

IN THIS ISSUE

During the last decades of the sixteenth century, Zurich authorities frequently demanded that the Swiss Brethren leaders in the region give a written account of their faith. One such document they produced—a 466-page manuscript focused mostly on themes going back to the Frankenthal Disputation of 1571—included original arguments interspersed with numerous unattributed excerpts from texts by other authors. For modern historians of Anabaptism, it is striking that the anonymous Swiss Brethren compilers of this manuscript drew extensively on the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier. Thus, for example, the manuscript cited long passages from Hubmaier's *Old and New Teachers on Believers Baptism* (1526); and it included nearly the full text of his *Dialogue with Zwingli's Baptism Book* (1526). That the Swiss Brethren regarded Hubmaier as an authoritative theological voice may come as something of a surprise, especially given Hubmaier's controversial status in Anabaptist historiography. To be sure, Hubmaier's writings on believer's baptism—exegetically nuanced, theologically sophisticated, anchored in the writings of the early Church fathers—were unsurpassed in Anabaptist circles. Moreover, Hubmaier died a martyr's death—burned at the stake by Archduke Ferdinand in 1528. Nonetheless, Hubmaier's active involvement in the Peasants' War and his explicit opposition to the principles of nonresistance and separation of church and state have prompted many Mennonite historians to exclude him from the pantheon of Anabaptist leaders. This issue of *MQR* will not resolve the hotly-debated question of Hubmaier's credentials as a normative Anabaptist theologian. But it does confirm that interest in Hubmaier's thought continues to flourish.

Drawing on extensive dissertation research, **Andrew Klager** opens the issue with a thoroughgoing analysis of Hubmaier's use of the Church fathers. Klager sets the stage for his study by surveying the availability of patristic texts in the early sixteenth century. He then explores the question of Hubmaier's access to those texts, making a strong case that Hubmaier relied heavily on Zwingli's personal library. The heart of the essay is a systematic summary of Hubmaier's interaction with specific Church fathers. The authority of the patristic writings for Hubmaier rested on their faithfulness to Scripture and their utility in demonstrating the historical persistence of believer's baptism and freedom of the will in the post-apostolic age.

Matthew Eaton follows with a careful interpretation of Hubmaier's soteriology. Eaton rejects the argument that Hubmaier was a Pelegianist. But Hubmaier did insist that faith cannot be understood apart from the

baptismal pledge to a life of obedience, in imitation of Christ, lived in the context of a covenantal community. Eaton clarifies Hubmaier's thought by drawing on a discussion in recent Pauline scholarship. In the original Greek, the standard Reformation prooftexts for *sola fide* – that salvation is based on “faith *in* Christ” – can also legitimately be translated as salvation based on “the faithfulness *of* Christ.” The primacy of Christ's saving action remains the same in both instances; but in the latter reading, salvation is inextricably associated with the human imitation of Christ's faithfulness, expressed as love of the neighbor.

Although Martin Luther angrily denied any association with Hubmaier, **Brian Brewer** argues that the points of convergence between the two reformers were more than incidental. Both were university trained pastor-scholars who reacted strongly against the Scholastic theology of their day. More specifically, both rejected the Catholic teaching that a sacrament confers grace independent of the person's spiritual condition. Yet even though Hubmaier agreed with Luther that faith necessarily preceded the sacramental sign, he assumed – contrary to Luther – that such a faith required a conscious assent. This approach to sacramental theology became the basis for Hubmaier's teaching on the freedom of the will and believer's baptism.

Although most of Hubmaier's writings have long been accessible to English readers, several important texts remain more obscure. In this issue, **Jonathan Seiling** provides a translation of a controversial document that sheds light on Hubmaier's activities in Waldshut during the Peasants' War of 1525. Immediately after Hubmaier's execution in March of 1528, Johann Fabri, the Catholic adviser and confessor of Archduke Ferdinand, wrote *The Justification for Burning Balthasar Hubmaier*. In the text, Fabri depicted his former student as a heretic and a hypocrite. Even more significantly, he insisted that Hubmaier had been an active participant in the Peasants' War, and that his seditious writings and treasonous activities deserved the death sentence. **Kirk MacGregor** follows with a translation of a brief letter by Hubmaier written in Latin to the humanist Johannes Sapidus in the fall of 1521. The letter provides clear evidence of Hubmaier's humanist training, his anticlericalism and his emerging sympathies for evangelical theology.

To be sure, the articles in this issue do not directly address important questions regarding Hubmaier's ecclesiology or his position on nonresistance. But Hubmaier was clearly a creative theologian, cited as an authority by both the Swiss Brethren and Hutterite traditions. Surely, his writings merit our ongoing attention.

– John D. Roth, editor