Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic Theology as Depicted in the Writings of German Anabaptist Leader Pilgram Marpeck (1495–1556)

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The object of my dissertation is to ascertain what conception of Catholic, Lutheran and Zwinglian theology the sixteenth century German Anabaptist lay theologian Pilgram Marpeck has. I am interested in discovering what he finds objectionable in their teaching, and also whether there is any common ground between him and them. I intend to learn whether Marpeck deserves his relatively peaceful reputation, and also whether his theology develops over time. I anticipate possible problems with language: theologians of the Reformation tend to use a robust, often provocative style, which may or may not be a mere rhetorical device, rather than an accurate reflection of their exact thoughts. I also anticipate problems with understanding the world view of Christians of those times, the conception of the role of the individual in society and the importance of the concept of Christendom. As regards a working hypothesis, I do expect to find some common ground, especially between Marpeck and Zwingli, and that Marpeck’s reputation as a peacemaker is deserved.

My method has been to study Marpeck’s writings, translated into modern English. Some material is available in book form, some online. I have used the analyses of various Swiss, English and Finnish researchers to shed further light on Marpeck’s thought. I have also needed to resort to more general histories of the period, especially of the Anabaptists, for factual information. I have concentrated mainly on the topics of baptism, communion and secular authority in the theology of the above Christian groupings, as Marpeck understood them. I have also covered other aspects of Christian belief and practice more briefly. Of course Marpeck’s presentation of his own Anabaptist thinking on these topics has further elucidated his opinions of these other Christians’ teachings on them. My research overlaps with the field of systematic theology, but the specific events of those years (c1528-1556), and how they affect Marpeck’s thinking, provide a historical dimension. I have needed to keep in mind any differences between how Marpeck understands, for example, Lutheran theology and how Lutherans understand it. I have consulted works on the theology of these groupings for further information.

The results of my research show that Marpeck does not share much common ground with the above mentioned groupings. What common ground there is he does not emphasise, but instead focuses on the significant differences that there are between them. His own starting point is sometimes so far from that of his opponents that he does not always grasp what their starting point is. This leads to several misconceptions on his part of the teachings of these other Christians. I have not discovered any particular developments in his theology over the years. His frequent use of provocative language leads me to the conclusion that he does not deserve his reputation as a peacemaker. Despite this, when one allows for his lack of formal training, he is a skillful, convincing writer of theology, as well as clearly a man of great integrity.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Object of research

The subject of my master’s dissertation is the significant sixteenth century German Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck’s\(^1\) conception of Lutheranism, Zwinglianism and Catholicism. Marpeck, (c.1495–1556), is known for his writings on Anabaptism and Spiritualism, but his opinions on those main groupings in the Church are less familiar. He did however explain how Catholic, Lutheran and Zwinglian views on theological issues were in his mind mistaken by comparing them with his Anabaptist views. I would like to find out what Marpeck disagreed with them about, what he drew particular attention to in their theology (and whether these topics were particularly important to Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and the Catholic Church\(^2\)) and also whether he agreed with them about anything. I would like to ascertain what these large, mainstream groupings within the Church looked like in the eyes of this non-mainstream theologian. Marpeck has the reputation of being a moderate and respectable peacemaker in the extremely polemic world of the Reformation, who sincerely tried to understand the beliefs of other Protestants\(^3\) better: I will investigate to what extent he deserved this reputation by analyzing the language he used in his letters and other writings.

I believe this topic is worthy of research because the better a modern Christian understands the differences, and similarities, between the various Christian groupings of the 1500s, the better they will understand the differences and also common ground between today’s churches, and the better they will be able to co-operate in matters of ecumenism. Analysing what was considered worthy of debate in the past gives one a fresh perspective as to what is worthy of debate today, and helps one to form a clearer opinion as to what differences

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\(^1\) Also spelt “Marbeck” in some sources.
\(^2\) Marpeck was writing at a time when all West European Christians considered themselves as belonging to the Catholic Church. Referring to only certain Western Christians as “Catholic” can therefore be misleading. For this reason I shall refer to what we understand as Catholics as “the Old Church”, “the medieval Church”, “the Western Church”, as “Papists” or sometimes “Catholics”, depending on the context. “Papist” is the term Marpeck (and other reformers) normally used; I have used it frequently merely in order to reflect their usage, and bring the reader closer to their mindset.
\(^3\) The word “Protestant” means different things to people in different times and places. I use it in a broad sense to refer to any and every Christian grouping that disagreed with the Western, ie. Catholic Church during the Reformation, including Lutherans, Zwinglians, Spiritualists, other Anabaptists etc. The terms “Protestant” and “Evangelicals” were already gradually coming into use, but “Reform Church” came later.
today’s churches can settle and what differences may remain outstanding. A wide range of issues have divided opinion in the church(es) throughout Christian history, from whether to allow apostates back into the church to the question of women priests. I will be concentrating mainly on the issues that Marpeck saw as key: the meaning of baptism and communion and the relationship between Christians and secular power. It is also important to research “losers’” history anyway: most history is after all written by the “winners”. The winners, in this case the Lutherans, Zwinglians and the Catholics branded the Anabaptists as dangerous heretics; only by reading the losers’ writings can the modern reader make up their mind as to what the Anabaptists really believed in. It is interesting to note that some Anabaptist beliefs would not be considered radical at all nowadays. It is also worth bearing in mind that the free churches, including the Baptists and Pentecostals, with their hundreds of millions of followers, were indirectly inspired by the Anabaptists. So the latter were by no means “losers” in the long run.

I am approaching this topic mainly by studying Marpeck’s own words, by analyzing his writings, most of which have been translated into modern English in the book The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, edited by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen. I will look at what he wrote on topics such as baptism and how he explained other Western Christians’ views on these topics, generally in comparison with or rather in contrast to his own views. He never apparently wrote directly to Luther, Zwingli or any leading Catholic theologians of that time, but he did refer to their beliefs in works intended for others, such as for Anabaptists or Spiritualists (or Spirituals), as well as in discussion and correspondence with leading Protestant theologian Martin Bucer. I will need to familiarize myself with Marpeck’s writing style as well as consider why he left some things unsaid. Other linguistic matters may also cause difficulties.

Sometimes Marpeck was able to write in peace and safety, at other times he feared persecution or exile. Often he wrote in direct response to a fellow Anabaptist’s question or to a challenge from an opponent of his. I will need to ascertain to what extent his writings were for public use. I will look for possible inconsistencies: his theology may have changed over the almost thirty years of his “career” as an Anabaptist apologist. He also lived and wrote in a somewhat different Europe from the Europe of today. Religion aroused people’s interests and emotions far more strongly than today, knowledge of science was quite
different from today, knowledge of the rest of the world was limited and people’s attitudes to such diverse matters as individual choice and the end of the world were quite different from today. The reader too will need to be wary of looking at Marpeck’s writings from a too modern perspective. At the same time, one should not overemphasise these cultural and historical differences. Religion has a timeless appeal, and theological texts written in the 1500s (or in the 100s for that matter) are often every bit as fresh and directly relevant to the reader now as they were then.

There are numerous secondary sources that provide background information on Marpeck and the Anabaptist movement, such as the Mennonitisches Lexikon online, the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, and books and articles by Jan Kiwiet, Päivi Räisänen-Schröder and Stephen Boyd. Most deal with Anabaptism itself or the debate at that time between the Anabaptists and Spiritualists. Kiwiet, who mainly researched Marpeck’s *Explanation of the Testaments (Testamentserleuterung)* however, makes at least some comparisons of Marpeck’s theology with that of Luther and Zwingli in his *Pilgram Marpeck: Sein Kreis und seine Theologie*. Some researchers have concentrated on Marpeck’s life in general (for example, Stephen Boyd’s *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology*) or on his theology. His views on the main churches have received little attention from scholars. Most of what he wrote was indeed either a defence of his brand of Anabaptism or an attack on other versions of Anabaptism or on the Spiritualists. What he wrote about Lutheranism, Zwinglianism or on Catholic teachings has to the best of my knowledge not been researched in depth before.

The main texts I have selected for analysis are Pilgram Marpeck’s *Confession (Rechenschaft seines Glaubens, 1532)*, the *Admonition (Vermahnung, 1542)*, and *Exposé of the Babylonian Whore (Aufdeckung der Babylonischen Hure, 1531)*, as well as several letters. The *Confession* came at the end of his time in Strassburg (nowadays Strasbourg), and was his defence against the accusations of “misleading the citizens” that had been laid against him. It was aimed mainly at Bucer, leader of what became the Reformed church in Strassburg at the time. In it Marpeck sets out clearly his defence of the practice of believers’ baptism in contrast to the infant baptism practiced by other groupings in the Church. The *Admonition* was an altogether longer document, in fact the longest document on

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the Anabaptist view of baptism and communion. It was actually based on an older
text which was reworked by Marpeck and his followers. The Exposé, whose title
reflects Luther’s On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520), was a
provocative text in which he attacked both Protestants and Spiritualists, especially
for resorting to the use of the sword. It was written during his last year in
Strassburg, when he was under pressure to conform to the beliefs of the
Protestants of that city. The Explanation mentioned earlier is a massive biblical
concordance that focuses mainly on the relationship between the Old and New
Testaments. It is aimed mainly at proving the Spiritualists wrong. I will give
further information on these texts where necessary.

I will continue this dissertation by giving the reader basic background facts
about Central Europe in the 1500s and about the Reformation, the Anabaptists in
particular. I will then narrate the events of Pilgram Marpeck’s life and describe
the main points of his theology, before turning to the more specific topics of this
dissertation. I have tried to use terminology that is as appropriate as possible to
the sixteenth century context, while at the same time being understandable to the
modern reader. There were no “church denominations” in Western and Central
Europe in those days, but rather there was The Church, ie. the Catholic Church,
and the various Protestant groupings functioning still within the Church. These
groups were trying to return to what they saw as a purer form of the Church,
untainted by changes made in the Middle Ages. It only became possible to talk of
separate churches to a limited extent after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 (see also
2.2 and 5.1). The term “Anabaptist” is pejorative to its followers, but there is no
real alternative in English, unlike in German (Täufer) or in Finnish (kastaja).
“Baptist” would of course refer to a quite different, much more recent
denomination, which did, however, have its roots in Anabaptism. Still, there is
nothing unusual or even unsuitable in using possibly pejorative or misleading
terms to refer to different Christian groups and denominations. They were often
originally labelled by their opponents, the label stuck and came to be used by that
group or nascent church themselves. Martin Luther would surely have been
shocked to find out that the denomination that follows his doctrines is still named
after him in some countries, but the name is not a problem among Lutherans;
likewise there is surely far more spirituality, piety and devotion in Methodism
than this rather dull name given to them suggests.
1.2 The Reformation in Central Europe

Pilgram Marpeck was a leading figure in the Anabaptist movement which swept through Central Europe during the Reformation. He could loosely be described as a German, since German was his mother tongue. In fact, he was from the Tyrol, which belonged to The Holy Roman Empire. This was the most important state in Central Europe at that time, and consisted roughly of the modern states and districts of Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Alsace, northern Italy, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. The Emperor, Charles V of Habsburg (1500–1558), also ruled Spain and its enormous empire, but was rather weaker in Central Europe than the size of his territories might suggest. In fact, he ruled “Germany” - as I shall loosely refer to the German-speaking parts of Central Europe that were under his control - through a regent, his brother King Ferdinand.

Ferdinand was not able to impose his will directly on his subjects in the way that, for example, King Gustavus Vasa of Sweden or Henry VIII of England was able to. The rulers of the various principalities, duchies, bishoprics and imperial cities of the Empire enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and were willing and able to defy the King or Emperor if they so chose. Note how Martin Luther was able to escape the imperial authorities when Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony hid him from them in 1521. More significantly for Marpeck, the imperial city of Strassburg was able to pursue a policy of remarkable tolerance in religious matters during the 1520s and 1530s, relatively free of interference from the staunchly Catholic Ferdinand or Charles. It welcomed just such radical reformers as Marpeck, who may have had nowhere else to go. There was also one German-speaking state that more or less ran its own affairs, while still being nominally part of the Empire: Switzerland. It had only gained its autonomy as recently as 1499, but wasted no time in flexing its political and military muscles. Switzerland was to play a major role in the Reformation and particularly in the development of the Anabaptist movement, and was one of several regions in which the much-travelled Marpeck lived.

The 1500s were an extremely tense and vibrant time, which must surely have had an effect on the religious debates and conflicts of that period, producing more numerous radical movements than other periods have produced. Marpeck’s key Strassburg years roughly coincided with the victory of the Ottoman Turks in

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5 Hill 2007, 252.
6 MacCulloch 2003, 50.
Hungary (1526) and the siege of Vienna (1529). The Muslim Ottoman Empire seemed to threaten not just Central Europe but the whole of Christendom. Was God using the “infidel” to punish his errant flock? There was a widespread fear of the imminent end of the world, so the question of reforming the Church, or at least “returning” to true Christian practice, was an urgent one. The events and writings of the Reformation should always be looked at in the light of this ongoing high tension.

The Reformation began in 1517, when Martin Luther (1483–1546) of Wittenberg, Saxony, called numerous theological issues and ecclesiastical practices into question, including the sale of indulgences, the Church’s role as intermediary between man and God, corruption, clerical celibacy and the very raison d’être of the powerful and influential system of monasteries. The questions he asked did not lead to a mere academic debate but to direct confrontation and bitter hostility between those who supported and those who opposed reform. Many of those involved were ordinary people, who held strong feelings about the issues under debate. Many were poor and downtrodden and resented the powerful and wealthy Church leadership. It was not long before the reformers themselves were divided into different camps. As the Church hierarchy refused to agree to his demands, an increasingly isolated Luther had to turn to the princes of the Empire for support, in other words, to secular power. Thus the Reformation took on a political dimension in this “Magisterial Reformation” as princes endorsed it or rejected it as much for political reasons as theological. This relationship between secular power and Christians was one of the key issues addressed by Marpeck in his writings.

Meanwhile, some were taking the Reformation much further; in Switzerland in the early 1520s the Leutpriester (lit. “people’s priest”) at Zürich Grossmünster, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), challenged the Church directly on the questions of fasting, use of images and the real presence of Christ in Communion. Like Germany, Switzerland was divided between pro-reform (“Protestant”) and anti-reform (“Catholic”) regions, and the theology of leaders like Zwingli had an influence well beyond its borders. He also questioned the validity of infant baptism, which became the most important issue of all for the Anabaptists.

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8 Räisänen-Schröder 2009, 38.
Marpeck himself wrote extensively on the question of the real presence in communion and on infant baptism.

At the same time, further west, Strassburg developed into a hotbed of Protestant fervor, where reformers of numerous groups rubbed shoulders. Martin Bucer (1491–1551) implemented the city’s moderate reformation and on the whole managed to keep the peace between the different groups.\textsuperscript{10} There were several radical groups, notably the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists, whom Marpeck wrote to and about frequently. The Spiritualists had tapped into the deep reservoir of medieval mysticism which emphasised the importance of the immaterial, ie. the spiritual, over the material. Personal devotion had grown in importance at the expense of liturgy. The Spiritualists radically opposed the material in religion, such as the sacraments, not to mention church art and holy relics, which indeed many other Protestants opposed. Reformers such as Luther and Zwingli also underlined the importance of the spiritual, but took pains to distance themselves from the Spiritualists, whom they dismissed as fanatics\textsuperscript{11}. Nor did they necessarily bother to differentiate between the Spiritualists and the Anabaptists, who did share some things in common.\textsuperscript{12} The Spiritualists are not, however, part of this dissertation, as Marpeck’s relations with them have already been researched in some detail.

\section*{1.3 The Anabaptists}

Anabaptism started in Switzerland in 1525 and spread to many parts of Central Europe. Key centres of Anabaptist activity were Zurich, Strassburg, Augsburg, Moravia, Emden and Münster in northern Germany, and Holland. Marpeck became an Anabaptist in Tyrol in about 1527. These radical Christians took the Reformation even further than Zwingli, whom they briefly looked on as one of their own. To an outsider the Anabaptists might seem to have much in common with other Protestants in that they opposed the Catholic Church on many issues and were united on such theological themes as the primacy of Scripture. However, the differences are at least as striking as the similarities. In Kiwiet’s words, with the Reformers and the Anabaptists it was a case of two different worlds coming up against each other.\textsuperscript{13} They were considered successors of Luther’s Reformation

\textsuperscript{10} MacCulloch 2003, 180.
\textsuperscript{11} German: ”Schwärmer”.
\textsuperscript{12} McLaughlin 1996, 105–107.
\textsuperscript{13} Kiwiet 1955, 149.
by some, but it soon became clear that they had their own detailed agenda for reform of the Old Church.\textsuperscript{14}

It was a disunited movement, with considerable differences between the various Anabaptist communities. Like Luther, some of them believed they were living the last days; others were awaiting the imminent arrival of God’s kingdom on earth.\textsuperscript{15} Like Luther, they sought inspiration from the Bible, especially from the depictions of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. There was a strong social and political element to their beliefs; for example, some believed in a community of goods rather than private ownership. Some also rejected the paying of tithes and preferred to retreat into their own communities, cutting themselves off from the outer world, so that they could live and worship according to their ideals.\textsuperscript{16}

They strongly opposed the age-old Church practice of infant baptism. They did not believe in “Anabaptism” “rebaptising”,\textsuperscript{17} literally, as their name suggests, but rather that the infant baptism that they had all experienced was invalid. Therefore a proper, believer’s baptism was called for. There was a belief amongst some Anabaptists that infant baptism was not scriptural, had been enforced only since the time of Pope Eugene II (824–827) and that therefore adult or believer’s baptism had been common before that.\textsuperscript{18} Like other Protestants they insisted on support in scripture for any Christian practices: scripture, however, is not explicit on the question of infant or adult baptism. This inevitably brought them into confrontation with the rest of the Church, both with reformers and opponents of reform, since baptizing their members so that they fully belonged was one of the key functions of the Church. It was believed that anyone who rejected the Church’s practice of infant baptism might develop other ideas that went against Church teaching.\textsuperscript{19} There was simply no room in early sixteenth century Europe for Christians who did not belong to the Church.

The Anabaptists also rejected the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This was, at least, closer to mainstream Protestant thought: Zwingli and later John Calvin (1509–1564) shared this belief. Nor do differences on the interpretation of the Eucharist ever seem to have been a burning issue between

\textsuperscript{14} Kiwiet 1955, 133.
\textsuperscript{15} Stayer 1996, 31.
\textsuperscript{16} Stayer 1996, 31–33.
\textsuperscript{17} Greek: “ανα-” = again, re-.
\textsuperscript{18} Arffman 1994, 202–203. See also 3.8 below.
\textsuperscript{19} Räisänen-Schröder 2013, 249.
Luthers and Papists. Rather bigger matters were the Anabaptists’ refusal to swear oaths or to do military service. These two issues brought them into direct conflict with the secular authorities everywhere, especially in Switzerland, where oath-taking and military service had a particularly important role.\(^{20}\)

Although most Anabaptists were pacifists, some took to armed rebellion: some future Anabaptists took part in the Germans Peasants’ War (1524–25) and others in the disastrous and bloody Münster Rebellion (1534–35). These events must have made it easier for the authorities, Papist and Protestant alike, to oppress them and even outlaw the movement on pain of death. The movement rose and fell in the 1520s and 1530s in German-speaking Europe, suffering sometimes mild, sometimes brutal persecution, as a result of which it more or less disappeared from the region. It resurfaced in Holland, however, and spread from there to England and America. Numerous Anabaptist leaders have gone down in the history books, such as Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Balthasar Hubmaier and Menno Simmons,\(^{21}\) but their tale lies outside the confines of this dissertation.

### 2 Pilgram Marpeck and the Reformation

#### 2.1 Biography of a lay Anabaptist theologist

Marpeck was born in about 1495 in the small town of Rattenberg, Tyrol, in modern Austria. Tyrol belonged to the Holy Roman Empire, but was also one of the hereditary lands of the Habsburgs. He was a leading figure in the town, working on the town council from 1520–1528, and thanks to his knowledge of engineering, enjoying the significant position of mining judge or magistrate.\(^{22}\) He had been brought up in the Old Church by his parents, and as an adult was inspired by the Lutheran message. He eventually turned away from Lutheranism, too, objecting to the carnal freedom he associated with Lutheranism. This was when he embraced Anabaptism. He apparently came into contact with Anabaptists in about 1527.\(^{23}\)

The key test of his new calling came in late 1527 – early 1528, when the town authorities, loyal to their Habsburg masters, were cracking down on

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\(^{20}\) MacCulloch 2003, 148.  
\(^{21}\) Stayer 1996, 34.  
\(^{22}\) Rothkegel, Mennlex.  
\(^{23}\) Loserth et al 1987.
heretical activity. They insisted that he, as a member of the town council, help them round up suspected Anabaptists. At first he complied, but after the local Anabaptist leader Leonard Schiemer had been executed, Marpeck clearly had second thoughts. No doubt inspired by Schiemer’s martyrdom, he resigned his post and fled his home town, forfeiting his considerable property in the process. The efficiency and ruthlessess of the authorities bears noting here: Schiemer had only set up his Anabaptist group as late as November 1527, he was subsequently arrested and then executed on 14 January 1528. Marpeck left Rattenberg and fled into exile – the only alternative to arrest and possible execution - on 22nd of the same month. One can only imagine how traumatic these months were for Marpeck.

He spent the rest of his life in exile; on the other hand, he never left German-speaking areas, nor indeed did he ever leave Imperial territory. After a brief sojourn with fellow Anabaptists in Krumau (Český Krumlov), Bohemia, where he was elected elder, he fled to the Imperial city of Strassburg. He settled there with his wife, became a citizen, and was responsible for wood supply. He was briefly put under arrest, within a month of his arrival, for Anabaptist activity, but was mostly able to live in peace there, unmolested by the authorities, for four years. It was certainly the place to be: Strassburg was the most important centre of Anabaptist activity during the late 1520s and early 1530s. He was fortunate to be there at the time of Martin Bucer’s ascendancy. Bucer had a conciliatory, tolerant approach, and sought to find common ground between the Protestant groups. Strassburg gradually implemented its evangelical Reformation, and while the Anabaptists were taken seriously, the main issues for leading churchmen in Strassburg seem to have been about the precise nature of their Protestant reforms, ie. whether to take a Lutheran or a Zwinglian direction.

During his time in Strassburg Marpeck wrote three pamphlets on Anabaptism. He also became recognised as the leader of the Anabaptists there. He mixed with important figures who had either Spiritualist or Anabaptist beliefs, such as Caspar Schwenckfeld, Melchior Hoffman and Jakob Kautz. Anabaptist meetings were held in his house. He also performed baptisms in his capacity as

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24 Rothkegel, Mennlex.
26 Rothkegel, Mennlex.
elder of the church of Moravia. He seems to have made himself indispensable to the authorities in Strasbourg, thanks to his knowledge of mining, civic engineering and forestry. He enjoyed an excellent reputation as a decent, honourable, God-fearing citizen, and had the gift of being able to make even his theological enemies like him. Bucer, who described Marpeck as a very stiff-necked heretic, also described his conduct as "unblameable", and he apparently enjoyed god-like status among the Anabaptists of Strasbourg. Whatever crucial differences there were between him and his opponents, he never seems to have lost their respect. He was not popular among all the local clergy, however, whom he publicly criticised. These halcyon days were not to last. As he persistently opposed infant baptism and encouraged Anabaptists not to take an oath of allegiance to the city, he was eventually arrested in October 1531. There followed a three-month stand-off, during which he met and debated with Bucer and wrote the Confession of his faith. It proved impossible to reconcile his position on key theological issues with that of Bucer or the Strasbourg authorities, and he was exiled in January 1532.

The next period in his life, 1532–1544 is much less well documented. He lived in a variety of places: Graubünden in Switzerland, Augsburg, Strasbourg again and Moravia. There was quite a network of clandestine Anabaptist communities stretching from Graubünden, Württemberg and Alsace to Moravia and even Vienna. He seems to have continued to be active in attempting to unite rival factions among the Anabaptists, albeit without success. A distinct group seems to have formed about the person of Marpeck, too. This was the period during which the Admonition was published.

In 1544 he moved to Augsburg, where he lived until he died in 1556, aged approximately sixty-one. He worked in his usual capacity as an engineer. There are signs that Marpeck was circumspect, and unwilling to irritate the state unnecessarily. It is notable that the authorities did not actually prevent him from pursuing his Anabaptists activities, although they did warn him from time to time. One explanation, other than Marpeck’s cautious approach, may lie in the fact that there were so few Anabaptists by that time in Augsburg - possibly only a

31 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 35.  
33 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 40–41.
dozen – so they no longer posed any kind of “threat”.\textsuperscript{34} When he died, he died a natural death, a rare thing for an outspoken Anabaptist at that time.\textsuperscript{35} The network he had set up broke up soon after his death and with time he was gradually forgotten.

\textbf{2.2 The state of the Church from Marpeck’s viewpoint}

Let us now look at the main theological beliefs of this lay theologian, brought up a Catholic like everyone else in that part of Europe at the time, and briefly a supporter of Luther’s Reformation. He comes across as a most practical thinker: much of his theology could be classified as social theology, since he wrote about matters that directly concerned a Christian’s place in society, such as the separation of church and state, oath-taking, individualism versus collectivism, the authorities’ use of the sword, and pacifism.

Stayer argues that Anabaptist theology was rudimentary, and that to them practical considerations always came first.\textsuperscript{36} Rothkegel, however, draws attention to the intricate albeit somewhat repetitive exegetical technique used by Marpeck, contrasting it with the methods and concepts employed by his more academic contemporaries.\textsuperscript{37} Marpeck was a self-taught lay theologian with no formal training, and this seems evident in some passages of his writings, particularly in what he omits to mention. On the whole, however, Marpeck’s theology is well developed, well expressed and full of insight. According to Stayer again, Marpeck combined in his theology ideas taken from Luther, Caspar von Schwenckfeld and Bernhard Rothmann.\textsuperscript{38} There are some similarities with Zwingli’s theology too, although they may of course have arrived at their conclusions independently. According to Kiwiet, his starting point was somewhat similar to that of the Anabaptist Hans Denck, who vigorously defended his views against those of the Spiritualists on the one hand and against the Lutherans on the other.\textsuperscript{39}

One key practical aspect of religion, the role of “externals”, ie. the physically tangible in religion, was very close to his heart. He wrote extensively on believer’s baptism, the nature of the Eucharist (a hotly debated topic within Protestantism at that time), church unity, the role of the covenant of the Old Testament \textit{vis à vis} the covenant of the New, and Christ’s humility versus his

\textsuperscript{34} Rothkegel, Mennlex.
\textsuperscript{35} Klassen & Klaassen, 1978, 41.
\textsuperscript{36} Stayer 1996, 32–33.
\textsuperscript{37} Rothkegel, Pilgram Marpeck, Mennlex.
\textsuperscript{38} Stayer 1996, 32–33. Schwenckfeld was a Spiritualist, Rothmann an Anabaptist.
\textsuperscript{39} Kiwiet 1955, 148.
glory. Behind all this was his typically Protestant insistence on the primacy of the Bible as the root of all Christian faith. I will analyse his theology in relation to that of Lutherans, Zwinglians and Papists in detail in chapters 2.3 - 5: first, here are a few general comments.

Marpeck wrote at great length on key theological issues of the time, justifying his own opinion vis à vis that of his opponents, and pointing out the flaws he perceived in their arguments. He does not always seem to have understood his opponents’ theology fully, but he certainly understood it better than some of them understood his: Luther apparently never took Anabaptist theology seriously, associating Anabaptists always with radicals such as Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer as well as with rebellion and mayhem, especially after the Münster Rebellion. Martin Bucer, on the other hand, took Anabaptist theology very seriously, responding to Marpeck’s Confession of 1530 with a line-by-line analysis of Marpeck’s arguments.

Marpeck was critical of the Church in general. He clearly believed it did not represent God’s message to mankind properly; it had become a “dark cave”, a “den of thieves” ruled by earthly powers. He was critical of them all - Papists, Lutherans and Zwinglians - while occasionally admitting common ground, especially with the Lutherans. The very goodness he perceived in other Christians masked the real danger they represented, as those who seemed to represent the true Christian message were more of a threat than those who manifestly represented heresy. They were hard to spot, because they “nowadays do everything so much like the true children of God”, even suffer for the cross. Even when doing acts of love, they do them with “a dissembling heart.” To Marpeck Papists, Lutherans, Zwinglians and false Anabaptists were hypocrites and liars.

On the subject of the individual versus the community, Marpeck developed a concept of a religious community in which there was room for individual and communal aspects, which were in constant tension. Here he differed strikingly from the more extreme Spiritualists, whose ideal was a largely internal spiritual life for each believer, at the expense of communal worship. He also pointed out that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given for the common good rather than for

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40 Kaufmann, Mennlex.
42 PM, Admonition, 278.
43 PM, Judgement and Decision, 351.
individual edification.\textsuperscript{44} Social justice and community were clearly very important to Marpeck, but so was one’s personal spiritual life.

He rejected the Spiritualists’ arguments against the continued use of the sacraments and other externals. He insisted that even if these practices had been perverted by other Christians who misunderstood them, they remained valid for a true believer who used them in “a correct and pure manner.”\textsuperscript{45} He also referred to the Church’s duty to continue these ceremonies:

\[\text{It will be found in Scripture that such ceremonies must remain as long as there are Christians, that is, until the end of the world, for, in his command to baptise, Jesus had in mind … all future disciples throughout time …}^{46}\]

Marpeck was shocked at the lack of unity in the Church, especially within the Anabaptist community, and blamed it on Satan’s involvement, through his “false apostles”. He describes the disunity as the result of the “terrible errors of many sects”\textsuperscript{47} He worked passionately for unity amongst Anabaptists throughout his career, with some success in the 1550s. The newly found unity did not last long, however, with the Hutterites and Mennonites splitting from other Anabaptists soon after.\textsuperscript{48} Marpeck must have realized by this stage that full Church unity was not practicable. Anyway, like other Anabaptists, he seems to have favoured purity of belief and conduct within his own community to attempting to reform the whole Church, which no doubt seemed beyond redemption to him. It will be remembered that by 1555 the Peace of Augsburg had been signed, granting full recognition to at least some Protestant churches, and putting an end to any chance of church reunification. Marpeck died the following year. Kiwiet rates his contribution to Anabaptist literature very highly, putting his writings on a par with those of Mennon Simmons.\textsuperscript{49}

\section*{2.3 Marpeck on other Christians and on the Reformation}
Marpeck’s theological writing is remarkably wide-ranging. He provides much valuable material for ecumenical discussion today, as Kiwiet has noted. He describes Marpeck as the only person in history to have written a complete free church theology, as well as analysing the theology of other churches and Christian

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{44} Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 43–44.  
\textsuperscript{45} PM, Refutation, 45.  
\textsuperscript{46} PM, Refutation, 47.  
\textsuperscript{47} Both quotes from PM, Admonition, 163.  
\textsuperscript{48} Kiwiet 1955, 148.  
\textsuperscript{49} Kiwiet 1955, 148.}
groupings. Kiwiet did not mention that Marpeck never wrote a systematic theology for Anabaptists, but neither did, for example Martin Luther ever write a fully systematic theology. Both wrote mainly in response to specific events, debates and needs. Still there is a great deal in Marpeck for a modern Christian to ponder.

Once Marpeck was asked whether there were true believers in other churches. He answered that it was not for him but for God to judge. He condemned other churches, but not their members. This tells us much about Marpeck’s attitude: no matter how strongly he disagreed with Papist, Lutheran and Zwinglian teachers and preachers, he clearly felt pity and understanding for the ordinary folk who were subject to their (in his opinion) distorted view of Christianity. He occasionally expressed a wish that other Christians, or their teachers would realise the error of their ways and come to a fuller understanding of the Christian message.

He believed that only a few Christians had remained true to the Lord and would be saved. He compared other Christians to his own followers by referring to Abraham’s children via Hagar the slavewoman and via Sarah his wife in Genesis 21. Hagar’s children were illegitimate even though their father was Abraham himself. Only Sara’s children were fully legitimate. In the same way, a true Christian acknowledged both God as their father and the Church of Christ as their mother. Unfortunately there were a great many Christians who resembled the children of Hagar. They only had the letter of Scripture but not the spirit; theirs was a purely external faith. A real mother was needed, not one from whose breasts “there is no flow of grace or aid from the Holy Spirit.” These despised children:

are disinherited; they are excluded from the heritage, grace, and discipline of the Holy Spirit, and given over to everlasting destruction.

Klassen and Klaassen believe Marpeck may be referring specifically to Reformed Christians here, but the comments seem to apply equally to any Christians who did not follow Marpeck’s brand of Anabaptism.

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51 Kiwiet 1955, 120.
52 PM, Peasant Aristocracy, 468.
53 PM, Hagar, 397–398.
54 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 390.
He referred to the great changes that we know as the Reformation as “the revealing of the Kingdom of the Antichrist … the fulfilment of the kingdom of Babylon and Antichrist.” In fact he frequently referred to his opponents as the Antichrist (or the Evangelicals as the new Antichrist).\(^\text{55}\) He wrote dismissively of the “so-called evangelicals”, thereby making clear his opinion that they did not represent the true message of the gospel either. Perhaps with an over-simplified interpretation of Luther’s doctrine of *sola fide* in mind, he considered that Lutherans wanted too easy a life, and that they shunned the narrow gate (Mt 7:13–14). There was not enough emphasis for him on the cross of Christ in evangelical teaching.\(^\text{56}\) At the same time he admitted a certain admiration for the “evangelicals” for having stood up to the Catholic Church.\(^\text{57}\)

As we have already seen, Marpeck frequently tarred Lutherans, Zwinglians and Papists with the same brush when they shared similar doctrine or practices; for example they were all “forcers of faith”\(^\text{58}\), referring to their inability to tolerate other Christians on their territory. Perhaps surprisingly, he rarely criticized the Church on the grounds of being too wealthy or worldly, apart from a brief disparaging comparison of the modern Church and its “greedy bishops” with the ideal early Church.\(^\text{59}\) This seems unusual, bearing in mind the humble origins of many Anabaptists, the relevance of this issue to many people at the time and bearing in mind how the Old Church had frequently been criticised for this in the Middle Ages.

In one passage Marpeck divided Christians into Petrine and Iscariot Christians. The “Petrine Christians” were those Protestants who had “denied” Christ by signing the Augsburg Interim in 1548. This was an agreement forced on the defeated Protestants by the victorious Emperor after the Schmalkaldic War. The Protestants had to make concessions which in the eyes of some Protestants constituted a denial of the gospel.\(^\text{60}\) The Iscariot Christians were of course those who in Marpeck’s opinion had betrayed Christ; apparently he had in mind here particularly the wealthy Fugger banking family.\(^\text{61}\)

\(^{55}\) PM, *Exposé*.
\(^{56}\) PM, *Exposé*.
\(^{57}\) PM, *Confession*, 157.
\(^{58}\) PM, *Lowliness*, 450.
\(^{59}\) PM, *Admonition*, 281.
\(^{60}\) Boyd 1992, 160.
Marpeck described in some detail in *Exposé of the Babylonian Whore* his rejection of what the Old Church stood for, his adoption of the new evangelical teachings and his subsequent rejection of them, too. He had felt “deeply possessed and imprisoned by the human laws of the papacy”, and had felt “bound and suffered in conscience”. He experienced from the new Protestant teachings a new sense of freedom, and acknowledged that he learnt at least part of the truth from them. He even “readily accepted” such “Papist rules and human inventions” as confession, which the Protestant had continued to use, because he agreed that they were correct teachings. Unfortunately, this new freedom proved to be for him merely the “liberty of the flesh”. The “evangelical teachers” made no mention of the mystery of the cross of Christ, or of the narrow gate through which a Christian had to pass. It was the only way from the “Babylonian” captivity to the “liberty of Jerusalem.”

Even worse:

> Not only that, but those who announce and teach it are persecuted by these teachers, who become their betrayers and executioners. For this reason they are justly called those workers of evil whom Christ banishes from his presence (Matt. 7 [25:41]). They teach the truth and the Gospel partially and point to the true way like a wooden hand at the fork in the road. What is missing in their teaching is the cross of Christ; they resist it and teach others to resist it.

Marpeck touches on a painful development in Lutheranism here: by insisting on *sola fide* instead of on good works as the way to eternal life, Luther had unwittingly encouraged some his followers to neglect good works altogether. They had interpreted his words literally and failed to understand that good works are the result of faith. This had caused much debate at the time. Luther’s later works explained the link between faith and good works more clearly, but the debate about the role of good works in salvation was still going on after his death. Marpeck, however, ceased to be a follower of Luther, finding he had more in common with the Anabaptists. Of course he took much Lutheran “baggage“ with him, but he still came to oppose Lutheranism and Zwinglianism almost as vehemently as Catholicism. Suddenly the evangelical teachers became their followers’ “betrayers and executioners” and “those workers of evil whom Christ banishes from his presence (Matt. 7 [25:41]).” The Lutherans resisted the

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62 PM, *Exposé*.
63 PM, *Exposé*.
64 Whitford 2003, 180.
cross of Christ and taught others to do the same. Relations between the Anabaptists and Zwingli were poor. Zwingli’s personally torturing Balthasar Hubmaier in 1525 would only have estranged them further. Before long Zwingli was the Anabaptists’ bitterest opponent, not to mention a heretic, murderer, thief, false prophet and the Antichrist to the disappointed Anabaptists. From Marpeck’s writings it seems clear that he would have subscribed to this view.

The question of sola fide was so central to Luther’s Reformation that it deserves a special mention here. Marpeck called this doctrine of Luther’s into question in his letter Judgement and Decision. He stated that “The fruit [of faith], however, is not salvation“, nor could man gain salvation through any means of his own. Instead he emphasised Christ’s redeeming work of dying on the cross for our sins. In other words he emphasised Christ’s work rather than the human “work“ of believing in Christ.

Another major issue raised by Luther was a new emphasis on preaching in church. Luther and Marpeck differed as regards the effects of preaching. Luther believed God was working directly through him and other preachers, and that the preacher’s words were the same as the Word of God, as long as the message was the same. He encouraged preachers to be bold, however uncertain they felt, and to trust that God would do the rest. He likened preaching to a wanderer walking through a wood, singing: “the tree hears and the echo answers. That was enough. ‘Whom it hits, it hits.” Marpeck believed that faith was necessary in both the transmission of the Word in the sermon and in its reception by a believing Christian. A non-believing preacher could not preach the Word, nor could the listener receive the Word in faith unless he was already in the faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit. He challenged the Lutherans by declaring that the letter, paper and ink are nothing without the faith of those involved. Here he seems to be accusing the Lutherans of an unspiritual, mechanical approach to their faith. He believed that they separated faith from preaching and receiving the Word. In Luther there is a greater reliance on God’s direct intervention, and on the preacher’s work, whereas in Marpeck the preachers’ and listeners’ active faith is emphasised more.

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65 PM, Exposé.
66 Räisänen 2009, 60.
67 Räisänen 2009, 49
68 PM, Judgement and Decision, 346.
69 Meuser 2003, 137.
70 Kiwiet 1955, 111-112.
3 Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic teaching on baptism in Marpeck’s writings

3.1 The nature of baptism

Let us look now at Marpeck’s views on the Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic doctrines of baptism, since it was a theme of such central importance to all concerned. Marpeck dealt with the meaning of baptism itself and the issue of infant or believer’s baptism briefly in his Confession and in rather more detail in the Admonition. His writing style in this latter work has been described as “gentle”,71 while David Southall contrasts Marpecks’s irenic style with Luther’s vitriolic polemics.72 I will return to this topic of writing style in Chapter Six.

Kiwiet has summarised some key aspects of Marpeck’s baptismal theology in his work. The individual freedom to choose to be baptized, to choose to belong to the Church, was at the very heart of his theology. It was one of several reasons why he opposed the infant baptism practiced by Lutherans, Zwinglians and Papists. He also challenged the Church on the sacramental nature of baptism. He did not believe the baptismal act had any affect on one’s faith, therefore it was not a sacrament, since a sacrament did have an affect on the person’s spiritual life. He believed the approach should be the other way round: a person comes to faith and is then baptized to confirm this and to become fully part of the Christian community. This by no means lessened the importance of baptism. Becoming a member of the church meant becoming a member of Christ’s body: Marpeck shared this standard Christian belief in what the Church represented. And “only through the baptizing of the faithful will the Church be built.”73

The Confession was mainly an exposition of Marpeck’s own views, but he also pointed out mistakes he perceived in others’ theology, especially Bucer’s. It will be remembered that Marpeck wrote this work when Bucer was threatening to exile him from Strassburg. Bucer was trying to find common ground between Lutheranism and emerging Reformed theology, and wanted to win at least some Anabaptists over.74 Bucer was a formidable opponent for Marpeck. For example, hundreds of Anabaptists rejoined the semi-official Protestant Church of Hesse

72 Southall 2000, 4.
73 Kiwiet 1955, 113–114.
74 MacCulloch 2003, 180.
after hearing him preach on a visit in 1538.\textsuperscript{75} To Bucer the institution of infant baptism made the Church a community for the whole of society, capable of improving itself under God’s care and supported in matters of discipline by the civil authorities.\textsuperscript{76} Let us keep this definition of the relationship between infant baptism and the Church in mind as we look at Marpeck’s criticism of Bucer here, which applies equally well to Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic doctrine.

\textbf{3.2 Infant baptism and covenant theology}

All of the above advocated infant baptism, although Zwingli did briefly flirt with Anabaptist views on this subject.\textsuperscript{77} In the Old Church infants were invariably baptized. Their godparents and parents were responsible for bringing them up as Christians within the Church. Marpeck correctly pointed out that according to other Christians’ views it was parents who were mainly responsible for teaching their children the Christian faith. Yet these same parents were incapable of this task:

\begin{quote}
Although I don’t say it of all, parents do display pride and avarice, usury and gluttony; they lie, deceive and gossip; they blaspheme; they are drunkards, gamblers and murderers. Yes, burdened with all vices, how can such parents teach children the teaching of faith?\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

How could the Church baptize children of such parents? They were “alien” to God’s kingdom.\textsuperscript{79} As an Anabaptist Marpeck believed that the individual should be responsible for making the personal decision of accepting the Christian faith based on his own understanding of it. He was appalled at infant baptism, which threw children “together with sinners and unbelieving deceit, into damnation and death.” It was “contrary to Christ’s grace, for children cannot know and confess any sin, faith or unbelief.”\textsuperscript{80}

Marpeck insisted on “first teaching, then faith and only then baptism.” By sticking to this precept he ruled out infant baptism, as teaching was obviously impossible with infants. He based this idea on the precedence Christ gave to teaching as well as on Peter’s words on baptism. Teaching must come before the

\textsuperscript{75} MacCulloch 2003, 182.
\textsuperscript{76} Buckwalter, Mennlex.
\textsuperscript{77} Yoder, 1959.
\textsuperscript{78} PM, Confession, 155–156.
\textsuperscript{79} PM, Confession, 156.
\textsuperscript{80} Both quotes PM, Confession, 130.
deed, in this case baptism, otherwise the recipient does not understand the deed and the deed remains meaningless.\textsuperscript{81}

One commonly used argument in favour of infant baptism was that just as with circumcision infants were received into the Jewish religious community, so in baptism infants are received into the Christian community of the Church; the former concerned the covenant of the Old Testament, the latter the covenant of the New Testament. He criticized this argument (used by Bucer and Zwingli, among others) in the \textit{Confession}, challenging Bucer to find one word of Scripture to support it.\textsuperscript{82}

Covenant theology is mainly associated with Zwingli, but credit for it must also go to Luther, and the Anabaptists. Under pressure from the Swiss Anabaptists to find scriptural justification for infant baptism, Zwingli used and developed an old argument of Luther’s: just as circumcision had been the seal of entry into the community of God’s chosen people of Israel and thus into the Old Covenant, so was baptism the seal of entry into the Christian community, the Church, and therefore into God’s new covenant.\textsuperscript{83} Zwingli emphasised the \textit{unity} of these covenants, that just as there was only only God and one Bible, there was only one covenant, which included both Israelites and Christians.\textsuperscript{84} There was indeed a big difference between the Old and New Covenants, but it was not an \textit{important} difference. It was one covenant from God’s point of view, albeit two from man’s point of view. Being chosen was God’s work, it was not dependent on the choice of an individual believer.\textsuperscript{85}

Marpeck developed his very different theory of covenant theology in reaction to this. He believed that the covenant of the Old Testament was a combination of several covenants, namely God’s covenant with Noah after the flood, two covenants with Abraham, and the covenants with Moses and David. In practice they were all one and they foreshadowed the New Covenant of the New Testament between God and his new chosen people. He disagreed with Zwingli’s claim that the covenants were united, and that the difference between them was only a relative one. Marpeck believed the difference was an absolute one. He thought the religion of the Old Testament had been a purely external form of faith,
whereas the religion of the New Testament was internal. He did not believe the Israelites had had a spiritual inner life. To him there was a world of difference between the external act of circumcision and the external act of baptism with its spiritual dimension. At the same he emphasised the figurative importance of the Old Covenant in that it pointed towards the New. He rejected Zwingli’s argument that there was only one covenant from God’s point of view although two from man’s: to Marpeck there could be only one truth, and it was the same for both God and man. Whereas the Old Covenant had been a time of seeking and of thirst, the New was a time of finding and of peace.

On the relationship between the covenants of the Old and New Testaments, Marpeck emphasised mainly the differences. Circumcision was not the old covenant, but rather a sign of the old covenant, as well as a reference to the circumcision without hands, ie. the new covenant of Christ. The old covenant was only “an assurance and a promise” of what was to happen. Because of this difference, Marpeck saw no connection between circumcision and baptism.

Marpeck looked at the relationship between baptism, circumcision and the covenant in some detail in the Admonition, especially in the light of Zwingli’s theology. First a word about the Admonition, a long document in which Marpeck expounds his doctrine of baptism and communion in some detail. It was written in 1542; little is otherwise known of the circumstances of its publication. It is believed, however, that as much as two thirds of it was based on fellow Anabaptist Rothmann’s Bekenntnisse van beyden Sakramenten of 1533. Because Marpeck concentrated mainly on baptism this text is also known as the Baptism booklet. He explained his own views while pointing out the errors in his opponents’ views of baptism. Marpeck declared himself in the Admonition “suspicious of everything that is not in accordance with the Scriptures and apostolic usage.” And, referring to Gal. 1:8, (“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”), basing one’s teaching on anything other than Scriptures and apostolic usage would be an “abomination.”

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86 Kiwiet 1955, 93–94.
88 PM, Confession, 117–118.
89 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 160. Rothmann was a north German, so this proves that there was some co-operation between pre-Münsterite Anabaptists in North Germany and the South German groups. Loserth et al.
90 PM, Admonition, 179.
Zwingli considered baptism to be comparable with circumcision for Jews: it was a mark of the child’s membership of the religious community. Many Anabaptists disagreed with Zwingli that baptism marked the baptized person’s entry into the Church: what they considered more important was that it marked the beginning of the life in faith of the believer.\textsuperscript{91} Marpeck himself attached great importance to both. However, he opposed Zwingli’s view that just as circumcision sealed God’s covenant with the Israelites, so baptism sealed God’s covenant with Christians. This “external and figurative promise” referred only to Israelites of Abraham’s generation, not to Christians. There was also the problem for him that baptism required the participant’s faith, whereas circumcision did not.\textsuperscript{92} So he did not equate belonging to a religious community entirely with belonging to the covenant.

He also objected to his opponents’ apparent belief that the Old and New Testaments were one. They seemed to believe that by baptizing their children God would accept them as his own. His opponents based this equation of circumcision with baptism on their reading of Paul.\textsuperscript{93} Marpeck insisted, however, that they had misunderstood Paul, who:

\begin{quote}
refers not to the circumcision of young children, which was practiced by the ancients. Rather, he refers to the true circumcision of the heart, performed without hands.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

Christians who therefore practiced infant baptism on the grounds that it equated with Jewish circumcision had failed to understand the Bible.\textsuperscript{95}

\section*{3.3 Baptism, free will and predestination}

Words such as “decision” and “choice” come up frequently in Marpeck’s writings. The concept of free will was central to his theology, and contrasted with the Lutheran interpretation. The latter, as expressed by Philip Melanchthon, went as follows. There were three elements in conversion: the Holy Spirit, the voice of the gospel and the human will giving assent to the gospel. The Holy Spirit inspired a person to believe, and only in this inspired state could one choose to believe. A completely free human will would always choose not to believe, in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[91] McGrath 2011, 596.
\item[92] PM, \textit{Admonition}, 222.
\item[93] PM, \textit{Admonition}, 224.
\item[94] PM, \textit{Admonition}, 238–239.
\item[95] PM, \textit{Admonition}, 241.
\end{footnotes}
other words, would choose evil. Marpeck, however, strongly believed in the freedom of the individual to choose to believe. Faith was not down to the predestined will of God, nor was it the result of a sacrament. The spiritual effect of belief was greater for South German Anabaptists like Marpeck than for Luther, but did not endanger free will. Christians were people who expressed their belief, which they had reached through exercising their own free will to believe. That was no doubt why it was so powerful: the believer was fully committed, a perfect vessel for the expression of God’s faith. According to Marpeck’s way of thinking, as analysed by Kiwiet, the spiritual effect of faith could not be as great among, for example, Lutherans, who had not chosen to believe themselves. Other Protestants, with their beliefs in predestination or a very limited free will, must have seemed passive and uninspired to Marpeck. For this reason Marpeck could not believe in the doctrine of predestination. A highly developed sense of free will was incompatible with predestination.

Marpeck considered that those who believed in predestination were guilty of the mistake of assuming they knew more about God than had been revealed (see also 5.6.) They were correct that God had “the right to all salvation and damnation [but] not outside of His order and will, to which His power is subordinated.” It would be interesting to know who exactly Marpeck had in mind at this point. Luther, Zwingli and Bucer had all expressed some kind of belief in predestination, basing their views on St Augustine’s theology, although it does not seem to have been a tenet of central importance to them. Calvin, however, a member of a new generation of theologians, did make predestination a central theme of his theology, as expressed in his Institutions of 1539. As Marpeck’s views expressed here date from a letter (Judgement and Decision) written in 1541, we may speculate that he had Calvin particularly in mind here.

Marpeck described the effects of man’s decision to believe thus: whereas Luther contrasted the effects of God’s mercy (Gnadenwirkung) in a Christian with the works of man, Marpeck contrasted the call of God’s mercy (Gnadenruf Gottes) with man’s decision, i.e. decision to believe. Again the Lutheran comes

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97 Kiwiet 1955, 147.
98 Kiwiet 1955, 144–145.
99 PM, Judgement and Decision, 341.
100 Müller 1996, 332–333.
across as humbler and more passive compared with the determined Anabaptist who takes charge of their own spiritual life.\textsuperscript{101}

Marpeck may well have emphasised human free will and decision-making partly because he wanted to distance his form of Anabaptism from Spiritualism. Nobody was likely to confuse Lutherans with Spiritualists, so Lutherans were able to emphasise the spiritual element of faith more freely than Marpeck could. Lutherans and Spiritualists actually agreed that faith came from God through Word and sacrament, although they agreed about little else. Anabaptists insisted that the process was the other way round: first came faith, then the sacraments could be enjoyed.\textsuperscript{102}

Marpeck explained about belief in another way in another passage. He believed a Christian should discover their own inability to save oneself, and find this ability in Christ their saviour. First he should meet Christ, then become aware of his own sinfulness, then receive the possibility to decide about their faith.\textsuperscript{103}

\section*{3.4 Material and form in baptism}

After explaining what baptism really meant Marpeck criticized the Papists (and, by extension, others) for their drawing a distinction between material and form in baptism. The baptismal water was the material, the words of the priest the form. Let us look at this in connection with Luther’s views on the relationship between the word and the material, or external, especially concerning the sacraments. Luther found himself attempting to both correct the Old Church’s concept of sacraments and defend himself from the more recently expressed views of Spiritualists and Anabaptists. He believed that the external sign in a sacrament (eg. the water of baptism, the bread and wine of communion) was essential. Faith did not consist entirely of mere thoughts and feelings, as it did for the Spiritualists; believers also needed something tangible to cling to. This material, external thing could not, of course, achieve anything on its own, but only in connection with the word. The word came from outside the person, from God.\textsuperscript{104} According to Marpeck, Papists seemed to believe that if anyone was cast into water and these words of the rite of baptism uttered, that person was baptized. They did not pay enough attention to the meaning of the baptismal words. He

\textsuperscript{101} Kiwiet 1955, 140.
\textsuperscript{102} Kiwiet 1955, 141.
\textsuperscript{103} Kiwiet 1955, 145.
\textsuperscript{104} Barth 2009, 224–226.
went on to describe this interpretation as “false and fabricated,” and accused Lutherans and Zwinglians, the supposedly “foremost and best Christians” of the same. He acknowledged that the latter did not agree with the Papists on everything, “yet they share with them almost completely this understanding of baptism.” In brief, then, Marpeck emphasized the importance of an individual’s faith in baptism, whereas Luther emphasized God’s role in this sacrament.

3.5 Baptism and original sin

There is a strong connection between the doctrines of baptism and original sin. Lutheran doctrine on this key point of doctrine is as follows. All are born with original sin, inherited from Adam. At the heart of original sin lies ignorance or disregard of God. It is so serious that humans will face damnation unless they are forgiven in baptism. Even after baptism sin remains with them: a Christian is at the same time sinful but also justified. Lutherans believe that in baptism original sin is forgiven, but other sins, known as concupiscence, remain. This Lutheran concept of sin was darker and more absolute than the slightly milder Catholic doctrine of sin. Zwingli, however, had doubts about original sin; he wondered how a new-born child could be considered guilty of anything. Marpeck challenged this doctrine on the same grounds.

Marpeck tackled this subject in the following way in the Admonition. As a result of the baptismal ceremony, the newly baptized child was supposedly considered to be free from original sin and a member of the body of Christ. If this person later faced temptation, “they should remember that they have been baptized, in the name of God, with water.” Thus Marpeck drew attention to what he considered to be an obsession amongst Papists, Lutherans and Zwinglians with the matter (water) of baptism, instead of with its true meaning. He also implied that their claims of the value of baptism were exaggerated: how could an unknowing infant become free of original sin and part of the body of Christ through a quick dunk into water and a few words mumbled by a priest? The inference is that the Anabaptists (who also baptized with water) did get the balance right because the baptized was a thinking, rational adult, not an infant, and therefore able to participate fully in the rite.

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105 All quotes from PM, Admonition, 183.
107 McGrath 2011, 595.
108 PM, Admonition, 188, including quote.
Further on, Marpeck returns to his argument used earlier: to believe that infant baptism could wash away original sin was “hypocrisy“:

if baptism is given with the assumption that it will wash away original sin in a child, and the child thereby is christened, that is, made into a Christian as the common people think, it is slanderous idolatry and abomination before God and, as said before, a blasphemy and a mockery of the blood of Jesus Christ.\footnote{PM, Admonition, 210.}

Then he again criticized the Papist motive of baptizing in order to wash away the child’s sins. Papists (also, from the context, Lutherans) referred to Psalms 51:5 to justify this: “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” He could not accept their argument that even a child was with original sin: this was an unscriptural idea in his opinion.\footnote{Both quotes from PM, Admonition, 244–245.} In another passage he dismissed infant baptism as “a mere work of mockery before God.” His opponents seemed to emphasise that baptism brought forgiveness of one’s sins; however, infants did not know sin and even if they did, could not confess to it; therefore, advocation of infant baptism on these grounds was false.\footnote{Loserth et al 1987.}

He drew a parallel between Papist and Lutheran doctrine, mentioning that Luther, too, believed in the “children’s hidden, inner, unrevealed, and future faith”, and claiming that Luther did not believe in original sin in children. Klassen and Klaassen have pointed out, however, that Marpeck was mistaken on this latter point, as there is plenty of evidence that Luther did indeed believe that everyone was tainted by original sin. Marpeck also claimed that Zwingli disagreed with Luther about children’s hidden faith, but there is no evidence to back up this claim either.\footnote{Klassen & Klaassen 1978, footnote 59, p.247.}

In the next section of the Admonition Marpeck challenged this belief of Luther’s in children’s inner faith. He drew an analogy with communion, claiming that if an infant’s inner faith justified their baptism, then infants’ inner love justified their receiving holy communion. Marpeck also referred to passages in Paul (eg. 1 Cor 13:2) which supported the idea that if one has faith one also has love. This led to the conclusion that an infant must be full of both inner faith and inner love, and that therefore both baptism and communion were applicable to infants, according to Lutheran logic.\footnote{PM, Admonition, 248–249.}

\footnote{109 PM, Admonition, 210.} \footnote{110 Both quotes from PM, Admonition, 244–245.} \footnote{111 Loserth et al 1987.} \footnote{112 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, footnote 59, p.247.} \footnote{113 PM, Admonition, 248–249.}
3.6 Spiritual preparation for baptism

In baptism Marpeck believed a penitent frame of mind and obedience and submission to God’s will through Christ were needed. He pointed out further on that many people (Papists, in particular,) believed that through penance, faith by proxy, anointing with holy water and baptism one could be cleansed of original sin and made Christian. He seems to suggest in this passage that Papists did not attach enough importance to “true repentance and faith.”

In other words, by inference their faith emphasised empty rites over true religion. He considered their baptism therefore to be unscriptural, since scripture emphasised that when baptised a Christian died to his sins, then led a God-fearing life until the end of his days. Papist baptism could not achieve this since it did not involve that active faith and repentance of the participant. It was therefore wrong for the Church to claim that such a rite could “get rid of sin”. Worse, the Church seemed to be taking control of the process, was putting itself in Christ’s place, and was therefore making itself into “true Antichrists.” Infant baptism was in fact “anti-baptism”.

Marpeck believed that infant baptism was “the root of all kinds of nonsense,” He strongly objected to the practice of “sponsorship”, that is, the practice in the Church of having godparents who sponsor the child to be christened. This amounted to man taking God’s place, and promising to raise the child in the faith - something which only God was capable of doing. As people are so manifestly flawed, it was a case of the blind leading the blind and resulted in the baptised child turning to sin later in life, since those who sponsored them were sinners. These baptised Christians, as adults, belonged to the devil. He also saw God’s hand in this, punishing Christians for having turned away from proper baptism.

Marpeck also roundly condemned monasticism, which, he claimed, sprang up directly from infant baptism. His argument as to the direct connection was somewhat incoherent, but he seemed to blame monasticism on Christians trusting their godfathers rather than God. As a result, people that had become monks or nuns had done so in order to impress other people, and had taken vows of obedience out of a need to obey man rather than God. He also likened the donning

115 PM, Admonition, 206.
116 PM, Admonition, 207–208.
117 All from PM, Admonition, 214–215.
of special clothing by monks and nuns to another false kind of baptism. In the same passage he condemned infant baptism in quite graphic language, for instance, as a “monkey show”, “perverted”, “defiled”, “antichristian”.\textsuperscript{118} He further criticized the papery for resorting to “hypocrisy and magic” by using oil, “spittle, ashes and salts” in its ceremonies.\textsuperscript{119}

### 3.7 Baptism and the children’s gospel

Marpeck also opposed the argument used by Lutherans, Papists and Zwinglians that the children’s gospel (Lk 18:16, Mt 18:3) justified infant baptism. He pointed out that Christ did not baptise the little children who came to him but left them in their innocent state and in his promise.\textsuperscript{120} Jesus’s blessing the children supposedly justified these other Christians’ desire to baptise the children “with many fancy words”. His interpretation of this passage was literal: Christ did not baptize these children, therefore the Church could not use this passage to justify baptizing them. Christians who had their children baptized in order to save them were denying Christ’s salvific work of dying on the cross for their sins, and were turning baptism into idol worship.

### 3.8 Baptism in church history

Another common defence of infant baptism was the claim that it had been in use since the time of the apostles. Marpeck believed that this by no means justified it: the papacy had been in existence since the time of the apostles, as well as “many false teachings”, but its long existence did not justify it. Like other Anabaptists Marpeck also disputed the claim that infant baptism had indeed been standard practice in the early Church. Marpeck referred to as eminent a historian as the humanist Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547), who apparently claimed that adult baptism had been the norm until the time of Charlemagne. It seemed the ninth century Pope Eugene II had confirmed infant baptism; Marpeck agreed with Martin Luther that one should be suspicious of anything that the Pope ratified, since Christ had already confirmed all true teaching, which needed no further confirmation by any human being.\textsuperscript{121} In fact, Rhenanus became worried at his work being misinterpreted by the Anabaptists, and explained in his later writings that the early Church had adapted its baptismal practices to suit the needs of the

\textsuperscript{118} All from PM, \textit{Admonition}, 215–217; see 4.2 for explanation of "monkey show."

\textsuperscript{119} All from PM, \textit{Admonition}, 219–220.

\textsuperscript{120} PM, \textit{Admonition}, 206–208.

\textsuperscript{121} PM, \textit{Admonition}, 253–254.
time. Pagans who were converted by missionaries were naturally adults and were inevitably baptized as adults. The Church Fathers, however, had been in favour or infant baptism in normal circumstances.122

3.9 Criticisms of Papist baptismal practices
Returning to his differences with the Church, Marpeck further criticized the Papists for holding sacrificial masses for the dead, a practice which he compared with the practice of apostolic times of having oneself baptized for the sake of the dead, which Paul apparently referred to (1 Cor 15). He believed Papists justified infant baptism on the grounds that if baptism could benefit the dead, it must be suitable for infants as well.123 He also attacked another Papist justification of infant baptism: that the apostles, according to Scripture, baptized entire households, which must have contained some children, too. In Marpeck’s opinion, “households” were just as likely not to contain children as to contain them. After all, when we read, for example, of how “the whole of Jerusalem” was afraid (Mt 2:3), it does not necessarily follow that infants, too, were afraid.

Yet another argument Papists used in favour of infant baptism was that God had the power to bestow faith on a one-day-old infant as easily as on a one hundred-year-old adult. In Marpeck’s opinion having the power, which he agreed God had, was not the same as using that power, and Scripture simply did not refer to God using that power.124

Marpeck went on to criticize the Papist practice of blessing objects, such as bells and buildings. He described this as “baptizing”, and dismissed it as “ridiculous”. He was no doubt well aware of the difference between blessing and baptizing; he was criticizing their argument that just as the bringing of the children to Christ justified infant baptism, so the bringing of any objects, such as frankincense, to Christ would justify “baptizing” these objects, according to the same logic. In the same way a priest blessing a bell would actually be baptizing it.125

Finally, he rejected the Papist argument that, as he put it, there were two types of baptism: one for adults, who needed to “be matured in reason, and, of their own free will, confess their faith”, and one for infants, to whom this rule did not apply. Marpeck stated that “Holy Scripture” identified only one baptism:

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123 PM, Admonition, 254.
124 PM, Admonition, 255–256.
125 PM, Admonition, 243.
This practice is contrary to Scripture and according to true understanding may not be permitted; Scripture speaks only of one conscious, confessed, and acknowledged baptism based on faith. It does not speak of baptism of unconscious people.¹²⁶

He summarised his verdict on infant baptism by declaring it either a vain practice or an example of idolatry. Those who practiced it in vain were at least “well-intentioned”, but they baptized their children as a kind of safeguard, out of belief that it was God’s command and because they were uncertain of God’s intentions. Marpeck condemned even these well-intentioned people, claiming they were taking the Lord’s name in vain. He also denied that God had commanded it. He used the term idolatry to refer to the Papist belief that when a child was baptized he would, when he died, go to heaven, whereas a child who died unbaptized would go to hell. Behind it all Marpeck saw the work of the Antichrist and the devil, who had undermined the Church with this false baptism.¹²⁷

4 Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic teaching on communion in Marpeck’s writings

4.1 Marpeck’s interpretation of communion in his opponents’ theology

Differences in interpretation of the Eucharist were one of the key points of contention between Luther and Zwingli. Bucer, ever conciliatory, reached the conclusion that despite appearances Luther and Zwingli actually agreed with each other on communion, although it seems few other people shared his optimistic view.¹²⁸ According to Klassen and Klaassen, Marpeck’s views on communion were somewhere between the extremes represented by these two men.¹²⁹ In the light of this remark let us look at Marpeck’s comments on communion in his Confession and Admonition.

In a particularly interesting passage of the Admonition Marpeck analysed Christ’s words “This is my body, this is my blood”, by setting out his opponents’ interpretations of them one by one. According to him the “Thomist”, “Papist” or “Roman” explanation of these words was that the bread and wine became “the

¹²⁶ PM, Admonition, 256–257.
¹²⁷ PM, Admonition, 258.
¹²⁸ MacCulloch 2003, 180–181; in fact, Luther’s intransigence on the issue almost reduced Zwingli to tears.
true flesh and blood of Christ”, and remained bread and wine in appearance only. This was how he summarized the doctrine of transubstantiation. Using Aristotelian terminology, Catholic scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages had devised a precise, logical way to describe what happened in the Eucharist. While the external properties of the bread and wine did not alter, their inner substance did alter in that they became Christ’s body and blood at the moment of consecration. Marpeck condemned this doctrine, in particular the priest’s role in uttering the words of consecration: its logical extension would be that whenever and wherever a man uttered these words, any nearby bread and wine would be transformed into Christ’s body and blood, something which would be “contrary to all Scripture”. It is doubtful whether any Catholic would have used such logic, but he considered the doctrine of transubstantiation to be as flawed as this.

He then gave his version of the Lutheran interpretation of these words thus:

> when the words are spoken over the bread and wine, flesh and blood truly are in the bread and wine. By synecdoche, the wheat, together with the sack, and the wine, together with the flask, are called wheat and wine.

Just as a bottle of wine is referred to as “wine”, even though it contains glass, too, so the communion bread and wine can be referred to as Christ’s body and blood, even though they still contain wheat, water etc. Luther himself preferred the image of an iron being put into the fire and becoming burning hot: both heat and iron were then present in the burning iron. In the same way both bread and wine and Christ’s body and blood were present at the same time during communion. Luther called this doctrine *consubstantiation*. Marpeck condemned this belief, too, pointing out its lack of support in scripture. Lutherans seemingly claimed that Christ said, or meant “Therein is my body” rather than “This is my body”. These words could bring Christ into bread and wine, whereas in Marpeck’s opinion words could not bring Christ anywhere; only faith could bring Christ into a believing heart.

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131 McGrath 2011, 555.
133 PM, *Admonition*, 287.
135 Consubstantiation, *Theopedia*. 

He also opposed the Lutheran idea that “the natural body of Christ is everywhere, and can be received other than spiritually, through faith”.\textsuperscript{136} This is a reference to Luther’s doctrine of ubiquity, according to which since God as a spirit could be everywhere, Christ’s divine nature enabled Christ to be everywhere, which meant that Christ’s human nature, which was united with his divine nature, could be everywhere too. This explained how Christ could be really present in the eucharist.\textsuperscript{137} Marpeck, like Zwingli, thought little of the doctrine of ubiquity. In short, his criticism of the Lutheran doctrine of communion is similar to his criticism of Papist doctrine on this matter: too strong an emphasis on mere words, too little emphasis on faith.

Marpeck also mocked Luther’s belief in the real presence in his \textit{Exposé of the Babylonian Whore} with some interesting logic. As Luther believed that Christ’s body and blood were present, it followed that those who partook of communion were “transformed into the nature and essence of Christ.” After all, everything we eat “changes from its natural essence into something else.”\textsuperscript{138} It is doubtful whether Luther would have taken his theory of communion quite as far as this.

Finally, returning to the \textit{Admonition}, he gave the definition widely associated with Zwingli and John Oecolampadius. Oecolampadius was a former Lutheran who had joined Zwingli’s reform movement; he and Zwingli shared the same view on communion.\textsuperscript{139} The words meant that the bread and wine merely \textit{represented} Christ’s body and blood. Marpeck believed that this doctrine had been explained particularly well by Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) and Sebastian Franck (1499–1543) in their writings, to which he referred the reader. Bullinger was Zwingli’s successor in Zürich whereas Franck was a lone dissenter who rejected the Church as an institution and indeed all groupings of Christians, including Anabaptism. Franck also utterly rejected externals in religion. He believed they had been useful in the early Church in much the same way that dolls are useful for children to learn with. The modern Church, having grown up, did not need such things.\textsuperscript{140} Marpeck did not agree that bread and wine were not necessary, but he did agree with Franck’s symbolic interpretation of the Eucharist.

\textsuperscript{136} PM, \textit{Admonition}, 287.
\textsuperscript{137} Gassman 1999, 212.
\textsuperscript{138} PM, \textit{Exposé}.
\textsuperscript{139} Hill 2007, 254.
\textsuperscript{140} Arffman 1994, 133.
He also referred to Paul for support for this interpretation.\textsuperscript{141} Marpeck described the bread and wine as being a mere “external signal”; what was important was what was going on in the mind of the communicant.\textsuperscript{142}

So we see here his approval of Zwinglian thought on communion.\textsuperscript{143} He regretted that their beliefs had caused such a “gruesome split … among the people”, but he did believe that Oecolampadius had “come closest to the truth” in his definition of communion.\textsuperscript{144} Marpeck could only believe that Christ’s words were meant figuratively; he believed that this interpretation was closest to that of the ancient church, so it seems that Marpeck’s opinion of communion was much the same as Zwingli’s, rather than halfway between Zwingli’s and Luther’s, as Klassen and Klaassen claim.

\textbf{4.2 A memorial meal}

The importance Marpeck attached to this rite is clear in the preamble he wrote on the subject towards the end of the \emph{Admonition}, which focuses mainly on baptism. He referred to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice of himself out of love for mankind and to his thereby attaining for man the possibility of eternal life. This was surely worth commemorating, something which Christ indeed commanded his followers to do. The precise words Marpeck used at this point are particularly interesting:

\begin{quote}
In this commemoration, according to the practice of Christ, bread and wine are used as a parable of the mystery of Christ’s body and blood, as a spiritual food which is eaten in faith, and not in bread and wine. According to the opinion of Martin Luther and others, He would be of little use to us in bread and wine.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}

So he considered himself to be on the same ground as Luther here, even referring to him directly. In fact, Luther believed in Christ’s “‘coexistence’ in and under the bread and wine.”\textsuperscript{146} Luther did believe, passionately, in Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist; Marpeck, though, avoided these words “the real presence”, nor did he refer to this belief of Luther’s. I believe the latter’s position on the Eucharist was clearly closer to the Old Church’s position than the Anabaptists’. Luther would not have described the Last Supper as a “parable” or symbol.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[141] PM, \emph{Admonition}, 289.
\item[142] PM, \emph{Admonition}, 291.
\item[143] PM, \emph{Admonition}, 278; Klassen \& Klaassen footnotes 80 \& 81.
\item[144] PM, \emph{Admonition}, 287–289.
\item[145] PM, \emph{Confession}, 148.
\item[146] Edwards 2003, 199.
\end{footnotes}
Communion was to Marpeck simply a memorial meal held “for the renewal, strengthening and comfort of the soul, and for nothing else.” Referring to Tertullian he described communion as an *agape* meal that brought together the Christian community in love, while they listened to scripture. They broke the bread as a witness to their faith. Marpeck also referred to the Acts of the Apostles: the apostles broke the bread, prayed and discussed Christian teaching and fellowship. He found support for his views in Erasmus of Rotterdam’s interpretation of the breaking of the bread as an observance of the Christian covenant. Erasmus was sceptical of the doctrine of transubstantiation, preferring a rationalistic approach to it which resembled the teaching of Zwingli. He also believed in individuals reaching their own conclusions about such questions. It should be remembered, though, that Erasmus did ultimately remain loyal to the Old Church, and opposed the Protestant Reformation in general, despite clearly having sympathy for at least some reforms and beliefs that the Protestants advocated. Erasmus’s way was to question, create debate, ridicule and criticise, but when pushed he still accepted Church teaching, albeit with reservations.

Marpeck’s interpretation of Jesus’s words “This do in remembrance of me”, was that Christ meant for Christians to have the communion meal for this commemorative purpose only. Anyone who added further meaning to it (he had in mind Papists and Lutherans, but not Zwinglians, with whom he agreed on this issue,) was guilty of damning themselves. Marpeck stated that he had no desire to take sides in these arguments, but then proceeded to explain his own Scripture-based interpretation of the Eucharist. He believed that if everybody, like him, were to base their interpretations of communion upon scripture, then the arguments would cease. Thus he implied that not all of his opponents did base their arguments on scripture. He clearly had the philosophical arguments of the scholastics in mind at this point. The fact that Christ’s words at the Last Supper had caused a great deal of bitter debate, especially between Luther and Zwingli was one reason why Marpeck rejected Lutheranism: he was disgusted at the split which had developed between Lutherans and Zwinglians, mainly over

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149 Catholic, Desiderius Erasmus.
152 MacCulloch 2003, 172.
communion. On the other hand, it does not seem to have struck him that by splitting from the Lutherans in order join the Anabaptists, he was guilty of the same sort of behaviour that he had accused the Lutherans and Zwinglians of.

He vented his anger at the Papists for making communion into “a monkey show” in which “Christ’s example is thoroughly blasphemed.” The idea of the Lord’s Supper was not to mimic what Christ physically did on the evening of the Last Supper, even to the washing of the apostles’ feet on Maundy Thursday, but to gather together, united in love and in belief in Jesus Christ, to partake in a commemorative meal. Again he was opposing the overly physical, concrete Papist practice of religion at the expense, as he thought, of spirit, love and truth. It saddened Marpeck that this special Christian rite should have become part of a “war of semantics” and of “hairsplitting and unnecessary disputes” and had degenerated into a “jealous dog’s meal.” No doubt in the opinion of his opponents he, too, had become involved in the war of semantics, since he wrote on his interpretation of communion frequently.

4.3 Spiritual preparation for communion
Marpeck indirectly condemned the practice of others, probably Papists and Lutherans from the context, of taking part in communion although not properly prepared spiritually. He hoped their behaviour in this respect would improve. We can detect elements here of his Anabaptist belief in a pure church of devout followers, and his opposition to the Old Church, which seemed to accept sinners, even to participate in communion. He did not refer to the fact that both the Old Church and Lutherans required their parishioners to go to confession before communion, which constituted their spiritual preparation. He would have known about it as a former Papist, but he presumably considered it to be insufficient. Marpeck liked to focus on the communal aspect of Anabaptism as represented in communion, the concept of a holy people set apart, united in faith, supporting each other and reprimanding the sinner. An Anabaptist who sinned faced the ban: they had to publicly repent or face exclusion not just from communion, but from

154 PM, Admonition, 265. This is not as bizarre an image as it sounds: A better translation might be “an ape show”: to ape = to imitate; cf. German nachäffen from die Affe = “monkey, ape”.
155 All from PM, Admonition, 265. Interestingly, some South German Anabaptist communities had feet-washing as part of communion. (Kiwiet 1955, 118.) Marpeck himself seems to have approved of it (see, eg. PM, Judgement and Decision, 342), despite his disapproval of merely copying what Christ physically did at the Last Supper.
156 PM, Admonition, 271.
157 PM, Confession, 149.
the community. The implication here was that there was a sharp contrast between this strict (and scriptural) practice and the lax practices of other Christians, whom Marpeck claimed allowed unrepentant sinners too to come to communion.

Marpeck derided in the Exposé Luther’s apparent willingness to allow sinners to communion:

> In Martin Luther’s eyes all who eat and drink both the body and blood of Christ, regardless of whether they are adulterers or prostitutes, gluttons or drunkards, gamblers, murderers, betayers, tyrants, deceivers, or whatever else are all a good community of his kind of godliness.

There is an echo here of his earlier vivid description of parents of infants to be baptized (see 3.2). Amidst the colourful rhetoric, though, he is making an important theological point, about the need for proper preparation for the Lord’s Supper. According to Loserth, Marpeck used as justification for banning unrepentant sinners from communion the argument that if decent Christians shared the Lord’s Supper with sinners without rebuking them, then they became partakers of their sin, too.

This banning of sinners from receiving communion until they had repented is an example of church discipline, something Anabaptists believed they took more seriously than their rivals. Martin Bucer, however, found common ground with them on this question; he aimed to make church discipline a third watchword (Kennzeichen) of the Church, alongside preaching and the sacraments. It is useful to note exactly how in the Admonition Marpeck recommended communicants prepare themselves for communion. According to Johann Loserth’s summary of this, members should examine their consciences regarding their relations with other people, both friends and enemies. They should even ask themselves whether they are ready to die for Christ. They wanted to keep their church pure and demanded the highest standards from their members. Neither the Old Church nor the evangelical churches was pure or strict enough for them. They always objected when the authorities tried to have them rejoin the Church. Their objections apparently led to the Protestants introducing church discipline

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159 PM, Exposé.
160 Loserth et al 1987 (S. Marpeck’s Vermahnung.)
161 Buckwalter, Mennlex.
themselves.\textsuperscript{162} Marpeck also dealt with this topic in the letter \textit{Men in Judgement and the Peasant Aristocracy}, where he declared that unrepentant sinners could not be allowed back into the fold of the church because they dishonoured the Lord’s name.\textsuperscript{163}

Marpeck demanded high standards of morality, but he did not believe in excessive punishments. The ban from communion was enough, he thought; he did not call for confiscation of property, fines or any other punishments.\textsuperscript{164} His approach comes across as one of encouraging solidarity in the Anabaptist community: members were encouraged to be open about their sins, and their brothers would scold them and call them to repentance. Anabaptists believed that a Papist or Lutheran, for example, only had to say “sorry” and their sins would be forgiven, as pointed out by Marpeck in the letter \textit{Judgement and Decision}.\textsuperscript{165} There was a lack of soul-searching, and rebuking of fellow parishioners; no doubt it seemed to Marpeck that there was a merely mechanical playing out of roles in confession and absolution.

Marpeck also emphasized the importance of the communicants’ reasons for coming to communion in a later passage in the \textit{Admonition}. By this he meant that they should be committed, full of love, and spiritually prepared. Other Christians did not emphasise this enough, he believed, as they did not set enough store on the communicants preparing themselves for communion, as mentioned earlier. He referred to those who disagreed with him on this matter as “heathens” and “not Christians.”\textsuperscript{166}

\subsection*{4.4 Communion as a sacrament}

Marpeck questioned other Christians’ use of the word “sacrament” in the section concerning communion in the \textit{Admonition}. As mentioned earlier, he attached great importance to baptism and communion, but preferred to avoid the actual term \textit{sacrament}.\textsuperscript{167} He believed it confused people: in his experience the same person who could declare that the “sacrament of the altar” was God could not say what communion was. He was also worried that the word might lead to superstition,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{162} Loserth et al 1987. Reference originally from Loserth, J. "Studien zu Pilgram Marbeck."
\item \textsuperscript{163} Klassen & Klassen 1978, 465.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Kiwiet 1955, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{165} PM, \textit{Judgement and Decision}, 335, & editorial footnote 32.
\item \textsuperscript{166} PM, \textit{Admonition}, 284.
\item \textsuperscript{167} PM, \textit{Admonition}, 263.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
possibly because of its mystical sound. So he chose to avoid the term altogether. He went on to point out that Paul never used this term, preferring, for example, “the Lord’s Communion”, nor did it appear anywhere else in Scripture.\textsuperscript{168} At the same time he had another important motive for avoiding the term “sacrament.” Whereas his opponents believed that sacraments had an affect, he believed that they were merely symbols. The desired spiritual affect had to begin within the individual: a person believed, then was rewarded with the gifts of faith.\textsuperscript{169} In summary, to the Catholics there were seven sacraments, to the Lutherans two, to Marpeck there were none at all.

4.5 The mass according to Marpeck
In a later passage of the \textit{Admonition} he dismissed the mass as a later invention of the church which had replaced the original Lord’s Supper, or \textit{agape} “banquet of love,” as he also referred to it. He regretted how:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
it had been made into an idolatry, and the true function of communion has become completely covered up and repressed, scandalized and forgotten\textsuperscript{170}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

as a result of the mass. He regretted the fact that the Papist “Antichrist’s troops” had “perverted” the Lord’s Supper into a sacrificial mass\textsuperscript{171}, to him far removed from the ideal memorial meal of \textit{agape}. Here he found himself in agreement with Zwingli. As mentioned earlier Zwingli, too, opposed the mass, and arranged for the saying of mass to cease in Zürich in 1525.\textsuperscript{172}

4.6 Sub utraque specie and sacrifice
Marpeck is marked out as a Protestant in his approval of communicants receiving communion in both kinds (\textit{sub utraque specie}), i.e. under the form of both bread and wine. Protestants had just recently reintroduced this practice, and opposed the contemporary practice in the Old Church of communicants receiving only the bread, while only the priest received both the bread and the wine. This came down partly to practical matters – fear that the blood of Christ might get stuck in the beards and moustaches of the male communicants\textsuperscript{173} – but also to the belief that Christ was fully present in both the bread and the wine, so it was not theologically

\begin{footnotes}
\item[168] PM. \textit{Admonition}, 263.
\item[169] Kiwiet 1955, 135.
\item[170] PM. \textit{Admonition}, 281.
\item[171] PM. \textit{Admonition}, 297.
\item[172] MacCulloch 2003, 147.
\item[173] McCulloch 2003, 11.
\end{footnotes}
necessary for the communicant to receive both the bread and the wine in order to fully receive Christ. Marpeck also expressed his annoyance that others should have attached so much importance to such an issue, which should not have been of central importance to anyone. Lutherans reintroduced communion in both kinds on the grounds that it was scriptural and had been the practice in the early Church. Marpeck also devoted his attention to this topic in the Exposé. He went on to express his opposition to the Papist doctrine according to which communion was an act of sacrifice, which he believed made it into an act of idolatry worse than the idolatry practised by pagans.

He also referred to communion, this time as practised by Papists, in his letter Concerning the Lowliness of Christ. He drew attention to their practices of putting some consecrated bread aside for emergencies, or for carrying in solemn procession on the feast of Corpus Christi. Marpeck condemned such practices on the grounds that the true bread from heaven is in the hearts of the faithful: carrying prepared, consecrated bread and wine around in a special vessel for the faithful to solemnly bow to must have seemed absurd to him, as if one were worshipping the bread and wine themselves. The Papists seemed again to him to be focusing too much on the material.

At the end of the Admonition Marpeck summarised both his own beliefs and his understanding of other Christians’ beliefs. He regretted that these mistaken beliefs, along with other perversions, had “virtually destroyed and discontinued” the holy church. He referred to their practice again as “idolatry” and lamented the fact that these idolatries were practised by “new … supposed Christians”, too, by which he meant Lutherans.

5 Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic teaching on secular authority in Marpeck’s writings

5.1 Freedom of choice
Martin Bucer could not understand the Anabaptists’ tendency towards separatism and their distrust of civil government. He found it to be a more problematic issue

174 Catholic, Communion under Both Kinds.
175 PM, Admonition, 284.
176 PM, Exposé, note 2.
177 PM, Lowliness, 447 and editorial footnote 14.
178 PM, Admonition, 298.
than any specifically theological differences. Marpeck, too, considered it to be a crucial question. According to Klassen and Klaassen, Marpeck believed the issue of the relationship between Christians and secular power to be the most important one of all, rather than for example the question of believer’s baptism, which was of such key importance to other Anabaptists. To understand his attitude we need to understand the attitude of his opponents, too, to questions of power.

There was a widespread belief that all Christians belonged to the same culture and religion, Christendom. These Christians came together in the Church, which was Christ’s body. Just as Christ’s body was one, so the Church had to be one. It was therefore difficult on theological grounds to allow beliefs other than the official beliefs of the Church: divergent beliefs represented heresy. Thus the Church was justified in using coercion to impose its views on those who challenged those views. Eventually, by the mid-1500s, tolerance became more common, but apparently only on practical grounds, or in order to avoid the greater evil of further bloodshed. As for Church - State relations, passages in the Bible such as John 19:11 support the concept of those who had power having received it from God; rebellion against the civil authorities was therefore tantamount to rebellion against God. Luther and Zwingli maintained this tradition of Church and State working hand in hand. The Protestants of the Magisterial Reformation by no means supported freedom of conscience, a quite revolutionary idea at the time.

Marpeck distanced himself from Lutherans and other Reformers by rejecting their claim that the Church and the State should have spiritual authority over the individual. The Peace of Augsburg of 1555 confirmed the principle of cuius regio, eius religio: in other words, that the ruler of the state decided on the religion of his subjects. It was a sensible compromise in the Empire that prevented further bloodshed, but must have been a terrible shock to an ageing Marpeck, who was actually living in Augsburg at this time, since it went against his most cherished principle: the individual’s freedom to choose their faith.

He considered religion to be a personal commitment of faith. In other

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179 Buckwalter, Mennlex.
180 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 36.
181 MacCulloch 2003, 143.
183 “Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’”
184 Boyd 1992, 95.
words, one could not be born into a religion, nor should external authorities such as the Church as an institution or the head of state of one’s country determine one’s faith. He firmly believed that one’s religious beliefs were the choice of the individual, and that therefore faith and the state, also church and state should be separated. This was revolutionary thought at a time when people were automatically baptized and thus belonged to the Church, which worked closely with the state, the individual then owing both Church and state his/her allegiance. He believed one should be loyal to the state in general matters, but that religious conviction was a private matter.\textsuperscript{185} This was not a matter of mere abstract principle: coerced faith prevented the spiritual transformation of both the individual and the community. Coerced faith was superficial and went against the conscience of the recipient. The Holy Spirit could only come to a willing recipient. Papists, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Münsterites and the German peasants were all to blame for resorting to coercion in spiritual matters. Marpeck of course had personal experience of the heavy hand of the state, notably in the Tyrol and Strassburg, but also in Switzerland and Augsburg. How could people be committed to their faith if they had no choice in the matter?\textsuperscript{186}

5.2 Christians and secular leadership

He wrote extensively on this issue in the \textit{Exposé of the Babylonian Whore}. He gave free rein to his frustration with top-down religion, criticizing Lutherans, Zwinglians and Papists for this same reason: their desire to impose their beliefs on the people. There follows a summary of his arguments against his opponents’ support for the church and/or state authorities in spiritual matters in the \textit{Exposé}.

After praising the Protestants for what they had achieved in their early years he criticised them for taking “refuge behind princes, lords and cities”\textsuperscript{187}:

\begin{quote}
they hide behind princes, cities and nobles, and incite them to follow the way of Cain…With much greater and more awful bloodshed than in the Peasant War, they will all perish in the rebellion of Korah, which is not the same as dying for Christ.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

Luther had turned to the city authorities for support in his efforts to consolidate his Reformation, as had other Protestant leaders such as Zwingli (see 1.2). This

\textsuperscript{185} Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 22–23.
\textsuperscript{186} Boyd 1992, 159–160, referring to \textit{Kunstbuch} no.33, 291. The \textit{Kunstbuch} is a handwritten collection of early Anabaptist writings, compiled in 1561 by Jörg Rothenfelder. It contains sixteen of Marpeck’s letters. See Klassen & Klaassen, pp.303–305.
\textsuperscript{187} PM \textit{Exposé}.
\textsuperscript{188} PM \textit{Exposé}. 
must have greatly disappointed the Anabaptists, since the early years of the Reformation had been a time of bottom-up reform and grass-roots enthusiasm. Marpeck argued that “patient endurance” would “triumph over all tribulation”, and must be learned “only under the cross”. He likened Christians who fought against each other to wild beasts, using supporting references in Revelation to Christ the Lamb being ultimately victorious (Rev 17:14 and Rev 13:2).

He also questioned the need for the spiritual leadership of any human authority, since God had all the authority a Christian needed, and wielded the sword when necessary. Also, whereas God’s leadership was unquestionably just, human authorities’ leadership should be admonished when it promoted wickedness. Marpeck believed a Christian had a right and duty to rebuke the authorities when they did wrong, although as a pacifist he strongly opposed rebellion. Vengeance, after all, was God’s. Anyone who taught otherwise was an Antichrist.

He noted a certain hypocrisy, as he saw it, in the Lutherans’ approach to power and obedience. On the one hand, Luther persuaded ordinary people to defend his version of the faith, in other words be obedient to him and the Lutheran princes, while on the other hand he encouraged these princes and the German nobility of the Empire to rebel against their lawful overlord, the Emperor. By applying Marpeck’s theology, Luther should indeed have encouraged the princes to challenge the Emperor, but not to the point of armed rebellion. To add to their hypocrisy, the Lutherans (Papists and Zwinglians, too) accused the Anabaptists of being rebellious. They had been accused of “opposing the Emperor and forbidding payment of taxes, refusing him obedience, saying government is not necessary, wanting to be our own lords…” Marpeck saw the Devil’s work in this.

Marpeck encouraged Christians to follow Christ’s example: he had never resisted with violence, nor should modern Christians resist their emperor with violence. He held the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor in the highest regard, reminding his readers, with reference to Mat 22:21, that the Emperor got his power from on high, and was due obedience in temporal matters. At the same time Marpeck rejected the idea that the Emperor had the right to punish in spiritual matters, because vengeance was God’s alone (Rom 12:19).
Marpeck had other grounds for not wishing to grant to secular authority power over religious affairs: it clashed with his understanding of God’s covenant with his people. As Kiwiet pointed out, as far as the relationship to power goes, Marpeck believed that the Protestants giving “power in religious affairs to the secular authorities goes against the New Covenant” (‘Es ist nicht dem neuen Bund gemäß.’) Christ should be the head of the Church, not some secular leader. Even the king of Babylon was a subject of God. Those with authority had their role to play, but this had nothing to do with the covenant.\textsuperscript{193} As mentioned earlier, people should be obedient to the authorities in non-religious matters, but the state should not have power in the spiritual sphere.

Marpeck’s theology relating to secular power comes across as somewhat anachronistic. In the Europe of the early 1500s the secular and the religious were not easily separated. I believe he was in a minority in holding that subjects did not owe their allegiance to their sovereign in religious matters, however reasonable his arguments may sound to a modern audience. It was not until the 1600s that such beliefs gradually became more widespread.

\subsection*{5.3 Christianity of the cross}
Marpeck summarised the argument mentioned above in paragraph 11 of the \textit{Exposé}, which is directed at “so-called evangelicals and their teachers and preachers.” He accused them of failing to teach true Christianity, because they did not emphasise the “crucified, patient, and loving Christ.” He emphasised Christianity of the cross, while other Christians supported the methods of the Antichrist. He believed that Christ would not acknowledge them as his own on Judgement Day, referring to Matt 25:41–44. He admitted that the “new evangelical preachers” spoke at least part of the truth about Christ, but went on to accuse them of wanting to avoid the “narrow gate,” and, worse still, of encouraging others to join them. In a somewhat confusing passage, he linked this with their carnal freedom and their desire to let the common people use the sword, all in the name of scripture. He then compared them to the rebels of Korah (Num 16), accused them of hiding behind “princes, cities and nobles,” of being inspired by Cain and Balaam, and warned that they would face an even worse fate than Korah’s followers. At the same time he expressed his wish that they would see the

\textsuperscript{193} Marpeck, quoted in Kiwiet 1955, 117.
errors in their ways.\textsuperscript{194}

In paragraph 16 he repeated his belief in temporal authority being ordained by God. Temporal peace was needed where the peace of God had not been accepted; it was maintained by the secular authorities who prevented people from “destroying each other over their property.” People were to “act against the authority” if it behaved in an unchristian way, but ultimately to surrender to it rather than resist to the point of rebellion.\textsuperscript{195} Marpeck emphasised the quality of humility in a Christian: a true Christian was ready to “submit to be admonished and disciplined through fear of the word of Christ.” The problem with “so-called Christians” (ie. Papists, Lutherans and Zwinglians) was that they admonished via other means: via “the letter” of the law of God and via the sword. They were no longer Christians.\textsuperscript{196}

Marpeck went on to contrast the modern Church with the Church of Roman times. The early Christians had had no power at all. Then, during the reign of Emperor Constantine (306–337) an unholy alliance was formed between the Church and the Empire, ie. secular power. The pope of that time, as Marpeck put it, “was married to Leviathan” and thus the Antichrist was conceived and born. This Antichrist, with its wicked clergy, was only finally revealed in the 1500s:

… which is also now the case with the new Antichrist. They are false shepherds to whom the sheep do not belong; they enter through the roof and come only to devour, plunder, and kill (John 10 [:10]). The spiritual devil and his multitude, a murderer from the beginning (John 8 [:44]), entered the sheepfold with violence and stole and wrested the sword from the secular Authority. No heathen tyrant ever murdered and killed so thoroughly.\textsuperscript{197}

To Marpeck the Antichrist represented the Old Church, and the new Antichrist the Lutherans and Zwinglians. He did not spare the reader the most gruesome of comparisons: referring to Ezekiel 34:17–19 he declared that this new Antichrist was a “most horrible monster” which would destroy its own by trampling, crushing and ravaging.\textsuperscript{198} It is interesting to note that his understanding of the Pope’s role in late Roman times was in line with the traditional version of events according to the Catholic Church. In fact, as early modern scholarship had already shown, the pope had still been a relatively minor figure in the 300s, the mere

\textsuperscript{194} PM Exposé.
\textsuperscript{195} PM Exposé.
\textsuperscript{196} PM Exposé.
\textsuperscript{197} PM Exposé.
\textsuperscript{198} PM Exposé.
Bishop of Rome, and had little influence on the events of Constantine’s reign. Not until the time of Pope Gregory (590–604) did the Pope begin to play a really decisive role as true leader of Western Christendom. Marpeck’s thought is therefore closer to Catholic thought on this topic than, for example, to Luther’s. In Luther’s opinion the Church had managed perfectly well without a pope for five hundred years, the Orthodox were still managing perfectly well without one, and the Pope was only important in his capacity of Bishop of Rome and secular ruler of the Papal States.¹⁹⁹

Marpeck chose to emphasise Christ’s abasement and humility rather than his power and glory. Christ had conquered death itself and Satan through his death, but the Spirit conquered with patience rather than with force. Marpeck saw this as having implications for Christians in their behaviour: they were to be humble and do God’s bidding through patience and humility rather than through force. Hence his distaste for spiritual authority in the Church and in secular rulers, and also his leanings towards pacifism.²⁰⁰

Marpeck touched on this topic in his Exposé. Lutheranism seems to have been too easy an option to him: one’s sins were forgiven thanks to justification through faith, and that was all there was to it. Marpeck, though, underlined how true Christians suffered, too. They were humble, accepted their cross to bear and kept in mind the “mystery of the cross of Christ”.²⁰¹ Rothkegel draws attention to the term Tiefe Christi (literally, the “depths of Christ”) frequently used by Marpeck in contrast to Glorie Christi used by, for example, his Spiritualist opponent Schwenckfeld. Christ’s humbling of himself in his incarnation and in his descent into hell corresponded with the beleaguered situation (bedrängte Lage) the true (ie. Anabaptist) Church was in. Just as God the Son suffered, so too must true Christians suffer.²⁰²

5.4 Christians and the use of the sword
According to Luther’s Two Kingdoms doctrine, God rules directly through his own power and indirectly through worldly authority.²⁰³ Basing his argument mainly on the Confession, Boyd described Marpeck’s theology concerning civil

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¹⁹⁹ Heininen 2004, 62.
²⁰¹ PM, Exposé; Boyd 1992, 21.
²⁰² Rothkegel, Marpeck, Pilgram. See eg. PM, Lowliness, 434.
²⁰³ Wannenwetsch 2003, 132.
authority as a radicalisation of this doctrine.\textsuperscript{204} As stated earlier, Marpeck did not believe subjects were bound to follow the dictates of the State in religious matters. He did, however, agree with Luther that armed rebellion against secular authority was wrong.

In the Preface to the Explanation of the Testaments Marpeck considered the question as to whether worldly authority was in "its true God-ordained service" or whether it was in "the holy place." To paraphrase: was worldly authority given its merely worldly power by God, or was it given divine power? If the latter, then the Pope was justified in his claims to supreme power in the Church. Marpeck believed, however, that the Pope was merely "God-ordained", in other words on the same level as worldly magistrates, who received their power from God.\textsuperscript{205} His argumentation in this passage is obscure, but the point he was making was that he expected more humility from secular authority. They may have got their power from God, but that did actually not mean much in the whole scheme of things.

In the Admonition Marpeck repeatedly referred to the “sword” used by earthly powers in disparaging tones, calling to mind Peter’s futile use of his sword in protecting Christ in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:52), and comparing earthly violence unfavourably with “fighting with the sword of the Spirit in the Word of Truth.”\textsuperscript{206} Marpeck emphasised a kind of theology of the cross: every Christian must humbly bear his personal cross and accept his suffering, rather than fight against it. Christ had refused to defend himself against attack, and humbly accepted his death. In Marpeck’s opinion the Word was stronger than the sword.\textsuperscript{207}

Although he clearly deplored the use of violence, Marpeck was not an out-and-out pacifist, unlike, for example, the Swiss Anabaptists.\textsuperscript{208} He had, after all, sworn allegiance to the city of Strassburg, which entailed the duty of defending the city in case of attack. It should be noted that he himself was exempt from military service\textsuperscript{209}; we can only speculate as to whether this was because of his important job or because of his age. However, he opposed the decision of the German peasants to rebel in the war of 1524–25, the decision of Zwingli to go to war with neighbouring Swiss city-states (the Kappel Wars, 1530–31) and the

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{boyd1992} Boyd 1992, 95.
\bibitem{pm1992} PM, Explanation, 557–558.
\bibitem{pm1992a} PM, Admonition, 209.
\bibitem{boyd1992c} Boyd 1992, 142; PM, Admonition, 298–299.
\bibitem{boyd1992d} Boyd 1992, 165.
\end{thebibliography}
Münsterite rebels of the war of 1534–35, all of whom he said had been stirred into action by Satan:

All of these Satan raised up in order to confuse and disrupt the true baptism of Christ which, through patience in faith and love alone, can do good to friend and enemy alike by fighting with the sword of the Spirit in the Word of truth.²¹⁰

He clearly considered none of these wars to have been justifiable acts of self-defence. He criticized the protagonists for resorting to “human power”, ie. the sword, in self-defence, contrasting this with Christ’s pacifist teaching and behavior.

He returned to this argument in Concerning the Lowliness of Christ, in which he referred indirectly to contemporary wars such as the Kappel Wars and the Schmalkaldic War (1546–1547). Christians should not raise arms against other Christians, not even in self-defence. War represented a “false hope” and imprisoned people “in their own vengeance.” He compared Zwingli and his like with the Philistines, whose “impatience … opposes the true patience of Christ.” They adopted the gospel, but only the appearance of the patience of Christ. They trusted in human power, just as the Philistines trusted in Goliath’s great strength. He contrasted this with Christ himself, the “true David”, who did not need weapons or armour.²¹¹

He ridiculed his opponents in Concerning the Love of God in Christ for putting their trust in worldly allies to protect them from their enemies: Catholics for thinking that the Emperor would protect them from the Turks and the Protestants; Protestants for thinking any opponent of the Emperor was on their side, whether the French, the Turks, cities, princes or peasants. They were all wrong – a true Christian didn’t await deliverance from his enemies, but patiently endured the cross of Christ. He drew a distinction between what he called “the consolation of redemption in Christ and the deceptive consolation of redemption by men.”²¹² Elsewhere in this passage he also referred to the authorities as “gods and mediators between goodness and evil“. This is not as dramatic a title as it sounds. It is an echo of the words of Psalm 82, words which Luther also used in reference to the princes.²¹³

²¹⁰ PM, Admonition, 209.
²¹¹ PM, Lowliness, 448.
²¹² PM, Concerning the Love, 540–541; Boyd 1992, 161.
²¹³ "I said ‘You are gods...’” (Ps. 82:6); PM Concerning the Love, 538 and editorial footnote 8.
Marpeck touched on this subject also in *Judgement and Decision*. He wrote of Christians he would have nothing to do with, and mentioned “those who use the bodily sword” first of all, at the start of a list of malpractices amongst Christians. He used emphatic language in this passage, reminding the reader that Christ actually commanded his followers to do as he had done and not to resist evil. Next on the list are those who “institute, command and forbid, therewith to lead and rule the kingdom of Christ.” In other words he accused some of his opponents of wanting high office in the Church out of selfish reasons, rather than in order to serve others. He no doubt had in mind here rich and politically powerful churchmen, whether of Catholic, Lutheran or Zwinglian persuasion. Such motivation was unlikely in an Anabaptist, since there were no lucrative, high positions in their communities.

All in all, his reasoning on the topic of non-violence comes across as somewhat contradictory. It seems that he only believed in the right of self-defence at a theoretical level. He does not give any examples of the justified use of violence in, for example, self-defence. His taking the oath to defend Strassburg is also theoretical, since, as mentioned earlier, he was exempt from military service anyway.

### 5.5 Marpeck and poor relief
Marpeck refers to oath-taking in several passages in his works. Stephen Boyd has researched topics related to the social aspect of Marpeck’s theology, especially matters concerning the individual and the community and Marpeck’s Christianity of the cross mentioned in 5.3. He analysed Marpeck’s attitude to the swearing of oaths in some detail. Anabaptists often opposed the swearing of oaths, which they considered to have been prohibited by Jesus (Mt 5:34–35). This was one reason why they were so mistrusted by the authorities, whether those authorities supported Rome or the reformers. The Swiss Anabaptists took this principle the furthest, opposing all carrying of weapons, all oath-taking and the recognition of civil courts. Marpeck opposed this radical approach to the issue. He approved of oath-taking in ordinary circumstances, and frequently took and required others to take oaths as part of his work. The annual oath of loyalty to the city of Strassburg was an absolutely key part of its public life - the very

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214 PM, *Judgement and Decision*, 332.
215 See, for example, PM 170, 368 and 465.
216 Boyd 1992, 164.
foundation of its city law and the centre of its city life.\textsuperscript{217} Marpeck clearly saw oath-taking as part of the responsibilities of a decent citizen. However, he also claimed that oath-taking was a matter of conscience and that it should be left up to the individual to decide. He apparently sometimes even encouraged other Anabaptists not to swear oaths, and got into trouble as a result. Probably the oath in question here was the oath required by Strassburg civil authorities to desist from Anabaptist activity: this, Marpeck thought, was unacceptable, as it was a matter of conscience.\textsuperscript{218}

Boyd has also researched Marpeck’s views on taxes. He approved of the collection of taxes, because he advocated the use of money for the common good, especially poor relief. He did not actually pay taxes himself due to his position as a civil servant, but he ensured that large amounts of public money were used to help the poor.\textsuperscript{219} As for the question of paying tithes, this meant supporting the established church, and many Anabaptists refused to pay them as a result. Marpeck is known to have mixed with people in Strassburg who refused to pay tithes\textsuperscript{220}, but there is no evidence as to whether he personally opposed their payment or not. This issue proved to be one of the main points of disagreement between the Swiss Anabaptists and Zwingli, who supported them as a necessary part of supporting the Church.\textsuperscript{221}

As Marpeck believed in what we would call social welfare, it will come as no surprise to learn that he encouraged Christians to be politically active as a way of expressing their social responsibility. The ultimate expression of political activity was of course to rule, but he believed that a ruler could only be a true Christian with great difficulty.\textsuperscript{222} He emphasised “liberal mutuality” in the individual over self-interest. He seemed to attach more importance to this than other Christians, especially some of his brother Anabaptists, who wanted to withdraw from society and only look after their own.\textsuperscript{223} At times he described acts of kindness to others as having a kind of sacramental value: if the recipient of the good act was full of faith, then he received the Holy Spirit, too, in the act.\textsuperscript{224}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item\textsuperscript{217} Boyd 1992, 53.
\item\textsuperscript{218} Boyd 1992, 164.
\item\textsuperscript{219} Boyd 1992, 165.
\item\textsuperscript{220} Boyd 1992, 54.
\item\textsuperscript{221} Stayer 1996, 31.
\item\textsuperscript{222} Stayer 1996, 33.
\item\textsuperscript{223} Boyd 1992, 171.
\item\textsuperscript{224} Boyd 1992, 172.
\end{thebibliography}
5.6 On other aspects of Christian belief and life

Marpeck wrote sometimes in depth, sometimes in brief about many other aspects of Christians belief and life. Here are some more of his thoughts on other Christian groupings’ theology which shed further light on his attitude towards these groupings.

He declared that he had found common ground with Bucer and other Protestants on the mass not being a sacrifice: “This act you have decried as the greatest apostasy, and it is.” He was appalled at the Papists’ idea of the mass being a perfect sacrifice of the Son of God to the Father, describing their mass practices as “a sacrifice to Moloch, an apish copying, a serpent sign.”

Marpeck shared Luther’s concept of the Church consisting of a priesthood of believers. He defined it as Christians who had died to the world, been baptized and consciously believed in Christ.

He commented on the Papists’ reliance on the saints’ intercession on behalf of the living in *Judgement and Decision*. He declared simply, “I cannot be saved by the works of someone else.” To the likes of Marpeck saints had far too important a place in Christian life. For example, in Cologne no less than one hundred saints’ days were celebrated every year at that time.

Another Papist belief that Marpeck objected to was the to him superstitious belief in God’s presence in a physical place, such as a church building. Marpeck emphasised the internal here, ie. God’s presence in the hearts of true believers. He used the word “temple” to describe the spiritual place where Christians live: “all the faithful live and dwell in the risen temple of the body of Christ.”

He also wrote critically of the (presumably Catholic) practice of burying the unbaptized dead in a “pagan graveyard.” By the 1500s the unbaptised dead were in fact buried outside Christian cemeteries, although the result would have been the same: they were buried in unhallowed ground. These above-mentioned beliefs of Marpeck’s show how much he had in common with other Protestants on these matters.

Marpeck accused Luther of taking the liberty of interpreting God’s will in his own way, in other words, of assuming he knew God’s will outside of the

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226 Kiwiet 1955, 115; PM, *Lowliness*, 446.
227 PM *Judgement & Decision*, 339 and editorial footnote 36.
revealed Word. Luther referred to “God’s will“ in order to justify his views on communion, child baptism and infant faith, among other things. As Marpeck put it, in reference to Luther and his supporters:

Whenever they find themselves at their wits’ end, they save their theology by appealing to the omnipotence of God. There is no sharper nor more deceitful article of false teaching than to use and preach the power and omnipotence of God outside of the order of God’s [revealed] Word.230

Such behaviour is presumptious and rebellious, since God’s revealed Word should be enough.231

Marpeck criticised the Zwinglians for their obsession with observance of the Sabbath. The council of Zürich even passed a law requiring seventh day observance in 1541. Marpeck did not believe “keeping the Sabbath holy“ meant literally taking one day of rest each week.232 People who did so were making the same mistake as the Pharisees, who seemed to think that man was made for the Sabbath rather than the other way round (Mk 2:27). It may seem surprising that Marpeck did not take the fourth commandment literally, considering the importance he attached to the word of Scripture, but it is in keeping with his overall theology to emphasise internal rather than external observance. A true Christian did not work all the time anyway, because that would be putting man’s needs and desires before God’s.

6 Results of research
Let me summarise Marpeck’s views on Catholic, Lutheran and Zwinglian theology: first I shall recap what he objected to in their theologies, then I shall list the topics he agreed with them on. Finally I shall draw my conclusions about Marpeck’s perceptions of these other Christian theologies, and answer the questions I asked in the Introduction.

Marpeck opposed them all on infant baptism, and everything that was unavoidably connected with it: godparents, the compulsion to belong to the Church and the lack of teaching for the baptised in preparation for baptism. He objected to their denial of absolute free will, including free will to choose to believe in God or not. He believed they had underestimated the importance of

230 PM, Judgement and Decision, 341.
231 Klassen & Klaassen 1978, 341: editorial footnote 47.
232 PM, Judgement and Decision, 339 and editorial footnote 35.
communion, in that they did not seem to come to the Lord’s Supper spiritually prepared. He perceived a lack of discipline, in that they allowed unrepentant sinners to partake of it. He objected to their use of the term ”sacrament” for communion, baptism or indeed anything else. He criticised their willingness to resort to the sword in self-defence or for other less justifiable reasons. He opposed not just the papacy in its capacity as leader of the Church but the idea of anyone having spiritual authority over anyone else.

He challenged the Catholic and Lutheran doctrine of original sin and disagreed with the Lutherans and Zwinglians on predestination.

He took issue with specifically the Catholic Church on numerous other matters, many of which other Protestants, too, objected to. He detected an obsession with externals and rituals, including an altogether too showy eucharistic ceremony and the to him bizarre idea of blessing objects. He disagreed with the doctrine of transubstantiation and opposed the practice of communion under one kind. He opposed the ancient concept of monasticism and also the important place the Church gave to tradition (as opposed to sola scriptura). He disagreed with its interpretation of history, deploring the political power the Church had come to enjoy since late Roman times, which he contrasted with the as he saw it ideal early Church of humble, downtrodden, true believers. He opposed the idea of the mass being a sacrifice as well as the institution of masses for the dead. Of the particular issues under debate during the Reformation, he did not agree with the Catholics about very much. Their interpretation of free will was to narrow for him, and while he approved of the use of externals, he did not approve of the way the Catholics used them.

Regarding the Lutherans, Marpeck disagreed with their eucharistic doctrine of consubstantiation, as well as Luther’s belief in children’s inner faith. He also objected to the doctrine of sola fide and differed with Luther on the effects of preaching. There was much common ground, though, albeit rarely admitted. I believe he would have approved of the relatively restrained use of externals by Lutherans, and he expressed agreement with them about, for example, communion under both kinds and the concept of a priesthood of believers. Lutheran innovations such as the translation of the Bible into German were in use and no doubt had his full approval.

Finally, his specific disagreement with the Zwinglians was about covenant theology. There was quite a rift between Marpeck (and other Anabaptists) and
Zwingli. This was probably partly because the Anabaptists had originally set their hopes on Zwingli as the leading Evangelical churchman who was closest to their beliefs. Once Zwingli decided against infant baptism, though, and in favour of tithes, the differences between them stood out more than the similarities. I noted in 4.1 that Marpeck and Zwingli shared the same view on the symbolic meaning of communion, but Marpeck gave the credit for this doctrine to Oecolampadius, Franck and Bullinger, not to Zwingli. Did he do so deliberately? He described in detail his differences with Zwingli over covenant theology. This all suggests that he was unwilling to emphasise the things they did have in common.

And yet the two did have quite a lot in common, notably the doctrine of communion, including sub utraque specie, a similar distrust of the doctrine of original sin, a rigid belief in sola scriptura and, the numerous points that they, as well as the Lutherans, disagreed with the Old Church about. This last point deserves particular attention. Those who oppose the same things often become allies, despite their differences on other issues. There were several instances of a Catholic state allying itself with a Protestant country against another Catholic state, such as the case of France during the Thirty Years War. Although such alliances are not unusual between states, they seem to be much rarer in the field of religion. Catholics, Lutheran and Zwinglians all distrusted Anabaptists equally, but this having a common enemy did not reconcile them to each other. There was just as much bitterness between Lutherans and Zwinglians as there was between either grouping and the Catholics. Sometimes, Lutherans found they had more in common with their Catholic than their fellow Protestant Calvinist counterparts. Marpeck’s differences with the Lutherans and Zwinglians far outweighed the considerable common ground there was between them.

One issue above all others was behind this, an issue both Marpeck and Bucer had described as of paramount importance. It concerned the attitude of Christians towards civil government. Whereas Marpeck could not emphasise enough the need for people to be able to decide about matters concerning their faith, Bucer, tolerant though he was, was appalled at the Anabaptists’ tendency towards separatism. In those days the ideal of Christendom, a united Christian community, was still alive. Yet the Anabaptist seemingly led two lives: a secular life within that community and a religious life outside it. Marpeck’s ideal citizen was obedient to his overlord, but made up his own mind about religious matters, which in practice meant setting up an Anabaptist community in the city where he
lived, rather than staying inside the established church and attempting to transform it from within, as the Lutherans and Zwinglians were doing. These radically different attitudes to questions of authority were ultimately more divisive than more specifically religious questions.

To what extent were Pilgram Marpeck’s criticisms of his opponents’ theology justified? He was an adult when the Reformation broke out, became a Lutheran in his twenties, and an Anabaptist in his thirties. He was therefore mature enough to be able to reflect deeply on these different theologies and practices. I suspect, however, that he had no great desire to get to know his opponents’ theology and practice particularly well. His criticisms of some Papist, Lutheran and Zwinglian practices display an ignorance of the reasoning behind them. He did not analyse long-standing, widely accepted Old Church apologia of, for example, baptism or transubstantiation; his objections, although well reasoned, come across as somewhat superficial. His starting point was often completely different from that of his opponents. For example, only an adult could understand what it meant to become a Christian, therefore infant baptism was invalid. He did not analyse the theology behind the use of godparents, members of the Christian lay community, to bring the child up in the faith, or the concept of faith by proxy. He emphasized the important role of Anabaptist laypeople in admonishing each other in preparation for communion, but did not seem to believe that other Christian laypeople were capable of instructing children about the faith. There is a discrepancy here. He ruled out transubstantiation and consubstantiation in rather brief passages, whereas many theologians have devoted a lot more space to Eucharistic theology. He did not write about the deep spiritual meaning behind the mass as a sacrifice, or the practice of going to confession before communion. Marpeck was, of course, a self-taught lay theologian, so gaps in his theological knowledge ae only to be expected. It should equally be pointed out that his knowledge of theology was remarkable for a man of such a description.

What importance do Marpeck’s writings have for dialogue between different Christian groupings? I have looked at what Marpeck wrote about Lutheran, Zwinglian and Catholic theology in his works. The reader will have noted how often he tarred them all with the same brush: they all supported infant baptism, the concept of *cuius regio eius religio*, and the use of the sword, for example. No matter how substantial the differences between these groupings may have been to his contemporaries, or to us, he frequently noted how much his
opponents had in common. Unfortunately this seems to have created an "us and them" mentality in him: only he understood what the true Church should be like, while his mainstream opponents, not to mention the Spiritualists and many other Anabaptists, had all got it wrong. There is nothing unusual in this kind of mentality. Of course, such a way of thinking can indirectly foster a spirit of ecumenism. Those put unwittingly in the same category might suddenly realise that they do indeed have much in common. On the whole, however, it displays an ignorance of the various different theologies.

To what extent did Marpeck’s work and writings as a lay theologian foster a spirit of reconciliation between the Christian groupings of the time? I believe that his character and behaviour won him many friends and admirers, even among his opponents, as mentioned in chapter 2.1. He was able to live and work in Strassburg for four years, despite his heretical status. He may have had a certain personal charm which impressed those he dealt with. This may have enabled him to keep discussions going when a less agreeable figure might have simply provoked his opponents to extreme measures.

In his writings, however, these qualities are rarely in evidence. He dismissed his opponents’ deeply held convictions in the strongest possible terms. Terms such as "Antichrist", "abomination", "hypocrisy", "idolatry", "perverted", "defiled", "antichristian", "den of thieves" and "mockery" abound in his texts. About half of the conclusion of his main work, the Admonition, consists in an attack on his opponents and about half in a defence of his own beliefs. Admittedly, he was a typical writer of his time: the Lutheran Confessions, too, use a similar approach of setting out their doctrines of belief while at the same time criticizing their opponents’ beliefs. But it is difficult to defend his reputation as a peacemaker. There is little evidence of “gentle” language in his works, and Southall is surely wrong in describing his writings as “irenic” (see 3.1). Marpeck did grudgingly admit to agreement with his opponents on some issues, but never emphasized what he had in common with them over what separated them.

Marpeck’s theological thought seems to have been consistent over the years. I have not detected any major developments in it in the texts I have analysed, which cover a twenty-year period. He continued to use the same arguments throughout. He did, however, adopt a lower profile in his later years, which may have reflected his fear of getting into any entanglements with the authorities. This consistency should come as no surprise: he had, after all, been through dramatic
changes in his beliefs as a young man. At least his beliefs during the Anabaptist phase of his life were consistent.

I have already mentioned some of the theological subjects Marpeck had seemingly only a superficial knowledge of. It is interesting to note what he neglected to write about, or largely ignored. As far as I know, Marpeck did not write about such subjects which Luther held to be of great importance as indulgences, purgatory, the Virgin Mary, clerical celibacy or the apparently imminent end of the world. He barely mentioned corruption in the Church, the veneration of saints, monasticism or Eastern Orthodoxy. Perhaps strangest of all, he was silent on the burning issue of iconoclasm: Zwingli’s supporters and some other Protestants smashed religious paintings, statues and other images, believing them to be against the second commandment. And yet the related use of externals in religious practice was of particular interest to Marpeck. One must bear in mind that, like Luther, he did not write a systematic theology of Christianity, but it is surprising that these topics, which were much discussed at the time, were not covered by him. He seems to have left his Catholic upbringing behind him, with most of the practices and traditions associated with it. But then he apparently had no interest in some of the topics that inspired Luther’s and Zwingli’s reformations. Many subjects left unmentioned were, of course, those about which there was general agreement: Christ’s nature as both God and man, Christ’s redemptive work, the holy trinity and so on.

History tends to be written by winners. Most of our knowledge of the Anabaptists comes from texts written by non-Anabaptists. To understand this movement better, or any movement that ended in defeat, it is essential to read the writings that they, too, left behind. In the same way, it is very useful to see what “losers” wrote about “winners”, for example, what Anabaptists wrote about Catholics, Lutherans and Zwinglians. Marpeck no doubt represented a considerable body of opinion at the time who dismissed much of what the Old Church stood for as a falsification of true Christianity, while also criticizing the Magisterial Reformers as having failed in their task of reforming the Church. His writings help us to understand what these other Christian groupings looked like to those who were outside them. They also help us to understand the various modern church denominations better. A knowledge of what was considered acceptable or unacceptable Christian practice in the 1500s gives one an insight into what might be considered acceptable or unacceptable today, and how harmful it may be to
label a certain practice as unacceptable.

Marpeck was largely forgotten for centuries, but was rediscovered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century thanks to the work of Johann Loserth, while the discovery of some of his texts in the Kunstbuch, unearthed in 1956, raised interest still further. He has received considerable attention since then from Torsten Bergsten and William Klassen in particular. This attention and renewed interest in his work has cemented his reputation as one of the most important theological thinkers of Anabaptism in the sixteenth century.

7 Glossary of important persons

**Bucer, Martin** (1491–1551) - leading Protestant theologian; Strassburg
**Bullinger, Heinrich** (1504–1575) – leader of Reformed Church in Zürich after Zwingli
**Franck, Sebastian** (1499–1543) – dissenter, opposed all “churches”; Strassburg and S Germany
**Hubmaier, Balthasar** (1480–1528) – leading Anabaptist theologian; S Germany, Switzerland
**Luther, Martin** (1483–1546) – leading Protestant theologian; N Germany
**Marpeck, Pilgram** (c.1495–1556) – lay Anabaptist theologian; Tyrol, Strassburg, Switzerland and S Germany
**Oecolampadius, Johannes** (1482–1531) – Protestant theologian; Basel
**Rothmann, Bernhard** (c.1495–c.1535) – early Anabaptist; N Germany
**Schwenckfeld, Caspar von** (1489/90 – 1561) – Spiritualist; Silesia, Strassburg and S Germany
**Zwingli, Ulrich** (1484 – 1531) – leading Protestant theologian; Zürich

8 List of Pilgram Marpeck’s works

Below is a list of the works by Pilgram Marpeck referred to in this dissertation:

A Clear Refutation / Eine Clare Verantwortung (1531)
Exposé of the Babylonian Whore / Aufdeckung der Babylonischen Hure (1531)
Pilgram Marpeck’s Confession / Rechenschaft seines Glaubens (1532)
Admonition / Vermahnung (1541)
Explanation of the Testaments / Testamentserleuterung (c.1544-c.1550)
Letters: Judgement and Decision (c.1541), The Churches of Christ and Hagar (1544), Concerning the Lowliness of Christ (1547), Men in Judgement and the Peasant Aristocracy (1547), Concerning the love of God in Christ (SA)

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McGrath, Alister E.

McLaughlin, R. Emmet

Meuser, Fred W.

Müller, Richard A.

Räisänen, Päivi

Räisänen-Schröder, Päivi

Rothkegel, Martin

Southall, David

Stayer, James M.

Wannenwetsch, Bernd

Whitford, David M.
Yoder, John Howard