

Theological Roots of Gender Reconciliation in 16th Century Anabaptism: A Prolegomenon

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I attended the “EnGendering the Past: Women and Men in Mennonite History” conference as an historical theologian most recently concerned about: 1. various forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, heterosexism) in the world and their manifestations in the church; 2. the ways in which Christian theology has been used and continues to be used to mystify us about those forms of oppression and our participation in them; 3. the ways in which historical constructions of masculinity inscribe oppressive habits of thought feeling and behavior in men’s lives and bodies; and 4. the possibilities of recovering and re-visioning aspects of the Christian tradition that have led and can lead us toward justice and reconciliation.¹ These concerns have been significantly influenced by earlier work on sixteenth century South German Anabaptism.² Consequently, a recently discovered reference to the unconventional ideas and practices of a group related to that strain of Anabaptism led me to wonder whether members might have been experimenting with the transformation of marriage and sexuality by rejecting the patterns of male supremacy and female subordination that characterized the prevailing sexist gender system.³ The invitation to the conference provided an opportunity to begin to explore that possibility.

In 1531, a group of peasants near Erlangen were rounded up and arrested for

officials thought undermined the institution of marriage. Under interrogation often accompanied by torture, members of the group described how some of them—both women and men—had left spouses and entered “new” marriages in obedience to the Spirit. Some testified that they saw a great deal of quarreling, anger, unfaithfulness, and discord among married people. Consequently they concluded, according to one Michael Maier, that the kind of marriages that produced such enmity must be the product of “fleshly lusts” and could not be true marriages from God. Therefore, God led them to enter “new marriages, in which there should be no quarreling and self-justifying wrangling.”⁴ Some who were already married engaged in a period of sexual renunciation.⁵ Then, listening to the voice of God (die Stein), they left former spouses and entered spiritual marriages with new partners. Some unmarried believers were directed to enter into spousal relationships for the first time.⁶ At least one married couple said that they were led to renew their relationship with one another.⁷ In addition, they testified that “the voice” told them when and how often to have sexual relations.⁸ Apparently, for many members of this group, “marriages which were not of the spirit and sex which was not spiritual were not real unions at all, but worldly, false marriages.”⁹

Of the approximately 65 persons from thirteen towns and villages identified with the group, nineteen can be identified as having been associated with Anabaptist circles in the area, including Hans Schmid, whose house in Uttenreuth was the center of the group. Among other group participants formerly jailed as Anabaptists were Hans Strigel, Hans Hut’s host in Uttenreuth several years earlier, Marx Maier of Altererlangen and the Kerns of Crainthal.¹⁰

In this essay, I want to explore the possibility that these short-lived experiments which Claus-Peter Clasen has characterized as irrational aberrations from Anabaptist norms might be seen instead as nascent attempts to transform marriage and sexuality based on an affirmation of gender equality consistent with theological impulses within early South German Anabaptism.¹¹ My suggestion is tentative and requires much more development than I can offer here. However, as a prolegomenon to a fuller investigation, I want to locate this group in a trajectory within western Christianity concerning women’s full equality with men, view Martin Luther’s innovative position in that trajectory from perspectives developed in the “new men’s studies,” and relate the Erlangen group to several notions and practices central to a related strain of South German Anabaptism.

Trajectory toward the *Theological Affirmation of Women’s Equality*

In the history of biblical interpretation of the Genesis creation narratives and other theological assessments of the status of women, one can identify three key questions in the movement toward the affirmation of women’s full humanity:

Stage One: Is woman made in the image of God?; Stage Two: Is subjugation of woman to man to considered the intended order of God in creation or is it the order of the Fall?; Stage Three: Is a full and equal participation of women in the social, political, and religious life of society simply an eschatological hope or is that God's intention for this world?

Stage One: Woman Created in the Image of God

Discussions about whether women were created in the image of God have tended to focus on the various things Paul said about women in the Corinthian correspondence and on the interpretation of the Genesis accounts of creation.¹² Early Christian traditions of interpretation (e.g., Ambrosiaster) explicitly denied that women were created in the image of God, citing I Corinthians 11:7 "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man." In addition, Christian interpreters, following Jewish predecessors, tended to relate Genesis 1:27b "male and female he [God] created them" to 1:28 "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;'" In other words, the sexual differentiation of 1:27b was related to God's plan, articulated in the next verse, for sexual reproduction among human beings. In this tradition, sexual differentiation was simply God's way of providing for reproduction; women were, then, necessary for reproduction, but did not have, as did men, the image of God as a part of their nature.

However, Clement of Alexandria introduced an exegetical innovation and initiated an alternative trajectory in western Christian thinking concerning the nature and status of women and their relation to men. He interpreted Genesis 1:27b in light of Genesis 1:27a: "So God created humankind in his [God's] own image, in the image of God he created them." In contrast to the earlier exegetical tradition, Clement, by relating Gen. 1:27b to 1:27a, argued that women were created in the image of God and interpreted I Corinthians 11:7 not literally, but as an allegory with "man" representing higher reason and "woman" representing lower reason. By spiritualizing the image of God, Clement can then claim that women share it insofar as they possess higher reason. Augustine, building on Clement's innovation, also asserted that women, insofar as they possess higher reason, are in the image of God, but, insofar as they play an inferior role in procreation (i.e., that of receptacles) and are subject to men they are not in the image of God. Those who followed Clement and Augustine (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas) in this new interpretation advanced similar qualifications and also presumed that Adam, even in Paradise, had an inherent ability, right, and responsibility to rule in the physical, temporal world.¹³

In this trajectory, then, there was the affirmation that women were created in the image of God. However, in many of the figures constituting this tradition,

that affirmation was so qualified that the affirmation was nearly negated. This was probably due to the fact that most of the figures, even in this tradition, believed that men's rule and women's subjection was of the order intended by God in creation.

Stage Two: Male Dominance as Order of the Fall

Martin Luther, however, introduced a further exegetical innovation arguing that the Genesis narratives reveal that patriarchy—the rule of men over women—was not God's intention in creation, but a consequence of the fall into sin. Holding a view of contemporary married life similar to that of Marx Maier, Luther's explanation for why marriages were so full of enmity and strife was that the original equality of women and men had been disrupted by human sin.¹⁴ The Fall had profound consequences for both sexes.

In the original creation the woman had mental gifts "in the same degree" as did the man; she partook of both "the divine image and similitude" and of the "rule over everything."¹⁵ Luther says that if Eve had not sinned, she would not have been subject to the rule of her husband and would have been a partner in the ruling functions that are now entirely the responsibility of males. However, because of her sin woman was "deprived of the ability of administering those affairs that are outside... she does not go beyond her most personal duties." She is like a "nail driven into the wall; she sits at home... as the snail carries its house with it, so the wife should stay at home and look after the affairs of the household." She unwillingly bears the punishment of having been placed "under the power of her husband." Luther says, "women are generally disinclined to put up with this burden, and they naturally seek to gain what they have lost through sin."¹⁶ So, a power struggle ensues in the family. While the husband attempts to do his duty by ruling, directing and instructing the wife often tries to wrest whatever power she can from him. If she is unable to accomplish much of this, she "at least indicates [her] impatience by grumbling." As the man tries to carry out his responsibility to rule the family he is met with, at worst, guerilla warfare and, at best, grumbling resentment.

As for the man, Luther observes, "Adam's position is burdened with a definite punishment, since it is the husband's duty to support his family, to rule, to direct, and to instruct; and these things cannot be done without extraordinary trouble and very great effort."¹⁷ So, Adam's dominance brings with it "extraordinary trouble and very great effort" that Luther construes to be a kind of punishment. These troubles and effort come externally as he attempts "to rule the home, the family, cities, [and] kingdoms..." as well as internally as he attempts to control impulses unleashed within himself. In his body, Adam and his successors have "a raging lust kindled by the poison of Satan in his body..." Everything else in his body is "almost dead and without sensation." This raging

lust is passionate not only “in its desire,” but also “in its disgust after it has acquired what it wanted.”¹⁸ Men, impelled by “raging lust” were, according to Luther, “compelled to make use of intercourse with their wives to avoid sin”—a use that could and often did lead to abuse—physical, emotional, and sexual. Faced with chaos from without and within, a man’s duty, then, is to exercise a tight discipline externally and internally:

In this life he must control his own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin; here a man cannot enjoy leisure; here he must indeed take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline...¹⁹

And, as Luther said, it is extraordinarily difficult. In fact, he believed that these extra burdens were the reason why men in his day died younger than those in the age of the biblical patriarchs.

So, according to Luther, many of the difficulties in men’s and women’s lives and in their relationships to one another stem from the unjust domination of men over women, which is a manifestation, or result, of human sin. It is unjust in the sense that it is contrary to the intentions of God for humanity.²⁰ One of the interesting things about Luther’s perspective is that he acknowledges that the injustice of a sexist gender system causes pain for both women and men—though in different ways. He notes some of the ways he believes women react to that pain—covert power struggles or grumbling resentment. He says less about men’s responses.

A Men’s Studies Perspective on Men’s Condition

Luther’s view of men’s difficulties is remarkably similar to that of some contemporary practitioners of men’s studies who do examine the effects of patterns of male dominance on men.²¹ For example, social psychologists, Joseph Pleck and James O’Neill, have identified domination, or control, as a core aspect of the masculine sex-role and argue that it causes a great deal of psychological, emotional and physical strain in the lives of men.²² Their research indicates that a person is considered masculine if he is “in control, powerful, and competitive.”²³ Further, men associate masculinity with achievement and success, so that work becomes the primary arena for the validation of their masculinity; task completion takes prominence over relationship maintenance. Masculine socialization, then, shapes men to be externally focused and to strive for success, which is understood to be the management, or control, of the people and things around them. Masculine norms also tend to be femiphobic and homophobic and to produce restrictive emotionality and sexual compulsivity in men. Due to the ridicule, humiliation or physical abuse boys routinely experience for displays of emotion as unmanly, many men come to associate emotional expressiveness with the feminine, repudiate it, and demonstrate a stunted capacity to recognize

feelings and express them. Men are also violently conditioned to view as feminine touching, sensuality, the expression of sexual need or passive sexual behavior, and any attraction to another male. Sex, then, is separated from intimate reciprocity and turns into another arena of achievement, performance, or control.

One might say that men's success at work, or in the public sphere, depends on their ability to control their bodies, emotionality and sexuality, and to channel them into a very narrow, often compulsive set of behaviors. And the cost of such success is high. Because this kind of success is situational and externally conferred, it must be continuously repeated, leading to workaholism. Low emotional self-disclosure often means that men's emotional needs go unmet, resulting in intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts, frustrations, and disappointments. The inhibition from expressing needs for sensual and sexual contact causes many men to suffer from touch deprivation and accompanying psychological distress. In sum, the male role requires men to be tireless, self-sufficient, invincible "machines."²⁴ The result for many men is a state of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological isolation. Unexpressed emotions and ill-cared for bodies lead to pain and stress, causing acute and chronic illnesses and lowered life expectancies.

Although they do not, as did Luther, describe them as a "punishment for sin," Pleck and O'Neill would agree that the requirements of masculinity involve men in "extraordinary trouble and very great effort." Doing one's duty as a man (read: Luther's vocation), involves internal repression (Luther's self-control) for the purpose of external domination, leading to internal alienation and external isolation and an early death. Along with Luther, these social psychologists do not see these masculine requirements as somehow derived from the essence or nature of men. Rather, they are a consequence of human arrangements. While Pleck and O'Neill might call them dysfunctional, unhealthy, or even unjust, Luther calls them "sinful"—a consequence of human alienation from God.

It seems, then, that one could argue that at the core of men's difficulties and the difficulties they cause for others are dominative habits of thought, emotion, and behavior shaped by the conditioning of a sexist social order.

Stage 3: Christ's Restoration of Gender Equality: Luther and Gender Equality in the *Next* World

If, as Luther believed, male supremacy—and the difficulties it causes for women and men—was not God's intention in creation, one might anticipate that he would argue that Christ's redemption restored the original equality of women and men in the world. Does he, then, affirm the full and equal participation of women in the social, political, religious life of society?²⁵ In short, the answer is no.²⁶

Luther believed that original sin and its consequences—unbelief and raging lust—are

so deeply implanted in our flesh, and this poison has been so widely spread through the flesh, body, mind, muscles, and blood; through the bones and the very marrow; in the will, in the intellect, and in the reason, that they cannot be fully removed....²⁷

Therefore, although we are set free by Christ's death, acquire his merits through faith, and are reborn for righteousness, that righteousness "merely has its beginning in this life and it cannot attain perfection in this flesh." Christians, through baptism are restored not so much to the life lost by Adam and Eve, but to the hope of that life.²⁸ That hope would be fulfilled in the eschaton, which Luther expected imminently. So, until then, Luther believed that the three estates (i.e., the state, the church and the family) God had ordained to restrain the destructive consequences of unbelief and raging lust (caused by original sin) remained a tragic necessity. These estates, including the family, provided that restraint through the use of force exercised by hierarchically ordered male officers, whose exclusive responsibility it was to administer that dominating power.

South German Anabaptism and Gender Equality in *This* World

This leads to a final question: Were there others in the sixteenth century who believed not only that women were created fully in the image of God and that male domination was an order of the Fall not of Creation, but also that Christ's redemption restores equality and mutuality between women and men in this world, as well as in the next? I believe there might have been. I want to advance the thesis that there were some early South German Anabaptists who moved farther in the direction of women's equality and gender reconciliation than did Luther. In the rest of this paper I provide evidence of a movement toward a third stage of Christian thinking and practice concerning male/female relations and gender reconciliation in the thought and actions of representatives of two strains emerging from the Hans Hut mission—Pilgram Marpeck and members of the Erlangen group.

Pilgram Marpeck (1495–1556) was somewhat more critical than Luther about the role of dominating, or coercive, power to the redeeming work of Christ in this world. In his view, Christ, through his suffering, death and the outpouring of the Spirit, initiated a new realm (*reich Christi*) which Marpeck carefully contrasts to the realm of the world (*weltliches reich*).²⁹ The world is characterized by what he terms variously: coercion, physical force, external authority, fleshly compulsion and force, or the power of domination and mastery (*gewalt der herrschung/oder meisterschaft*). However, in the realm of Christ, things are different, "Here there is no coercion, but spontaneous spirit in Christ Jesus our Lord." External power (*ausserliche gewalt*) may not "dominate, be used or

rule.” When speaking of power in Christ’s realm, Marpeck tends to use the term *kraft*; while he tends to use *gewalt* when referring to the kind of power exercised in the worldly realm. *Kraft*, then, denotes a strength that empowers and elicits the response of another, while *gewalt* denotes an external force and implies an unwilling coercion or domination of one over another. Rather than coercing or dominating the human being, the Spirit empowers one to participate in the divine life through a new being (*neues wesen*). In this new being or nature, “They are no longer born into slavery but as free children without humiliation, compulsion, or a guardian, as lords over all things.” The divine Spirit, imposing itself on no one, recognizes and respects the sovereignty of each person.

While asserting the sovereignty of each person in matters of faith, Marpeck also believed that intrinsic to human nature, as created by God, was an embodied dependency that required just relationships with others for the actualization of the full potential of that nature. He asserts, “The health of the soul consists of the love of the neighbor. Whoever does not love him, does not love his own soul and seeks with ignorance, his own advantage to his own greatest disadvantage.” This fundamental embodied interdependence, then, requires the believer to turn his or her attention to the quality of justice that obtains in the social relationships in which men or women find themselves. Through the Spirit of Christ, “believers are set in the freedom of the spirit,” by which they are “resolved to be diligent in all things (II Corinthians 2 [: 9]) unto the fulfillment of all justice [*gerechtigkeijt*] Matthew 3: [: 15]), not only internally before God, but also externally before humanity (2 Corinthians 8[: 21], Titus 2 [: 8]).”

When it comes to gender relations, a question that can be raised with regard to Marpeck’s perspective is, “What does ‘the fulfillment of all justice’ mean in the relationships between men and women.” As we have seen, the dominant view of the western churches defined divine justice as a hierarchically ordered relationship where, as St. Augustine puts it, there is “a certain friendly and true union of the one [the man] ruling, and the ~~other~~ [the woman] obeying.”³⁰ Focused on biblical traditions such as the household codes made use of by the authors of the pastoral epistles, this view has assumed that the subordination of women to men is an expression of God’s intention for right relations between the sexes. From this perspective, the problems between men and women could usually be traced to women’s sinful, rebellious rejection of their “natural,” subordinate place or men’s irresponsible refusal to exercise their “natural” leadership roles. This view fundamentally contradicts the affirmation of the sovereignty of each human person—in this case, that of women. As we have seen, Luther disagrees, in theory, with this view, but, his belief that the renewal of God’s intended equal and mutual relationships between men and women will be postponed to the next dispensation or the next world has the same practical effect as those who see male supremacy as God’s intention in creation. And that effect on men is to reinforce the inscription of destructive dominative habits of thought, feeling and behavior by a sexist gender system. Luther agreed that they were destructive; he just thought that more destruction would be caused if men weren’t so inscribed.

To put the question in Marpeck's terms, "Did he or members of other related groups, including the Erlangen group, see male domination as a species of *gewalt* that should be repudiated in the family, the church, and other arenas in which men and women relate?" Marpeck refused to spiritualize completely the "realm of Christ" and rejected the magisterial reformers' use of *gewalt* in it as either God's intention or as a tragic necessity. It seems reasonable, then, to assume that he or others, among the South German Anabaptists, might have also rejected *gewalt*, in the form of male domination, in the gathered church and in the family. Let's put it another way. Marpeck asserted, "The health of the soul consists of the love of the neighbor. Whoever does not love him, does not love his own soul and seeks with ignorance, his own advantage to his own greatest disadvantage." Did he or others ever come to believe that, for men, "love of the neighbor [i.e., women]" meant an acceptance of women's equal sovereignty and authority? Did "the fulfillment of all justice" come to mean the rejection of relations characterized by the unilateral control or power of men over women and a recognition of women's status as full partners in the body of Christ, along with an insistence on relationships between the sexes characterized by mutuality? Answers to these questions require more development than this essay can offer and will be the focus of future exploration. However, I want to offer some evidence that there was movement in these directions in the early Marpeck circles and in the Erlangen group.

Here, I will follow the methodological suggestions of Merry Wiesner-Hanks on the application of gender as a category of analysis and of Linda Huebert Hecht concerning the assessment of the status of women in Anabaptism. Wiesner-Hanks argues that one needs to go beyond women's and family history to gender history. Among the tasks she identifies as necessary are:

1. a reexamination of women-identified categories (i.e., marital status, number of children, etc.) to determine how "they determine men's experiences as well" as women's and
2. attention to male sexuality, familial roles, and gender restrictions on men.³¹

On the basis of her own and others' work, Huebert Hecht proposes that one go beyond the analysis of prescriptive statements in the writings of leaders to case histories of particular women and their relation to regionally specific forms of Anabaptism on the basis of court records, correspondence, and other archival materials.³²

Early Tirolean Anabaptism and Marpeck's Circles

In at least some of the circles that influenced and were influenced by Marpeck, there are indications that women were: 1. integrally involved in the gathered communities, some making contributions equivalent to those of men,

and 2. may have been viewed by some as peers and partners in marital relationships. In a later manuscript version of the paper she gave at the EnGendering Mennonite History Conference, Huebert Hecht, argues that, "There is convincing evidence that for a brief moment in time at the beginning of the Anabaptist movement women took the opportunity to share authority with men in various forms of mutual, alternate and interdependent leadership." While she focuses on that opportunity in the gathered community of faith (the church), I am asking whether that opportunity was extended to marital relationships (the family).³³

Among the 455 Anabaptist members of Tirolean congregations from which Marpeck sprang 210 were women, including 15 lay leaders and missionaries, and 49 martyrs.³⁴ In the early period (1526–1529) women appear, in some areas, to have been as active as the men in proselytizing, hosting congregations in their homes, and otherwise leading Anabaptist groups. In fact, women were viewed by civil authorities as among the "principal baptizers and seducers" and targeted for arrest, torture, and execution.³⁵ There is some indication that women, in this early period, may have baptized, as one woman reported that she "made six new Christians in a short time."³⁶ Consequently, the extent to which there were limits on the roles of and on the formal functions performed by women in this early period is uncertain and requires more research into archival sources either not yet published or not completely reproduced in published editions.³⁷

Marpeck, significantly shaped by Tirolean Anabaptism, never addressed the status of women in congregational life explicitly. However, he comes very close in one passage in "*A Clear and Useful Instruction*," 1531 where Marpeck speaks of women, as a group, and echoes the language of Paul (I Corinthians 12:22).³⁸ Against Christian Entfelder and other spiritualists, Marpeck joins Paul's assertion that the weakest members of the body are the most necessary with the resurrection narratives (John 20:17; Matthew 28:10; Mark 16:7; and Luke 24:9,10) in which the women "were asked to announce the resurrection of Christ to the apostles." Because of the division caused in the late 1520's by disagreements over the proper mode and function of baptism and the Lord's Supper, Entfelder contended that they should be suspended (*a stillstandt* observed) until an external, miraculous command from God through a new prophet restored these and other ceremonies, including perhaps the election of a *Vorsteher*.³⁹ Marpeck retorts that following this logic, the apostles should never have believed the "weak and poor" women and should have waited for "higher and greater prophets" who could "dispel their unbelief with signs and miracles." Earlier in the same treatise, Marpeck affirmed,

For God the Father is not completely in any one member of Christ's body (which body endures until the end of the world) or in the single member alone; rather, He is all in all when the members are knit together under the Head and united through His Spirit...⁴⁰

For Marpeck God is available in Christ, not spiritually apart from the physical acts and ceremonies, but physically through and only through members of the concrete, gathered community of believers. Further, he argues, "Regard-

less of how much the false prophets may exalt the preaching office, this testimony is evidently, even today, not forbidden to any of the true believers,” including women in 1531, one must assume, as in apostolic times.⁴¹ Finally, Marpeck asserts that “reason and thought and almost all conceited spirits strongly resist... they must all come under the physical feet of Christ,” by which he means, “such mundane things as outward teaching received by faith” and witnessed to “by simple water.”⁴²

The thrust of Marpeck’s argument, along with underlining the centrality for Christian faith of the material aspects of Christ’s presence in the congregation, makes a strong case against Entfelder and, perhaps, others for women’s right, even obligation, to preach, teach and, apparently, baptize. For him, the saving power of Christ is present in the whole body, that is, in the congregation composed of everyone who believes and is baptized. The body of Christ, then, includes women who are not forbidden to preach, teach, or baptize. They, like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had done in apostolic times, bear testimony to the power of Christ’s resurrection. Acknowledging that women were regarded by the world, in the first century and evidently by Entfelder in his own, as “weak and poor,” Marpeck, relying on Paul, reverses that judgment and implies that they and their preaching and teaching are necessary. In fact, anyone who wants to enter the body of Christ must “come under the physical feet of Christ”—that is, anyone, including women, who preaches, teaches, and baptizes.

Is Marpeck, in 1531, rejecting the exercise by men of a “*gewalt der herrschung*” in the gathered congregation of the baptized and making, for his time, an argument for women’s full participation in a “discipleship of equals”?⁴³ Would he extend that rejection of male domination to another of Luther’s three estates—the family and the relation between husbands and wives? A definitive response to these questions would require: 1. a closer examination of Marpeck’s writings and those emanating from the congregations related to him; 2. an analysis, based on correspondence and archival material, of the kinds of activities women pursued in these groups;⁴⁴ 3. attention to possible changes in Marpeck’s position on the status and role of women over time.⁴⁵ There are, however, some intriguing indications that there was movement toward a more egalitarian view of the relationships between men and women. For example, the figure of Helena von Freyberg looms large as a collaborator with Marpeck throughout his life and ministry. As the head of one of the earliest Anabaptist congregations in the Tirol, Helena may well have facilitated Marpeck’s introduction to Anabaptist ideas.⁴⁶ After her expulsion from the Tirol, she left her husband, Onophrius von Freyberg,⁴⁷ and settled in Constance and may also have mediated a relationship between Marpeck and Margaret Blaurer that was the cause of much distress to the latter’s brother, Ambrosius, the magisterial reformer of the same city and Martin Bucer, Marpeck’s nemesis in Strasbourg.⁴⁸ After Marpeck’s expulsion from Strasbourg in 1531, Helena apparently stayed in contact with him, as she sent a copy of Marpeck’s *Admonition* to Caspar

Schwenckfeld and received a letter from Schwenckfeld to send on to Marpeck.⁴⁹ Finally, Helena was probably instrumental in Marpeck's settling in Augsburg, where, according to Marpeck's later colleague, Hans Jakob Schneider, she had instructed him in fundamentals of the faith when he had served as her tailor in the early 1540's.⁵⁰ Magdalena Marschalk von Pappenheim, a former Benedictine nun and member of an aristocratic family, engaged Marpeck and Caspar Schwenckfeld in theological debate, defended Marpeck's position against Helena Streicher, and corresponded with him until the end of her life.⁵¹ So, there are indications that there were at least some women in Anabaptist circles who presented the Gospel message and with whom Marpeck developed relationships characterized by mutual respect, support, and intellectual exchange.

Are there any indications that recognition of women's competence and sovereignty extended into the marital relations of any of those Anabaptist congregations affiliated with Marpeck? Again, more careful analysis of the correspondence and archival material related to these groups will need to be done. With regard to Marpeck, himself, he was apparently married twice. His first wife, Sophia Harrer, with whom he had one daughter, Margareth, died sometime before 1528 and he was married to an Anna by July of the same year.⁵² In his writings and correspondence, Marpeck discloses very little personal information. However, in three letters dating from the period, 1545–1547, Marpeck refers to Anna in ways that suggest that his relationship to her was governed, in his mind, primarily by their mutual membership in the body of Christ, where, as we have seen, there was, in some respects, a more egalitarian notion of social roles than obtained in Luther's view or in the wider culture. The model he uses to express his understanding of the nature of that relationship is that of a brother and sister. In 1547, Marpeck ends a letter to Magdalena von Pappenheim by writing, "My sister, Anna, and I thank you kindly for your gifts and contributions."⁵³ In an earlier letter, he assures Leupold Scharnschlager, "Know that, by the grace of Christ, I and Anna and the other brothers and sisters are spiritually and physically well."⁵⁴ Finally, Marpeck sends greetings to Cornelius Veh and others in Austerlitz from "Jörg Stadler and his marital sister, Anna... and my marital sister, Anna..."⁵⁵ Commenting on this passage, William Klassen and Walter Klaassen note that Marpeck's usage of "marital sister" is unusual and "would seem to support the idea that, for the Anabaptists, marriage was seen as a partnership for the purpose of more effective service in the kingdom."⁵⁶ The degree to which this usage is "unusual" will have to be further explored. It is not unprecedented in South German/Moravian Anabaptist circles. In a 1535 testimony, Katharina Hutter refers to Jacob Hutter as her "married brother."⁵⁷

Erlangen Group

I return now to the Erlangen group, with which we began. Is there evidence to suggest that members of this group shared similar impulses toward a more

egalitarian view of women and men's roles within the community of faith and within marital relations? If so, did these impulses motivate their experiments with the transformation of marriage?

There are indications of a democratization of religious authority within the group. As Roper notes, "...until interrogated under torture, most [members of the group] deliberately denied that the group had a leader, insisting that all were equal before God."⁵⁸ Michael Mair testified that, since the preachers taught conflicting things about the Scriptures, therefore the Holy Spirit is the only "true teacher."⁵⁹ Similarly, Fritz Stiegel insisted that there was no teacher other than God through "the Voice."⁶⁰ During his torture Stiegel did acknowledge "no other leader (*haupt*) than [Hans] Schmid."⁶¹ So, though Schmid and Marx Maier seem to have been prominent leaders, more than one member articulated a group self-understanding that affirmed the equal access of each member to the divine "Voice."

This leveling of the hierarchical distinction between clergy and laity seems also to have extended to at least some of the relationships between the women and men in the new, spiritual marriages. While in some instances the men claimed to have been spoken to by "the Voice" and, in turn, informed their new female partners, several women "were at pains to insist, a against their own interest of self-preservation, that they themselves had suggested the union at the prompting of 'the Voice,' even if they also admitted that the man had first suggested the union...."⁶² Katharina Kern, however, clearly took the initiative, traveling from Uttenreuth to Alt-Erlangen to inform Marx Maier that she was to take him as her husband.⁶³ Although some of the relationships "reflected a patriarchal ordering in which the wife's status was determined by the husband's," there was, in some, an "inversion of expected feminine demeanor [that] involved a claim of a kind of sexual equality which cannot simply be dismissed as a mirage of male sexual fantasy."⁶⁴ There is, then, an acknowledgment that women, as well as men, receive the leading of "the Voice" and therefore, not only can, but must exercise leadership in the marital relationship.⁶⁵

Is it possible that the spiritualizing tendencies of the Erlangen group, focused on the purification of sexual relations, served as a means toward a third stage of gender reconciliation in the history of Christianity? Emphasizing the spiritualizing tendencies of the group, Lyndal Roper argues that its members were trying "to create a new understanding of the relationship between the mind and body," in order to purify 'marriage from sin and creat[e] a morally perfect relationship.'⁶⁶ Whereas many in their world saw the will as the arbiter of sexual expression, it could either curb "the anarchic, lustful flesh" or surrender to it. The members of the Erlangen group

...made the division between flesh and the will even sharper. They rendered the sexual act good by alienating it from the human will altogether and making it an act of obedience to a divine, not a natural command.⁶⁷

One of the effects of this spiritualizing tendency was an opening of the group members to a leveling of hierarchical gender relations, as both women and men

could and did receive the promptings of the Spirit. Apparently none of the members ever identified, as clearly as did Luther, that the source of much of the enmity between women and men in marriage was an “unnatural,” or “ungodly,” male domination and female subjection.⁶⁸ However, their insistence on listening to “the Voice” and to everyone who had heard it, regardless of whether they were men or women, seems to have led them toward a stage of gender reconciliation beyond Luther—equality of religious authority and mutuality in marital relationships in this world, not just the next. Further, it seems that this impulse toward gender equality, the critique of marriage and the unconventional sexual experiments of members of this group should not be distanced as far as some have from Anabaptist thought and practice.⁶⁹ These impulses and dynamics may not have been prominent in all Anabaptist groups, but they were present in some, though their extent and duration must be further investigated.

Notes

¹ See Stephen B. Boyd, *The Men We Long to Be: Beyond Lonely Warriors and Desperate Lovers* (Pilgrim Press, 1997); “Masculinity and Male Dominance: Martin Luther and the Punishment of Adam,” in S. Boyd, M. Longwood, M. Muesse, *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculine Identity* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), 19–31; and “Response to Arnold Snyder,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 10 (1992), 336–340.

² See Stephen B. Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press and Mainz, Germany: Philipp von Zabern Verlag, 1992; “Community as Sacrament in the Thought of Hans Schlaffer,” in *Anabaptism Revisited*, ed. Walter Klaassen. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1990, 50–64; “Hans Schlaffer,” *Bibliotheca Dissidentium, Répertoire des non-conformistes religieux des seizième et dix-septième siècles*, Vol. 15, ed. Andre Seguenny. Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner. (1995), 63–84; “Leonhart Schiemer,” *Bibliotheca Dissidentium, Répertoire des non-conformistes religieux des seizième et dix-septième siècles*, Vol. 15, ed. Andre Seguenny, Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner. 1995, 85–109; and “Pilgram Marpeck,” *Bibliotheca Dissidentium, Répertoire des non-conformistes religieux des seizième et dix-septième siècles*, Vol. 15, ed. Andre Seguenny, Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner. 1995, 23–62.

³ See Lyndal Roper, “Sexual Utopianism in the German Reformation,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (July 1991), 394–418.

⁴ Karl Schornbaum (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, vol. 2, *Markgraftum Brandenburg, Bayern I. Abteilung* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1934), 287 and 311–312. Hereafter cited at QGT. See also Roper, “Sexual Utopianism,” 399.

⁵ QGT 2, 272, Hans Schmid; 316, Philipp Jacob; 323, Else Kern. See Roper, 399.

⁶ QGT 2, 287. Among those who were previously unmarried were the brothers, Marx, Michael, and Hans Maier and the sisters, Else, Katherina, and Appolonia Kern.

⁷ QGT 2, 321, Thomas and Anna Kern.

⁸ QGT 2, 312. For example, Michael Maier testified that often two or three days would go by during which the Spirit would not move him and his partner, Anna Schmid, to have sex. He also said

that he could not remember a time that the Spirit moved them to have sex more than once or twice.

⁹ Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 401.

¹⁰ Clasen, 131–34.

¹¹ Clasen, 129–30 sees the "spiritualistic tendencies" in South German groups associated with Hans Hut as "aberrations" and judges Hans Schmid and the other members of the Erlangen group "hardly capable" of "a degree of rational thinking" required of one who could take religious apocalypticism in a revolutionary direction.

¹² Parts of these two paragraphs first appeared in Boyd, "Masculinity and Male Dominance," 25–26.

¹³ See Kari E. Børresen, "God's Image, Man's Image? Patristic Interpretation of Gen. 1,27 and I Cor. 11,7," in *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari E. Børresen (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991), 188–207 and 208–27.

¹⁴ See Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989) 165–205 for the views of Luther and other magisterial reformers on the violence and difficulties in marital relations in the sixteenth century.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Works*. American Edition, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958) 66 and 1:68–69. All translations of Luther's text are from this edition, which will be signified in the rest of the notes as AE (American Edition) followed by Volume: page number. For those interested in referring to the German text, I enclose in parentheses references to "Vorlesungen über 1. Mose von 1535–45," ed. G. Koffmane and D. Reichert, *D. Martin Luthers Werke; Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1911), vol. 42, 152. The standard abbreviation, WA, for this edition will be followed by numbers designating the volume and page numbers of the citation. Earlier version of some of the material in this and the next paragraph were first published in "Masculinity and Male Dominance: Martin Luther and the Punishment of Adam" in *Redeeming Men*, 19–31; "Domination as Punishment: Men's Studies and Religion," *Men's Studies Review* 7 (1990) 1–9; and "On Listening and Speaking: Men, Masculinity, and Christianity," *Journal of Men's Studies* 1 (1993) 323–345.

¹⁶ AE 1,203 (WA 42,151) In another place Luther makes a distinction between the public and private spheres and says the man is put in charge of the public, but the woman has dominion in the family. (AE 1,67 [WA 42,51]) This reveals a more complex relationship between the husband and wife than Luther implies elsewhere. AE 1,200 (WA 42,149)

¹⁷ AE 1,203 (WA 42,151)

¹⁸ AE 1,203 (WA 42,152); AE 1,62 (WA 42,46–47); AE 1,71 (WA 42, 54)

¹⁹ "On the Freedom of the Christian," in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 73.

²⁰ It might be noted here that, in contrast to Luther, John Calvin had a slightly different, but influential, view. He, like Luther, believed that women shared in the image of God, but argued that God's order in creation called for "liberal and gentle subjection" of the woman to the man. The fall into sin in his view brought to the woman a harsh "servitude" to the man. See his *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, transl. by John King, Vol. I (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1947) 171–72, excerpted in Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Readings in Her Story: Women in the Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 74.

²¹ Harry Brod, "The Case for Men's Studies," in H. Brod (ed.), *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987) 39–62, one of the early theorists of this interdisciplinary area of study, observes, "Men's studies investigates masculinities, as specific and varying social-historical-cultural formations, placing them on level ground with female sex-roles and women's experiences, rather than elevating them to universal norms." He calls this area the "new" men's studies in order to distinguish this conscious attention to masculine sex roles as social constructions from traditional, androcentric approaches that unconsciously assume the univer-

sality and normativity of male experience and remain unconscious of the ways in which specific forms of masculinity shape men's experience and the ways in which women's experiences are shaped differently.

²² Joseph H. Pleck, *The Myth of Masculinity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981) and James. M. O'Neill, "Gender-role Conflict and Strain in Men's Lives," in K. Solomon and N.B. Levy (eds.), *Men in Transition: Theory and Therapy* (New York: Plenum, 1981) 5–44. It should be noted that the data informing the particular construction of masculinity they describe is taken from North American, mostly European-American men.

²³ Eric Mendelson, "An Exploratory investigation of Male Gender-role development during early Adulthood," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1987 provides a helpful summary of Pleck and O'Neill.

²⁴ Marc Fasteau's, *The Male Machine* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); image is apt.

²⁵ In Calvin's view, Christ restores the original relationship of a "liberal and gentle subjection" of women to men. Consequently, there should obtain in the church a beneficent patriarchy, but a patriarchy nonetheless. This view is shared by a number of contemporary Christian groups, including the Promise Keepers. When asked whether the movement's notion of "headship" doesn't promote male supremacy or dominance, Coach McCartney asserts that men are not supposed to dominate their wives (that is, insist on a harsh servitude). Rather, male headship means that, when there is a disagreement between the man and the woman, the man "breaks the tie"—the woman's "subjection." But male headship also means that men "out love" their wives and exercise a "servant" leadership—a "liberal and gentle subjection." For an illuminating report on the continued difficulties caused by the practices of this "beneficent patriarchy" for Genevans and Calvin, himself, see Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) and my review in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* Vol. 7, 1996, 276–78.

²⁶ Despite Luther's exegetical innovation, his thinking continued to manifest a residual presumption of male dominance. For example, Luther asserted that even in the first narrative the *ha' adam* was male, not androgynous, that he, not she, presided over the natural basilica (tree of the knowledge of good and evil), and that he was free independent and without need of any other, except when God decided that the species would reproduce sexually. See "Masculinity and Male Dominance" 26.

²⁷ AE 1,166 (WA 42,124)

²⁸ AE 1,64 (WA, 42,48); AE 1,196 (WA 42,146)

²⁹ See Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck*, 80–82 for references to the primary texts and a more complete analysis of Marpeck's distinction and terminology. I follow the orthography of the sixteenth century texts.

³⁰ "On the Good of Marriage" in *A Select library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series I, Vol. III, translated by Rev. C. L. Cornish (New York, The Christian literature Co., 1886–90).

³¹ "Beyond Women and the Family: Towards a Gender Analysis of the Reformation," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987) 311–22.

³² See her "Review of the Literature on Women in the Reformation and Radical Reformation," in C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth Century Reforming Pioneers* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1996), 406–414.

³³ Linda Huebert Hecht, "A Brief Moment in Time: Informal Leadership and Shared Authority Among Sixteenth Century Anabaptist Women," 4.

³⁴ Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 75–76.

³⁵ See Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 76 and 80, n.22.

³⁶ Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 76 and 80, n. 21. Huebert Hecht, "A Brief Moment," 18 identifies this woman as "Gilt Klein's wife" as reported by a young boy in May 1529. Grete Mecenseffy, ed.,

Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, Österreich, II. Teil, (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972) 229 in her elliptical summary of an entry from the "Causa Domini" 1527–1529, 422^v notes that the authorities considered a woman, who carried with her in 1529 a register of the names of 800 Anabaptists, a "Vorsteherin" and that she baptized some or all of the persons in the register. Huebert Hecht, "A Brief Moment in Time," 16 and 29, n.64, notes that the phrase used in the manuscript "die auch widertauff" may or may not mean that she baptized anyone and that, if she did, it is unlikely that she baptized all of them. Snyder, Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 80, n. 23, argues that there is no explicit, "compelling evidence" (i.e., testimony from imprisoned Anabaptists) that any women baptized during even this early period.

³⁷ Arnold Snyder, "The South German/Austrian Anabaptist Context," in Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 77 argues that the "potential scope of public activity for women" in the Tirolean communities was severely restricted when Tirolean refugees under the leadership of Jakob Hutter entered, in 1529, Moravian communities that were characterized by a pervasive "patriarchal frame" that put congregational leadership exclusively in the hands of men.

³⁸ *Ain klarer/vast nützlicher unterricht....* (Strasbourg: Jakob Cammerlander, 1531) Ciii^r. For a translation see William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978) 91–92.

³⁹ See Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck*, 85.

⁴⁰ *Ain klarer/vast nützlicher unterricht*, Aiiii^v. See Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 74.

⁴¹ *Ain klarer/vast nützlicher unterricht*, Aviii^r. See Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 78.

⁴² *Ain klarer/vast nützlicher unterricht*, B^r. See Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 79.

⁴³ See Elizabeth Schüller Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) for this characterization of some of the early Christian communities.

⁴⁴ Research on whether women baptized in even the early congregations related to Marpeck would need to include an assessment of the early Tirol material (see above) and Moravian materials, including the testimony of Thomas Adolf "who in January 1531 testified that no one had the right to baptize 'unless he has been sent for that purpose by the congregation, which congregation is in Moravia'" and the earliest church orders that shaped and emerged from these congregations. See Werner Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments in the Reformation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), 137 and 33–53.

⁴⁵ James Stayer, "The Passing of the Radical Moment in the Radical Reformation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (1997) 147–153 notes a general trend among reformation radicals toward accommodation to the mores of the larger culture. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 50–51 notes shifts in Marpeck circles by 1540 from the early advocacy of the community of goods to its rejection and from a more open position on leadership to a more structured leadership.

⁴⁶ See Huebert Hecht, Helena von Freyberg," in Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 126. See also my *Pilgram Marpeck*, 24. I say there "Helena von Münchinnau [von Freyberg] may have been influenced in favor of the movement by Marpeck." The converse may also be true. In light of their later relationship, they probably met during the early phase of Anabaptist activity and before Marpeck left in February of 1528.

⁴⁷ A baron, or Freiherr, Helena's husband remained a Lutheran and, along with her sons, continued to send her financial support, though she never again lived for any length of time with him in the Münichau castle. See Huebert Hecht, "Helena von Freyberg," 125, 129.

⁴⁸ For Helena's stay in Constance, see Huebert Hecht, "Helena von Freyberg," 127. For Marpeck's relationship to Margaret Blaurer, see my *Pilgram Marpeck*, 64.

⁴⁹ See my *Pilgram Marpeck*, 105–106. Schwenckfeld was staying in Justingen, hosted by Helena's brother-in-law, Baron Georg Ludwig von Freyberg. See Huebert Hecht, "Helena von Freyberg," 130.

⁵⁰ See my *Pilgram Marpeck*, 134. She also hosted one of the groups of Anabaptists in her home in Rosenau, just outside Augsburg.

⁵¹ See Huebert Hecht, "Magdalena, Walpurga and Sophia Marchalk von Pappenheim," in Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 111–117.

⁵² When Marpeck was expelled from Rattenberg, he requested that interest from a loan he had made earlier to Duke Ferdinand I be used to support Margareth, who remained in Rattenberg. See my *Pilgram Marpeck*, 6–7.

⁵³ Jörg Maler, *Das Kunstbuch* (1561) in the Bürgerbibliothek, Bern, MSS Codex 464, 317 v: "Mein schw[este]r Anna dannekt euch freuntlich, ouch ich, euer gaben und schannckhung." Transcription courtesy of Heinold Fast. See Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 483.

⁵⁴ *Kunstbuch*, 240v: "Weiter wiss, das es mir, meiner Andle und den andern gschwisterten durch die gnad Chrisiti geistlich und leiplich ganntz wol geet." See also Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 416.

⁵⁵ *Kunstbuch*, 306v: "Jörg Stadler und sein eeliche schw[öste]r Anna, ouch mein eeliche schw[öste]r Anna..." See Klassen and Klaassen, *Writings*, 426.

⁵⁶ *Writings*, 582, 10. *On the Inner Church*, n. 6. To support this suggestion they cite Roland Bainton, *What Christianity Says about Sex, Love and Marriage* (New York: Association Press, 1957), 91, "This third Christian attitude to marriage, which considers companionability as the prime ingredient, came into its own most fully with the more radical varieties of the Reformation such as the Anabaptists, later the Quakers..."

⁵⁷ See Snyder and Huebert Hecht, 184. My thanks to Linda Huebert Hecht for pointing this out.

⁵⁸ Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 401.

⁵⁹ Schornbaum, *Quellen*, 285.

⁶⁰ Schornbaum, *Quellen*, 275.

⁶¹ Schornbaum, *Quellen*, 276.

⁶² Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 402. Else Kern and Katharina Pertels.

⁶³ Schornbaum, *Quellen*, 277.

⁶⁴ Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 402, notes that Else Kern became the mistress of Hans Schmid's house but his former wife also remained in the house.

⁶⁵ Another consequence of the democratizing effects of "the Voice" was the inversion of status based on class. See Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 401: "Many of the new marriages brought inversions of status. Hans Schmid married his maid while his old wife too Michael Maier in marriage; Jerg Kern, a manservant, married Baltasar Freund's wife."

⁶⁶ Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 407.

⁶⁷ Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 402.

⁶⁸ Also, they, along with Luther, did not identify the origin of "fleshly lusts" in sexist practices. Elsewhere, I have argued that what Michael Maier called "fleshly lusts", or compulsive sexuality, may well not be a biological inheritance, but rather a necessary product of an objectified sexuality resulting from the patterns of male domination and female subjection that characterize patriarchal social arrangements. See my "Masculinity and Male Dominance," 27–28.

⁶⁹ Roper, "Sexual Utopianism," 407–408, argues, citing James Stayer's *Anabaptist and the Sword*, that just as one cannot underestimate the "activist, revolutionary wing" without distorting the plurality of Anabaptist theology, so one cannot dismiss such "sexual libertine groups within Anabaptism" without making "unintelligible one of the major currents within Anabaptist and radical movements, namely the critique of marriage."