

Reformation Publishing and Anabaptist Propaganda: Two Contrasting Communication Strategies for the Spread of the Anabaptist Message in the Early Days of the Swiss Brethren

ALEJANDRO ZORZIN*

Abstract: We know of no pamphlets published by any of the first Zurich Anabaptists. This absence of printed material could be explained by rigorous press censorship, or perhaps by the fact that the circle gathered around Conrad Grebel accepted Hubmaier as the sole publicist of early Anabaptism in its dispute with Zwingli. Strong evidence, however, suggests that from the beginning early Swiss Anabaptists consciously chose to spread their views and teachings by means of a strategy deliberately patterned after “early apostolic itinerant mission.” This was a process of communication that propagated beliefs by word of mouth and encouraged their discussion and memorization by means of handwritten copies. This peculiar form of Anabaptist propaganda stood in clear contrast to the academic publishing activity typical for their opponents in the Reformation camp.

In his published description of the Anabaptists in 1531, Sebastian Franck said nothing at all about the Zurich Anabaptists.¹ From his perspective the “leaders and bishops” of the “Anabaptists or Baptists” were, “among others, preeminently Balthasar Hubmaier, Melchior Rinck, Hans Hut, Hans Denck and Ludwig Hätzer.”² An explanation of this statement, and also of the fact that Franck did not locate the beginning of the movement until “the year 1526 in and after the Peasants’ War,” could be that Franck had no contemporary written sources from early Swiss Anabaptist circles. In fact, we know of no pamphlets published in the

*Alejandro Zorzin is pastor of the Mennonite congregations of Altleiningen, Friedelsheim and Kohlhof in the Palatinate (Germany) and conducts research on the Radical Reformation as an independent scholar.

1. *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel, von Anbeginn bis in dieses gegenwärtige Jahr 1531* (Strasbourg: Balthasar Beck, Sept. 5, 1531). Cf. Alejandro Zorzin, “Die Täufer in Sebastian Francks *Ketzerchronik* (1531). Eine zeitgenössische Darstellung des Täuferturns aus der Sicht eines Dissidenten,” *Grenzen des Täuferturns/Boundaries of Anabaptism. Neue Forschungen – Beiträge der Konferenz in Göttingen vom 23.-27.08.2006*, ed. Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta and Michael Driedger (Gütersloh, forthcoming).

2. *Chronica*, cited from the photographic reproduction (Darmstadt, 1969) of the Ulm ed. of Hans Varnier, 1536, fol. 193a. Franck identified Michael Sattler, in relation to his execution on May 27, 1527, in Rottenburg a. Neckar as a “Vorsteher etlicher Täufer – Männer und Frauen.” – *ibid.*, fol 176b. He also knew that Sattler was regarded as the author of the Schleithem articles, which Zwingli denounced in his *Elenchus* (1527) (fol. 154b). Franck, however, did not associate Sattler with the Swiss Brethren.

names of any of the first Zurich Anabaptists (e.g., Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Andreas Castelberger, Wilhelm Reublin, George Blaurock and Johannes Brötli). Only one published writing from the beginning stage of the movement is extant; it appeared at Augsburg in 1525 under the name of the St. Gall Anabaptist Hans Krüsi.³ A second set of published writings by the Swiss Anabaptists appeared only with the *Brotherly Union on Seven Articles*⁴ and Sattler's *Letter to the Church at Horb*, published in 1527-1528 by Peter Schöffler Jr. in Worms.⁵

By contrast, Balthasar Hubmaier published Anabaptist writings from mid-1525 (and Hans Denck from 1526) in the usual manner of the Reformation camp.⁶ Thomas Müntzer and Andreas Karlstadt were also authors of pamphlets. Karlstadt's pamphlets were not only known and used by the Zurich Anabaptists,⁷ but in the late fall of 1524 some of them, particularly Felix Mantz, even took an active role in printing Karlstadt's tracts on the Lord's Supper and his dialogue on baptism.⁸

3. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz: Ostschweiz*, ed. Heinold Fast (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973) [hereafter QGTS, vol. 2], no. 355, 265-273; cf. Heinold Fast, "Hans Krüsis Büchlein über Glauben und Taufe. Ein Täuferdruck von 1525," *Zwingliana* 11 (1962), 456-475; *A Legacy of Faith. The Heritage of Menno Simons*, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1962), 213-257; and Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli. Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), 485-509. The pamphlet was published in two editions by Heinrich Steiner in Augsburg. — *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts* [hereafter VD 16], ed. Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek, Munich, in association with the Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, 25 vols. (Stuttgart: Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek, 1983-2000), K 2466, ZV 11351.

4. Cf. the data on print history by Helmut Claus in *Flugschriften vom Bauernkrieg zum Täuferreich (1526-1535)*, ed. Adolf Laube, et al., vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 741f.; *Das Schleithimer Bekenntnis 1527. Einleitung, Faksimile, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, ed. Urs Leu and Christian Scheidegger (Zug: Achius Verlag, 2004), esp. 16f., 20f.

5. The anonymous printing attributed to Sattler, *Wie die Schrift verstanden und erklärt werden soll* [Augsburg: Philipp Ulhart, Sr. (VD 16, S 1885)] was dated ca. 1545 by Helmut Claus on the basis of the type material. — Laube, *Flugschriften*, 725. Naturally the "Marpeck circle," assumed to be responsible for these late printings in Augsburg, could have reprinted an earlier version that is now lost.

6. Cf. Alejandro Zorzín, "Verfechter und Gegner der Reformation als Publizisten," in *Karlstadt als Flugschriftenautor* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 11f.

7. Cf. Johannes Brötli's letter from Hallau to Fridli Schumacher and the brothers in Zollikon after his exile in the beginning of Feb. 1525: "Schicken . . . mir des Carolstats büchli." — *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz: Zürich*, ed. Leonhard von Muralt and Wather Schmid (Zurich: S. Hertz, 1952) [hereafter QGTS, vol. 1], no. 36, 46. In these two letters from Brötli there are clear verbal parallels to Pauline style and use of words. "Die frühe Täuferbewegung parallelisiert ihre Situation zweifellos mit der Geschichte der urchristlichen Mission." — Strübind, *Eifriger*, 382ff. Also in the letter from the St. Gall resident Gabriel Giger to the brothers in Zollikon, the greeting at the beginning draws on the model of Gal. 1: 3f. — QGTS, vol. 1, no. 66, 75; cf. Strübind, *Eifriger*, 483f.

8. Hermann Barge, "Zur Chronologie und Drucklegung der Abendmahlstraktate

In light of the fact that as early as January 1525, when Zwingli sharply criticized the Zurich Anabaptist circle in his booklet *Who Gives Occasion for Rebellion; Who are the True Rebels*⁹—mentioning them, albeit without naming names, as one of four groups that caused the Gospel to be hated—the question arises whether anyone in this group intended to write and publish a reply.¹⁰

There is evidence that in early September 1524 Conrad Grebel planned “to write and collect proof texts on two topics.”¹¹ It is not clear, however, whether he intended to have this collection of biblical proof texts printed in order to make them accessible to a broader public. In a letter some six months later, probably written to Andreas Castelberger, Grebel stated that Zwingli composed an answer to his “unassailable quotations from the Bible,” which was then printed.¹² Grebel’s remark is interesting in that the collection Zwingli argued against must have been the one Grebel gave to a man named Erasmus [Ritter] in Schaffhausen, who presumably sent it on to Zwingli.¹³ Hence this “Grebel writing” was not a printed work, but one that was circulated by Grebel during his Anabaptist wanderings. Hans Krüsi in St. Gall, for example, received a copy from Grebel.¹⁴ It could be that the manuscript was written in multiple copies and passed on, either by Krüsi himself or by someone

Karlstadts,” *Zentralblatt f. Bibliothekswesen* 21 (1904), 321-331. Regarding the statements of the Basler printers Johannes Bebel and Thomas Wolff, cf. J. F. G. Goeters, *Ludwig Hätzer* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1957), 49f., n. 1; Emil Dürr, *Aktensammlung zur Geschichte der Basler Reformation in den Jahren 1519 bis Anfang 1534*, vol. 1 (Basel: Verlag der Historischen und antiquarischen Gesellschaft, 1921), no. 307, 174-176.

9. *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Emil Egli, et al. (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1908ff), [hereafter cited as *Z*], 3:355-469. Zwingli began the writing on Dec. 7, 1524, completed it on Dec. 28, and it appeared no later than the middle of Jan. 1525.

10. Felix Mantz wrote a defense in the form of a memorandum to the city council of Zurich (around the turn of the year 1524/1525) in which he attempted to refute the arguments Zwingli had presented in favor of infant baptism with a series of scriptural references. It does not appear, however, that Mantz ever intended this *Protestation* to be published.—Cf. QGTS vol. 1, no. 16, 23-28.

11. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 13, 12: “Postremo omnium est, quod conscribam et colligam locos nempe duos communes . . . nisi alius quispiam praeveniat, in publicum deturbaturus.”

12. The Zwingli writing mentioned here was probably *Von der Taufe. Von der Wiedertaufe und der Kindertaufe*, which appeared in print shortly after its dedication date, May 27, 1525.—*Z*, 4:188-337; VD 16 Z 920 & 921.

13. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 63 [between March 20 and May 27, 1525], 71f.; translated in Mira Baumgartner, *Die Täufer und Zwingli. Eine Dokumentation* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993), 113-115.

14 In his confession (before he was burned at the stake on July 27, 1525, in Lucerne) Krüsi said “der jung [Conrad] Grebell habe . . . im ein büchly bracht und anzöggt; das selb büchly sye geschriben gsin und nit [ge]trückt.”—QGTS, vol. 2, no. 354, 265; cf. Fast, “Krüsis Büchlein,” 215f.

else. In this way it eventually came to be printed in Augsburg and appeared under Krüsi's name, possibly only in the second half of 1525.¹⁵

Before he even saw Zwingli's first anti-Anabaptist pamphlet (*On Baptism, Rebaptism and Infant Baptism*), Grebel expressed the view, in a letter to Castelberger, that it was a "lying, shameful and shameless book," and that, if he did not write against it, then he would "never write again but would remain more silent and mute than a dead fish."¹⁶ Obviously, Grebel intended to take a public position against Zwingli's arguments.

In connection with the measures of the St. Gall city council against the Anabaptist movement, which had become severe in the town, Johannes Vadian composed *Writing against the Anabaptists*, which the council received on May 19, 1525.¹⁷ The St. Gall Anabaptists complained about the length of Vadian's statement and secured a delay until June 4 to submit the written statement that the council required from them.¹⁸

Zwingli dedicated his anti-Anabaptist pamphlet to the burgomaster, councilmen and the whole community of the town of St. Gall, dating it May 27, 1525.¹⁹ In this tense situation Grebel wrote a very critical letter to his brother-in-law Vadian on May 30, and announced that he would "give testimony to the truth . . . with imprisonments, exiles and the writing of a booklet, unless God should hinder it. But if I do not write in reply [against Zwingli's writing], others will not sleep."²⁰ This letter makes it clear that Grebel intended to provide written support to the St. Gall Anabaptists. In fact, there is evidence of a writing that Grebel sent to the St. Gall magistrate on this matter.²¹ The St. Gall supporters of

15. Fast writes (*ibid.*, 230f.): "Von 'Hans Krüsis Büchlein' kann man ohne Einschränkung nicht mehr schreiben. Man könnte den Titel jetzt sogar von der andern Seite her formulieren: Die Drucklegung der Bibelstellensammlung von Konrad Grebel. Aber ohne ein Fragezeichen möchte ich auch diese Überschrift nicht hinsetzen." – Cf. Strübind, *Eifriger*, 508.

16. Grebel to Andreas Castelberger (April/May 1525): "Si quid certi habes de Zinlii scriptione adversus me meosque infallibiles locos e scriptura, si licet, et si integrum tibi est, paucis ostende. Audio sub prelo esse libellum. Vis dicam? Mendaciter impudentem et impudenter mendacem libellum oportet esse. Contra quem, si non rescribo civitatem hanc lusurus, nunquam rescribam. Mortuo pisce taciturnior magisque mutus futurus." – QGTS, vol. 1, no. 63, 71f.

17. Vadian read out his *Buchlein gegen die Täufer*, which is now lost, at the negotiations before the St. Gall council on June 5, 1525. – cf. QGTS, vol. 2, no. 456, 388; and also the statements by Johannes Kessler, *Sabbata*, *ibid.*, 610.

18. QGTS, vol. 2, no. 449, 383.

19. QGTS, vol. 2, no. 451, 384f. and no. 452 (Zwingli's letter to Vadian, May 28, 1525).

20. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 70.

21. QGTS, vol. 2, no. 456, 457, 388-390; the council kept Grebel's letter, which "unziemlich ist unnd straff l[e]ibs verdient."

Anabaptism seem to have waited for his refutation of Zwingli's pamphlet.²²

In the beginning of June 1525 Grebel and Marx Boßhart were active in the territory of Grüningen in the Zurich highland. According to third-party testimony, Grebel said in a verbal confrontation with Hans Brennwald, the pastor of Hinwil, that if he were imprisoned in a tower with adequate light and had access to pen and ink, he "would write. And if he could not overcome Zwingli, they should burn him and not Zwingli."²³ From this statement one can conclude that early in July of 1525 Grebel had not yet responded to Zwingli's anti-Anabaptist pamphlet. But he still held fast to his intent to confront Zwingli in writing. Indeed, he even imagined the possibility of a decisive disputation between the two of them. On the basis of these indicators, the question remains whether Grebel, in fact, wrote this promised refutation of Zwingli's critique of the Anabaptist arguments against infant baptism.

In his exhaustive settling of accounts, *Refutation of the Tricks of the Anabaptists*, published in 1527 in a Latin tome of 190 pages, Zwingli dealt first with an Anabaptist "booklet of refutation," sent to him from Oecolampadius in Basel. This Anabaptist booklet in Swiss German—from which Zwingli cited extensive passages in Latin translation—had long been in circulation among the Anabaptists in manuscript copies.²⁴

22. According to the information in Kessler, *Sabbata*, the pastor Dominicus Zili read from Zwingli's pamphlet to a public gathering at St. Lorenz church. Then the Anabaptists present in the hall provoked a tumult (probably Gabriel Giger among others [cf. QGTS, vol. 2, no. 456, 389, n. 12]); one of them said that they awaited a writing from brother Conrad Grebel, and when it arrived they would give an answer to Zwingli's argument. In the same context the Anabaptists mentioned having a "brief von dem Cunrat Grebel an ainen bugermaister und rat," and wanted to expound from it Grebel's critique of Zwingli. The burgomaster, who was present, demanded that the letter from Grebel to him be handed over, and thus thwarted a public use of it.—cf. QGTS, vol. 2, 611. From early on Grebel seems to have used letters for the consolidation of an Anabaptist group in St. Gall. We have evidence of this approach before Sept. 1524 in the controversy between Lorenz Hochrütiner and Johannes Kessler, where there is reference to a "vierbogigen brief [von Grebel] an die Brüder."—cf. QGTS, vol. 2, 603; Kessler, *Sabbata* (1533).

23. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 84, 89; some of the witnesses said that Grebel had said, "wen man sin schreiben in truck ließe us gan, so welte er dan mit dem Zwingli dispotieren."—*ibid.*, 90.

24. Cf. Walter Köhler, "Der Verfasser des 'Libellus confutationis' in Zwinglis 'In catabaptistarum strophas elenchus' (Konrad Grebel)," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 3 (1938), 11f. Köhler's concluding finding: "Wir wissen zudem, dass Grebel gegen die Kindertaufe schreiben wollte; diese Schrift war, wie wir jetzt mit Sicherheit sagen können, der libellus confutationis. Leider scheint er im schweizerdeutschen Original verschollen." It is a merit of Baumgartner, *Täufer und Zwingli*, 138-142, to have assembled most of the passages from Grebel's writing contained in the *Elenchus*, and to have retranslated them into German.

Zwingli did not name the suspected author of this booklet, since the author was already dead.²⁵ The “booklet of refutation” still circulated ten years later among the Basel Anabaptists. When Oswald Myconius wrote to Heinrich Bullinger on June 2, 1536, enquiring about this “booklet of the Zurichers,” Bullinger responded, saying that the booklet “was written by Grebel and his gang,” and that Zwingli had answered it in his *Refutation* of 1527.²⁶

Accordingly, it is clear that the Zurich Anabaptists²⁷ responded in writing to the printed publications in which Zwingli criticized their justification of believers’ baptism, and undertook to attack his position. Apparently, however, their critique of Zwingli’s arguments was not circulated in print for many years.

CENSORSHIP OF PRESSES AND HUBMAIER’S ROLE AS PUBLICIST

There are various possible explanations for this absence of printed publications by the first Swiss Anabaptists. The first is that the Zurich Anabaptists, and their early supporters in the rural highlands and lowlands ruled by Zurich, found no printers or presses in the vicinity who were prepared to publish their writings.²⁸

This plausible assumption seems confirmed by a late statement by Zwingli in a letter to the Augsburg Diet (Aug. 27, 1530). In this letter Zwingli stated that he could bring witnesses to testify that in the two years during which the authorities in Switzerland were especially confronted with Anabaptists who taught that infants should not be baptized (likely 1525-1526), he suppressed the writings of some of them. In any case, he continued, he did this “in a friendly manner,” explaining

25. Although Conrad Grebel died in May or June 1526 in Maienfelden (Graubünden), probably of the plague, there are some indications that Zwingli assumed he was the author of the booklet. Felix Mantz was executed by drowning in the Limmat River on Jan. 5, 1527.

26. Heinrich Bullinger, *Briefwechsel* [hereafter cited as HBBW], ed. Ulrich Gäbler et al. (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973ff.), *Heinrich Bullinger, Werke*, part 2: Myconius to Bullinger (June 2, 1536), vol. 6, no. 835 (comments about the Anabaptists, ll. 42-48) and no. 841, l. 68f.: “Conscripsit tamen opusculum Grebelius una cum fece suorum, cui respondit Zuinglius in Elencho.”

27. Hearings in Feb. and March 1525 show that Felix Mantz intended to respond to Zwingli in writing as soon as Zwingli presented his arguments in writing. — cf. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 42f., 51 & no. 64, 73. After the appearance of Zwingli’s pamphlet Mantz said he was ready to respond, if the judgment over their controversy were entrusted to a “gantz gmeind.” — cf. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 87, 93.

28. E.g., Zurich, Basel or Constance.

to them that the Bible must be understood differently in the scriptural texts that they cited.²⁹

In the beginning of 1528 the exercise of such a strict press censorship is confirmed through the prosecution of the printer in Speyer who published Christoph Freisleben's *On the Genuine Baptism of John, Christ and the Apostles*.³⁰ There are also statements by Ludwig Hätzer about the difficulties he encountered in getting his books published.³¹ This is confirmed by a comment Zwingli made in the course of the Marburg Disputation of 1529 in his discussions with Philip Melancthon. According to Bullinger's *Reformation History*, Zwingli cited his successful effort to block the publication of Hätzer's *About Christ* as proof of his own orthodoxy.³²

But these obstacles were higher in 1527 and 1528 than they were in 1525, the year of Anabaptist beginnings, when printers in the somewhat distant imperial cities of Augsburg and Strasbourg were entirely ready and willing to publish Anabaptist writings. An impressive example of this can be seen in Balthasar Hubmaier, the "Anabaptist publicist" par excellence in this year.

This observation suggests another possible explanation for the lack of Anabaptist publishing among the Swiss Anabaptists during these early years: namely, that their fundamental agreement with Hubmaier meant that his publications met the initial need among the Swiss Anabaptists for a polemical defense.

An older tradition of scholarship has argued that the Zurich Anabaptists like Grebel, Mantz, Blaurock and Reublin "sought and found their literary champion in Hubmaier."³³ More recent studies

29. Z, 6:238, cited according to Baumgartner, *Täufer und Zwingli*, 91f.

30. Laube, *Flugschriften*, 2:862-882; [Speyer: Jacob Schmidt], 1528 (VD 16 F2630); cf. also Helmut Claus, "Astrologische Flugschriften von Johannes Virdung und Balthasar Eißlinger d. Ä als 'Leitfossilien' des Speyerer Buchdrucks der Jahre 1514 bis 1540," *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 54 (2001), 111-155, esp. 119.

31. In Hätzer's preface to his edition of the apocryphal books *Baruch der Prophet, die Historie Susannah, and die Historie Bel zu Babel* [Worms: Peter Schöffler, Jr., 1528 (VD 16 B3727)], he writes: "Der Satan wirt sich vnderstehen alle Schlupffwinckel zuo verschliessen das weder ich noch andere platz haben mögen/ weder diß noch jehns zuo verantworten oder zuo schreiben. Jnn Gottes nammen/ Gott kann es wol mit wuocher erstatten. Bleibet es schon gar vnderwegen/ so wirt sich eyn ieder schuoler Christi der predig deß Lambs Gottes/ götlichs samens/ inn aller menschen hertzen gelegt/ . . . be[g]nügen lassen/ ob schon keyn buochstab inn ewigkeyt nimmer/ weder getruckt noch geschrieben würd" (f. 2r).

32. Goeters, *Hätzer*, 142.

33. Johann Loserth, Hubmaier's biographer, *Mennonitisches Lexikon* (Frankfurt a. M. & Weierhof: C. Hege, 1937), 2:355.

identify Hubmaier as a university-schooled theologian “who moved from the Roman church by way of the Lutheran and Zwinglian movements to the Anabaptists,” and attribute to him the “polemical and systematic power” needed “to bring the new understanding of baptism into discussion in an organized presentation.”³⁴ The view that—given the absence of writings by Grebel, Mantz and Blaurock—“the task fell to Balthasar Hubmaier” to write and publish “works in defense of adult baptism” has persisted.³⁵ Most recently Arnold Snyder advanced the interpretation that it is highly likely that Hubmaier’s first two Anabaptist pamphlets³⁶ were “a further development of ideas of the Grebel circle in Zurich . . . developed in dialogue with Grebel himself,” particularly on the basis of documented contacts between Grebel and Hubmaier.³⁷

To be sure, there is no proof for this interesting contention that the first Swiss Anabaptists regarded Hubmaier as the publicist of their cause, or recognized him as such after he produced Anabaptist publications in 1525. In the middle of January 1525 Grebel was well enough informed to report that Hubmaier was “against Zwingli on the matter of baptism and will write against him if he does not back away. Others will do the same.”³⁸ Nevertheless, sometime between the middle of July and the end of September 1525, Grebel authored his own “booklet of refutation” against Zwingli. At Hubmaier’s request Grebel came to Waldshut (probably in September 1525) for a discussion with him.³⁹ Thereafter, before his flight from Waldshut at the beginning of December 1525, Hubmaier composed his own refutation of Zwingli’s pamphlet on

34. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Die Täufer. Geschichte und Deutung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1980), 85.

35. C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology. An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995), 55, 63, n. 13.

36. *Summe eines christlichen Lebens*, July 1, 1525 (Augsburg: Melchior Ramminger) cf. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer: Balthasar Hubmaier Schriften*, ed. Gunar Westin and Torsten Bergsten (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1962) [hereafter QGT, vol. 9], 109-15 (VD 16 H5648); *Von dem christlichen Tauf der Gläubigen*. July 11, 1525 (Strasbourg: Matthias Schürer Erben), cf. QGT, vol. 9, 118-63 (VD 16 H5651).

37. C. Arnold Snyder, “The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism, 1520-1530,” *MQR* 80 (Oct. 2006), 558f. In n. 228, p. 559, Snyder takes issue with the conclusion of John Howard Yoder that “even after his turning to Anabaptism, we hear little of Hubmaier’s relationship to the other Anabaptist leaders.”—Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2004), 41.

38. Letter of Grebel to Vadian, Jan. 14, 1525.—QGT, vol. 1, no. 23, 33; *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism. The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, ed. Leland Harder (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1985), 332.

39. Letter of Jakob Hottinger (who accompanied Grebel to Waldshut) to the Zurich Council.—cf. QGT, vol. 1, no. 113, 113.

baptism.⁴⁰ Yet despite the good connections between Hubmaier and the Zurich Anabaptists—including Wilhelm Reublin and Heini Aberli—there does not seem to have been a uniform publication strategy against Zwingli. Naturally that does not exclude a community of interest between them, particularly in the second half of 1525. In the middle of 1526, after his flight from Waldshut, Hubmaier sought refuge among the Anabaptists in Zurich in the house of Heini Aberli, and he expressed praise for them in the preface to his *Dialogue with Ulrich Zwingli's Baptism Book*.⁴¹

ANABAPTIST STRATEGIES FOR SPREADING THEIR MESSAGE

Several statements by Ulrich Zwingli are also informative in clarifying the absence of publications by the Zurich Anabaptists. In his publication offensive against the Zurich Anabaptists (from *On Baptism, Rebaptism and Infant Baptism*, late May 1525, to *Refutation of the Tricks of the Anabaptists* in August 1527) Zwingli mostly targeted their teachings that circulated by word of mouth or in manuscripts.

In *On Baptism* he reproached them for using the Bible only if they were able to access it in their concordance booklets.⁴² And, in fact, in the case of the only Swiss Anabaptist writing that appeared in print in 1525 under the name of Krüsi, we have a collection of selected Bible passages pertaining to the two main themes of “faith” and “baptism.” Zwingli’s caustic remark mirrors a situation that Andrea Strübind explains in a convincing manner:

In the first instance, the Anabaptist missionaries did not encounter their Reformed opponents in the matter of baptism but a population brought up in the old faith. For these people it was necessary, first of all, to explain the concept of Reformation faith. . . . Accordingly the first part of the baptism book [of Krüsi] was a tract of instruction

40. Hubmaier complained in his *Gespräch auf Zwinglis Taufbüchlein* (mostly composed in Nov. 1525 in Waldshut, but only printed in mid-1526 in Nikolsburg) that he had long wanted to bring this writing before the public: “. . . bin ich doch durch den Satan allenthalb in den Truckereyen verhindert worden, vnnd auch sunst durch grosse hörtigkeit vnnd marter der schwerer gefencknuß, so ich (. . .), zuo Zürich erliten.”—cf. QGT, vol. 9, 168. In May 1526, and possibly in June, Hubmaier resided in Augsburg. It is not clear to me why he did not publish the basically completed writing there. In 1526 Hans Denck, who by that time was a known Anabaptist, had three writings published in Augsburg.—cf. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer: Hans Denck Schriften: Bibliographie*, ed. Georg Baring (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1955), vol. 6/1, A I. a [VD 16 D569], A II. b [VD 16 D562] and A III. a [VD 16 D570].

41. Cf. QGT, vol. 9, 169f.

42. Z, 4: 305.

in the Reformation teaching about faith. Hence its “Sitz im Leben” was one of missionary proclamation and instruction rather than an apologetic [about baptism] within the Reformation camp.⁴³

In his *Refutation* Zwingli asserted in the middle of 1527 that the first “trick” (*strophä*) of the Anabaptists was that they put their own writings into circulation only in secret, knowing that these could not stand up when exposed to the light of day. They did not permit their “booklet” to reach the hands of anyone other than their supporters.⁴⁴ In this case, too, Zwingli’s assertion can be explained with the particular form of missionary propaganda practiced by the itinerant Anabaptist preachers. On the one hand, the copied manuscript texts that were distributed among the brothers and sisters were not mass-produced products like printed pamphlets, but valuable and worth preserving. Presumably, they were, above all, a collection of proof texts, well suited for use in oral discussion in small groups and assemblies.⁴⁵ On the other hand, if such booklets, copied and circulated by hand, contained arguments for debate with theologically-schooled opponents, then it was wise to hold them back as long as possible, so as to make best use of the “surprise effect” in direct debate.

How might we picture this newly-emerging form of Anabaptist missionary propaganda during the opening years of the movement in 1525-1526? Jacob Groß, the furrier from Waldshut, is a good example of the sort of itinerant missionary activity inspired by the biblical model of the apostles.⁴⁶ Groß was won for the movement by Conrad Grebel early

43 Strübind, *Eifriger*, 493f.

44. Z, 6: 31. “Haec ergo prima strophä sit, quod sua ista scripta, quae per conscientiam cauterio adustam non ignorant lucem proferre nequire, clam per manus coniuuratorum, qui ut ignorantia lusciosi sunt, sic adfectu ampliandae sectae caeci, transmittunt. In aliorum manus pervenire non sinunt.” — Cf. *Selected Works of Ulrich Zwingli*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, [1901], 1972), 132.

45. Snyder, “Birth and Evolution,” 590, remarks on the submission of the Anabaptists Jacob Falk and Heini Reimann: “[they] composed a petition on the question of baptism, in which they put forward a reasoned biblical apology for adult baptism [QGTS, vol. 1, no. 212], in spite of the fact that their New Testament had been taken from them. The committing to memory of central Bible passages displayed by the uneducated commoners Falk and Reimann was actually the norm in early Swiss Anabaptism, and points to the oral methods of catechism used by the baptizers.” On this point cf. C. Arnold Snyder, “Orality, Literacy, and the Study of Anabaptism,” *MQR* 65 (Oct. 1991), 371-392.

46. Cf. Christian Neff, “Jakob Groß,” *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, 2:187f.; Snyder, “Birth and Evolution,” 600f.; *Profiles of Anabaptist Women. Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder and Linda Huebert Hecht (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 25-31; material on Agnes Zender of Aarau, with inclusion of data on Jacob Groß, can be followed in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz*, vol. 3: *Aargau – Bern – Solothurn*, ed. Martin Haas (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2008), 23-31.

on, and baptized by Hubmaier in Waldshut.⁴⁷ Together with Ulrich Teck he had to leave town because both of them refused to participate in the military actions undertaken by Waldshut and the town's allies in the Peasants' War.⁴⁸ In September 1525 Groß and Teck were arrested, interrogated and exiled from Zurich territories because they had recruited and baptized in the Grüningen region.⁴⁹ In late 1525 and early 1526 Groß was active in the territory of Aargau, and he was imprisoned in Brugg at the end of February 1526.⁵⁰ In his hearings Groß reproached the local pastors for their unorthodox and selfish preaching; if they really were good evangelicals they would follow the Gospel model and travel about preaching God's word. In contrast to him and his ilk—who were called by God to itinerate, preaching the word according to the Gospel, content with receiving food—they were possessed by a spirit of fear, avarice and selfishness.⁵¹ In Aarau Groß found shelter in connection with work to support himself. While there he took advantage of a group of men and women gathered for spinning and weaving to discuss biblical and Anabaptist topics, and he administered the Lord's Supper with the words of Paul (I Cor. 11) in a congregation that met in the home of a sick woman in the neighborhood. After his expulsion from the territories of Bern, Groß worked in Lahr in Baden.⁵² Following his imprisonment there he was active in Strasbourg where, starting in the summer of 1526, he baptized newcomers. In his Strasbourg hearing, his apostolic sense of mission was clearly evident. Groß reproached the Strasbourgers, saying that after four years of the preaching of the Gospel and word of God so

47. In his Augsburg hearing from the middle of Sept. 1527, Groß says that he first concerned himself with the issue of baptism three-and-a-half years earlier, hence in April or May 1524. He also says that he was won for the Anabaptist movement by Grebel and baptized in Waldshut by Hubmaier, hence no earlier than the middle of April 1525.—Christian Meyer, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer in Oberschwaben," *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Schwaben und Neuburg* 1 (1874), 254f.

48. In his Strasbourg hearing, at the end of 1526 or beginning of 1527 (?), Groß said that he "abscheiden müssen [from Waldshut] vmb das willen, daß er nit mit inen [the Waldshut troops] haben wollen zu den buren gen Zell [Radolfzell] to ziehen. . . ."—*Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer: Stadt Straßburg, 1522-1532*, ed. Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann 1959) [hereafter QGT, vol. 7], no. 64, 63f. Waldshut's help in the siege of Radolfzell took place in June 1525.—*Ibid.*, fn. 3. In the hearing Groß also said "er sey vor zweyen jaren getaufft worden zu Walßhut," which creates difficulties for the dating of the Strasbourg hearing.—*Ibid.*, 64, l. 12f.

49. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 107, esp. 109. At their expulsion from Zurich territory Groß and Teck refused to swear the required oath.—*Ibid.*, no. 238, 261.

50. QGTS, vol. 1, no. 239, esp. 263.

51. *Ibid.* In this statement the model of the apostles as wandering preachers (cf. esp. Mt. 10: 9f.) is clearly made the basis of his criticism of the Evangelical preachers.

52. Cf. the statement of Hans Huber from Lahr that "Jacob der kürßner habe jhn daselbst getauffet."—QGT, vol. 7, no. 117, 144.

little fruit had been brought forth among them that people who called themselves Christians would throw people like him and his fellow prisoners into the tower without giving them a hearing or convincing them of their so-called errors with Scriptural proofs. He was not afraid, because not a hair on his head could be touched unless it was the will of God (cf. Mt. 10: 30f). He had already renounced his property; and, if it was God's will, he was ready now to abandon his body: "the Christian manner was none other than to be exiled from countries and to bear the cross in the manner of the apostles." In the same hearing, with reference to Matthew 5: 34, Groß declined to swear an oath, and asked "to be given pen and ink in the tower, so that he might write down a statement and teaching from the testament and sign it to improve his situation."⁵³ He thus appeared to be ready to commit his thoughts to writing when it served the purpose of his own defense or protection while in prison. After his expulsion from Strasbourg, Groß found his way to Augsburg. There he baptized at Easter 1527 and, with his wife Veronica,⁵⁴ joined the Anabaptist congregation. He was imprisoned on September 15, 1527 and was released only at the end of June 1531, after almost four years of imprisonment.

The tangible connection between Swiss and South German Anabaptism that we see in the case of Groß is also apparent in the missionary activities practiced by Anabaptists in these two regions.⁵⁵ Hans Hut, too, was an itinerant missionary who consciously used

53. QGT, vol. 7, no. 67, 64f. This request by Groß is reminiscent of expressions of Grebel in the debate, mentioned above, with pastor Brennwald of Hinwil. It seems as though the writing down of their views and teachings could only take place when their usual itinerant preaching activity was interrupted by a period of imprisonment. Paul seems to have been the "apostolic model" for this, as when, for instance, he wrote to the Ephesians from his imprisonment (cf. Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). It is difficult to prove whether or not the handwritten explanations of oath refusal preserved in Strasbourg actually go back to Groß, as was suspected by the Strasbourg archivist Jakob Wencker II (1668-1743).—QGT, vol. 7, no. 165, 192-194. However, the manuscript folio on oath refusal is evidence of the sort of booklets that circulated in Anabaptist circles, combining relevant Bible texts and aids to argument.

54. Groß's wife, Veronika Albrechtin, was imprisoned on April 12, 1528. She stated in a hearing on April 30: "vor dreien jahren . . . durch einen, genant Wilhelm [Reublin?] getauft worden zu sein"; moreover, she "irs man 2 buecher verkaufft, benamblich die [Worms] propheten . . .; das ander buch ist ein klein testament gewesen. . . ."—Cf. Friedrich Roth, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer in Oberschwaben," *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Schwaben und Neuburg* 28 [1901], 66-69.

55. For Snyder, "Birth and Evolution," (e. g. p. 618, n. 35) the example of Groß showed that at this time there was no confrontation between Swiss and South German Anabaptists in Augsburg. He holds the opinion that extreme typological differences between the two groups are misleading, and that Swiss and South German Anabaptists were a good deal more permeable than has been previously argued.

epistles or distributed copies of his works.⁵⁶ Hut's only published writing, which appeared anonymously (*A Christian Instruction on How the Holy Scripture Should be Harmonized and Appraised*), was not printed by him, but by someone else without his knowledge.⁵⁷ Hut distributed none of his writings in print, although before his activity as an Anabaptist he had traveled around as a bookbinder and bookseller and had contacts with printers.⁵⁸ In one of his hearings, Hut mentioned the apostolic model for decisions that were taken in the Augsburg congregation: in the spring of 1527 the brothers resolved to choose a leader "who would preside over them as in apostolic times; hence they prayed to God and drew lots (cf. Acts 1: 26), and the lot fell on Sigmund [Salminger], that he should be their leader."⁵⁹ Further, those attending the Augsburg Anabaptist meeting on August 20-24, 1527, decided to send Anabaptist brothers into various regions and cities to propagate Anabaptist standpoints and teachings—again according to the example of the apostles (cf. Acts 15: 22-35).⁶⁰

ANABAPTIST PROPAGANDA: HANDCOPIED, MEMORIZED WORDS

Naturally the two possibilities of explaining the absence of publications by the early Swiss Anabaptist movement—censorship of presses and Hubmaier's role as the publicist of early Anabaptism—should not be entirely dismissed. But beside such factors, in view of the strong orientation toward spreading Anabaptist views and teachings by means of an "apostolic itinerant mission," the early Swiss leaders were

56. About the copies of Hut's *roten Büchlein* and his writing *Von Geheimnis der Taufe*, cf. Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe. Werk, Leben, und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), 50-53.

57. It was edited at the beginning of 1527 by Johannes Landtsperger; the writing *Ein Sendbrief Han Huts* was commented on and edited by Urbanus Rhegius in the summer of 1528 after Hut's death in Dec. 1527 in an attempt to escape from prison.—Cf. Laube, *Flugschriften*, 687-701, 858-861.

58. In his hearing Hut said that he had gotten a small book from Müntzer in order to get it printed, and also that, besides books by Müntzer, he had carried around and sold all kinds of other books in Franconia and other places.—Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 525.

59. Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 517.

60. In a letter of Sept. 20, 1527, sent by Augsburg to Strasbourg, seeking information about Jacob Groß, then imprisoned in Augsburg, his statement from an interrogation was reproduced: "das sie [the persons assembled in the Anabaptist meeting in Augsburg] von hynnen [Augsburg] aus zu den bruedern gen Basel und in Zurcher gepiet geschicht haben." Groß mentioned as messengers Hans Denck, Gregor Maler from Chur, Ulrich Trechsel and Hans Beck from Basel.—QGT, vol. 7, no. 104, 129. From the first hearing in Augsburg of Hans Hut the information was received that Trechsel and Peter Scheppach went to Worms, Leonhard [Dorfbrunner] to Linz, Jörg from Passau to Franconia, Hänslin [Mittermeier] to Austria and Leonhard [Spörle] to Bavaria.—Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 518f.

primarily concerned with preparing biblical aids to assist in the instruction and reinforcement of faith commitments among new believers, especially simple laypeople. A process of communication that took place chiefly by word of mouth gradually emerged that linked Anabaptist congregations in various places. Above all, spreading their teachings by copying manuscripts gave the Swiss Brethren a manageable means of transmitting beliefs to initiated followers, who in turn could multiply handwritten copies. These handwritten writings were not designed for mass appeal or for literary polemic against the so-called *Schriftgelehrten* – highly educated biblical scholars. Here we find a clear distinction between the early Swiss Anabaptist leaders and the academic manner of their opponents, who expressed their Reformation standpoints through printed publications intended for mass circulation.

Accordingly, the absence of Swiss Anabaptist publications, particularly in 1525 and 1526, can be attributed to the conscious preferences by the leaders of charismatic preaching of the word as the primary means of missionary activity. Moreover, this approach was deepened by congregational Bible exegesis and an exchange of ideas about specific central themes that were communicated by epistles and handwritten copies passed from person to person. The Swiss Brethren preferred this particular form of Anabaptist propaganda, first of all, as an expression of the apostolic model⁶¹ and, second, because of its clear distinction from the academic approach to Scripture taken by opponents (*Schriftgelehrten*) who produced printed books. This direction, apparently chosen by the first Swiss Brethren, became increasingly distinct under the pressure of early persecution.

(translated by James M. Stayer)

61. The hearing in Jan. 1526 of the baker Heini Aberli, one of the early members of the Zurich Anabaptist group, shows how much these people imagined themselves in a situation similar to the book of Acts in the New Testament. Aberli said “. . . als er mit dem [Uli] Hottinger gen Waldshut gangenn, redtind [sie] allerley von miteinanderen, und wie sy zu einem brunnen kemind, do spreche Hottinger: ‘Wer ist mir davor, das ich nit toufft wird, oder wer will mir das wasser werenn?’ Da spreche er: ‘Was wit mit dem wasser thun?’ Da spreche er, das er toufft wurde. Da redet er: ‘Gloupst im hertzen?’ Da erzalte er im den glauben, fiele nieder uff die knüw und bette inn . . . durch gots willen, das er inn touffte. Das thete er.” –QGST, vol. 1, no. 157, 161f. The baptismal scene is patterned on that of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip (Acts 8: 26-40). –Strübind, *Eifriger*, 442.