themes in the course of the twentieth century. Most of this work from before 1978, the original publication date of *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, is referenced there. The book’s republication now is an occasion to draw attention to another generation of scholars and their further research into the context

and content of the Marpeck Circle writings.

During the 1970s it became clear to historians that the premise of a more or less uniform Anabaptism spread from Zurich to other German territories and the Low Countries was not tenable. The historical evidence for diverse radical impulses in different settings, often called “the polygenesis theory,” had become overwhelming. The first attempt to name this diversity came from the church historian George Hunston Williams,¹⁰ who identified three overlapping groups of radicals: Spiritualists, Rationalists, and Anabaptists. Hans-Juergen Goertz, Werner Packull, and others further documented the origins of Anabaptist impulses in various settings. Packull’s *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement* demonstrated that there was a brief but formative time in which South German Anabaptism was shaped by late medieval mystical thought and piety as appropriated by figures like Leonard Schiemer and Hans Hut.¹¹ It was through them that Marpeck first encountered what became Anabaptism.

Once it was clear that there were wide-ranging formative influences on disparate strands of Anabaptism, it was possible to see their differences and commonalities more clearly. This shift in scholarly orientation allowed Marpeck to be seen for who he was. For example, he did not come to his convictions in a setting of outright persecution. As a consequence, his piety and doctrine were not formed on the edge of society but within it. To find enough tolerance for fledgling congregations to survive, Marpeck was willing to negotiate both with those in power and with the long Christian tradition. Paradoxically, this stance allowed him to make the case for an interpretation of the gospel that became a *via media* between the territorial churches and churchless Spiritualism. Two well-attended conferences on Marpeck and his fraternity, in New York City in 2001 and in Bluffton, Ohio, in 2009, make it clear that Marpeck’s fusion of a dissident reading of the Bible with an accommodation of the existing social order has gained an articulate hearing.

A cluster of authors, especially C. Arnold Snyder, Neal Blough, Thomas Finger, and I, were attracted to Pilgram’s distinctive combination of theological rootedness and radicality because it spoke directly to twenty-first-century urban church life and mission.¹²

He constructed his understanding of the incarnation from the New Testament and patristic tradition, and by means of it he arrived at a believers' church ecclesiology as the prolongation of Christ's humanity. Critics of this reading of Marpeck assert that the above scholars have claimed a greater classical grounding for his Christology and sacramentology than the facts allow for.

The single most important shift in Marpeck scholarship in the new generation has come about by a fresh appreciation for Moravia as an early Anabaptist setting on par with Swiss, South German, and Dutch centers. Werner Packull's groundbreaking *Hutterite Beginnings* shows the vitality and diversity of Anabaptism in Moravia.¹³ The Hutterites themselves had continued historical preservation and research for their own people, but it was Packull and then Martin Rothkegel who ended the obscurity into which Moravian Anabaptism had fallen in the scholarly world.

Rothkegel discovered a trove of archives and court records in Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary in which Marpeck's interactions and influence were evident. At the same time, Rothkegel argued that moderate Anabaptism like Marpeck's had an ephemeral existence in Moravia and elsewhere. He concluded that talking about a "Marpeck Circle" – an ongoing collective of leaders – is untenable.¹⁴ Yet it is hard to miss both Marpeck's centrality to the movement that spread from Moravia to the Alsace and his collegiality in the *Kunstbuch*.

Finally it must be said that interest in Marpeck's person and thinking is no longer confined to English- and German-speaking scholars of Anabaptism. For example, Neal Blough and Denis Kennel have brought Marpeck's work to an international francophone readership.¹⁵ Nor is it any longer a largely Mennonite enterprise. For instance, Marpeck is the central figure in the Baptist theologian Malcolm Yarnell's *Formation of Christian Doctrine*.¹⁶

These treatises and pastoral letters will reward the reader with the visionary musings and the day-to-day struggles of a community and its enigmatic and beloved "first among equals" who sought to live the gospel in revolutionary times.

John D. Rempel

Notes

1. Gerald Mast, "Patient Separation in Marpeck's Theological Rhetoric," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2011): 77–88.
2. C. Arnold Snyder, ed., *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists, 1529–1592* (Walden, NY: Plough, 2019).
3. William Klassen gives a succinct summary of modern Mennonite scholarship in William Klassen, "The Legacy of the Marpeck Community in Anabaptist Scholarship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78, no. 1 (January 2004): 7–22.
4. William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life, Writings, and Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).
5. Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2008).
6. Jan Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marpeck: ein Fuehrer der Taeuferbewegung im Sudedeutschen Raum* (Kassel: Oncken, 1958), 47–59.
7. John D. Rempel, ed., *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle* (Walden, NY: Plough, 2019), 505–12.
8. See Rempel, ed., *Joerg Maler's Kunstbuch*.
9. Walter Klaassen et al, trans., *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1999).
10. George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).
11. Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525–31* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1977).
12. C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2002); Neal Blough, *Christ in Our Midst* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2007); Thomas Finger, "How 'Classical' Was Pilgram Marpeck's Theology?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2011): 115–31; and John D. Rempel, "Critically Appropriating Tradition: Pilgram Marpeck's Experiments in Corrective Theologizing," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2011): 59–76.
13. Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
14. Martin Rothkegel, "Pilgram Marpeck and the 'Fellows of the Covenant: The Short History of the Rise and Decline of an Anabaptist Denominational Network,'" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2011): 7–36.
15. Neal Blough, *Christologie anabaptiste: Pilgram Marpeck et l'humanité du Christ* (Genève: Labor et fides, 1984); Denis Kennel, *De l'esprit au salut: une anthropologie anabaptiste* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2017).
16. Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

General Editors' Preface

For many years a committee of European and North American historians known as the *Täuferaktenkommission* has published source materials of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement under the title *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*. Published in the original languages, these sources continue to be the indispensable tool of the specialist. However, except for the available translations of the writings of Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, and Peter Riedemann, the collection prepared by Professor George H. Williams of Harvard University for the *Library of Christian Classics*, Volume 25, the century-old version of the *Martyrs Mirror*, and a handful of other documents, these materials remain largely inaccessible to the growing number of students, churchmen, and lay readers who do not read German or Dutch. The recent initiation of the *Documents in Free Church History* paperback series, edited by Franklin H. Littell and George H. Williams, adds significantly to the primary literature available in the English language.

The intention of the *Classics of the Radical Reformation* series is to make available in the English language a scholarly and critical edition of the primary works of major Anabaptist and Free Church writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has not been considered essential to the purposes of the series to include every known document of the writers under translation and, unless some contribution can be made to a fuller understanding of the substance of the text, it is not deemed essential to pursue at length critical textual issues. Those scholars interested in the details will, in any case, turn to the original language text. Where a choice had to be made between clarity and awkward

literalism, the translators were encouraged to favor readability but without compromising the text.

The first volume in this series, *The Legacy of Michael Sattler* by John H. Yoder, appeared in 1973. Translators and editors are at work on subsequent volumes in the series. The next volume will likely be the letters of Conrad Grebel, prepared by Leland Harder. Additional books will include the writings of Andreas Karlstadt, Dirk Philips, Balthasar Hubmaier, and the Czech Reformation.

It is appropriate to express appreciation to the translators-editors who so willingly volunteered their services. Both the counsel of the North American Committee for the Documentation of Free Church Origins (NACDFCO), of which Professor George H. Williams serves as chairman, Professor Walter Klaassen as secretary, and Professor Franklin H. Littell as treasurer, and the help and encouragement of the late Professor Carl S. Meyer, director of the Foundation for Reformation Research, St. Louis, Missouri, are gratefully acknowledged. Finally, without the commitment to the work of the church on the part of Mennonite Publishing House and its willingness to include the series in its responsibility to society and the church, this venture could not have been undertaken.

The Institute of Mennonite Studies
Cornelius J. Dyck, Director
Walter Klaassen, Associate Editor

Preface

The important place which Pilgram Marpeck occupies in the development of South European Anabaptism has long been recognized. During the past two decades, new manuscripts have been discovered and various monographs and books published. At the same time, Marpeck's two earliest books were located, and the opinion was often expressed that these materials should be made available in English not only for scholars but also for other readers.

Both of the principal translators of these writings initially worked independently on issues which led us to explore more fully Marpeck's thought. After having completed one phase of our research, we agreed that the major writings of Marpeck deserved translation. This interest was communicated to the directors of the Institute of Mennonite Studies whose support and encouragement enabled us to embark on the project. Over the past few years, while our translation was in progress, it became evident that others were working along similar lines. Two such endeavors, one by Henry Klaassen and the other by Claude Foster, were translations of one of Marpeck's works of 1531. However, although they were available to us, neither one of these translations was used in this edition. The Confession of 1532, together with Bucer's reply to it, has appeared in a modern edition prepared by Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott. It was felt best to present Marpeck's text without Bucer's answer for the English readers. The translation of the letters owes much to Heinold Fast's willingness to provide us with a typescript of the text which he is preparing in German.

It was decided not to incorporate the longest work of Marpeck: the Reply of 1544. Many of the issues dealt with in that

work are covered in the shorter treatises and, since the present volume is already quite extensive, it was felt wise to leave the translation of the longer work to others. From the *Testamentserleutderung*, we have provided only the Preface, since the other materials in it consist primarily of scriptural quotations which would lose much of their point through translation. The verse designations have been added to most of the biblical chapter references without special notation in each instance.

We wish to acknowledge our gratitude to the two students who gave assistance in the final phases of the project, Victor Kliewer and Garry Enns. We are also grateful to Jeannine Watson, Pauline Bauman, and Lorena Reimer who typed the final draft. Richard Bailey prepared the indices. Without the financial assistance provided by the Canada Council, the Research Board of the University of Manitoba, and the Institute of Mennonite Studies, this work could never have been completed. The personal interest and encouragement given to the project by John Howard Yoder and Cornelius J. Dyck are also gratefully acknowledged. Anne Boeckx gave much time to make the whole more readable by painstaking editing.

We dedicate this book to our children for, like many others, they will most likely never read Marpeck in German. May they, as they read him in English, come to their own conclusions about whether the faith for which he lived also has meaning for them in their lives.

William Klassen
Department of Religion, University of Manitoba

Walter Klaassen
Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo
April, 1977

Abbreviations

ARG	<i>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte</i>
BM	British Museum
Cant.	Song of Solomon
CS	<i>Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum</i>
Covenant	<i>Covenant and Community, The Life . . . of Pilgram Marpeck</i> , by W. Klassen
CV	<i>Clare Verantwortung</i> , Marpeck booklet of 1531
KU	<i>Klarer vast nützlicher Unterricht</i> , booklet by Marpeck of 1531
Krebs-Rott	Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, ed. <i>Elsass I and II: Stadt Strassburg, 1522-1535 in Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i> , Vol. VII and VIII (Heidelberg, 1959, 1960)
ME	<i>Mennonite Encyclopedia</i> , edited by Harold S. Bender et al, 4 vols.
MQR	<i>Mennonite Quarterly Review</i>
RG	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
TB	<i>Taufbüchlein</i> , 1542, also known as <i>Vermanung</i> and here translated into English as <i>Admonition</i>
TE	<i>Testamentserleutterung</i> , concordance compiled by the Marpeck group but not translated here
QGT	<i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i>
V	<i>Verantwortung</i> , lengthy book produced by the Marpeck group in reply to Caspar Schwenckfeld, 1544 and later; not translated here

Contents

Introduction: The Life and Thought of Pilgram Marpeck	15
I. A Clear Refutation	43
II. A Clear and Useful Instruction	69
III. Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532	107
IV. The Admonition of 1542	159
V. The Letters of Pilgram Marpeck	303
1. To the Strasbourg Council (1532)	306
2. Judgment and Decision	309
3. Another letter to the Swiss Brethren (1543)	362
4. To Caspar Schwenckfeld (1544)	369
5. To Helena von Streicher (ca. 1544)	376
6. The Churches of Christ and of Hagar (1544)	390
7. Concerning the Libertarians (1544)	402
8. Those Dead in Sin (1545)	407
9. An Epistle Concerning the Heritage and Service of Sin (1545)	412
10. On the Inner Church (ca. 1545)	418
11. Concerning the Lowliness of Christ (1547)	427
12. Men in Judgment and the Peasant Aristocracy (1547)	464
13. Five Fruits of Repentance (1550)	484
14. To the Church in St. Gall and Appenzell (1551)	498
15. Concerning the Humanity of Christ (1555)	507
16. Concerning Love (undated)	516
17. The Unity of the Bride of Christ (undated)	521
18. Concerning the Love of God in Christ (undated)	528
19. The Servants and Service of the Church (undated)	549
VI. Preface to the "Explanation of the Testaments"	555
Notes	567
Bibliography	589
Indices	593
The Authors	611
Map	Inside back cover

Introduction

The Life and Thought of Pilgram Marpeck¹

A. Early Life in the Tirol

Pilgram Marpeck was born in the city of Rattenberg, in the Tirol, some time during the last decade of the fifteenth century. His family was prominent in the civic affairs of the city and all evidence indicates that Marpeck received a good education. With his wife, he joined the guild of mining workers of Rattenberg on February 26, 1520. He was an active member of his community, serving first as a member of the Lower Council after February 24, 1523, and then as a member of the Upper Council after June 11, 1525.²

Rattenberg, along with other cities and villages in the Tirol, had been directly affected by the movements toward reform in the sixteenth century. Revolutionary figures like Michael Gaismair had been able to attract and hold the support of the peasants in their efforts to achieve some measure of economic and political justice. In this program religion and politics were closely related. Like Gaismair, Marpeck belonged to the class that had both wealth and the power that comes with wealth, but most important he, like Gaismair, had certain skills which were eagerly sought after by the ruling authorities.

Evidence of the high confidence placed in him by the rulers appears from his appointment as mining magistrate on April 20, 1525, which provided him with an annual wage of sixty-five pounds a year, effective on June 7. Thus while the Anabaptist movement was beginning in Switzerland Marpeck began a

professional career which would save his life later when he had become an Anabaptist and such a status was punishable by death.

The office of mining magistrate goes back to the thirteenth century. Around the year 1477 there were only five mining directors in Europe. If there were only five in the 1520s then it is apparent that Marpeck had one of the most demanding and responsible positions in the Tirol. As mining magistrate he was commissioned to administer the laws regulating mining in a given region. Accordingly he was empowered to lease new mining strips or pits, and to settle legal controversies related to mining. In addition he was charged with the responsibility of arbitrating legal controversies concerning the personal affairs of the people working in the mining and smelting locations. The only exceptions were criminal offenses which the local regent alone could adjudicate. Not only did Marpeck supervise the adherence to the mining code; he was also charged with the responsibility of collecting the revenues pertaining to the mining royalty which went to the royal treasury and of keeping accurate records. Certain assistants were assigned to him for this latter task.³

Marpeck acquired his skill in the silver mines of the Inn Valley at Rattenberg and Schwaz, Tirol, some fifty miles from Innsbruck. As early as the year 1520 he appears in the records as a merchant who delivered ore from Schneeberg and Gossensass to Kitzbühel on February 20. He held the appointment as mining magistrate from April 20, 1525, until his release on January 28, 1528.⁴ Most likely he sought the release because of the pressures being put on him to police the miners and their religious affiliations.

There appears to have been a substantial group of miners in the Inn Valley who were receptive to and eventually became adherents of the Anabaptist movement. Evidence indicates that a mining magistrate refused to divulge the names of these Anabaptists and it is assumed that this refers to Marpeck himself.⁵

His work as mining magistrate thus brought Marpeck into direct contact with Anabaptists. Although it is not possible to



Rattenberg on the Inn, birthplace of mining magistrate Pilgram Marpeck.



Kitzbühel, where Marpeck delivered silver ore.

pinpoint the exact date when Anabaptists first appeared in the Inn Valley or when Marpeck first heard of them, Ferdinand I called attention to their presence in the Tirol as early as April 24, 1527.⁶ It is apparent from his mandate of April 1, 1528, that their presence in the valley had reached such proportions that the Archduke felt compelled to order that they be rooted out in his domains.

In spite of such measures and some undertaken earlier, men like Leonhard Schiemer and Hans Schlaffer had been active in the Inn Valley and had given forceful leadership to the groups of Anabaptists living there. Schiemer had been arrested in Rattenberg on November 25, 1527, a day after his arrival, and he was beheaded on January 14, 1528, two weeks before Marpeck resigned as mining magistrate. On December 5, 1527, Hans Schlaffer along with Leonard Schiemer had been arrested and both were beheaded on February 4, 1528, at Schwaz, about ten miles from Rattenberg. Both Schlaffer and Schiemer wrote inspiring treatises for their churches while imprisoned and some of these writings appear within the Marpeck circle in the *Kunstbuch* collected by Jörg Maler. It is inconceivable that Marpeck was unaware of these men and the developments within the Anabaptist communities in the Inn Valley. His later writings reflect the influence of their thought and his immediate circle collected some of the writings of Schlaffer and Schiemer along with those of Marpeck himself.

It has been suggested that Marpeck was baptized sometime during the year 1527 and since the Anabaptists may have been active in the Inn Valley as early as May 1526, this is possible. The Rattenberg congregation had seventy-one martyrs—more, as far as is known, than any other congregation. Neighboring Schwaz had about twenty martyrs and it is said that at one time 800 of its 1200 population were Anabaptists.⁷

The first evidence of Marpeck's reluctance to comply with the royal order of December 14, 1527, comes from a letter written by Bartlme Anngst, magistrate at Rattenberg, on January 1, 1528. That letter is not available but the government reply of January 3 says:



In the Upper Inn Valley two thirds of the population held Anabaptist beliefs during the late 1520s.

Your writing of January 1 in which you indicate that the mining magistrate of Rattenberg desires to be excused from apprehending the Anabaptists (den widerteuffern nachzustellen) because it does not fit his office or that it would not be suitable for the mining magistrate to collaborate thus with the provincial magistrate is hereby acknowledged, along with the rest of what he wrote.

His royal highness, however, advises us that those who are now in charge of the leases at Schwaz who have opened and read your writing have today written here that they wish to deal seriously with him (the mining magistrate) in these matters pertaining to the Anabaptists, together with you, in obedience to the royal mandates and orders. We are also confident that if he is negligent in these matters you know what is best and what is necessary. If he persists in not following the royal prescription you must report it to us.⁸

Seven days later a letter from the same source to the same destination deals with Marpeck's reluctance and apparently requests additional manpower to deal with it. The reply reads in part:

. . . we inform you that you have no need for additional protection beyond the court servant whom you have as part of your office. For when the assistants of our Royal Highness negotiated with the same mining magistrate recently in Schwaz, he promised seriously to prevent the mining workers under his jurisdiction from practicing rebaptism and to observe scrupulously the mandates of his Royal Highness.

In addition where it would come to his attention that one or more of the same miners was not living according to the mandates and adhering to the new sect of the Anabaptists he would indicate this to you, capture them, not hinder you, but upon your request to proceed with the appropriate punishment against such and to provide you with help and support. Therefore as the need requires you should feel free to ask the mining magistrate for assistance.⁹

It would appear from this that Marpeck had reconsidered and that he had decided to collaborate with the authorities in the apprehension of the Anabaptists. Eighteen days later (January 28, 1528) a letter came from Ferdinand I himself indicating that he has honored Marpeck's request to be relieved of his duties and instructing him to give the responsibility over to another. He requests that all books be handed over to his successor and that as soon as the latter has taken the oath of office Marpeck is free of all responsibility.¹⁰ This letter is addressed to Marpeck himself.

No further word about Marpeck appears in the sources except that a request is made that some of the goods confiscated from him may be used for the care of his adopted children (July 31, 1529). Is it possible that Marpeck changed his mind about his attitudes toward the Anabaptists? If so, what happened? Possibly the execution of Leonhard Schiemer on January 15, 1528, just five days after the letter indicating a change in Marpeck's position was written caused him to change his mind and give all of his allegiance to the new cause. In any case after this there appears to be no vacillation whatever in his resolve to be an Anabaptist.

Marpeck received whatever education he had in Rattenberg. The evidence that he had a good knowledge of Latin which has often been cited (most recently by Harold Bender) is not

persuasive. It is quite likely that the evidence of Latinisms in his writings comes in fact from the Bible that he used, for most of his Latinisms appear in biblical quotations.

Marpeck was a man of some wealth, for he lent Ferdinand I 1,000 guilders in 1528 at 5 percent interest¹¹ and his estate including two houses which he owned as early as 1524 was evaluated at 3,500 guilders when it was confiscated in 1528. He had easy access to members of the nobility including particularly Countess Helena von Freyberg whose castle was near Kitzbühel but he was himself not a member of the nobility.

It is not known how soon after January 28, 1528, Marpeck left Rattenberg but we do know that he relinquished his office as mining magistrate soon after that date. It is quite likely that he was one of a number who left Rattenberg secretly after the death of Schiemer.¹² One of the factors that may have influenced his leaving was the escalation of repressive mandates against the Anabaptists. Archduke Ferdinand's mandate of April 1, 1528, sought to root out all Anabaptism in his domains, particularly the Tirol. It called for the execution of all Anabaptists in prison if they would not recant and of all those who had been preaching and baptizing whether they recanted or not, and also the confiscation of all their property.¹³ The vitality of the Anabaptist movement in the Inn Valley undoubtedly contributed to Marpeck's conversion to Anabaptism. For about a generation Anabaptism was more prominent in this area than was Lutheranism which never became strong. In some cases early Lutheranism merged almost imperceptively into Anabaptism. It is impossible to estimate how many Anabaptists were in the Tirol before 1550 but there is constant evidence that their presence threatened the authorities. Marpeck's successor, W. Schönmann, was warned on February 9, 1528, by the authorities to be vigilant, for among the miners they were gaining the upper hand.¹⁴ Bender cites a report which claims that there were 12,000 Anabaptists in the Tirol before 1550 including over 600 martyrs. This is obviously exaggerated.¹⁵

Marpeck does tell us a little about his own spiritual pilgrimage in his discussion with Bucer at Strasbourg on December



The Mandate of Ferdinand I, dated April 1, 1528, called for the execution of all Anabaptists and confiscation of their property.

9, 1531. The Council Minutes report: “Since now in the whole world the fight and quarrel is only about the faith, he had been brought to this faith by his God-fearing parents in the papacy. Then he found a notable contradiction in the writings. For since at those places where one preached the gospel the Lutheran way, in which also fleshly liberty was felt, this made him hesitant, since he could not find peace in it” (the Lutheran gospel). Later he says that he had accepted baptism for a testimony of obedience of faith.¹⁶ Possibly Marpeck was first a Lutheran but in any case he rejected Lutheranism because of the “fleshly liberty” he saw in it. Anabaptism was for him a commitment of faith and probably this is the reason why he joined himself to an Anabaptist congregation.

Whatever may be the origin of Marpeck’s own Anabaptist convictions and whoever may have been the instrument responsible for bringing him to this conviction, it is apparent that

from the earliest days of his public work he was committed to a separation of church and state. The state could expect him to carry out his work as a mining magistrate diligently and efficiently. The state, however, could not dictate on matters of faith and when it attempted to do so Marpeck refused to comply with the wishes of the state. After he became an Anabaptist he could no longer live in his own town and once he left, his property and all his assets were confiscated by the state.

B. The Years in Strasbourg 1528-1532

From Rattenberg Marpeck went to live in the city of Strasbourg. Strasbourg was a city of great religious tolerance and Marpeck had his most important encounters with the Reformers in that city, particularly with Bucer. There is evidence to indicate that this encounter was fruitful for the development of both Marpeck's and Bucer's theology and it can be described as "futile"¹⁷ only if one assumes that it was the intention in these encounters to make each accept the other's position.

We know nothing about the movements of Marpeck from January 28, 1528, until his purchase of citizenship at Strasbourg on September 19 of that year although it can be assumed that he moved directly from Rattenberg to Strasbourg. The mandate of Archduke Ferdinand of April 1, 1528, led to the practice of widespread recantations but Marpeck took another alternative. If he had preached and baptized he would have lost his life and property, so he abandoned his property and his position and went to take up his life elsewhere. Some earlier historians have reported that he went first to Augsburg and others that he went to the martyr synod in Augsburg; some have claimed that he went to Moravia. No evidence has been found for any of these assertions.¹⁸ It may well be that he stopped in Augsburg on his way to Strasbourg only to discover that the Anabaptist congregation there was being severely persecuted. As he arrived in Strasbourg in 1528 he may have encountered other Anabaptists who had moved there from Augsburg. At any rate it was reported in the spring of 1529 that some 100 Anabaptists who had been in Augsburg were now living in Strasbourg.¹⁹

Whatever the route may have been which Marpeck took to get there, upon his arrival at Strasbourg he took a public position as an Anabaptist. The Strasbourg archives record that he became a citizen on September 19, 1528, and slightly more than a month later, October 22, it is indicated that meetings of the Anabaptists were being held in his house.²⁰ He and other Anabaptist leaders were given a hearing before the City Council. At this hearing Marpeck reported among other things that the Strasbourg congregation had set up a poor fund to care for needy members, since the city poor fund was overtaxed. It was also reported to the Council that Marpeck and Fridolin Meiger, a city notary, gave refuge to Anabaptists and attended a meeting in Staden, a suburb of Strasbourg. At this meeting plans were made to “establish a constitution as to how the brethren were to manage the affairs of their sect.”²¹ Other records indicate that in early 1529 meetings were held in at least three other homes besides Marpeck’s. In 1531 meetings were being held Sundays in Ostwald near Strasbourg where a large group had gathered, as reported to the City Council on April 17. Some years later the number of Anabaptists was reported at 300 and more. According to Claus-Peter Clasen, the number of converts in the Rhine Valley from 1525 to 1549 was 885.²²

From September 1528 to January 1532, Marpeck’s name appears frequently in the records of the city archives as the outstanding Anabaptist leader. On December 18, 1531, reference is made to Pilgram Marpeck, the Anabaptist leader. It is clear that Marpeck exercises the role of leadership both in his writings, as spokesman of the Anabaptists, and even as one who baptizes other people upon authorization of the church in Moravia.²³

The historical situation into which Marpeck came is important. The Anabaptist movement was perhaps strongest in the city of Strasbourg. Here the authorities tolerated the Anabaptists, engaged in hours of dialogue and debate with them, and to this city came every stripe of Anabaptist. For Marpeck himself his stay in Strasbourg meant the first major arena in which he did battle with the Reform theologians. At the same time he saw the



Marpeck fled to Strasbourg where he became a citizen on September 19, 1528.

factors which threatened the healthy establishment of the Anabaptist movement and took pen in hand to begin to describe what the Anabaptists believed. During this period he published two booklets (in 1531) and followed these booklets with considerable writing in December 1531 and January 1532 as he left the city of Strasbourg. During the time that the evangelical Reformation was gradually beginning to displace Catholicism in the city, when the evangelical preachers Martin Bucer, Wolfgang Capito, Caspar Hedio, and Matthäus Zell were striving to find a way of relating church and state, and of expressing the values of the Protestant Reformation, the Anabaptist movement also moved into Strasbourg.

The City Council moved slowly and deliberately and did not abolish the mass until February 28, 1529. This policy of gradualism together with the commitment to a merging of the City Council with the ministerial alliance received the severest criticism by Marpeck. During this time also came the conflict within Protestantism between the Lutherans and the Zwinglians over the nature of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in which Strasbourg took the Zwinglians' side. Marpeck's writings very clearly indicate that he stands between the extremes of those positions. It has been suggested that the preparation for the Augsburg Diet of 1530 was one of the occasions when little energy and time was left for Anabaptist problems on the part of the Strasbourg authorities and consequently the Anabaptists were relatively undisturbed.²⁴

The few mandates which the City Council enacted against the Anabaptists were relatively lax; the one of July 27, 1527, specified no particular or severe punishment and was not rigorously enforced. Sometimes Anabaptists were imprisoned for brief periods of time but in no case did Strasbourg ever execute an Anabaptist or anyone else for his faith. Censorship did exist sometimes, but for the most part the leaders, particularly Capito, were friendly toward the Anabaptists, and Katharine Zell, the wife of one of the preachers, ultimately became an adherent of Schwenckfeld. The ministers in the city had a great deal of difficulty agreeing among themselves on their attitude toward the



Jacob Sturm, the tolerant mayor of Strasbourg and chancellor of the university.



Martin Bucer, a leader in the Strasbourg reformation, highly respected Marpeck even as he disagreed with him.

Anabaptists. It was not until 1534 when they replied to the writings of Rothmann that some of the preachers took a united stand toward Anabaptist teachings. Bucer agreed with the Anabaptists on the necessity for church discipline and in other areas shows their influence.

Even though a more severe mandate was issued on March 3, 1534, in an attempt to crush the movement, it was never successful. Harold Bender is correct when he writes "Pilgram Marpeck's four years of relatively unhindered life and ministry as an Anabaptist leader in Strasbourg can thus be explained in the light of a very complex and fluid religious situation in the city, and the tolerance of Burgomaster Sturm and the Council, as well as by the need for his engineering services."²⁵

The catalogue of Anabaptists who appeared in Strasbourg includes the most illustrious leaders and reads like a *Who's Who* of the first few years of the movement. Balthasar Hubmaier, the Anabaptist theologian from Waldshut, arrived first in July 1525. In the following year a series of leaders arrived, often remaining a relatively short time and often being imprisoned.

In March of 1526, William Reublin, the real founder of Anabaptism in Strasbourg, arrived but left after a few months,

returning again in the spring of 1528 shortly before Marpeck arrived. He was in prison in Strasbourg from October 1528 until his release in late 1529. That a warm relationship existed between these two men would seem to be evident from the letter that Reublin wrote to Marpeck when he was in Austerlitz in Moravia on January 26, 1531. Others who visited Strasbourg were Jakob Gross, April 1526; Michael Sattler, November to December 1526; and Leupold Scharnschlager, arriving perhaps by late 1527 and remaining till 1534. This was perhaps the first occasion when Marpeck and Scharnschlager got together and they formed a strong relationship. During the 1540s both wrote letters to the Strasbourg brotherhood thus continuing to influence its development. The Anabaptist intellectual Hans Denck spent about a month in Strasbourg in 1526.

More significant for Marpeck's own intellectual development was the arrival in Strasbourg of the Spiritualist Hans Bänderlin in March 1529. During his stay in Strasbourg he published several booklets which were read in the group meetings. He called a meeting on March 16, 1529, at the home of Klaus Bruch apparently in an effort to take Anabaptism into a different type of emphasis. Bänderlin's books emphasized the characteristic points of view of the Spiritualists who rejected all external form and stressed the cultivation of the spirit. Marpeck himself saw Bänderlin's presence as threatening the integrity and stability of the group of Anabaptists with whom he was working and therefore it was against Bänderlin that he wrote his first book.²⁶

During this time also, Marpeck must have met Caspar Schwenckfeld for the first time. In later correspondence the Silesian nobleman speaks of the warm relationship they had in the early years and laments the fact that it no longer exists.²⁷ But Marpeck was able to see the difference between his position and Schwenckfeld's and opted for a more activist understanding of the Christian way. He knew that the quietism of Schwenckfeld would ultimately lead to a conventicle type of religion with its emphasis on the cultivation of inner piety. While Marpeck stressed the cultivation of inner devotion he also affirmed that all

genuine inner devotion must lead to external attestation.²⁸ The contexts in which Schwenckfeld and Marpeck met is not known but it is clear that Marpeck's other booklet (1531) was addressed against him even though the sharpest engagements they had in the realm of literary arguments came after 1542.²⁹

The name of Sebastian Franck was known to Marpeck, for it appears several times in Marpeck's writings. He used Franck's historical chronicles in his discussions of the history of baptism, but it is apparent that Marpeck did not accept Franck's theological position since he tends to lump Franck into the same category as Schwenckfeld and Bänderlin. There is no evidence that the two ever met.

Marpeck's daily life was spent in the services of the city and the wider community. As civic engineer it was his responsibility to provide the city of Strasbourg with wood and perhaps also to engage in other types of engineering work. He also appears to have had major responsibility in the area of mining since the mining director in the Tirol as well as in Alsace had supervision over the use of the forest. He had been given more authority over the forest through the reforms of Maximilian earlier in the sixteenth century. The regulations on cutting, transporting, and selling the wood were complex and it was the mining superintendent's responsibility to see that they were observed. The fact that Alsace followed Tirol in these regulations may have made it much easier for Marpeck to find employment there. It is also possible that he was instrumental in bringing some of the tried methods from Tirol and instituting them in the Alsace. At least one historian of the mining methods of that time concludes "the mining operations in Alsace took from the slightly earlier and more highly developed mining techniques of the Tirol the basic outlines of a unified mining law and also their engineering methods."³⁰

Marpeck built a water system for the city and wood-floating flumes in the surrounding valleys whereby Strasbourg which lacked wood attained access to the wealth of the forests surrounding it. The Kinzig River was used to bring the wood down into Strasbourg.



The Black Forest across the Rhine from Strasbourg.



Pilgram Marpeck built channel dams to float Black Forest lumber down the Kinzig River.

Every indication exists that Marpeck was an honored member of the Strasbourg religious community, so important in Reformation times. The leading ministers Capito and Bucer spoke highly of him and Bucer said that the Anabaptists honored him like a god. Bucer recognized his achievements and their value to the city. He admitted on August 19, 1531, in a letter to Margaret Blaurer that Marpeck and his wife were unblamable, adding,

concerning Pilgram you should know that he is a very stiff-necked heretic. He has left much but he cannot leave himself. The more serious vices he has beautifully put aside but the spiritual vices stick to him all the more. I write this in the presence of the Lord. I am not uninclined either to him or any other man upon the earth being as I am a grave sinner myself. But the church is the bride of Christ. . . . The premature or untimely strictness and a giving up of temporal goods which God has given us is an ancient bait of Satan which profits no one. With this he has lured all heretics from the beginning of time even to the time of Paul which is seen clearly in Colossians and Corinthians. Surely Christ is a more transparent common Saviour than that these people could have his spirit. The years of his own acceptance and presumed knowledge of this Pilgram stand up quite straight. Apart from that he and his wife have a nice unblameable conduct. The fish hook must have its bait.³¹

Because Marpeck staunchly opposed infant baptism which he called a sacrifice to Moloch and continued to encourage Anabaptists not to take the oath of allegiance to the city of Strasbourg and because of his prominence in the city, Bucer charged him with misleading the citizens and he was imprisoned on October 22 along with a number of other Anabaptist leaders including Reublin.³² At that time he appears to have come out of prison through the intercession of Capito who at least came to visit him in prison.³³

His period of freedom was of short duration for at the beginning of December 1531 events in Marpeck's confrontation with the authorities of Strasbourg took on a faster tempo. Throughout this period Bucer's correspondence indicated that Marpeck continued to baptize and to teach against the oath, and at one time he even expressed the concern that Marpeck would soon be

banished from the city.³⁴ During the beginning of this month Marpeck requested the Council's permission for a public debate with the clergy but this request was not granted. Instead on December 9 he and Bucer had a debate behind closed doors in which a number of points were discussed including Marpeck's own religious pilgrimage, his position on Anabaptism, his position on the Old Testament, and his position on the freedom of the pulpit in terms of its relationship to the princes and the city authorities. As long as the gospel was not freely preached, Marpeck argued, it could not bear fruit because it was really under the protection of princes and rulers.

This initial discussion took place on a Saturday, December 9, and the Council did not take a position in the matter. Rather they agreed that on Wednesday, December 13, Marpeck and the ministers would be allowed more fully to pursue these questions and the leader was instructed to tell Marpeck that he could bring along two more of his followers. First the leader was to inquire, however, if they knew something and if so to listen to them; if they did not know anything he was to tell them to keep their mouths shut.³⁵

On the same day Bucer wrote a letter to Ambrosius Blaurer reporting on the conversations that he had had with Marpeck. The report from the City Council notes indicates that on December 13 Marpeck along with another Anabaptist engaged in debate with the four preachers—most likely Bucer, Capito, Hedio, and Zell.

The reports indicate that after the enumeration of the articles a request was made for clarification from the ministers on their differentiation between the Old and the New Testament. Apparently the same group continued during the afternoon since two entries are listed under that date. In this notation it is indicated that no public disputation was permitted even though the preachers had consistently been asking for such. This is the first indication that the ministers were pressing for an open discussion with the Anabaptists for the sake of the common ordinary man. They insisted that it would be easier to refute the public impressions that there was disunity in the Council and also to keep

public order. On the following Monday, December 18, the Council took action and continued the debate with him which concluded in the decision to banish him from Strasbourg. To be sure this banishment was apparently given unenthusiastically. They preferred to have him stay on but he could only stay on if he gave up his views on baptism, discontinued his teaching about war and the oath to protect the city, and desisted from working for his own church or fellowship. They recognized that God had given him “many magnificent gifts and that in many ways he is a diligent man; that he possesses a diligent, good zeal but it is precisely these gifts which caused many good hearts to be led into error and kept there through his forthrightness.”³⁶

With the banishment of Marpeck a legal reality he requested a longer period of time in an intervention to the Council on December 19. He asked for three or four weeks in which to sell some property and to settle his accounts. This request was granted. At the same time on December 20, Marpeck made it clear that he would submit to the order of the Council, dependent, however, upon the way in which his spirit led him. This depended upon God’s own command, for Marpeck did not seek any change with regard to their decision relating to his worldly life. He expressed gratitude for the fatherly way in which they related to him.³⁷

The Council gave him another fourteen days but he was to abstain from all preaching and public assembly, otherwise he would not be tolerated. The Council further expressed reservations about the fact that he was making public statements that his position could not be refuted and that answers were not given to his questions. Later, on about January 2, 1532, he was given an additional fourteen days.

Some time after the middle of December 1531 Bucer wrote an apology for infant baptism which he gave to Marpeck. It may have come as a response to Marpeck’s request but in any case indicates the desire of these two to continue the discussion of the issues that divided them. During the beginning of January 1532 Marpeck wrote his confession of faith which appears in translation in this volume.³⁸ A detailed rebuttal to that confession of

faith is found in the Strasbourg archives written by Bucer himself. It appears together with the text of the confession in the collection of sources from the city of Strasbourg.

One of the striking tributes to the level of their discussion came when Marpeck sent this confession to the Strasbourg Council. He appended a letter to it in which he described his own reactions to the discussions. Although this is not dated it must have been written around January 12, 1532. It is also presented in translation in this volume.³⁹

As a tribute to the caliber of this discussion the report in the Council minutes shortly after the presentation of these letters indicates that before Marpeck left Strasbourg the ministers once more appealed in a written intervention to the Council for a debate with Marpeck. It begins,

Pilgram, fourteen days ago desired that we should briefly give him the bases from Scriptures for our practice of infant baptism in an attempt to see whether God could grant us the opportunity of agreeing in our interpretation of Scripture. We did this and when he received this from us he asked us whether we would permit him to write his interpretation over against our articles, in those instances where he was not satisfied with them. We asked him to do this. The day before yesterday he came to us and said that he had written rebuttals to our statements but desired that one or six of us would meet him and discuss these articles in an attempt more clearly to illuminate the truth. We are quite happy to let this happen. Therefore we told him that he should ask whomever he wished, then we would request that some of the church leaders discuss this matter with him in a very friendly manner to his heart's content. He responded to this that while he was quite prepared to do this he would prefer not to do it behind the backs of the lords of this council and therefore requested that we ask your graces for permission and we promised him that we would do so. Therefore we would ask our gracious lords humbly and submissively to help us to have such a discussion, for Pilgram complains that he has not much time left. We believe that it would further the common discussion with the Anabaptists. In such discussion we would eagerly desire to have Pilgram. In matters of faith above all we must act in accordance with God's Word. Please give us an answer. Written on Friday the 12th of January, 1532.⁴⁰

The Council granted the request and Marpeck was given

another opportunity for a discussion. Additional time was given him so that he could remain for this occasion. However, the Council minutes indicate that eventually because he did preach in a conventicle he was banned by virtue of the previous decree and both the city and jurisdiction of the city were forbidden to him.⁴¹

From an external point of view these four years in Strasbourg were exceedingly important for Marpeck. All the major positions with which he would debate throughout his years as a leader of the Anabaptist movement were represented in Strasbourg, and Marpeck's own position was increasingly more fully developed in these years. Again from an external point of view, they marked the time when he began his publishing career. The report of the censors of the year 1532 indicate their suspicion that in the year 1531 Marpeck published two books.

Both of these books were intended to clarify the relationship between the Anabaptist movement and the Spiritualists. Spiritualism had been strongly represented in the Strasbourg area and the two people to whom Marpeck addressed his booklets were Hans Bänderlin and Caspar Schwenckfeld. Bänderlin's influence among the Anabaptists is evident from the fact that the records show that he and Reublin were at the same meeting in March 1529 in which discussions were held about how the Anabaptists were to order their common life.

However long Bänderlin may have stayed in Strasbourg his influence continued on and his position was shared to a large extent by Sebastian Franck. While in Strasbourg Bänderlin attempted to unify the movement and rally it around his position. Even in his later books Marpeck refers on occasion to Bänderlin's people⁴² which may indicate that they were an independent group in Strasbourg although more likely it simply refers to a type of person who was attracted to the Anabaptists and the high place given to the spiritual dimension but who went on to deny the material aspects. Schwenckfeld tells us that about this time the Anabaptists called Bänderlin a squabbler.⁴³

Marpeck's own writings indicate that he saw the Strasbourg period of his life as a watershed in the development of the move-

ment. Writing in 1542 in the Preface of the major confessional volume—the *Admonition*—the writers refer to the manifold splits and sects which are a terrible error and which have been accomplished through the guile of the serpent “now into the twelfth year.” This is doubtless a reference to the turmoil of the Strasbourg period and the context makes it clear that the sects are being caused by false apostles of Satan within the true members of the covenant, that is, among the Anabaptists themselves. The situation did not stabilize with the departure of Marpeck and it seems that Moravian authorities instituted a temporary suspension of baptisms until the matter was clarified.⁴⁴

The most important dialogue of this period, however, was undertaken with Martin Bucer. The various elements of these discussions have not yet been isolated but it is clear that two of the best spirits of the Reformation met each other on these issues. The major issue from Marpeck’s point of view was the question of the separation of church and state. This is an issue which comes from his early encounter with the Anabaptist movement; no more in Strasbourg than in Tirol would he permit the authorities to prescribe the shape of his Christian faith. The theological issue of the relation of the old and the new covenant, the central concern of Bucer’s theology, also became a major point of discussion. Marpeck himself was just beginning to develop this aspect of his thought and Bucer was a major impetus to him in this matter. It is quite likely that the Sabbatarian influence found in Strasbourg also contributed to it. There is, however, no doubt that the major impetus for this element in Marpeck’s thought came from Bucer whose discussion of infant baptism and its relation to circumcision made it essential for Marpeck to take a look at the whole question of the relation of the Old Testament to the New. Four years later the Münsterites would raise the same question in a different context, but Bucer was the first to put it on Marpeck’s agenda.

C. Switzerland and Moravia: “The Obscure Years” 1532-1544

We have no direct knowledge of where Marpeck spent these years. No trace of his movements from Strasbourg has been left



Following his exile from Strasbourg, Marpeck worked for some time in Sankt Gallen.

although his correspondence with the Strasbourg church indicates that he maintained his connections with them as a leader and as a co-worker of Leupold Scharnschlager.⁴⁵

Some traces of his activities during these years do appear, however, in the court records of Switzerland and in some of the later correspondence. The suggestion that he returned to his homeland, the Tirol, has to be rejected for lack of evidence. If he did return it could only have been for a very brief visit. It is possible that the Moravian church asked him to serve as an itinerant apostle for them. At the same time he did not neglect his skills as an engineer, for there is evidence that he built a fulling mill at Sankt Gallen. He was also most likely responsible for building a water conduit around the mountains for the rapidly expanding weavers' craft in that city. One of Marpeck's closest associates in Augsburg in the later years, Jörg Maler, for fourteen years a weaver in Sankt Gallen and Appenzell, became acquainted with Marpeck there through his genius at construction. He told the Augsburg Council in the forties that he had first learned to know Marpeck through his fame "as the builder of the fulling mill at St. Gall."⁴⁶ No doubt Marpeck developed a close relationship with Maler, for throughout the ensuing years there is cor-

respondence between these two men. On one occasion Marpeck writes in an attempt to iron out the difficulties between Maler and the Swiss; the very preservation of the Marpeck letters by Maler indicates his esteem for Marpeck.

Other letters written from Switzerland include one written on December 21, 1540, from the Grisons to Strasbourg and one to the brethren in Württemberg on August 15, 1544, from Chur. It would seem most logical, therefore, to assume that Marpeck spent most of his time from 1532 to 1544 somewhere in Switzerland where contacts with Scharnschlager made it possible for the two to undertake the revised translation of the *Bekentnisse*. According to the Hutterite Chronicle he undertook a trip to Moravia in 1541 in an attempt to unite the Anabaptists there with the South German and the Swiss groups.⁴⁷ A letter written by Schwenckfeld on May 27, 1543, complains that he does not know where to find Marpeck and this also indicates that his dwelling place in these years was not fixed.⁴⁸

He did work for the unity of the church and continued to correspond with individuals and with the congregations. The abhorrence of church splits which had turned him away from Lutheranism because Lutheranism had its own split from Zwinglianism was carried over now into the Anabaptist movement. One of his basic concerns was to bring together the badly splintered Anabaptist movement. This concern for a united church based upon a united confession resulted in the publication of a major work in 1542. This book here translated under the title *Admonition* was a major factor in the attempt to draw the Anabaptists together around a common confession. At the same time it opened up a new era of debate and disagreement with the Schwenckfeld circle.

In many ways these twelve years are the most obscure and hidden ones of Marpeck's life. At no place does his name appear in the Council minutes of any of the towns where he had lived or where he was known. Perhaps the shock of the events at Münster in 1534 was so great that he could not involve himself directly in the Anabaptist movement again in a public way until the early forties.



Marpeck spent the final years of his life in Augsburg. The Fuggerei, the world's first socialized housing development, was only 25 years old when he arrived.

D. Marpeck's Life in Augsburg, 1544-1556

We can pick up the thread of Marpeck's life with certainty again in 1544 when he was engaged by the city of Augsburg as an engineer. City records indicate that Augsburg's chronic wood shortage led the city fathers to hire Marpeck and to ask him also to repair the water flumes of the city. Although in earlier days Augsburg had made every effort to eradicate the Anabaptists, by 1544 the religious concerns of the City Council lay elsewhere. To be sure Marpeck's efforts in the religious realm were neither curtailed nor were they unnoticed by the civic authorities. Caspar Schwenckfeld expressed surprise that the authorities did not apprehend him. He wrote in 1551:

Leonhard Hieber writes that Marpeck had to present his book to the Council. I did not think that he was there any more. Thus it sometimes happens when it is to your benefit, otherwise the Council would hardly give him shelter.⁴⁹

Thus Marpeck spent his time working as an engineer for the city and at the same time giving considerable time to the writing of books for the Anabaptists and also writing epistles to the churches.

Robert Friedmann was the first to suggest that for Marpeck to survive in Augsburg he must have made certain compromises with the authorities and indeed become a quietist in religious matters. But there is no evidence that he changed his style in any direct way. It is quite possible that he was more circumspect in the way that he raised the issues and the years had undoubtedly left their mark. In one of his letters written during this time he indicated the importance of not necessarily irritating the state, for unnecessary provocation may lead to bad results. The most important factor, however, was undoubtedly the changed political and religious scene in Augsburg.

Neither Augsburg nor Marpeck had any desire to pursue the questions of the earlier years as long as Marpeck rendered faithful service to Augsburg and as long as the city allowed him the privilege of publishing and working within the Anabaptist movement. The uneasiness of the Augsburg authorities with this is evident from the warnings sent him on at least four occasions. The first of these warnings came on July 16, 1545. He had been doing work occasionally for the city during the year 1544 and on May 12, 1545, the city contractors were instructed to approach Marpeck in regard to a longer term appointment. According to J. C. Wenger he was paid sixty-five florins in coins on July 18, 1545, and hired for one year. Accordingly the first warning he received to desist from Anabaptist ways must have come two days before he entered into a longer term contract with the city.⁵⁰

For the next five years, however, he was not bothered by the authorities and his salary from 1546 on was set as 150 florins annually.

The warnings from the City Council on the various dates are:

July 16, 1545: An order that the mayor was asked to relay to Marpeck that Marpeck was to desist from working among the Anabaptists.

May 6, 1550: A report had been given that Marpeck had published the concordance known as the *Testamentserleutterung* and the Council wished to have verification of this report.

September 26, 1553: An investigation was ordered on whether Marpeck was holding meetings, and if so that he be punished.

September 25, 1554: "If it is ascertained that Pilgram is spreading his error, he shall be told to go and spend his penny elsewhere."

Two years later, Marpeck died a natural death. While the exact date is not known it must have occurred some time in the last part of the year. The Augsburg records indicate that under the payment of his wages of December 16, 1556, are written the words, "Is dead."⁵¹

The life of Marpeck thus spans the first few years of the movement and the second generation of the Anabaptist movement. His contacts were with the Reformed parties, and with all stripes of Anabaptists. He was engaged in the major theological struggles of the Anabaptists for an identity which would be built upon the Bible and have a concrete meaning for the world in which they lived. His own life, lived intensely at the points where the secular world and the life of faith intersected, and the writings which emerged from that life, are a legacy to Anabaptism and to the whole free church movement today. Only as we study that life and the thought of this man can we assess what contribution if any he has made to man's search for truth and justice.

