

PILGRAM MARPECK, ST. BERNARD, AND THE CHURCH
AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST
MEDIÉVAL METAPHOR IN THE WORK OF A
LAY ANABAPTIST REFORMER

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ABSTRACT

St. Bernard's popularity as a Christian writer reached its peak in the sixteenth-century. He was read by Protestants and Catholics alike. He also had an influence on the Anabaptist movement, a movement that purported to be a break from Catholicism. Pilgram Marpeck, an early South-German Anabaptist elder maintained Bernard's allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs in his pastoral letters to Anabaptist congregations through southern Germany. This demonstrates that Marpeck's Anabaptism did not spring *ex nihilo*, but was formed in the religious spirit of the sixteenth-century and the centuries preceding it.

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Introduction

In 2011, John Rempel wrote, “[t]o press the search for the sources of [Pilgram] Marpeck’s thought much further is likely futile.”¹ This type of historical pessimism is unhelpful to historical inquiry and curiosity in general. As a remedy this thesis seeks to demonstrate that Anabaptists were connected with their medieval past by looking for medieval sources. It assumes that historical categorization which would define the late Middle Ages as being fundamentally different than the Reformation is a construct that has no bearing on how reformers saw themselves or how they engaged with the medieval sources. Examining the medieval era for clues about the early Anabaptists is not new and has been done in a general way by scholars such as Alister E. McGrath, Werner O. Packull, and Kenneth R. Davis in their works *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531*, and *Anabaptists and Asceticism* respectively. While providing a general survey of the debt owed to the Anabaptist’s medieval forefathers, these works do not provide a close, focused study of one reformer’s engagement with a historical source. Arnold Snyder has done this for the Anabaptist Michael Sattler’s (ca. 1490 - 1527) links to Benedictine monasticism in the book *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* but it has never been attempted on behalf of Pilgram Marpeck (ca. 1495 - 1556).² This thesis will examine the ways that the South German Anabaptist Marpeck used Bernard of Clairvaux’s allegory of the Song of Songs in order to illustrate the importance of unity in Anabaptist congregations. This is a major theme in Marpeck’s correspondence and it is important to demonstrate Marpeck’s intellectual sources so his letters can be fully understood.

The second objective of this thesis is to demonstrate Marpeck’s capability for independent thinking. While he relied closely upon medieval sources for his understanding of allegory he also created new modes for understanding the allegory of

¹ John D. Rempel, “Critically Approaching Tradition: Pilgram Marpeck’s Experiment in Corrective Theologizing,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, 1 (January 2011), 68.

² C. Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History No. 27 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 30-48.

the Song of Songs. In more than one letter, Marpeck reworked the medieval understanding of the Song of Songs to make specific points about the relationships represented in the Song. The traditional exegesis of the Song recognized a trio of possible characters represented by the female voice of the Song: the Church, the believer's soul and Mary, the mother of Jesus. In a remarkable way, Marpeck consolidated two of these characters, the Church and the soul, into a coherent allegory.

Described as “the Menno Simons of the South,” Marpeck has been the subject of two modern biographies in English.³ The first, a revision of a Th.D. dissertation focusing on Marpeck's theology, was written by Stephen Boyd and is titled *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology*. Boyd's book examines Marpeck's conversion, details his contact with other Anabaptist group, and also briefly looks at his links to medieval mysticism with a focus on the *Theologia Deutsch*. The second biography, a more accessible volume meant for a general audience, was written by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, two scholars who have focused a great deal of their research on Marpeck. Their book, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*, is a very learned popular history of this little-known Anabaptist and was well reviewed. Klassen and Klassen set the context for Marpeck's life by examining the political, economic, and social backdrop of South Germany. In academic circles Marpeck has recently become quite popular. Three of the four issues of the 2009 volume of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* contained articles dealing explicitly with Marpeck. The attention recently given to Marpeck's work is due to the fact that Heinold Fast and Gerhard Goeters only recovered his writings in 1955. They chanced upon the 740-page codex now known as *Das Kunstbuch*, which contains fifteen letters and one tract written by Marpeck, in the Bürgerbibliothek in Bern, Switzerland. The *Kunstbuch* was compiled by a friend of Marpeck named Jörg Maler (dates unknown) who collected writings that were considered important to the members of Marpeck's congregations. Fast and Goeters were only able to uncover half of the *Kunstbuch* and that half contains fifty-six pieces altogether. While the majority of the pieces are Anabaptist sermons, letters, or polemics, items such as the

³ William Klassen, “The Legacy of the Marpeck Community in Anabaptist Scholarship,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78, 1 (January 2004), 7, no. 2.

Athenasian Creed and long pieces of religious poetry were also included by Maler. Scholars soon recognized the significance of the *Kunstabuch* to the history of early South German and Swiss Anabaptism. Klassen and Klaassen translated most of Marpeck's work and published it in 1978 under the title *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*.⁴ They are also responsible for the inclusion of the booklets *Ain klarer vast nützlicher unterricht . . .* , *Clare verantwortung . . .* , and *Aufdeckung der Babylonischen hürn . . .* within the body of Marpeck's work.

Marpeck's birthday and birthplace are unknown, but it is probable that he was born in Rattenberg on the Inn in 1495.⁵ His family was not of noble stock but was quite affluent. When the city levied a new tax for the princes it looked to the forty-two wealthiest men in Rattenberg and Marpeck was among the seven who paid the most. He is also documented as having loaned a considerable sum of money to Archduke Ferdinand I (1503-1564), the annual interest from which equalled the yearly salary of a workman.⁶ On 20 April 1525 he was appointed the mining magistrate for the region taking over from the former magistrate Hans Griessteter.⁷ This post gave Marpeck complete civil control over the miners under his supervision and he was responsible for holding court and punishing wrongdoers.

Only fragments of Marpeck's personal life in Rattenberg are known. His father, Heinrich Marpeck, served as the sheriff of Rattenberg and became mayor in 1511.⁸ Two years earlier he had become a member of the mining guild, the *Bergwerksbrüderschaft*, an organization that would later provide the young Marpeck with a career. Marpeck's education is largely unknown but it is likely he knew some Latin. In 1966 William Klassen wrote that Marpeck knew no Latin, but by 2008 he agreed with Walter Klaassen

⁴ Klassen and Klaassen knowingly excluded Marpeck's longest work the *Reply of 1544* arguing that the issues dealt with in it are included in his shorter works. They also only included the preface to his *Testamentserleutterung* as the main text of this work is comprised mostly of scriptural quotations which would lose their meaning when translated. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, preface to *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 9-10.

⁵ Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008), 55.

⁶ Stephen B. Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 6-7.

⁷ Boyd, 11.

⁸ Klaassen and Klassen, 56.

and with the early twentieth-century historian Johann Loserth that Marpeck must have had at least an elementary knowledge of Latin as demonstrated by the structure of his written German.⁹ John Wenger even claims that, "...[Marpeck] thought in Latin and wrote in German."¹⁰ Chapter two will demonstrate that Marpeck had read Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs which were readily available as printed books in Latin and were very scarce as German manuscripts making it most likely that Marpeck knew at least some Latin.

It is known that Marpeck married Sophia Harrer, possibly the daughter of Rattenberg city councilman Linhart Harrer, sometime before 1520 and they had a daughter named Margareth.¹¹ When Marpeck left Rattenberg in 1528 due to his religious beliefs he asked that the interest provided from his loan to Ferdinand be given to Margareth. Sophia died sometime before Marpeck left Rattenberg and according to a letter written by Archduke Ferdinand, Marpeck had remarried either shortly before or after his self-enforced exile.¹² It is highly unlikely that the wife referred to in this letter is anyone but Anna, Marpeck's 'matrimonial sister' to whom he referred lovingly in several of his letters as 'my Andle'.¹³ During his time as the mining magistrate for Rattenberg, Marpeck adopted three children whom Boyd conjectures were orphans of men accidentally killed while working in the mines that Marpeck supervised.¹⁴ Though Marpeck had been able to provide for Margareth, when he left Rattenburg these children were removed from his care and given to caretakers appointed by the city.¹⁵

⁹ William Klassen, "Relation of the Old and New Covenants in Pilgram Marpeck's Theology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 40, 2 (April 1966), 107; Klassen and Klassen, 57.

¹⁰ John C. Wenger, "Pilgram Marpeck, Tyrolese Engineer and Anabaptist Elder," *Church History* 9, 1 (March 1940), 25.

¹¹ Boyd, 7.

¹² Jarold Knox Zeman, *The Anabaptists and Czech Brethren in Moravia, 1526-1628* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1969), 256 no. 57.

¹³ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin" [1545], trans. Walter Klaassen, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John d. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 497; Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Three Kinds of People in the Judgement and Kingdom of Christ; Concerning the Peasant Nobility" [1547], trans. Walter Klaassen and John D. Rempel, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John d. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 651.

¹⁴ Boyd, 7.

¹⁵ Boyd, 7.

Marpeck gave a succinct account of how he came to become an Anabaptist in his hearing with Martin Bucer (1491-1551) the principle reformer of Strasbourg. A city clerk recorded this testimony:

Afterwards and now, in the whole world, the struggle is only about faith. He was led by his God-fearing parents into the papal church. But he discovered a significant dispute about the Scriptures. Then he experienced a fleshy freedom in the places where the gospel was preached in the Lutheran way. This made him draw back, for he could find no peace in it . . . And then he reported that every Christian must yield himself under the bodily word and work of Christ . . . Therefore, he stands now and gives the reason for his faith . . . And in summary, he received baptism for a testimony of the obedience of faith.¹⁶

Marpeck, like all of his contemporaries, was raised in the Catholicism of the late middle ages. Theologian Malcolm Yarnell has noted “a deep familiarity with the classical doctrines of the Trinity and Christology” in Marpeck’s work as evidence of his connection to the traditions of the Catholic faith.¹⁷ The Marpeck group, like many Anabaptists, remained committed to the notion that they were a continuation of the apostolic church demonstrated by their inclusion of the Athanasian Creed in the *Kunstabuch*.¹⁸ What Marpeck rejected was the perceived accretion of non-biblical content in the Roman church such as the doctrine of transubstantiation and infant baptism.¹⁹

¹⁶ Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, eds. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*. Volume 7, *Elaß, I Teil: Stadt Strassburg, 1522-1532* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1959), 352, quoted in Boyd, 13.

¹⁷ Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 73.

¹⁸ “Athanasian Creed” in Jörg Maler’s *Kunstabuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John d. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 499-501. Hans Hillerbrand has rejected the idea that the Anabaptists held restitution of the pre-Constantinian Church as a defining doctrine but current historiography has upheld Franklin Littell’s argument for Anabaptist restitution. Dipple and Klassen argue that because Marpeck did not advocate a restitution but rather a continuity of the faithful as argued by Hillerbrand. See Franklin Littell, “The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution of the True Church,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24, 1 (January 1950), 33-52; Hans Hillerbrand, “Anabaptism and History,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 45, 2 (April 1971), 107-122; Franklin Littell, “A Response to Hans Hillerbrand,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 45, 4 (October 1971), 377-380; Geoffrey Dipple, “Anabaptist Restitution,” in *Just as in the Time of the Apostles” Uses of History in the Radical Reformation* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 105-115, 142-143; Klassen, “Relation of the Old and New Covenants in Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology,” 98.

¹⁹ Regarding the doctrine of transubstantiation, in his letter to the Swiss Brethren entitled “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” (1547) Marpeck argued that: “[God] dwells nowhere else, and God cannot be found or comprehended at any other place or location eternally; nor can He be known, seen, or heard anywhere else.” (*Kunstabuch*, 582).

Marpeck admitted to experiencing the “fleshy freedom” of “the Lutheran way” and he, as the mining magistrate of Rattenberg, involved himself in the 1522 case of Stephen Castenbaur, also known as Boius Agricola (c. 1491–1547). Castenbaur, an Augustinian prior, whom Ferdinand had arrested for reading Luther in public, claimed to have never read anything but the New Testament from the preaching chair.²⁰ Marpeck met with Ferdinand in 1522 to advocate for Castenbaur’s release though he was unable to do so.²¹ Klaassen and Klassen, as well as Yarnell, claim Castenbaur as the possible source of Marpeck’s early Lutheranism though Yarnell does not mention Castenbaur’s own disavowal of Luther’s teachings:²²

Whoever calls me a Lutheran does violence to me. . . . I follow Luther only when he is in harmony or in unison with the Holy Scripture. I have never attacked the Church Fathers, the Church leaders or the clergy, but only the abuses that are present and which have begun here. I have never attempted to teach Luther’s writings or his teachings for I do not understand them all.²³

Whether or not Castenbaur converted Marpeck to Lutheranism is a moot point, as his conversion did not last long. Marpeck became disillusioned with magisterial reform primarily because of his concern with the doctrine of *sola fide* which he believed led Christians to ignore “the ‘obedience of faith’ required by those who received the baptism into the ‘mystery of the cross of Christ,’ preached by the Anabaptist missionaries.”²⁴ Marpeck’s contact with Anabaptism revealed to him a system of Christianity that checked the excesses of the Roman church and the perceived moral laxity of the magisterial churches.

Marpeck’s conversion to Anabaptism was highly unlikely considering that he was required to assist Ferdinand in hunting out Anabaptists among the miners for whom he

²⁰ Boyd, 18.

²¹ Boyd, 15-18. Castenbaur remained in custody until 1524 when Ferdinand released him because of the public pressure and special intercession from his wife.

²² Klaassen and Klassen, 72. Yarnell, 74. Klaassen and Klassen recognize that Castenbaur’s theology came primarily from Augustine and the book of Romans. Yarnell problematically insists on calling Castenbaur a Lutheran preacher, a role that Castenbaur did not step into until his interactions with Marpeck were well over.

²³ Johann Sallaberger, *Kardinal Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg (1468-1540), Staatsmann und Kirchenfürst im Zeitalter von Renaissance, Reformation und Buernkriegen* (Salzburg, DE: Velag Anton Pustet, 1997), 274-275; quoted in Klaassen and Klassen, 86.

²⁴ Boyd, 21.

was responsible. Leading up to his conversion to Anabaptism he was forced to be involved in the case of Leonhard Schiemer (c. 1500-1528), an Anabaptist evangelist who was beheaded only 200 yards from Marpeck's home.²⁵ Klaassen and Klassen mark Schiemer's martyrdom as the critical point in Marpeck's conversion to Anabaptism.²⁶ Though they take some imaginative license with their portrayal of Marpeck's inner conflict, Klaassen and Klassen demonstrate that he had come to a point where a decision had to be made.²⁷ Confirming Tertullian's maxim that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, Marpeck chose to follow in the footsteps of the martyr Schiemer and, only days after the execution (the 15th or 16th January 1528) resigned his post as the mining superintendent of Rattenburg. He made his way to Bohemia where the persecution of Anabaptists was less fierce, though it too was in the realm of Ferdinand.²⁸ While Marpeck had every reason to worry for his safety, there is no indication that Ferdinand had any idea of Marpeck's conversion. His letter accepting Marpeck's resignation referred to Pilgram as "our faithful Pilgram Marpeck."²⁹

Pilgram's stay in Bohemia is documented by only a handful of letters to Ferdinand stating that Marpeck was staying on the estate of a noble in Krumau. Klaassen and Klassen point out that while Ferdinand was intent on crushing Anabaptism he could not do it without the help of his nobles. Therefore, nobles who were friendly to the Anabaptist cause were closely watched and this is how Marpeck's conversion came to Ferdinand's attention.³⁰ It is likely that while Marpeck was in Krumau he was both married to Anna re-baptized as an Anabaptist.³¹ At this point there is a minor disagreement in the secondary sources as Boyd disagrees with Klaassen and Klassen about when Pilgram and Anna were married and suggests that Anna was with Pilgram

²⁵ Boyd, 23.

²⁶ Klaassen and Klassen, 102.

²⁷ Though Klaassen and Klassen's book was very well received and well reviewed this speculation was justly criticized by reviewers. cf. C. Arnold Snyder, review of *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*, by Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 27 (2009): 281; and Karl Koop, review of *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity*, by Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Direction* 38, 2 (Fall 2009): 269.

²⁸ Klaassen and Klassen, 107-108; Boyd, 52.

²⁹ Klaassen and Klassen, 102.

³⁰ Klaassen and Klassen, 110.

³¹ Klaassen and Klassen, 109, 111.

when he left Rattenburg.³² However, both sources agree on the much more pertinent issue of Marpeck taking up a leadership role in the Anabaptist church while in Bohemia as a commissioned elder.³³

Both of Marpeck's biographers argue that because Bohemia was still under the control of Ferdinand and because of the decreasing ability of the nobles there to provide protection, Marpeck and his wife left and settled in Strasbourg where Marpeck bought citizenship in July 1528.³⁴ Martin Rothkegel, argues, alternatively, that Marpeck and Anna were sent to Strasbourg with the intention of expanding the Austerlitz Brethren; he goes so far as to say that, "...moving to Strasbourg in 1528 was more like leaving a safe haven."³⁵ Whatever his motives, Marpeck obtained employment there as an engineer and oversaw extensive waterworks and the procurement of lumber for the city. Marpeck's stay in Strasbourg was relatively short as his religious beliefs brought him into conflict with Bucer. Marpeck's accusation that Strasbourg practiced a false form of Christianity did not help his case and in 1531 he was expelled from the city. Marpeck then travelled quite extensively throughout South Germany until he settled in Augsburg in 1544 where he remained until his death in 1560.

Much of the content of Marpeck's theology was informed by the context of his relations with the other Anabaptist congregations he was in contact with, especially the Swiss Brethren. This large group of German Anabaptists were not influenced by the mystical elements of medieval Christianity that had come to Marpeck through Hans Denck.³⁶ They had taken a strict, legalistic approach to Christianity which led them to take harsh measures against members for trifling offenses such as wearing brightly coloured clothes or for carrying arms or taking an oath.³⁷ Marpeck's involvement with

³² Boyd, 52.

³³ Klaassen and Klassen, 112; Boyd, 52.

³⁴ Boyd, 52; Klaassen and Klassen, 114-118.

³⁵ Martin Rothkegel, "Pilgram Marpeck and the Fellows of the Covenant: The Short and Fragmentary History of the Rise and Decline of an Anabaptist Denominational Network," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, 1 (January 2011), 24-25.

³⁶ James M. Stayer, "The Swiss Brethren: An Exercise in Historical Definition" *Church History* 47, 2 (June 1978), 174; William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 19.

³⁷ Klassen, *Covenant and Community*, 89.

the Swiss Brethren came through his relationship with Jörg Maler who had lived among the Swiss Brethren for fourteen years in St. Gall and Appenzell but had rebelled against their legalism.³⁸ Marpeck engaged with the Swiss Brethren through a series of letters that insisted that unity was more important than the biblicism and legalism that was being preached. Inbetween Marpeck's expulsion from Strasbourg and his settling in Augsburg he spent some time himself living among the Swiss Brethren in Probin, Switzerland and during that time his views on unity were solidified. His letter addressed to the churches in Strasbourg, Alsace, and the Kinzig and Leber Valleys, entitled "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," was written while he was living in Probin. Marpeck invited his congregations to participate in communion so that they might be united as one body with Christ who is united with God the Father. The bonds of love hold the unity of the Trinity and that love, according to Marpeck is of utmost importance. Without it no one could be redeemed.³⁹ The unity that Marpeck speaks of is different then the unity that the Catholic Church would claim. Marpeck's definition of unity transcends the differences in doctrine that existed between his group and the Swiss Brethren. Instead love for one's fellow Christians is of utmost importance and the Christian unity should be able to encompass at least some doctrinal differences.

This love also shaped Marpeck's description of the Church. His communications often refer to the Church as the bride of Christ, a term which betrays the influence of medieval mystics on Marpeck's Anabaptism. Bridal mysticism has a long medieval past most often associated with St. Bernard in the twelfth-century and with the beguines in the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries.⁴⁰ Marpeck's definition of the Church as the bride of Christ allows for believers to take part in another mystical union with Christ. "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ" detailed how union could be achieved through the communion meal, but in his letter "Concerning the Christian and the Hagarite

³⁸ Klassen, *Covenant and Community*, 90.

³⁹ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," trans. William Klassen, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: The Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 108-109.

⁴⁰ Dom François Vandenbroucke, "New Milleux, New Problems: From the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century," in *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages, A History of Christian Spirituality*, Vol. II, by Dom Jean Leclercq, Dom François Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer, trans. the Benedictines of Holme Eden Abbey (London, UK: Burns and Oates: 1968), 358-364.

Churches” Marpeck describes how the Church as the bride of Christ becomes one flesh with Christ thus allowing for another mystical union.⁴¹ In this way the Church mediates and allows for believers to approach God. With this theology, it is not difficult to see the importance placed upon the sacraments by Marpeck. This emphasis on the importance of the sacraments formed the basis of the most intense theological disagreement of which Marpeck was a part of. In July 1530, Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489 – 1561), a Protestant spiritualist, published *Judicium de Anabaptistis* in which he argued that the spiritual experience of the Christian was more important than the external sacraments of the Church.⁴² This was because, in Schwenckfeld’s view, no one had the authority to practice “apostolic ministries” at that time.⁴³ For Marpeck, the sacraments provided a way for the believer to achieve union with God. The split with Schwenckfeld was a blow for Marpeck as he had thought that Schwenckfeld’s rejection of infant baptism meant that Schwenckfeld had joined the Anabaptist church. In fact, Schwenckfeld’s rejection of baptism in all its forms caused a break in the unity of Marpeck’s vision of the Church.⁴⁴

Because this thesis is concerned with the antecedents of Marpeck’s theological motifs a brief exposition on current historical theories of Anabaptist origins is in order. The conclusions of the twentieth-century church historians, Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Holl, were the two dominant theories relating to Anabaptist origins until James Stayer, Werner Packull, and Klaus Depperman published their work on its polygenetic origins in 1975. Though both Troeltsch and Holl defined Anabaptism according to its relation to Luther and the theologies of the magisterial reformers, their theories were fundamentally opposed to one another. Troeltsch argued that Conrad Grebel’s (ca. 1498–1526) commencement of believer’s baptisms in Zurich in 1525 was the source of Anabaptism. Troeltsch sought to classify all religious beliefs in one of three sociological types: church, sect, and mystic. By labelling the Anabaptists as a sect, he was able to minimize the links

⁴¹ Marpeck, “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches” trans. Walter Klaassen, in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: The Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 553.

⁴² Klaassen and Klassen, 145.

⁴³ Neal Blough, “Pilgram Marpeck and Caspar Schwenckfeld: The Strasbourg Years,” in *16th Century Anabaptism and Radical Reformation*, Bibliotheca Dissidentium: Scripta et Studia No. 3, ed. Jean-Georges Rott and Simon L. Verheus (Baden-Baden, DE: V. Koerner, 1987), 373.

⁴⁴ Klaassen and Klassen, 146.

that these early re-baptizers had with less desirable historical figures such as the Peasants's War leader Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525) who imparted a radicalness that more conservative historians were unwilling to admit.⁴⁵ Using Troeltsch's theory, Harold Bender also rejected the notion of Müntzer's influence and saw the Anabaptists as "belong[ing], even though as a 'left wing,' to the great mainline Protestant movement and to no other."⁴⁶ Snyder notes that Troeltsch's work was quite popular in North America among Mennonite historians.⁴⁷ Though it has been largely displaced by the polygenetic theory, this paradigm is still held by scholars as evidenced by the 1998 release of the revised second edition of Franklin Littell's book *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study In the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* in which Littell questions whether Müntzer can be considered an Anabaptist at all.⁴⁸

Holl's theory, alternatively, saw Anabaptism originate several years earlier than did Troeltsch's theory. Holl dated their origin to 1521 or 1522 when Martin Luther decried the radicals of Wittenberg as *Schwärmer*. This theory obviously tied the Anabaptists much closer to Müntzer and other socially radical figures of the sixteenth-century and even led one historian to state that Müntzer was a direct source of Anabaptism.⁴⁹ Holl and the historians who accepted his theory remained convinced that the events in Zurich were still a definitive point in Anabaptist history; they just believed that the source of Grebel's Anabaptism could be traced further back to Müntzer and the Zwickau prophets. This theory of Anabaptist origins fit closely with the long-standing historical understanding of the Anabaptists as fanatics.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 399.

⁴⁶ Harold S. Bender, "The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer, and the Anabaptists," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 27, 1 (January 1953), 16.

⁴⁷ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 399.

⁴⁸ Franklin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, 2nd ed. (Ephrata, PA: Grace Press Inc., 2006), 6.

⁴⁹ Hans Hillerbrand, "The Origin of Sixteenth Century Anabaptism: Another Look," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 53 (1962), 177-178.

⁵⁰ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 397-398. Snyder points out that this depiction of Anabaptists dates back to 1525 and that the idea remained the mostly unchallenged historical paradigm until well into the nineteenth-century.

These two theories of monogenesis are very similar in that they both saw Anabaptism as coming from Zurich. Stayer, Packull, and Depperman's polygenetic theory revolutionized how historians viewed Anabaptism. They note six primary independent groups of Anabaptists: "the Swiss Brethren, the followers of Hut, the Central German Anabaptists, the *Stäbler* sects in Moravia, the Marpeck circle and the heterogeneous Melchiorite tradition."⁵¹ While these groups have long been recognized, Stayer *et al.* note that they were not used to study Anabaptist origins because of "the excessive amount of energy and ingenuity devoted to the sociological and theological classification of the radical reformation."⁵² While recognizing the value of these classifications Stayer *et al.* conclude that:

The history of Anabaptist origins can no longer be preoccupied with the essentially sterile question of where Anabaptism began, but must devote itself to studying the plural origins of Anabaptism and their significance for the plural character of the movement.⁵³

In conflict with Harold Bender's definition of Anabaptism as essentially Protestant, this polygenetic theory insists that Anabaptism is a third paradigm, which cannot be defined as belonging to either of the dominant religious systems of the sixteenth-century. Walter Klaassen's book, *Anabaptist: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, details the fact that Anabaptists were not socially radical and that Luther's credo *sola fide* did not require the change in ethical behaviour that was demanded of Anabaptist converts.⁵⁴ Therefore, the polygenetic theory has more in common with Holl's explanation though it goes even further than Holl does and looks for the sources of Anabaptism in places other than the turbulent sixteenth-century. Kenneth Davis has focused his research in examining the influence of medieval asceticism.⁵⁵ Stayer and his co-authors speak highly of Davis's work though they seek to expand it even further than Davis has. Werner Packull has

⁵¹ James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49, 2 (1975): 86.

⁵² Stayer *et al.*, 86.

⁵³ Stayer *et al.*, 85.

⁵⁴ Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptist: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1973): 30.

⁵⁵ Kenneth Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 32.

enlarged the list of intellectual origins to include medieval mysticism as a probable source for South German Anabaptism.⁵⁶ In the context of this thesis, the polygenetic theory is useful as it can allow for Marpeck relying upon sources that lie outside of the boundaries of both Troeltsch's and Holl's theories. Where theories of monogenesis restrict historical inquiry, polygenesis allows for a wide range of sources to be used without having to connect these sources with Luther's *Schwärmer* or with Grebel's first group of baptized adults. It recognizes the complexity of religious life in the sixteenth-century.

Marpeck's conversion and life thereafter was a relatively normal one for an Anabaptist convert of the sixteenth-century with the exception of his peaceful death. What was not quite as normal was his extensive use of the medieval allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs in his letters. Marpeck's letters contain a high number of references to medieval allegory and have the most references in a condensed body of Marpeck's work. Only those letters in the *Kunstbuch* are under consideration, as the other three letters in Marpeck's corpus do not belong in the same category as his letters of instruction. These letters were personal correspondences that were not intended for instruction. One provided an apology for his beliefs upon his exile from Strasbourg while the other two pertained to Marpeck's famous confrontation with Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561). The Latin text of Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones super cantica canticorum* comes from a 1497 edition printed in Strasbourg by Martin Flach. This edition is one of many that could have possibly been used by Marpeck and was chosen on account of its geographic similarities with Marpeck as well as its history of being used by other reformers, most notably Martin Luther.⁵⁷ All translations from Flach's edition included in this thesis are my own.

Chapter one traces the ways in which the Song of Songs was allegorized from pre-Christian times through to the sixteenth-century in order to observe the development

⁵⁶ Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525-1531* (Scottsdale, PA: Harold Press, 1977), *passim*.

⁵⁷ Franz Posset, "Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the Devotion, Theology, and Art of the Sixteenth Century," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997), 311.

of the literary device that Marpeck utilized. Rabbinic Judaism first interpreted the Song of Songs as a metaphor for the love of YHWH and Israel. Later the third-century theologian Origen offered the most influential exegesis. The monastics of the high Middle Ages, specifically Hugh of St. Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux popularized the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs so that this interpretation became available to the laity. In the sixteenth-century John Calvin maintained the medieval interpretation of the Song of Songs, while Martin Luther proposed a new allegory. Anabaptist, for the most part, also maintained the medieval interpretation as bridal imagery.

Chapter two looks at Marpeck's use of the image of the Bride of Christ in more detail. This chapter demonstrates Marpeck's reliance on Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum*. This work had a significant impact on Marpeck's understanding of the relationship between the Church, the believer's soul, and Christ. Marpeck's letters contain near verbatim quotations from Bernard's texts and the parallels between their interpretations are evidence of Marpeck's dependence upon Bernard.

Chapter three looks specifically at two letters written by Marpeck, one to a close friend and associate, the other addressed to a congregation. These two letters make use of the Bride of Christ allegory in a manner unique to Marpeck. By tying the Song of Songs closely with the book of Genesis, Marpeck used allegory, one of the four medieval forms of interpretation, to comment on the status of the Church. Not only is this interpretation unique in Anabaptist thought, it appears to be unique in all commentaries on the Song of Songs until modern times.

The Church as the Bride of Solomon

Christians and Jews have long considered the Song of Songs, also known as the Canticle or the Song of Solomon, sacred Scripture despite the explicitly sexual nature of the writings and the somewhat more problematic failure of the book to mention God. Nevertheless, the Song has been considered a part of the Canon and according to Marvin Pope, “the evidence for its early acceptance, in spite of the objections, is as well attested as that for any other portion of the Jewish-Christian Scripture.”¹ Though Pope casts doubt on Solomon’s authorship, that tradition certainly influenced the decision to include the book. Early rabbinic Judaism theorized that the Song allegorized the relationship between YHWH and the nation of Israel.² This interpretation is still held by many Orthodox Jews who recite the Song in preparation for Passover. Following its Jewish heritage, Christianity understands the Song of Songs as an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the Church and also the relationship between Christ and the individual soul. The allegory has not been static. From its inception in the multi-volume commentaries of the Alexandrian commentator Origen (c. 185 – c. 254), the allegory of the amorous relationship between God and His *ecclesia* or God and the believer enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and despite a modern preference for a more literal reading the allegory is still considered a valid interpretation of the Song of Songs.³ The medieval interpretation of Biblical texts was three-fold and included literal, moral/tropological, and allegorical readings.⁴ Medieval commentators on the Song of Songs also insisted that the Song had a literal meaning as an epithalamium celebrating Solomon’s marriage to an Egyptian princess.⁵

¹ Marvin H. Pope, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1977), 18.

² Reuven Kimelman, “Rabbi Yokhanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third-Century Jewish-Christian Disputation” *The Harvard Theological Review* 73, 3/4 (July-October, 1980), 569-570.

³ Renita J. Weems, “The Song of Songs” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume V*, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 370-371.

⁴ Hugh St. Victor, *Didascalicon: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. by Jerome Taylor (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1961), 120.

⁵ Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 29-30.

Christians were not the only ones who felt the need to apologize for the sexuality and the non-theism of the Song of Songs. Judaism also questioned the meaning and purpose of the book. While the early Rabbis insisted on maintaining the book's literal meaning they also instituted an allegorical interpretation of the Song that saw the bride as Israel.⁶ William E. Phipps also notes that:

No reference is made to the Song of Songs in the earliest writings by Jews after the OT era. It is not overtly alluded to in the writings of Philo, Josephus, or the NT. The first mention of the Song is in rabbinic literature and there it carries a double meaning. For example, in the *Mishnah* it is associated with traditional wedding dance in which maidens participated . . . In addition to this literal interpretation, that rabbinic passage also places a symbolic meaning on sentiments from the Song. Solomon's wedding is interpreted to mean the giving of the Torah, and "the day of the gladness of his heart" ([Song of Songs] 3:11) is taken to mean the building of the temple.⁷

Origen is credited with reading *ecclesia* into the Song and, despite questions surrounding his orthodoxy as early as the fourth-century, his formulation of the allegory is still accepted as a valid reading of the book.⁸ Kimelman has noted the 'cross-fertilization' between Origen and a Jewish rabbi named Yohanan (d. ca. 279) against whom Origen argued about the meaning of the Song.⁹ Origen was actively studying Jewish interpretations of the song and, according to Kimelman, these shaped Origen's metaphorical productions.¹⁰ At the same time Origen was influenced by Hellenistic academia, which had allegorized Greek mythology for centuries.¹¹ In any case, Origen's work on the Song of Songs was considered a masterpiece by the early church fathers. Jerome (c. 347-420), the translator of the Vulgate, was an outspoken critic of Origen and attacked him as a heretic, but when it came to the Song of Songs, Jerome could not contain his admiration:

Although in other books Origen conquered everyone,
on the Song of Songs he conquered himself.¹²

⁶ Kimelman, 569-570.

⁷ William E. Phipps, "The Plight of the Song of Songs," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, 1 (March 1974), 84-85.

⁸ Weems, 370-371.

⁹ Kimelman, 573.

¹⁰ Kimelman, 595.

¹¹ Pope, 113.

¹² "Origenes, cum in ceteris libris omnes vicerit, in cantico canticorum ipse se vicit." Jerome, "S. Eusebii hieronymi stridonensis presbyteri interpretatio homiliarum duarum origenis in canticum canticorum," *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina*, (hereafter PL) ed. J.P. Migne, Vol. 23 (Paris, 1841-1864), 1117A; translated in E.

Following Jewish interpretations, Origen warned spiritually immature readers away from the text as its theme of carnal sexuality could easily distract the less spiritually developed. Earlier commentators had attempted to reconcile the literal sexuality of the book with Christianity; the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum (c. 386 – c. 455) wrote an apology for human sexuality based on a literal reading of the Song of Songs. His interpretation failed to convince the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, perhaps because of his heretical attachment to Pelagius and because of the strict views on sexuality and self-discipline that had been inherited from the pagan upper classes of the late Roman Empire.¹³ Julian’s work has been lost to modern readers and is only known of because the Venerable Bede (673-735) took pains to refute his literal understanding of the Canticle.¹⁴ With no opponent to effectively challenge Origen’s interpretation until the modern period, the potential sexuality of the Song was effectively neutered.¹⁵

Rufinus’ (c. 340-410) Latin translation of Origen’s commentary and Jerome’s translation of his homilies were the earliest Christian works on the Song of Songs that were available to medieval or Reformation scholars.¹⁶ These translations formed the basis for all Christian commentaries until the twelfth-century according to Chydenius.¹⁷ Matter takes exception both to this portrayal of the commentaries as static entities and to the claim that medieval exegesis did not highly value original contributions and emphasized the way in which the commentary was constructed from ‘disparate sources.’¹⁸ Only one commentator, Honorius of Autun, tried to surpass Origen’s work by augmenting it with an eschatological interpretation.¹⁹ As shall be demonstrated below, the structure of Origen’s allegory remained in popular use among exegetes

Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 27.

¹³ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 22.

¹⁴ Mary Dove, introduction to *The Glossa Ordinaria on the Song of Songs*, translated by Mary Dove (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), xvii; E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁵ Pope, 115.

¹⁶ Matter, 26. Matter notes that Hippolytus of Rome had written an earlier commentary but that this text was only available in fragments.

¹⁷ Johan Chydenius, “Medieval Institutions and the Old Testament,” *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 37, 2 (1965): 98.

¹⁸ Matter, 6.

¹⁹ Richard A. Norris Jr., ed. and trans., *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, The Church’s Bible, ed. Robert Louis Wilken (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), xx.

well into the Reformation. However, in Chydenius's favour, there were no major developments in the interpretation of the song until the twelfth-century when Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096 – 1141) posited the idealization of a Christian marriage, which was closely related to the metaphor of Christ's marriage to the Church. Hugh, following developments regarding marriage in the law courts of France, saw marriage as having two parts: *coniugium ipsum* and *officium conuigii*. *Coniugium ipsum* was completed upon the engagement of a couple while *officium conuigii* was completed upon the consummation of the marriage by the couple.²⁰ Hugh proceeded to apply this description of marriage to the exegesis of the Song of Songs. The promise of marriage was made between God and the soul in Eden and the consummation of this marriage was to be between the Christ and *ecclesia*.²¹ Hugh states:

Therefore he who was revealed as the first in divinity had been unified with a soul through love and afterwards, through assumed flesh, was joined to his Church.²²

In this way Hugh took Origen's commentary that recognized either the soul or the Church as the bride in the allegorical understanding of the song and created a narrative that saw the promise of marriage made to the individual soul culminating in the marriage in the union of Christ and the Church.²³

The most famous of medieval Song of Songs commentators was the great Cistercian abbot and monastic reformer Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Bernard left a lasting

²⁰ Chydenius, 99; Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Regulation of Sexuality in the Late Middle Ages: England and France" *Speculum* 86 (October 2011), 1038. Karras notes that the courts began seeing marriage as a two-step process involving first a commitment to the union finalized by the consummation of the marriage. She is quick to point out that while promises and intercourse made a couple legally married, these marriages were not necessarily recognized by the social body which preferred to label unsanctioned marriages as 'concubinage or maintenance'.

²¹ Chydenius, 99.

²² "Ut ostenderetur quod qui prius in divinitate per dilectionem junctus erat animae, postmodum per assumptum carnem junctus est Ecclesiae suae." Hugh of St. Victor, "De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei," *PL*, 176, 315. The translation is my own.

²³ Matter, 56. Here Matter states: "Latin interpretation of the Song of Songs strives for narrative; the primary objective of breaking the code was to turn the text into a narrative plot." Hugh's method of giving the Song a narrative had been prefaced by the application of headings that indicated a specific speaker for any particular passage. This was a medieval addition to the text as neither the Hebrew nor Jerome's Vulgate contained these headings. It can also be noted that all most all modern translations maintain the use of these headings to provide a narrative structure to the Song. *c.f.* D. de Bruyne, "Le anciennes versions latines du Cantique des Cantiques," *Revue Benedictine* 38 (1926), 121. De Bruyne states: "Ces rubriques sont la plus fine et la plus nuancée de interprétations du Cantique conçu comme un drame. La série des manuscrits de Salzbourg est de Graz, comme toutes les autres séries latines connues, est allégorique. Ici l'allégorie est discrète et voilée, elle n'en est pas moins réelle. Les rubriques 34 (*Sponsa de precatur patrem ut descendat sponsus eius in hortum*) et 56 (*Deprecatur sponsum ut cum ipsa sit in agro, hoc est in mundo*) ne laissent aucun doute à cet égard."

impression on the interpretation of the Song. Bernard was born into an aristocratic family with a history of crusading, but he turned his back on his military obligations to join the Cistercian Order and in a hagiographic example of his persuasive powers convinced upwards of thirty of his family members to do the same.²⁴ Bernard's contribution to the exegesis of the Song of Songs came from his eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters of the book. These works are called 'sermons' but Jean Leclercq's skilful research has demonstrated that they were carefully crafted written works styled as if they were for oral presentation.²⁵ Like Hugh of St. Victor, Bernard also attempted to construct a narrative that would complement the allegory of the Bride of Christ. The author of one of the most complete modern commentaries on the Song of Songs, Marvin Pope, explains Bernard's narrative this way:

Bernard of Clairvaux takes the prize in his own and in any century for devout and prolific prolixity on the Canticles. In eighty-six sermons of surpassing and extended eloquence, he progressed almost to the end of the second chapter of the Song. ... Bernard saw the action in three stages: first the groom leads the bride to the garden, then to the cellar, and finally takes her to his apartments; this is admittedly a logical procession, even though it does not accord with the order of references in the Song.²⁶

This deepening sense of intimacy as the bride moves closer to the bedchamber of the home echoes the secular love poetry of the early twelfth-century. Jean Leclercq's study of the social composition of Cistercian monks reveals that most Cistercians were from noble stock and Leclercq notes that with the influx of these monks that had once been a part of the secular world came a rising number of secular motifs. He notices a marked increase in military imagery and

²⁴ Brian P. McGuire, *The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux & His Tradition* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 22; William St. Thierry, *Vita Prima Bernardi* [1147] in *St. Bernard of Clairvaux: The Story of his Life as Recorded in the Vita Prima Bernardi by certain of his contemporaries, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bennevaux, Geoffrey and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil*, translated by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (London, UK: A.R. Mowbray and Co. Ltd. 1960), 36.

²⁵ Jean Leclercq, "Were the Sermons on the Song of Songs Delivered in Chapter?" introduction to *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs II: Sermons 21-46*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1983), xv; See also: Wm. Loyd Allen, "Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs: Why They Matter," *Review and Expositor* 105 (Summer 2008), 408; Astell, 89.

²⁶ Pope, 123. Pope's slight jab at Bernard's wordiness here is only a small part of his greater dislike for the Cistercian abbot. Pope lays the entire responsibility for the Second Crusade at Bernard's feet (p.124), states that Bernard pursued Abelard on charges of heresy based on Abelard's sexual encounters with Heloise (p. 123) and even calls him a 'heresy-hunter' (p. 123). One would have liked to see a more balanced approach taken in what has become the foremost commentary on the Song of Songs.

rhetoric purposefully mimicking the love literature that was popular among the noble classes.²⁷ Leclercq even identifies some former troubadours within the cloisters.²⁸

Astell argues that Bernard purposefully imagined the Song of Songs in all its graphic literalness before turning away from the carnal and directing his attention towards the spiritual allegory. This is important because, as Astell puts it:

By first unfolding the carnal meaning of the Song in an appealing way and then rejecting that same physical imagination as inappropriate, he enforces upon his auditors the painful awareness of their own cupidity. That awareness, moreover, precipitates a renewed conversion, a turning away from the self as unlikeness.²⁹

Of course other scholars have seen Bernard's *ex post facto* rejection of the sexuality of the Song as evidence of his own repressed sexuality. Stephen Moore, in his article "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," states:

The literal readings purport to reveal what the allegorical readings sought to conceal. The allegorical readings can themselves be read, therefore, as discourses of sexual repression.³⁰

This of course, counters Matter, ignores the fact that Origen, Bernard and most other propagators of the allegory of the marriage of the soul/Church to Christ do not try to repress the sexuality of the book though they shift the focus from the literal sense of a young married couple experimenting with their sexuality to the relationship of God with the Church or the soul.³¹ These commentators openly celebrate physical love. By way of an example, note Bernard's use of the sexual desire shown by allegorical bride and groom:

He loves and he continues to speak lovingly. Again he coaxingly calls her dove, he calls her his, and he affirms her as his own. And what she was liable to ask for herself, now it has turned the other way and he asks to see her and to hear her. He behaves as a groom;

²⁷ Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford, UK: At the Clarendon Press, 1979), 11, 21.

²⁸ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 14.

Astell, 90.

²⁹ Astell, 94.

³⁰ Stephen D. Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," *Church History* 69, 2 (June 2000), 331.

³¹ Matter, 32-33.

but as a shy one, he blushes in public, and he is determined to enjoy his pleasures in a hidden place, certainly in the clefts of the rock and in the grottos of the wall.³²

Surely Bernard has not lessened the sexuality of the bridegroom enjoying the sensual pleasures of the bride within the walls of the garden nor does he seem to be repressing it. He is merely applying this scene to spiritual matters instead of presenting it as erotica as Moore seems to wish that he would.

Bernard's exegesis of the Song of Songs also introduced the idea that the senses could be used to know and understand God.³³ His sermons abound with images of the devout soul 'touching' Christ and of 'tasting' Christ. Commenting on the famous first line of the Song "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth," Bernard wrote:

A happy kiss, that is an oddity of extraordinary honour, in which a mouth is not pressed against another mouth, but God is united to man. And thereupon indeed the contact of lips signifies the affection of hearts but this covenant of human and divine natures brings together and pacifies that which is on earth and that which is in heaven.³⁴

Elsewhere in Bernard's work we see this taken to extreme ends as Bernard requested to be hidden within the wounds of Christ and to be allowed the privilege of licking those wounds.³⁵

This intimate and physical relationship between Christ and the soul remained very popular among the religious population of late medieval Europe evidenced by the great distribution of his printed works after 1456. Even apart from his work on the Song of Songs, Bernard was so popular in the sixteenth-century that Martin Luther (1483-1546), the fiery reformer who wished to "wash his hands in the blood of the 'Romelings,'" referred to Bernard as

³² "Amat et perguit amatoria loqui. Columbam denuo blandiendo vocat, suam dicit, et sibi asserit propriam. Quodque ipse rogari obnixius ab illa solebat, ipsius, nunc versa vice, et conspectus postulat et colloquium. Agit ut sponsus; sed ut verecundus, publicum erubescit, decernitque frui deliciis suis in loco sequestri, utique in foramibus petre et in cavernis macerie." Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 61," *Sermones Super Cantica Canticatorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

³³ Allen, 409; McGuire, 242-243.

³⁴ "Felix osculum ac stupenda dignatione mirabile, in quo non os ori imprimitur, sed deus homini vnitur. Et ibi quidem contactus labiorum complexus significant animorum hic autem confideratio [sic] naturarum diuinis humana componit quae in terra sunt et que in celis [sic] pacificans." Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 2," *Sermones Super Cantica Canticatorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

³⁵ McGuire, 242.

pater Bernardus, a sign of his admiration for the Cistercian abbot.³⁶ Luther was most impressed with the Bernardine concept of the ‘double-right to heaven’ in which Bernard reportedly argued with the Devil for his salvation claiming that he was saved on account of Christ’s suffering and on account of Christ’s inheritance from God the Father. According to Posset, Luther correctly attributed this story to Bernard and Luther considered it a pinnacle of Bernard’s theology.³⁷

The biblical exegesis of the sixteenth-century was marked by a return to a literal understanding of Scripture and often an outright rejection of the allegorical understanding of Scripture.³⁸ The Reformation was aided by the rise of humanism in Europe and by a revitalized interest in the original languages of Scripture. Franz Posset, who has done so much work demonstrating Luther’s debt to medieval thought, writes:

[T]he interconnectedness of “humanism,” “monasticism,” and “Reformation” is a topic not fully explored in Reformation research, and a further “ism” needs to enter the picture, namely polyglotism as a distinctive concern among German intellectuals early in the sixteenth century – a phenomenon shared by monastic and non-monastic scholars alike. Polyglotism was an essential element of a renewed theology and may be the key to the understanding of the Reformer Martin Luther.³⁹

The desire to learn the original languages of the Bible (Greek and Hebrew) fuelled new understandings of Scripture that were expounded by both reformers and humanists alike. Luther was sure that by studying the Bible in its original language the meaning of the literal text would be apparent.⁴⁰ Luther reconceptualized the interpretation of the Song of Songs by refusing to accept that the author of the Song of Songs intended to signify the Church as the bride. Luther, attempting to grasp Solomon’s intentions, wrote:

³⁶ Adolf Laube, “Radicalism as a Research Problem in the History of Early Reformation,” in *Radical Tendencies in the Reformation: Divergent Perspectives, Volume IX Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers Inc., 1988), 14; Franz, Posset, *Pater Bernardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux*, Cistercian Study Series 168 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1999), *passim*.

³⁷ Franz Posset, “The ‘Double Right to Heaven’: Saint Bernard’s Impact in the Sixteenth Century” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38, 3 (2003), 268-269.

³⁸ Matter, 5.

³⁹ Franz Posset, “Polyglot Humanism in Germany *circa* 1520 as Luther’s Milieu and Matrix: The Evidence of the “Rectorate Page” of Crotus Rubeanus,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 27, 1 (Winter 2003), 5.

⁴⁰ Posset, “Polyglot Humanism,” 6; George L. Scheper, “Reformation Attitudes toward Allegory and the Song of Songs,” *PMLA* 89, 3 (May 1974), 551.

But to get at the simplest sense and the real character of this book, I think it is a song in which Solomon honors God with his praises; he gives him thanks for his divinely established and confirmed kingdom and government; he prays for the preservation and extension of this his kingdom, and at the same time he encourages the inhabitants and citizens of his realm to be of good cheer in their trials and adversities and to trust in God, who is always ready to defend and rescue those who call upon Him.⁴¹

This investigation of the intentions of the biblical authors resulted from a growing dissatisfaction with late medieval scholasticism in which the literal meaning of biblical texts were being marginalized and allegorized in ways that radically departed from the literal sense of the Scripture.⁴²

Though not generally thought of as a humanist, Luther himself was a polyglot who translated Erasmus's Greek New Testament into vernacular German.⁴³ Luther's desire to understand the Bible as it had been originally written is demonstrated by his regret that he had been unable to learn Hebrew fluently.⁴⁴ Luther was intent on translating the Bible into the vernacular because of his insistence that the meaning of Scripture was clear and that centuries of ecclesiastical interpretation and speculation had clouded the original meaning of the text. While Luther originally meant for this to provide believers the freedom to interpret the Bible according to the direction of the Holy Spirit, he was forced to realize that this freedom would cause too much dissention; thus he taught that the Bible's authority was to be used to support right doctrine.⁴⁵ While believers were encouraged to read the Bible for themselves they were not encouraged to tinker with doctrine. This interpretation necessarily excluded allegory as an appropriate methodology because of the variances and pluralistic conclusions that could be drawn from it. Some scholars have seen this rejection of the medieval model of exegesis as the birth of modern biblical interpretation.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 15: *Notes on Ecclesiastes; Lectures on the Song of Solomon; Treatise on the Last Words of David*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 191.

⁴² Scheper, 553. Scheper exemplifies this 'dialectic' method of biblical interpretation by relating how the six pots of water at the wedding feast in Cana were used to represent the six reasons why Christ became man. See J.W. Blech, *Preaching in England in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: A Study of English Sermons 1450 – c.1600* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 3-5.

⁴³ H.G. Haile, "Luther and Literacy," *PMLA* 91, 5 (October 1976), 816.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 12: *Selected Psalms*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 198-199; Hebert F. Hahn, "The Reformation and Bible Criticism," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 21, 4 (October 1953), 257.

⁴⁵ Hahn, 259.

⁴⁶ Hahn, 257.

Martin Luther claimed to despise allegory and championed the literal interpretation of Scripture throughout his career as a reformer. Luther declared:

But it was very difficult for me to break away from my habitual zeal for allegory; and yet I was aware that allegories were empty speculation and the froth, as it were, of the Holy Scriptures. It is the historical sense alone which supplies the true and sound doctrine.⁴⁷

However, Luther's condemnation of allegory was tempered by his realization that the apostle Paul used allegory in his letters. For example, Galatians 4:21-31 speaks of the earthly city of Jerusalem associated with Hagar and the heavenly city of Jerusalem associated with Sarah.⁴⁸ However, the allegory was only acceptable to Luther because it exemplified a point that Paul had already made. Luther wrote:

Just as a picture is an ornament for a house that has already been constructed, so an allegory is a kind of illumination or an oration or of a case that has already been established on other grounds.⁴⁹

Despite this admission that allegory could be found in Scripture, Luther was adamant that an interpreter of the Bible should not read or interpret allegorically unless the allegory was found elsewhere in the Bible.⁵⁰ Hendrix has argued that Luther believed that allegory only existed to, "help simple folk understand the text."⁵¹

This 'literalization' of the Bible was nearly complete but throughout the Reformation commentators, both Catholic and Protestant, maintained the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs.⁵² Though Luther prefaced his commentary by stating that, "[m]any commentators have produced all manner of interpretations of this song of King Solomon's – and they have been both immature and strange," he proceeded to give an allegorical interpretation of the book which

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1: *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 233.

⁴⁸ This passage is of great importance to Marpeck's understanding of the Song of Songs as will be shown in chapter three.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians Chapters 1-4, 1535*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 436.

⁵⁰ Hendrix, 231; Scheper, 551.

⁵¹ Scott H. Hendrix, "Luther Against the Background of the History of Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 31, 3 (July 1983), 230.

⁵² Scheper, 551.

purported to show government was a gift from God.⁵³ This allegory was just as ‘immature and strange’ as any medieval commentary and contrary to Luther’s guidelines for allegory was not centred in the historical context of the book. Furthermore Luther’s allegory of good government is not clearly outlined elsewhere in Scripture. Essentially, his new interpretation of the Song of Songs failed to conform to his own definition of the acceptable usages of allegory.

The fastidious reformer of Geneva, John Calvin also purported to reject allegory as a valid method of biblical interpretation. However he maintained a traditional view of the Song of Songs. Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563), a French peasant who became a professor of Greek and a Biblical scholar, applied to be a minister in Geneva but was turned away because of his insistence on taking a literal view of the Song of Songs.⁵⁴ According to Calvin:

Castellio said that it was a lascivious and obscene poem in which Solomon described his indecent amours. We told him first that he should not be so rash as to despise the perpetual consensus of the Church universal. There was no book of doubtful authenticity which had not been debated, and those books which we now receive without question were at first disputed. But this book has never been openly rejected by anyone. We told him also that he should not trust so to his own judgment, especially when he advanced nothing which had not been obvious to every one before he was born. As for the book we contended that it was an epithalamium not unlike Psalm 45. The only difference is that the one gives briefly what the other develops in detail. The Psalm of Solomon sings the beauty and adornment of the bride, so that the substance is the same. The difference is merely a matter of style.⁵⁵

⁵³ Martin Luther, *Notes on Ecclesiastes; Lectures on the Song of Solomon; Treatise on the Last Words of David*, 191; Jarrett A. Carty, “Martin Luther’s Political Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” *The Review of Politics* 73 (2011), 449-450.

⁵⁴ Castellio also disagreed with Calvin on the issue of Christ harrowing hell.

⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum 39: Calvini Opera Volume 11* (C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1873, reprinted 1964), 675-676, translated by and quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 3: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 8. “Existimat enim lascivum et obscœnum esse carmen, quo Salomo impudicos suos amores descripsit. Principio obstestati eum sumus, ut ne perpetuum universae ecclesiae consensum temere pro nihilo duceret. Nullum dubiae fidei librum esse, de quo non fuerit mota olim et agitata aliqua disceptatio. Quin etiam ex iis, quibus certam autoritatem nunc deferimus, quosdam non fuisse initio absque controversia receptos: hunc a nemine palam fuisse unquam repudiatum. Obstestati quoque sumus ne suo iudicio plus aequo arrogaret: praesertim quum nihil proponeret quod non omnes ante eum natum vidissent. Quod argumentum attinet, admonuimus formam esse epithalamii alteri non absimilem quae Ps. 45 habetur. Nec omnino quidquam interesse, nisi quod quae hic in genere breviter dicuntur, fusius et quasi minutatim explicantur in Cantico. Decantari enim in Psalmo Salomonis pulchritudinem et sponsae ornatum, ita ut res respondeat, discrimen in sola dictionis figura esse.”

As Castellio would not retreat from this position, Calvin had him exiled from Geneva.⁵⁶ As the quotation suggests, the fact that the Song had a long-standing tradition as an accepted book of the Bible, and that the sexuality of the Song was veiled by the allegory of the Bride was enough for Calvin to accept the book as a part of the canon.

In the Anabaptist tradition, allegorical marriage to Christ was a significant part of their theology and considered a fundamental part of a believer's existence.⁵⁷ Many Anabaptists struggled with the question of how that marriage affected their actual marriages to non-Anabaptists because their commitment to Christ as an allegorical groom was considered more important than any other relationship.⁵⁸ Though this imagery was more often based on the parables of Christ and the passages in Revelation that presented Christ as a bridegroom coming for his bride the Church, Anabaptists apart from Marpeck used the Song of Songs. The Dutch Anabaptists Menno Simons (1496-1561), a former priest and founder of the Mennonites, and Dirk Philips (1504-1568), a former monk, stand out most prominently. Though it is unlikely that Marpeck was aware of either men's writings, they are included here so that one can see how other Anabaptists interpreted the Song of Songs and how they also strived to keep the allegorical sense of the book.⁵⁹ Both Simons and Philips used the image of the Song's bride as a representative of the Church with Christ playing the role of the bridegroom. Both men were particularly drawn to Song of Songs 2:10-13, though for much different reasons. The verses read:

Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree hath put forth her green figs: the vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Scheper, 557.

⁵⁷ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995), 232; Beth Kreitzer, "Menno Simons and the Bride of Christ," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 70, 3 (July 1996), 306

⁵⁸ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 306.

⁵⁹ Kreitzer, 299. The possibility exists of Marpeck having had an influence on Simons however. Simons first heard of rebaptism from Melchior Hoffman (1495-1544?) who had received his baptism in 1530 in the city of Strasbourg. Marpeck was not associated with this baptism but it is likely that the two men would have met.

⁶⁰ Song of Songs, 2:10-13. Douay-Rheims, (hereafter D-R). Vulgate (hereafter V): "En dilectus meus loquitur mihi. SPONSUS. Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni: jam enim hiems transiit, imber abiit, et recessit. Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra; tempus putationis advenit: vox turturis audita est in terra nostra; ficus protulit grossos suos; vineæ florentes dederunt odorem suum. Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni..."; Zürich edition (hereafter Z): "...gibt mir antwort / und spricht: Stand auf du min geliebte / du min schone

Menno Simons interprets the groom's bidding as a call to the elect to be ready for the return of Christ. In 1539, near the end of his famous *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*, Simons wrote a long passage that aligned the Old Testament text with the New Testament book of Revelation.⁶¹

Simons wrote:

The Bridegroom, Christ Jesus, through Solomon addresses His bride, the church, saying, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle [dove] is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, by love, my fair one, and come away.⁶²

Simons continued this theme of the Church as a bride and described her using the language of the Song of Songs. Finally, using images from Revelation, he revealed the destination the groom intends for the bride:

Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ... Behold, thy walls are planted upon twelve foundations, thy gates are of pearl, the city is of pure gold, the rivers of living waters proceeding from the throne of God, and the Lamb is in the midst of you, the tree of life is on either side; its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Holy and happy is he who has part in this city.⁶³

Simon's usage of the Song of Songs is passionate. He embraces the sensuality of the Song and though he does not explicitly mention the sexuality of the book it is obviously implied.⁶⁴

Dirk Philips treated the same passage with more restraint than Simons. His interpretation, while maintaining the allegory of the Church as the bride, states that when the groom says, "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come," he means that God's wrath has been pacified and that the Church is free from the tyranny of the Old Testament Law. Philips wrote:

unnd tuni. Sihe der winter ist hin / der ragen ist vergangen. Man sicht die blümen wachsen auff dem vald: die zeyt ist hie das man schneyde: das seüffgen des Turteltüblins hort man in unserem land. Der feygbaum tructt seyne bollen herfür: die raben bluyend und riechend wol. Stand auf du mein freiindin / du meyn schone und tuni ..."

⁶¹ Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c.1496-1561*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 221-224.

⁶² Simons, 221.

⁶³ Simons, 223.

⁶⁴ For more on Simon's use of bridal imagery see: Beth Kreitzer, "Menno Simons and the Bride of Christ," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 70, 3 (July 1996).

This means that the time of the Law is gone, the wrath of God is stilled, the punishment of God is taken away. The time of grace has come and the comforting gospel is heard. ... So it was in the time of the apostolic church and continues even today among all believers.⁶⁵

Philips's optimistic approach to the Law was unfortunately not displayed in his dealings with dissenters and opponents. Liechty, in his introduction to Philips, writes, "Philips has been criticized for being extremely severe and close-minded in his dealings with opponents, especially those from within Anabaptist circles."⁶⁶ Philips continued to explain how the Babylonian whore destroyed the city of Jerusalem and that the Church is the heavenly city of Jerusalem recalling the imagery of Revelation in a way similar to that of Simons.⁶⁷

Anabaptists were often unwilling to accept the authority of the Old Testament as being equal to that of the New and so it is not surprising to see the references to the Song of Songs joined with the New Testament book of Revelations.⁶⁸ The problems that the Song of Songs posed for Biblical interpreters were great and Anabaptists were fixated on living out Christianity, a religious ideal that did not require any justification from the Song of Songs. What should be noted, however, is the fact that when Anabaptists did refer to the book, they followed not only the medieval understanding of the song but also that of the magisterial reformers.

This necessarily brief history of the interpretation of the Song of Songs leading up to and including the sixteenth-century has introduced the main themes and authors that may have influenced Pilgram Marpeck, however indirectly (the Dutch Anabaptists are a possible exception). Chapter two will detail how Marpeck used the Song in his letters and which traditions influenced the way in which he interpreted the allegory of the Song. By examining his methodology we can see just how grounded Marpeck was in a traditional understanding of the book.

⁶⁵ Dirk Philips, "Concerning Spiritual Restitution," [1539], in *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Liechty (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1994), 239.

⁶⁶ Daniel Liechty, *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1994), 199.

⁶⁷ Philips, 241.

⁶⁸ Abraham Friesen, "The Radical Reformation Revisited" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984), 150.

Marpeck and the Image of the Bride

Since the discovery of the *Kunstbuch* in 1955, both historians and theologians have been able to access the writings of Marpeck and have shown a great interest in his unique theology. William Klassen noted the importance of Marpeck's work in his book *Covenant and Community* that first introduced Marpeck to English readers:

The value of these sources is heightened by two factors. In the first place, they span nearly thirty years of the Anabaptist movement, 1530-1560, and open to our view the developing thought of a man who was an Anabaptist almost from the beginning. Secondly, they reveal a very wide range of reflection. Not only are the positions of the major Reformers, such as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger, and Bucer, here evaluated, but the various Anabaptist emphases are considered and discussed. Hutterite communism, the Munsterite rebellion, Swiss concern for external details, the spiritualism of Hans Denck and of Caspar Schwenckfeld – all are here evaluated and discarded. Marpeck, though indebted to many predecessors, emerges with an amazingly independent position singularly his own.¹

One theological construction that Marpeck evaluated but did not discard was the allegories associated with the Song of Songs and the notion of the Church as the bride of Christ. Marpeck repeatedly used this imagery, which came to him directly from the monasteries of medieval Europe. Marpeck's "amazingly independent position singularly his own," exists in this case also and will be examined in chapter three, but it too relied heavily upon the allegories created within the cloisters.

As a leader of the early South German Anabaptist churches, Marpeck was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of many Anabaptist congregations. He communicated with these churches through letters intended for individual congregations, as well as through 'circular letters' (*Rundbrief*) that were to be passed from congregation to congregation. The *Kunstbuch* preserves sixteen letters that Marpeck wrote to the churches and individuals in his role as an elder. It was within these letters that Marpeck

¹ William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life, Writings, and Hermeneutics of Pilgrim Marpeck* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1968), 56.

used allegory either directly from, or inspired by the Song of Songs. He also used similar allegories in his longer treatises, such as the “Confession of 1532” but those are outside of the scope of this thesis.² In *Covenant and Community*, Klassen notes that Marpeck only referred to the allegorical use of the Song of Songs in two of his letters, “Concerning Love,” and “Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ.”³ However, in the English edition of the *Kunstabuch* the editor, Rempel, notes six letters that refer specifically to the Song of Songs. Furthermore, I have identified eight letters that contain allegorical bridal imagery inspired by the Song of Songs.

Table 1

Letter (KB=<i>Kunstabuch</i>)	Direct Reference to the Song of Songs	Allegorical Bridal Imagery
KB #2 Concerning Those Dead in Sin [1545]	N	Y
KB #3 Concerning the Libertarians [1544]	N	N
KB #4 Concerning Love [undated]	1:4; 1:6; 2:9; 2:10; 2:12; 2:13; 2:14; 2:15	Y
KB #5 Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ [undated]	2:11; 2:12; 2:15; 5:2; 6:10; 8:6	Y
KB #7 Concerning Hasty Judgments and Verdicts [1542-43]	1:2; 1:4; 4:5; 4:10	N
KB # 8 The Cause of Conflict [1543]	N	N
KB #13 Concerning the Love of God and the Cross of Christ [undated]	1:4; 8:7	N
KB # 15 Concerning the Humanity of Christ [1555]	N	N
KB #16 Concerning the Service and Servants of the Church [undated]	N	N
KB #18 Concerning the Five Fruits of True Repentance [1550]	N	N
KB #27 Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin [1545]	8:6.	Y
KB #33 Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches [1544]	1:1-4; 1:8; 2:4; 3:11; 5:9; 6:1; 8:6	Y
KB #34 A Warning Against the Hidden Fire [1551]	N	N
KB #35 Concerning the Lowliness of Christ [1547]	N	Y
KB #37 On the Inner Church [ca. 1545]	N	Y

² For one example see: Pilgram Marpeck, “Pilgram Marpeck’s Confession of 1532,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. and trans. by William Klassen and Walter Klassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 117.

³ Klassen, 120.

KB #38 Concerning Three Kinds of People	N	Y
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It should not be that surprising that Marpeck makes these allegorical references without directly quoting from the Song as we see in “Concerning those Dead in Sin,” and “Concerning Three Kinds of People.” The Canticle is not the only Biblical book that makes reference to the allegorical marriage of the divine and an earthly entity (be it the Church, or Israel). This allegory appears elsewhere in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament the allegory appears in the Prophets, both major and minor. Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel were very fond of the image of Israel as the adulterous wife of God and this image appeared throughout their prophecies.⁴ Though this allegory differs from that of the Song in that the bride is being shamed, the idea that God has a spouse in the personification of Israel (and in Christian understanding with the Church) is reinforced by these texts.⁵ Old Testament scholars confirm this notion by noting direct quotations from the Song of Songs and by similarities in theme.⁶ In his letters that contain bridal imagery, Marpeck quoted from the chapters of the Old Testament prophets that portray the shamed bride, Israel. In “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches,” Marpeck quoted Jeremiah 2.⁷ He cited the same chapter (and verse) in “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” as well as Hosea 10:12.⁸ Intriguingly, despite Marpeck’s penchant for allegorical bridal imagery, he did not use the metaphor of the shamed bride even though it is clearly stated in the Biblical text. For instance, Jeremiah 2 begins with this simile:

⁴ I.A. Muirhead, “The Bride of Christ,” *The Scottish Review of Theology* 5, 2 (1952), 176.

⁵ See specifically Hosea 2; Jeremiah 2-4; 31:32; Isaiah 54:5; and Ezekiel 16, 23.

⁶ Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination. An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs: The Song of Songs and Hosea 2,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (1989), 80; Renita J. Weems, “The Song of Songs” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume V*, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 369.

⁷ Pilgram Marpeck, “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches,” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. by John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 556.

⁸ Pilgram Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. by John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 599, 602.

Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith the Lord: I have remembered thee, pitying thy youth, and the love of thy espousals, when thou followedst me in the desert, in a land that is not sown.⁹

It continues to detail how Israel fell away from the covenant made with the bridegroom (*i.e.* God). But when Marpeck quoted this chapter in two letters that already contain bridal imagery, and despite being aware of the marital themes of the biblical text, he used a verse that does not add to that imagery whatsoever. Marpeck wrote in “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches” that, “Hagar does not feed her children with the milk of love but with lifeless water, kept in a little barrel.”¹⁰ “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” is even less relevant to the allegory of the Bride. Marpeck wrote:

All these teachers, self appointed or re-established by human violence, who teach for the sake of carnal gain and self-indulgence under human protection, who have not drunk at the streams of living water but have stolen their human sophistry of scripture from stagnant cisterns; all these, as the prophet says, build with crumbling mortar.¹¹

Both of these letters make reference to the cisterns of stagnant water which is a metaphor used by Jeremiah only eleven verses after Jeremiah 2:2 quoted above.¹² Marpeck mixed his metaphors and in doing so demonstrated that he was aware of the prophetic imagery of the bride but was not interested in using it to describe the Anabaptist church. This

⁹ Jeremiah 2:2. D-R. V: “Vade, et clama in auribus Jerusalem, dicens: Hæc dicit Dominus: Recordatus sum tui, miserans adolescentiam tuam, et caritatem desponsationis tuæ, quando secuta es me in deserto, in terra quæ non seminatur”; Z: “Gag hin unnd schrey Jerusalem in die oren / und sprich also: Ulso redt der HERR: Ich bin dein eyngedenct umb der fromteyt willen deiner jugend / und um der unzerbrochne leibe willen / dz du mir nachzofest durch die wuste / in einem ungebauwnen land.”

¹⁰ Pilgram Marpeck, “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches,” 556. “Dann die Agar trennct ire kinder nit mit der milch der lieb, sonder mit einem todten wasser, des inn ein lägl ...” *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer 1527-1555 Das >Kunstabuch< des Jörg Probst Rotenfelder gen. Maler (Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 464)*, ed. by Heinold Fast and Martin Rothkegel (Gütersloher, DE: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 546.

¹¹ Pilgram Marpeck, “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ,” 599. “...und was sollich selblouffende oder von menschengwalt aufgestellte lerer send, die allein umb lon zeitlichs gwinß und gnieß willen under menschlichem schutz lernen, wölche lerer nit von dem lebendigen wasserr getrunnckhen haben, sondern fon kunst der gschrift und von menschen als von faulen zisternen ir ler und kunnst gestolen. Solche all bauen mit unkochem mörter, wie der phrofet sagt etc.” *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 577.

¹² Jeremiah 2:13 (D-R) reads: “For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” V: “Duo enim mala fecit populus meus: me dereliquerunt fontem aquæ vivæ, et foderunt sibi cisternas, cisternas dissipatas, quia continere non valent aquas.” Z: “Dan mein volct hat zwo schalctheyten begangen / Mich einen brunen der labendigen ymerwarenden wassern habend sy vlassen / das sy inen sod grubind / ja verworffne und zerbrochne sod/ die tein wasser habend.”

usage is telling of Marpeck's ecclesiology. His theological conception of the Church was as the pure bride of Christ who was exemplified in the Song of Songs and not the adulterous wife portrayed in the prophets.¹³ Neal Blough and Thomas Finger have noticed this glorification of the Church and both note that Marpeck equated the Church with the prolonged presence of the humanity of Christ on Earth. They both agree that:

Marpeck believed that Jesus' flesh purified that of his followers to the degree that they participated in his historically extended humanity.¹⁴

This attitude towards Christ and the Church is confirmed in Marpeck's letter "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ" in which Marpeck wrote that through the communion meal believers are united in one body with Christ.¹⁵ Though Marpeck's union of Christ and the Church lacks the sexual implications of the Song of Songs allegory the union is apparent and explains Marpeck's insistence on the glory of the Church rather than the shame found in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament the allegory of the Church as the bride of Christ is presented much differently than in the Old Testament. Gone is shame of the wayward bride; instead, she is shown in glory. Here the comparison between the bride and the Church is explicit. The apostle John wrote of the marriage of the Lamb to the Church and of the city of Jerusalem as the bride of Christ in Revelation.¹⁶ Perhaps the most obvious New Testament reference comes from Ephesians where Paul presents the ideal, pure Church as the bride of Christ:

¹³ This adulterous wife is most vividly portrayed by Gomer, the prostitute turned prophet's wife, who turned from Hosea back into her life of sin only to be redeemed a second time by Hosea.

¹⁴ Thomas Finger, "Pilgram Marpeck and the Christus Victor Motif," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78 (January 2004), 66; see also: Neal Blough, *Christologie Anabaptiste: Pilgram Marpeck et l'humanite du Christ* (Geneva, CH: Labor et Fides, 1984), 58-59. Blough writes that in Marpeck's ecclesiology, participation in church ceremonies means that the believer is participating in the humanity of Christ and that by doing so the believer extends his/her knowledge of God and subsequently lives a life of obedience.

¹⁵ Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. by John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 108. Finger confirms this on page 71 of "Pilgram Marpeck and the Christus Victor Motif" writing: "Eventually, the Lord's Supper became for him not only the primary sacrament, but also the major paradigm of overall relationships between Christ and the church, God and humans, Spirit and matter."

¹⁶ Revelations 19:7; 21:2,9; Muirhead, 177-181.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it: That he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish. So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the church: Because we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the church.¹⁷

New Testament scholar, J. Paul Sampley, argues that there are clear linguistic links between this passage and the Song of Songs. He juxtaposes Song of Songs 4:7, “Though art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee,” with Ephesians 5:27, “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish.”¹⁸ Sampley compares the translation of the Song of Songs in the Septuagint with the Greek of Ephesians to demonstrate that a link indeed exists between the two books.¹⁹ In any event, Marpeck clearly linked the two books in “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches.” Here Marpeck quoted from Song of Songs 1:1 and then in the following paragraph dictated

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:25-32. D-R.V: “Viri, diligite uxores vestras, sicut et Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et seipsum tradidit pro ea, ut illam sanctificaret, mundans lavacro aquæ in verbo vitæ, ut exhiberet ipse sibi gloriosam Ecclesiam, non habentem maculam, aut rugam, aut aliquid hujusmodi, sed ut sit sancta et immaculata. Ita et viri debent diligere uxores suas ut corpora sua. Qui suam uxorem diligit, seipsum diligit. Nemo enim umquam carnem suam odio habuit: sed nutrit et fovet eam, sicut et Christus Ecclesiam: quia membra sumus corporis ejus, de carne ejus et de ossibus ejus. Propter hoc relinquet homo patrem et matrem suam, et adhærebit uxori suæ, et erunt duo in carne una. Sacramentum hoc magnum est, ego autem dico in Christo et in Ecclesia.”; Z: “Ir man liebend euwere weyber / gleych wie Christus geliebet hatt die gmeind / unnd hatt sich selbs für sygeben / auff das er sy heyligete: unnd hatt sy geryniget durch das wasserbad im wort / auff das er im darstellte ein herrliche gemeind / die nit habe ein flacten oder runtzel / oder des etwas / sond das sy sey heylig und unstraff lich. Ulso follend auch die menner ire weyber lieben al sir eigne leyb. War sein weyb liebet / der liebet sich selbs. Dann niemants hatt ye seyn eygen fleysch gehasset / sonder er neeret es / und aufenthalts / gleych wie auch der Herr die gmeind. Dann wir sind glider seines leybs von seinem fleysch /und von seinem gebeynen. Umb des willen wirt ein mensch verlassen vatter und muter / und seinem weyb anhangen / und werdend zwey ein fleisch sein: die geheimnuß ist groß. Ich sag aber von Christo und der gemeind.”

¹⁸ Song of Songs 4:7 D-R; V: “Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.”; Z: “Gantz schon und hüpsch bist du mein geliebte: unnd tein maasen ist an dir.”. Ephesians 5:28 D-R; V: “... ut exhiberet ipse sibi gloriosam Ecclesiam, non habentem maculam, aut rugam, aut aliquid hujusmodi, sed ut sit sancta et immaculata.”; Z: “...auff das er im darstellte ein herrliche gemeind / die nit habe ein flacten oder runtzel / oder des etwas / sond das sy sey heylig und unstraff lich.”

¹⁹ J. Paul Sampley, “*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*”: A Study in the Traditions of Ephesians 5:21-33, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 16 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 47-48.

how the lover is the Church as presented in Ephesians.²⁰ He wrote:

All who are thus kissed by the mouth of God, and who have conceived a divine nature by the seed of the Word, are brought to this bride and mother, the church, by the Holy Spirit. In her, as the mother, spouse, consort, and church of Christ, are they born. Conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit, she bears the children of the Word in her body. As stated above, that body is the body of Christ, for while Christ is the husband and head, the two are one flesh.²¹

As Marpeck primarily used the Song of Songs as a source for his marital imagery the remainder of this chapter will focus on two of the letters that both demonstrate how Marpeck's approach betrays the influence of medieval exegesis. These two letters are "Concerning Love" and "Concerning Unity as the Bride of Christ," the same two identified by Klassen as exemplifying Marpeck's usage of allegory. Both of these letters draw directly from Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, a text that must have been familiar to Pilgram Marpeck.

This begs the question: how does a layperson from Southern Germany in the sixteenth-century become acquainted with a Cistercian abbot of the twelfth-century? There are two possibilities. The first is through an Augustinian friar named Johann von Paltz and the second is that Marpeck may have had a copy of one of Bernard's books.

Posset notes that in 1490, sermons preached in German by Johann von Paltz (d. 1511) to Frederick the Wise (ca. 1463-1525) were published under the title *Himlische Funtgrube*.²² In these sermons Paltz frequently quoted from Bernard and paid especial notice to Bernard's treatment of Song of Songs 2:14, the same passage quoted in "Concerning Love." Paltz's sermons were very popular and before 1522 had been reprinted five times in Leipzig, once in Magdeburg, Nuremberg, and Augsburg, twice in

²⁰ Marpeck, "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches," 552-553.

²¹ Marpeck, "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches," 553. "Diser prauth und müter, der kirchen, werden alle, die also durch den mund Gotes kust werden und vom somen des worts götlicher natur empfangen, durch den h[eilige]n geist zügefüert, inn sy ge- born und empfangen. Die geburt ouch nachmals als die müterr, gsporns, gemahel und kirchen Christi uß der mitgeburt des h[eilige]n geists, von dem sy, wie obsteet, des worts kinderr empfach inn iren leib, das ist inn den leib Christi, deren Christus der man und das houbt is, als zwey ein fleisch." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 544.

²² Posset, "Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the Devotion, Theology, and Art of the Sixteenth Century," 325.

Erfurt and once in Strasbourg.²³ The Strasbourg edition is especially interesting for a woodcut it contains. The title page depicts two monks working as miners tunnelling under Calvary. Marpeck, as a mining engineer and a devout Christian may have shown an interest in a book that combined both his religious life and his professional life. However, this text is unable to account for details that are present in both Bernard's sermons and Marpeck's letters. If we accept that Marpeck received his knowledge of Bernard through Paltz then we have to assume that the similarities between Bernard and Marpeck are coincidences.²⁴

Therefore, the most likely source of Marpeck's knowledge of Bernard was through Bernard himself. By the advent of the sixteenth century there were nearly three hundred printed editions of Bernard's work. The first printed edition of *Sermones super cantica canticorum* appeared in 1481 in Rostock, Germany quickly followed by others in Italy and France. In 1496 and in 1497 editions of the *Sermones* were published in Strasbourg, the latter one by publisher Martin Flach. These, of course, were all published in Latin and if Marpeck were to have used one of these incunabula he would have had to have known the language. Richard Bailey confirms that Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum* were not published in any language other than Latin until a Dutch edition was printed in 1557.²⁵ Posset does not list any other vernacular editions of Bernard's sermons either. However, Wybren Scheepsma has noted a single Bavarian manuscript, dated to ca. 1450, which was written in German.²⁶ This text was composed in the Benedictine abbey of Tegernsee, which is only a short distance south east of

²³ For a partial list of editions see Posset, "Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the Devotion, Theology, and Art of the Sixteenth Century," 348 n 57.

²⁴ The specific image missing in Paltz is that of the hawk in his exposition on Song of Songs 2:14. Both Bernard and Marpeck use the image of the hawk while Paltz refers to the devil laying traps for the believer. Posset, "Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the Devotion, Theology, and Art of the Sixteenth Century," 348 n 57 and 327.

²⁵ Richard G. Bailey, "Some Remarks on St. Bernard of Clairvaux as a Literary Source for Melchior Hoffman's Commentary *Dat Boeck Cantica Canticorum* (1529)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22, 1 (Spring, 1991), 94.

²⁶ Wybren Scheepsma, *The Limburg Sermons: Preaching in the Medieval Low Countries at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. by David F. Johnson, Brill's Series in Church History 34 (Leiden, NL: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 34.

Augsburg.²⁷ But the very fact that it was in a monastery ensures that it would not have been easily accessible to an itinerant Anabaptist such as Marpeck though it is a possibility. Hover's study of the manuscript also suggests that by 1495 the manuscript had made its way into private ownership.²⁸ All of the scholars noted above fail to mention another 1498 manuscript copy of the sermons translated into German that has recently been digitalized by the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.²⁹ Despite this second manuscript, it is more likely that Marpeck had access to one of the Latin editions of *Sermones super cantica canticorum* and was capable of reading it.

The first letter that demonstrates Marpeck's reliance upon Bernard, "Concerning Love," is a short letter, filled with complicated and sometimes puzzling allegories. Here Marpeck described love as being the foundation of Christianity. The letter lacks cohesion and is characterized by rapidly changing themes and complicated uses of allegory. The letter begins with a reminder that Christians belong to the body of the Church and that each member has his own function.³⁰ He then shifted the focus of the letter to a description of a feminized love that is God himself. Gender roles are fluid in Marpeck's allegories. Marpeck writes, "Yes love is never commanded, for *she* is the commandment herself. She is God *herself*. . ." (emphasis added).³¹ This feminizing of God has a medieval antecedent and had been used by both female mystics and male monks of the thirteenth-century.³² Marpeck immediately followed this description of Love/God with a complicated allegory describing the family tree of Love. In his depiction, God the Father (*m.*) has a polygamous relationship with Experience (*f.*) and with Knowledge (*f.*). Hope (*f.*) is born of Experience (*f.*) and God the Father, while Love (*f.*), which is also God, and

²⁷ For a complete description of this manuscript see: Werner Höver, *Theologia Mystica in altbairischer Übertragung: Bernhard von Clairvaux, Bonaventura, Hugo von Balma, Jean Gerson, Bernhard von Waging und andere* (München, DE: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971), 3-51.

²⁸ Höver, 6.

²⁹ München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CGM 350.

³⁰ I use the male pronoun only as Marpeck makes no mention of women's roles in the body of the Church in this letter.

³¹ Marpeck, "Concerning Love," 99.

Ja, ir, der lieb, wirt nymerr geboten, dann sy ist das gebot selberr, ja, in allem Got selbs...

Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer, 154-155.

³² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 112; 189-190.

Faith (*m.*) are born of Knowledge and God the Father.³³ After detailing the family tree of Love, Marpeck focused his letter on the Song of Songs. He bemoaned the fact that we cannot know the full love of God and that the allegory of the Song is but a foretaste. He took the imagery of the believer as the vine from John 15 and planted the vine in the vineyard of the Canticle where love watches over and protects the believer. Marpeck then concluded his letter with a warning not to abuse the gift of love for one's own self but instead to honour the giver, *i.e.* God.

As described in chapter one, the dominant interpretation of the Song of Songs came from Origen and was propelled into the sixteenth-century by the popularity of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Order. Even among Protestants, Bernard was considered a great Christian writer. The legend of Bernard's double right to heaven appears multiple times in Luther's writings where he refers to it as "spiritually and theologically most precious."³⁴ Bernard, like Augustine and other great non-Protestant writers, was enlisted to witness the truth of the Protestant Reformation.³⁵ Marpeck must have held an equal amount of respect for the reforming Cistercian of the twelfth-century as he relied upon Bernard while writing this letter. As mentioned above, in "Concerning Love," Marpeck outlined how Love protects the believers from harm and in doing so he shows a strong dependency upon Bernard's Sermon 61. Marpeck wrote:

The Spirit speaks further: "My dove, in the clefts of the rock." This is only that love which is in Christ Jesus; he is the rock in whose clefts true love dwells. These clefts are his suffering, wounds, bloodshed, and dying, in which the believers in love have total safety and rest from birds of prey, that is, the devil and his seed, which are the enemies of love.³⁶

³³ Though Love is presented here as the offspring of God the Father, in Marpeck's use of the allegory it does not represent Christ or the church, but is instead presented as another bride of Christ. The allegory is not perfect but it succeeds in demonstrating the relation of love, experience, knowledge, hope, and faith.

³⁴ Franz Posset, "The 'Double Right to Heaven': Saint Bernard's Impact in the Sixteenth Century," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38, 3 (2003), 268-269.

³⁵ Bruce Gordon, "The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe: Volume 1 The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. by Bruce Gordon (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1996), 4.

³⁶ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Love," 102. "Spricht weiter der geist: >>Mein taub, inn des velsen löchern,<< das ist nur die liebe, die inn Christo Jesu ist, der is der felß, inn wölchs löchern die ware liebe woneth. Die löcher, das ist sein leiden, wunden, plütvergiessen und sterben, darinn die gloubigen inn der liebe freye sicherheit und rû haben vor dem roubennden gflugl, das is vor dem teufel und seunem somen als feind der liebe." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 156.

Bernard's sermon is very similar:

Another writer explains this text in this way, interpreting the holes in the rock as the wounds of Christ. This is altogether correct. For Christ is the rock. The good clefts build faith in the resurrection and the divinity of Christ. 'My Lord,' he said (i.e. the apostle Thomas), 'and my God.' What was the source of these divine words if not the clefts of the rock? In them the sparrow finds his home: and the turtledove a nest where she may lay her young. In them, the dove is protected and unperturbed, watches the circling hawk.³⁷

Both Bernard and Pilgram are relying on Song of Songs 2:14 for their imagery. This verse reads:

My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely. (D-R)³⁸

It is clear that Marpeck is not working solely from the biblical text in this instance. Both the image of Satan as the hawk and the notion of Christ being the rock are absent from the text of the Canticle. Christ as a rock is a metaphor used in I Corinthians 10:4, but the idea of the wounds of Christ being clefts in the rock is extra-biblical and a major source of medieval devotion.³⁹ Clearly either Bernard or the other writer mentioned by Bernard was influencing Pilgram.

This other writer that Bernard referred to was Pope Gregory the Great who wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs in the sixth-century. However, the likelihood of Marpeck quoting from Gregory instead of Bernard is small. As noted above, Bernard enjoyed a wide following in the sixteenth-century among both Catholics and Protestants (and at least one Anabaptist). Posset writes: "Therefore with Constable one must state

³⁷ "Alius hunc locum ita exposuit, foramina petre vulnera Christi iterpretans. Recte omnino. Nam petra Christus. Bona foramina quae fidem a[d]struunt resurrectonis et Christi divinitatem. Dominus meus (inquit) et deus meus. Unde hoc reportatum oraculum nisi ex foraminibus petre. In his passer ivenit sibi domum; et turtur nidum ubi repornat pullos suos. In his le columba tutatur et circumvolitate itrepida intuetur accipirem." Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 61," *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

³⁸ V: "...columba mea, in foraminibus petrae, in caverna maceriae, ostende mihi faciem tuam, sonet vox tua in auribus meis: vox enim tua dulcis, et facies tua decora."; Z: "...du mein Tub auß den holen velsen / auß den lochern der mauren. Laß mich dein angesicht sahen / und dein stini horen. Dann dein stini ist suß / und dein angesicht schon."

³⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), 271; 279.

that of individual medieval writers whose works were widely read in later medieval times, Bernard was by far the most important.”⁴⁰ Gregory, on the other hand, had become increasingly popular for the image of ‘The Mass of Saint Gregory’ in which Jesus appeared naked above the altar and bled into the chalice, thus emphasizing the actual presence of Christ within the Eucharist.⁴¹ Marpeck’s rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the fact that Gregory had been Pope makes it unlikely that Marpeck would have considered Gregory’s commentary authoritative.⁴² Perhaps more convincing is the fact that Gregory fails to mention the circling hawk in his exposition.⁴³

Demonstrating further reliance upon Bernard, Marpeck continued in “Concerning Love” to write about ‘little foxes’ that are destroying the garden. This is a reference to Song of Songs 2:15, the verse that immediately follows the one from the previous example. It reads:

Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines: for our vineyard hath flourished.
(D-R)⁴⁴

Marpeck reminded his readers that these foxes are allegorical. They represent, “the cunning people of this world, the small ones, who have no worth in God’s eyes,” that is, unrepentant sinners.⁴⁵ Following his theme of love as the protector of the believer Marpeck wrote that, “These foxes are caught only in love through patience, by

⁴⁰ Franz Posset, “Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the Devotion, Theology, and Art of the Sixteenth Century,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997), 315.

⁴¹ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 309-310.

⁴² For Marpeck’s views on transubstantiation see his letter “Concerning the Lowliness of Christ” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgrim Marpeck Circle*, trans. by Walter Klaassen, ed. by John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 571-611; cf. Finger, 71-73.

⁴³ “Per foramina autem petrae, vulnera manuum et pedum Christi in cruce pendentis libenter intellexerim. Cavernam vero maceriae, vulnus lateris quod lancea factum est, eodem sensu dixerim. Et bene columba in foraminibus petrae et in caverna maceriae esse dicitur, quia dum in crucis recordatione patientiam Christi imitatur, dum ipsa vulnera propter exemplum ad memoriam reducit, quasi columba in foraminibus, sic simplex anima in vulneribus nutrimentum quo convalescat, invenit. Possunt tamen per foramina petrae, incarnationis Christi sacramenta signari, et per cavernam maceriae, ipsa protectio angelicae custodiae figurari.” Gregory the Great, “Sancti Gregorii magni romani pontificis super cantica canticorum expositio,” *PL*, 79, 0499D.

⁴⁴ V: “Capite nobis vulpes parvulas quæ demoliuntur vineas: nam vinea nostra floruit.”; Z: “Fahend uns die fuchßlin / ha die tleinen fuchßlin die den raben schade tünd / dann unsere raben bluyend.”

⁴⁵ Marpeck, “Concerning Love,” 102. “Do meint er die listigen menschen diser welt, die cleinen, als gar nichts geschetzt vor Gotes augen.” *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 157.

overcoming them with the truth even as Christ overcame the world.”⁴⁶ This is not an original idea developed by Marpeck but is again derived from the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard’s treatment of 2:15 is substantially longer than Marpeck’s, but it contains this paragraph, which is of especial interest:

The wise man will be careful to guard his vineyard no less than he tends it, nor will he leave it to be devoured by foxes. The worst fox is the hidden disparager, but no less is the alluring flatterer. The wise man will be cautious of these. Indeed, he will devote himself, as much as he can, to catch those who do such things, but catch them with kindness and courtesies, and by advantageous admonitions and by praying to God for them.⁴⁷

Marpeck took the image further than Bernard does by applying the passage to Christ and invoking believers to follow his example, but the image of the vineyard tender capturing the foxes through kindness is certainly the same.

That Pilgram had knowledge of Bernard’s work is confirmed by another reference to the *Sermones super cantica canticorum* in a second letter. The unity of the Church was a motif that Marpeck returned to many times and was the theme of the earliest letter of his that exists. On 21 December 1540 he wrote “Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ” to the congregations of Strasbourg and those in the Kinzig and Leber valleys. Rempel notes that the motif of unity is to be expected, because of the uneasy relationship between him and the Swiss Brethren.⁴⁸ In the letter Marpeck began with an exposition of the communion meal, which he concluded by stating that all believers are a part of one body, *i.e.* the Church, through the sacrifice of Christ’s one body.⁴⁹ Marpeck then returned

⁴⁶ Marpeck, “Concerning Love,” 102. “Dise fuchs fachtet (fängt) man nur inn der leibe durch gedult mit der uberwindung inn der warheit, wie Christus die welt...” *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 157.

⁴⁷ “Sapiens erit sollicitus seruare vineam suam non minus quam excolere, nec sinet eam vorari a vulpibus. Pessima vulpis occultus detractor, sed non minus nequam adulator blandus. Cauebit sapiens ab his. Dabit operam sane, quod in ipso est, cape illos qui talia agunt sed cape beneficiis atque obsequiis monitisque salutaribus et orationibus pro his ad deum.” Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon 63,” *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

⁴⁸ John D. Rempel, *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 105.

⁴⁹ *cf.* above page 10-11 and 39; the *Kunstbuch* reveals that the Marpeck circle thought of themselves as the bride of Christ set in opposition to the rest of the world. The rest of the world included Catholics, Lutherans, and other Anabaptist congregations. Martin Rothkegel, “Pilgram Marpeck and the

to the image of the Church as the bride of Christ and wrote of the beautification of the bride by the Father, *i.e.* God. The crowning jewel of the Church is the gem of unity given to the Church at the request of Christ. From there, Marpeck commented on Song of Songs 2:10-13 in which he wrote that the coming of Christ is like the advent of spring and that believers can now bear spiritual fruit in the warmth of the sun. The subject of the letter then turns to a parable of Marpeck's own creation in which a bride loses a coronet on her wedding day and it is only found when the groom recovers it from a thief. The moral is that the bride will now take better care of the treasure just as Christians will take better care of the jewel of unity that has been restored to us by Christ, our allegorical bridegroom.

This letter contains two obvious references to Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs. The first has to do with the adornment of the Church. In Marpeck's explanation, God the Father, at Christ's request, provides the Church with sumptuous robes and beautifies her in such a way that, "even the angels desire and long to see the bridegroom in his glory, together with his bride."⁵⁰ The crowning jewel in the Bride's attire, according to Marpeck, is the gem of unity that identifies true Christians. Marpeck wrote:

I write this to you that you may truly awaken and that you may not lose the glorious jewel, the true necklace, bracelet, wreath, and crown. For the Father has decorated his Son and the Son's bride, love, the dearest of all. This is the communion of Christ, which the Father himself has given in marriage to Christ his Son, with the jewel of unity.⁵¹

The editors of Marpeck's work draw attention to the New Testament passages which comment on the crown (Revelations 3:11) and a prize (Philippians 3:14; I Corinthians

Fellows of the Covenant: The Short and Fragmentary History of the Rise and Decline of an Anabaptist Denominational Network," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, 1 (January 2011), 13.

⁵⁰ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ" [1540], trans. by William Klassen, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press Inc., 2010), 110. "...umb wölcher zier willen ouch die engel lust und verlanngen haben..." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 160.

⁵¹ Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," 109-110. "Das schreib ich euch darum, das ir recht aufwachent, damit ir das hörlich kleinat, das recht halspant, armzierd, schapl, krantz und kron nit verliert. Dann der vaterr hat sein sun mitsambt der prauth, die lieb, ja die liebste under allen, die do ist die gemeinsam Christi, die der vater selbs Christo seinem sun vertrauet und vermechelt hat, die hat der vaterr mit disem kleinat der einigkheit geziert." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 160.

9:24) but these texts mention neither the necklace nor the jewel of unity.⁵² The reference to the necklace comes from Song of Songs 1:9-10:

Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove's, thy neck as jewels. We will make thee chains of gold, inlaid with silver.

Marpeck's text does not make the allusion immediately obvious but when it is examined in conjunction with Bernard's thirty-ninth sermon on the Song of Songs one can see how this verse influenced Marpeck's letter. Bernard's sermon on this biblical text begins with a bestowing of gifts upon the bride by Christ that climaxes with this paragraph:

Concerning the rest, by a singular honour after her liberation, she is accepted as his beloved, she is beautifully dressed just as the bride of the Lord but for the time being not more than the cheeks and neck. She has been promised a necklace for ornamentation: made of expensive gold and decorated with beautiful silver. Who would not be totally pleased with such a gift? First he mercifully sets her free. Second, he nobly falls in love with her, third, he kindly washes and purges her, and finally she receives a promise of the finest jewel.⁵³

Obviously the usage of the imagery is different, and despite Bernard's jewel not having a specific trait attached to it, his sermon contains the image of God beautifying his bride with a specific adornment which is not biblical in nature. The conjunction of the necklace and the fine jewels being bestowed by Christ on the bride in both Bernard and Marpeck's writings demonstrates a familiarity with Bernard on the part of Marpeck.

Pilgram's commentary on Song of Songs 2:10-13 in "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," also shares similarities with the *Sermones*. The verses read:

Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the

⁵² I have corrected Rempel's footnote here. His text has an obvious misprint stating that the Biblical text is Philemon 3:14 rather than Philippians 3:14. Of course the book of Philemon has only one chapter. Rempel, 109.

⁵³ "De reliquo illa singulari dignatione postquam liberata est, asciscitur in amicam, decorem induitur tamquam domini sponsa interim tamen in genis dumtaxat et in collo. Ad hec illi promittuntur murenulo pro ornatu: ipseque auree pro preio et distincte argento pro decore. Cui non admodum placeat ordo ipse donationum. Primum misericorditer liberatur. secundo dignanter adamatur, tertio benigne abluitur et purgatur, postremo optimi ornamenti accipit promissionem." Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 39," *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

turtle is heard in our land: The fig tree hath put forth her green figs: the vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come ...⁵⁴

Marpeck's understanding of this passage is that Christ is the spring, and that the Incarnation has brought the conditions necessary for the growth of spiritual fruit in believers.⁵⁵ Before Christ, people were like plants in the wintertime with "neither bud nor blossoms."⁵⁶ However, Marpeck continues:

But when the sun Christ Jesus appeared on earth in the weakness of his true humanity, from the seed of the woman and the human race, only then did people begin to bloom. The fig tree and the vine developed buds and blossoms, but without fruit, before the setting of this sun, Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

It is only with the coming of Pentecost that the plants, *i.e.* the believers, are able to bear the fruits of the Spirit. Marpeck continues the allegory:

When the turtledove, that is the Holy Spirit, was heard, only then were the first and earliest fruits borne. The blossoms ceased with the appearance of the fruit; the shadow shrank away through the sun of union and reconciliation, to bring fruits to God through the lovely dawn. This is also the sealing of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins with the cool dew of grace. My dearest ones, the highest ornament and adornment of love is therefore the preserving of unity in the Holy Spirit, for without this unity there is no sincere love.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Song of Songs 2:10-13, D-R. V: "En dilectus meus loquitur mihi. SPONSUS. Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni: jam enim hiems transiit; imber abiit, et recessit. Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra; tempus putationis advenit: vox turturis audita est in terra nostra; ficus protulit grossos suos; vineæ florentes dederunt odorem suum. Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni ..."; Z: "...gibt mir antwort / und spricht: Stand auf du min geliebte / du min schone unnd tuni. Sihe der winter ist hin / der ragen ist vergangen. Man sicht die blümen wachsen auff dem vald: die zeyt ist hie das man schneyde: das seüffgen des Turtelüblins hort man in unserem land. Der feygbaum tructt seyne bollen herfür: die raben bluyend und riechend wol. Stand auf du mein freiindin / du meyn schone und tuni ...".

⁵⁵ See Galatians 5:22.

⁵⁶ Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," 111. "...weder knöpf noch ougen..."; *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 161.

⁵⁷ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," 111. "Do aberr die sonn Christus Jesus noch inn der schwach als warerr mensch vom weibssomen und gschlecht der menschen aufs etrich erschein, do haben die menschen erst anfähen zû plueen, die feigenbeum und weinstöckh knöpf und ougen gwunnen, aber noch als on frucht vor undergang dieser sonnen Jesu Christi..." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 161.

⁵⁸ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," 111. "...do sich die turteltaub hören hat lassen, das ist der h[eilig] geist. Do send erst die ersten und fruen frucht worden. Do haben die pluee aufgehört durch erscheinung der frucht und ist der schatenn gwichen durch die sonn der vereinigung, versuenung, Got frucht ze bringen durch liepliche morgenröth. Das ist ouch die versiglung des h[eilig]n geists inn verzeichung der sundt mit kuelethouder gnaden. Darum, mein hertzliebsten, ist die höchst zier und schmuckh der lieb, die einigkheit im h[eilige]n geist zû halten, on wölche einigkheit kein ungeferbte ware liebe funden mag werden." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 161.

This exposition of Christ as the coming of spring and the bringer of conditions favourable to true spiritual growth is prefaced in Bernard's fifty-eighth sermon on the Song. Like the other examples of Pilgram using Bernard's imagery the message being presented in each man's work is different. Bernard's winter refers to the very short time in which Jesus did not walk openly among the Jews because they were plotting to kill him. Marpeck's winter refers to the entire history of the world before the advent of Christ. Despite this difference the imagery used is very similar. In Bernard's passage the winter rains fall and turn the ground to mud. This rain is not helpful for the growing of fruit and as long as it lasted the vines could not produce fruit. Bernard wrote:

Therefore so long as the pestilences of water seize and strengthen the earth above them, the vineyard did not come into season, nor was the bride invited to prune the vines. But when they recede dry land is revealed and flowers appear on it, indicating the time for pruning was now. You ask when this was? When do you think, if not when the flesh of Christ flowered again at the resurrection? And this was the first and greatest flower, which appeared on our earth: for Christ is the first fruit of those who sleep.⁵⁹

Here, like in Marpeck's work, we see the reversal of winter, or the floods in Bernard's text, as Christ appears in the flesh. Bernard continues his sermon by writing that the cessation of winter brought with it multitudes of flowers, *i.e.* believers, who, when they flowered, brought forth the fruit of faith, one of the fruits of the Spirit alluded to by Marpeck. Even Marpeck's reference to the turtledove has its reference in the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*. Sermon fifty-nine follows Origen in identifying the turtledove with the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ This example of Marpeck drawing upon Bernard is the only one that has been noted by previous scholars. William Klassen drew attention to the

⁵⁹ "Donec ergo istiusmodi aque pestilentes occupauerunt terram et inualuerunt super eam: tempus suum vinee non habuerunt, nec fuit quod sponsa inuigaretur ad putandas vineas. Ceterum illis decurrentibus, terra aperuit arida et flores apparuerunt in ea, significantes tempus putationis adesse. Queris quando hoc fuit? Quando putas, nisi cum reffloruit caro Christi in resurrectione? Et hic primus et maximus flos qui apparuit in terra nostra: nam primitie dormientium Christus." Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 58," *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

⁶⁰ "Ceterum si multi gementes quid sibi vult vnus de signatio? Vox turturis (inquit) Quare non turturum? Forte apostolus id soluit vbi ait quia ipse spiritus postulat pro sanctis gemitibus inenarrabilibus. Ita est." Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 59," *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497); *Glossa Ordinaria*, 53.

similarities between Marpeck and Bernard in *Covenant and Community* though he stopped short of attributing Bernard's influence on Marpeck.⁶¹

Finally, I would like to provide a simple statistical example that, if it does not prove dependence, at least strengthens the case that Marpeck was influenced by Bernard's sermons. In his letters Marpeck alluded to or quoted from the Song of Songs thirty times. Out of these thirty references nineteen refer to verses prior to Song of Songs 3:3, the last verse treated by Bernard in his sermons. Verses commented on by Bernard of Clairvaux make up nearly two-thirds (63%) of Marpeck's references to the Song of Songs.

Though Marpeck was familiar with Bernard's sermons he did not give credit to the Cistercian abbot nor did he use the imagery of the Canticle in the same way as Bernard. In the sixteenth-century plagiarism was not an offense but rather a form of flattery. Furthermore, Anabaptists had a tendency to 'forget' to cite their Catholic sources. Kenneth Davis remarks that:

[B]ecause of their self-conscious role as ardent biblicists [sic] because, in part, of the nature of their zeal for the restitution of the apostolic church over against Catholic traditionalism, and because of their conscious separation from "Babylon", they tended in their writings to avoid references to either influential historical antecedents or to contemporary influences.⁶²

This phenomenon is readily observable in Marpeck's writings. Marpeck's letter "Concerning Love," contains six references to the Bible made by either Marpeck or Jörg Maler. Modern scholars have noted forty-one additional references to the Bible that were not immediately marked by Marpeck or Maler. However, neither Marpeck nor Maler (nor the modern commentators) noted any reference to a source outside of the Scriptures. Quite interestingly, the *Kunstbuch's* editor, Rempel, draws the reader's attention to Bernard of Clairvaux by writing that the allegory of the Church as the bride of the Song of Songs remained popular during the Reformation and that Bernard of Clairvaux had

⁶¹ Klassen, 122.

⁶² Kenneth Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 33.

written the most “profound” commentary on the subject.⁶³ Though these editors were aware of Bernard’s work it appears that they were not familiar enough with his writings to notice Marpeck’s dependence upon them.⁶⁴ This is not surprising. Historical categorization has traditionally seen a definitive break between the medieval era and the Reformation and Renaissance.⁶⁵ This is especially true of Anabaptists. Marpeck’s usage of Bernard’s sermons stands as a reminder that the Anabaptists were grounded in the religious traditions that they were born into. Recall the quotation from the introduction in which Marpeck is recorded to have been “led by his God-fearing parents into the papal church.”⁶⁶ Marpeck, the Anabaptist elder, was born a Catholic. Likewise, Menno Simons began his religious life as a priest. Marpeck’s usage of the Song of Songs’s allegory reinforces this fact that Anabaptists drew upon medieval traditions. Davis’s quotation about the ‘ardent’ biblicism of the Anabaptists demonstrates exactly how this imaginary break came to be. Indeed, the Anabaptist monomania regarding the Scripture was intense enough that historians examining the roots of Anabaptism have asked, “why look elsewhere?”⁶⁷ Besides demonstrating a lack of historical curiosity, this criticism fails to appreciate the fact that the earliest Anabaptists were medieval people living in a medieval world. Despite a strong affinity for the Bible, they told medieval stories, listened to medieval music, and saw medieval art. It was a changing world, but it was still a medieval world. On several occasions Marpeck demonstrated that not only was he aware of medieval institutions he was familiar enough with them to use them as illustrations of his points. For example, while disputing the notion that temporal powers should be resisted, Marpeck boldly claimed that those who died on Crusade had not lost their lives

⁶³ John D. Rempel, “Introduction to ‘Concerning Love’ by Pilgram Marpeck,” in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. by John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 97. Immediately after Rempel attacks Bernard for his involvement in the Second Crusade.

Fast makes no direct reference to Bernard in his introduction of the letter but references Klassen’s *Covenant and Community* in which Klassen makes the assertion. *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 154, no. 1.

⁶⁴ Klassen comes the closest to making this claim in *Covenant and Community*. He writes: “...Marpeck’s usage of typology clearly borders on allegory. But a comparison with Bernard of Clairvaux’s famous sermons on this book show an important difference in method. (122).”

⁶⁵ Paul A. Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521-1525* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

⁶⁶ Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, eds. *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*. Volume 7, *Elaß, I Teil: Stadt Strassburg, 1522-1532* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1959), 352, quoted in Boyd, 13. For the earlier quotation see above, page 6.

⁶⁷ Jarold Knox Zeman, “Anabaptism: A Replay of Medieval Themes or a Prelude to the Modern Age?” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 50, 4 (October 1976), 265.

for the sake of Christ but rather were being punished for their sinful behaviour.⁶⁸ Though Marpeck's writings reveal that he was a relatively well-educated man he was neither a historian nor a scholar. He was a layman and an engineer and could not be expected to have specialized knowledge about a past that he was only distantly connected to. He was, however, a medieval man who was raised in a medieval culture and was therefore aware of medieval institutions like the crusades even if only by proxy. Therefore, Zemen's criticism that there is no medieval source to Anabaptism worth examining and that Anabaptist ideals sprung, fully formed, from Scripture, is unjustified.

⁶⁸ Pilgram Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, trans. and ed. by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 210.

Marpeck and the Allegories of the Patriarchs¹

Chapter two began with a quotation from William Klassen's book *Covenant and Community*, which demonstrated the wide range of topics that Marpeck treated in his writings. According to Klassen: "Marpeck, though indebted to many predecessors, emerges with an amazingly independent position singularly his own."² Chapter two demonstrated that Marpeck used Bernard of Clairvaux's allegory for his own interpretation of the Song of Songs. However, Marpeck made a contribution of his own to the allegory of the Song that was not influenced by Bernard and one can honestly state that this contribution is "singularly his own," for it is remarkably complex and has no identifiable historical antecedent. In fact it was not until the 1970s that an interpreter of the Song of Songs even used the same framework as Marpeck had in 1544 and 1545.³ Pilgram's original contribution to Song of Song's exegesis was to link the Songs's allegory to the historical characters of the book of Genesis and reconcile the Church and the soul as participants in a coherent allegory. In Marpeck's examples, members of the house of Abraham play the roles of the allegorical characters of the Song of Songs. Two of Marpeck's letters were instrumental in this process, namely: "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin," [1555] and "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches" [1544].⁴ Both of these letters made use of the allegory of the marriage of Christ and the Church by using the first family of Israel to illustrate their relationship.

The first letter in the *Kunstbuch* to demonstrate Marpeck's unique approach to the marriage of Christ and the Church is the peculiar "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin." This letter is addressed to his fellow wealthy townsman turned

¹ I would like to thank Professor Sarah Powrie for suggesting the title of this chapter.

² William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life, Writings, and Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1968), 56.

³ Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), chapters 4 & 5. Tribble's work is very different from Marpeck's synthesis of Genesis and the Song of Songs and does more to illustrate Tribble's liberal theology than it does to provide a basis for comparison. However, it is the closest another commentator has come to replicating Marpeck's use of Genesis and the Song of Songs.

⁴ *Kunstbuch* #27 and #33 respectively.

itinerant Anabaptist elder, Leupold Scharnschlager (d. 1563) who was listed as a co-author with Marpeck of the *Verantwortung*.⁵ Scharnschlager was living in Ilanz in eastern Switzerland and had contact with the Swiss Brethren. Despite Marpeck's friendly relationship with Scharnschlager the letter has a decidedly theological purpose and the tone remains professional until the very last paragraph, which reads as a postscript rather than as a continuation of the letter.⁶ Marpeck was again attempting to heal the disagreements between his congregations and the Swiss Brethren and to bring the unity that he understood as being essential to the Anabaptist church. This theme was repeated again and again in Marpeck's letters. Marpeck began the letter with a curious exaltation of the allegorical things that Christ has done for believers: the staunching of the menstrual flow, the healing of blindness, and the resurrection from the dead. These do not refer to actual events in Christ's life but are metaphorical descriptions of the changes worked in the lives of believers. Because of Christ's sacrifice, believers are free from the negative consequences of the aforementioned afflictions and should therefore live rightly under Christ. He spoke out against those who appear as Christians but do not serve under Christ:

There are many rulers, many temporal and spiritual tyrants who, while appearing to be Christian, violate, judge, and condemn. They run ahead of Christ and seize his power like thieves and murderers; they rob him of his honour and glory and arrogate it to themselves! They rule before they have known patience, distress, and suffering, even though tribulation has to precede glory. They become powerful before they have humbled themselves; they rule and govern before they serve; they condemn and judge before they have judged themselves.⁷

After this condemnation of unrighteous leaders Marpeck concludes the letter with an explanation of why he had written it:

⁵ Klassen, 30; 50.

⁶ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin" [1545], trans. Walter Klaassen, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John d. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 497-498.

⁷ Marpeck, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin," 497. "Vasst vil hörscherr, begweltigerr richter, verdamerr, geistlich und leiplich tyrannen undter dem schein Christi, die vor Christo louffen, im vor der zeit seinen gwalt als dieb und mörder stelen und sein ehr und hörrligkeit im rouben und inen selbs zümessen, hörschenn vor der gedult, elennndt und leiden, so doch elennndt vor der hörrligkeit hergeet, werden gwaltig, ee und sy sich demuetigen, regieren unnd hörschen, ee sy dienen, verdamen und richten, ee und sy sich selber gericht haben." *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer 1527-1555 Das >Kunstbuch< des Jörg Probst Rotenfelder gen. Maler (Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 464)*, edited by Heinold Fast and Martin Rothkegel (Gütersloh, DE: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 504.

I have written this epistle to you because the brothers in Moravia have written to me, and because it has been reported to me by a brother, Heinrich Schneider, how those who live there are full of schisms and deceit. May the Lord preserve us. Amen.⁸

His readers can have no question about whom he was addressing the condemnation. In Marpeck's thought the "schism and deceit" of the Moravian church was due to the glorification of the Moravian church leaders ahead of the glorification of Christ.

Marpeck used the on-going story of Jacob, Laban, Rachel, Leah and the two serving girls Bilhah and Zilpah in Genesis 29-31 to describe the state of relations between God, the Church, and the believer. The portion of the letter that is of particular interest to this study are the allegorical afflictions described near the beginning, particularly the image of the staunching of the menstrual flow.⁹ Marpeck drew inspiration for that particular metaphor from Genesis 31 and the story of Rachel stealing her father Laban's idols. Rachel concealed the idols from Laban by sitting on them and refusing to move on the account of her menstrual cycle. Marpeck, perhaps unwittingly, followed an interlinear gloss of Genesis 31 by identifying Rachel as the Church.¹⁰ That is somewhat erroneous though, as Marpeck wrongly identified the female character in the story as Rebekah, who was, of course, Jacob's mother.¹¹ He did, however, mean Rachel, as she is the one who concealed the idols from her father. Marpeck continued his allegory of Jacob's story by writing:

⁸ Marpeck, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin," 497. "Das schreib ich dir darum, das mir die b[rüde]r uß Merchern geschriben haben und ouch durch ein b[rude]r, Heinrichenn Schneidern, gesanthen bericht bin worden, wie im lanndt allenthalben follerr spaltungen und betrug sey. Der Herr well unns bewaren. Amen." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 504.

⁹ The exact word Marpeck uses here is: *Plutflussz*.

¹⁰ The gloss reads: "Quod non inuenit apud maiores, inuenire molitur apud minors, sed Rachel, i. Ecclesia, que Laban reputat lucre contemnit, ut stultorum onera." *Biblio latina una cum glossa ordinaria Walafridi Strabonis et interlineari Anselmi Laudunensis* (Strassburg, DE: A. Rusch, 1479), Genesis 31. My translation: "That which he could not discover among the great, he also struggled to find among the small, but Rachel, that is the Church, and her profits were regarded with contempt by Laban, such is the burden of fools."

¹¹ One can only assume that Marpeck was working from memory while writing this letter and made this small mistake. Heinold Fast and Martin Rothkegel, the editors of the critical edition of the *Künstbuch*, also point out the error. *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 501.

We continue to thank God for his great mercy; he has given us the privilege to live in his house of peace (yes, in the house of grace and love), not as slaves, strangers, or hirelings, but as friends, children, brothers, and sisters. Unlike Jacob, we are not like those who work for the inheritance (I mean the inheritance of sin) and for wives. Nor do we serve another seven years for the beautiful Rebekah, that is, the church and bride of Christ.¹²

Marpeck's meaning is not entirely clear. By inheritance of sin he must have been referring to original sin but what he meant by working for that inheritance is unclear. The reference to working for wives seems to be presented in a non-allegorical fashion, which would suggest that Marpeck means earthly gain in this passage. Though it was quite uncommon for Anabaptists to deal with the doctrine of original sin, Marpeck was an exception and, among Anabaptists, had the most developed ideas on the topic in the sixteenth-century.¹³ It is probable that Marpeck was referring to the transformation of the believer upon conversion, a theme Marpeck expounded upon in the *Verantwortung* where he stated that "man came from nature into supernature and became a spiritual being," a process he does not have to work at to achieve.¹⁴ Another possible meaning for Marpeck's inherited sin is outlined in Sebastian Franck's (1499-1543) *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibel* which states that:

[I]f Adam's sin condemns all men at once merely by its (inherent) nature, it necessarily follows that Christ's righteousness would save all men at once. But if Christ's righteousness saves only those believers who by faith have become transformed into Christ himself, that is, who no longer live themselves but Christ lives in them, then it follows clearly that Adam's sin likewise condemns only nonbelievers who became Adam not by the mere fact of having been born but by their particular faith or rather unfaith; . . .¹⁵

¹² Marpeck, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin," 493. "...darfur wir Got noch heut seiner grossen erbarmung danncken, der uns also inn seinem fridhauß (ja, im hauß der gnaden und der lieb) vergunt zû wandlen, nit als knechten, frembdling und muetlingen, sonder als freunden, kinder und gschwistreten, nit erst dienende umb die erbschaft (ich main umb die erbschaft des fleischs) und umb die weiber wie Jacob, das ist, das wir ouch nit mer andre siben jar umb die schön Rebecka dienen, ich main umb die kirchenn und gsponschaft Christi." *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 501.

¹³ Robert Friedmann, "The Doctrine of Original Sin as Held by the Anabaptists of the Sixteenth-Century," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 33, 3 (July 1959), 206-207.

¹⁴ "Sich, auf disem staffel ist man aus der natur in die übernatur kommen und ein geistlicher mensch worden durch empfangung des verhaissen h. geists." Pilgram Marpeck, *Antwort auf Kaspar Schwenckfelds Beurteilung des Buches der Bundesbezeugung von 1542*, ed. Johann Loserth (Vienna, AT: Carl Fromme, 1929), 234. Quoted in Friedmann, 209.

¹⁵ Sebastian Franck, "Chronica der Römischen Ketzler" in *Chronica Zeitbuch un Geschichtsbibel*, Fol. 447; quoted in Friedmann, 210.

Despite the fact that Franck and Marpeck stood on opposite sides of the Spiritualist/Anabaptist debate between Marpeck and Schwenckfeld, it is quite possible that Marpeck was influenced by Franck's statement. According to Geoffrey Dipple's article on the Franck, Franck's work shows signs of being influenced by Marpeck.¹⁶ Both men were living in Strasbourg while Franck was writing and Franck's book was widely read by Anabaptists. If that is the case then Marpeck may have been referring to non-believers who work out their faith in Adam and is stating that believers are free from that work as they are considered friends and family in the "house of peace."

The topic of the letter becomes clearer when Marpeck claims that believers do not have to work to be included in the Church, a confirmation of Luther's doctrine of *sola fide*. Nevertheless, Marpeck maintained the normative Anabaptist position that salvation requires a change in the believer's life. The believer must live in service to the Church and to Christ. Marpeck continued:

Because of his blood and death on the cross we are already given and married to him, and are as handmaidens to Rebekah his bride.¹⁷

Handmaidens work, they care for and serve their mistresses. In this allegory, believers work for and care for the Church. The reference to the allegory of the Canticle is apparent. The marriage of the soul to Christ is entirely within the realm of typical Song of Songs exegesis. It is the clause that comes after the comma that is of great interest though. The believer's soul is married to Christ, but she is not the principal wife of Christ. Here, the Church fills that role. It is through the Church that the believer is able to come to Christ and be united with Him. The Church plays a mediating role in Marpeck's theology and this passage represents a major step forward in understanding the bridal allegory of the Song of Songs.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Dipple, "Sebastian Franck in Strasbourg," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73, 4 (October, 1999), 790.

¹⁷ Marpeck, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin," 494. "Wir send im schon mit dieserr Rebecka, als seiner gesponß, zû mägten vertraut und vermehelt durch sein plût und tod am creutz." *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 501.

Though Marpeck makes no direct reference to her, Rachel's handmaiden Bilhah is the key character to understanding this advancement. Marpeck uses Rachel to represent the Church and Bilhah to represent the believer's soul while Jacob obviously represents Christ. The Church and Christ are joined in union but Marpeck states that the believer's soul is also given to Christ as a bride and that she exists as a servant of the Church in the same way that Bilhah, the servant of Rachel, was given to Jacob. Therefore, like Jacob, Christ has a polygamous relationship. The commentaries of Origen and Bernard both recognize the possibility of the Song of Songs being about either the soul or the Church, but Marpeck was the first to combine the two female allegorizations in this way.¹⁸ Marpeck reinforced this combination with the quasi-historical narrative of Jacob and his wives. Marpeck used the polygamy of Jacob to emphasize the importance of both the soul and the Church in the allegorical understanding of the relationship between the divine and the earthly.

This letter is not the only place that Marpeck attributes a kind of polygamous relationship to God. Recall Marpeck's letter "Concerning Love" from chapter two in which God has a spousal relationship with both a personified Knowledge and a personified Experience.¹⁹ Marpeck's use of allegorical polygamy is entirely positive which is curious when one remembers that there were actual cases of polygamy in the sixteenth-century, none of which were represented the Anabaptists in a positive manner. The most infamous of these cases was that of Münster. Marpeck himself was not a polygamist and only married Anna after his first wife had died.²⁰ When Marpeck penned, "Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin" the disaster of Münster was only eleven years passed and its horrors were fresh within the consciousness of the

¹⁸ cf. Bernard's sermon twenty-seven. In this sermon Bernard allows himself to let the allegory refer to both the soul and the church but he does not reconcile the two in a polygamous relationship the way that Marpeck does. In sermon nine Bernard makes a reference to Leah and Rachel but it is in a different context and did not contribute to Marpeck's allegory. Origen, "Commentary on the Song of Songs," ed. and trans. R.P. Lawson, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Song of Songs: Commentaries and Homilies* (Pinehouse, NJ: Newman Press, 1957), 21.

¹⁹ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Love" [1545], trans. William Klassen, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John d. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 100.

²⁰ Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008), 104-109; John C. Wenger, "Pilgram Marpeck, Tyrolese Engineer and Anabaptist Elder," *Church History* 9, 1 (March 1940), 34; see page 44-45.

Anabaptists.²¹ The deconstruction of the basic family unit and a return to Old Testament polygamy caused contemporaries to realize Münster as the worst of all Anabaptist revolutionary ideals.²² Because of the horror at the perceived (and actual) depravities of the Münsterites, the desire to separate themselves from the extremists of Münster was evident in Anabaptist writings even up until the modern period.²³ Marpeck, however, did not seem particularly bothered by the image of a polygamous God and used the allegory without apology. He evidently was able to divorce the allegory of polygamy from the reality.

The second letter in which Marpeck ties the allegory of the Song of Songs to Genesis is “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches.” This letter was written in 1544 to the Anabaptists in Württemberg. This letter relies upon the text of Galatians 4:21-31 in which Paul writes about Sara and Hagar, the mothers of Abram’s two sons, Isaac and Ishmael as well as the Song of Songs.²⁴ The letter contains prolific use of allegory and reversals of gender that were common in medieval texts and could easily have been included in the second chapter as examples of Marpeck’s reliance upon a medieval understanding of the Song of Songs.²⁵ However, Marpeck used this letter to illustrate his own unique way of understanding the allegory by partnering it with images from Genesis.

Though somewhat longer, the content of this letter is quite similar to “Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ” which was examined in chapter two. The themes are so alike that Rempel speculates that “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches”

²¹ “Concerning Love” is undated and therefore it cannot be confirmed whether he wrote it before or after the Münster disaster.

²² R. Po-chia Hsia, *Society and Religion in Münster, 1535-1618* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 16.

²³ Menno Simons condemned the Münsterites as early as 1535 in, “The Blasphemy of John of Leiden.” In the modern period, Harold Bender’s definition of “Anabaptist” is essentially anyone but the Münsterites and their ilk. He writes: “There is no longer any excuse for permitting our understanding of the distinct character of this genuine Anabaptism to be obscured by Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants War, the Münsterites, or any other aberration of Protestantism in the sixteenth century.” Harold Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 11.

²⁴ Abram and Sara’s names are changed to Abraham and Sarah shortly after the events surrounding Hagar and Ishmael.

²⁵ It was not included because its connections with Bernard are less obvious than the examples that were given in chapter two.

could have been written earlier and only sent to Marpeck's congregations in 1544 as they were experiencing a time of great need.²⁶ However, if the allegory of "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ" was obscure, than the allegory of "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches" is nearly incomprehensible. After his salutation Marpeck returned to the familiar theme of God being Love and Love being the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. He also reiterated the motif of Christ dressing his bride in glory before lamenting the fact that the true love of God can only be seen in fleeting glimpses in this world. Marpeck then began his the allegory of the Song of Songs with an exposition on 1:1-4. Here Marpeck's use of allegory quickly became very elaborate:

All who are thus kissed by the mouth of God, and who have conceived a divine nature by the seed of the Word, are brought to this bride and mother, the church, by the Holy Spirit. In her, as the mother, spouse, consort, and church of Christ, are they born. Conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit, she bears the children of the Word in her body. As stated above, that body is the body of Christ, for while Christ is the husband and the head, the two are one flesh.²⁷

Trying to untangle Marpeck's allegory while maintaining some reasonable understanding of the Trinity is impossible. Despite this problem, Marpeck was not being heretical; he was simply a layperson, without university training making his way through a very complicated problem. In this case, he was merely trying to illustrate that while believers are born through divine grace they require the nourishment provided by the Church. Recognizing that the sixteenth-century was a century of turmoil for Christianity, Marpeck proceeded to differentiate between the true Church, defined by its fruits and its unity, and the false church, defined by its own cleverness.²⁸ He personifies these two churches by associating them with Sara, the true wife of Abram, and Hagar, Sara's handmaiden. Both women had relations with Abram, who in this case represents God, but only the offspring

²⁶ John D. Rempel, *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 547-548.

²⁷ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches" (1544), translated by Walter Klaassen, in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. John d. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 553. "Diser prauth und müter, der kirchen, werden alle, die also durch den mund Gotes kust warden und vom somen des worts götlicher natur empfangen, durch den h[eilige]n geist zügefüert, inn sy geborn und entpfangen. Die geburt ouch nachmals als die müterr, gsporns, gemahel und kirchen Christi uß der mitgeburt des h[eilige]n geists, von dem sy, wie obsteet, des worts kinderr empfach inn iren leib, das ist inn den leib Christi, deren Christus der man und das houbt ist, als zwey ein fleisch..." *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 544.

²⁸ Marpeck, "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches," 554.

of Sara, that is those raised within the unity and love and nourishment of the true Church, are legitimate believers. The offspring of Hagar then, are those who “serve only in the interests of reward.”²⁹ In Marpeck’s allegory, the believers who nurse at the breasts of Sara are given pure milk, which Marpeck tells us is better than wine, an obvious echo of Song of Songs 1:2. He wrote:

The children of the mother are all eager for her milk and suck from her breasts to their hearts’ content. They are raised and nourished, and grow and increase, in the discipline the mother applies to them.³⁰

Those born of Hagar, despite their paternal parentage, are faced with other prospects:

Hagar does not feed her children with the milk of love but with lifeless water, kept in a little barrel. The desert destroys the water, so that in the end neither mother nor child has any nourishment. Then the mother in despair abandons the child in the wilderness to die of hunger and thirst. Hagar’s children boast of being a church and the spouse of Christ. In fact they are only Egyptian maids and mothers who bear only Ishmaelites, reared on the dead letter and skill in scripture, and fed on keg water.³¹

This theme is expounded upon at some length and the motif of the true mother as opposed to the false mother remains constant. Marpeck warns his readers not to forsake the Church or risk being like the five foolish virgins of Matthew 25 who were denied entry to the banquet. Finally, Marpeck closed his letter with another example of blurred gender identities that reminded his readers of the Song of Songs. Marpeck wrote:

²⁹ Marpeck, “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches,” 554. “... die mitsambt irn kindern nur umb Ion dienet.” *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 545.

³⁰ Marpeck, “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches,” 555. “Wölcher müterr kinder ganntz begirig darnach send und mit hertzens lust von iren brussten saugen und inn der züucht und pfleg der müterr (so die müterr mit allem fleiß an ire inder legt) erzogenn und ernört werden...” *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 545.

³¹ Marpeck, “Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches,” 556. “Dann die Agar trennckt ire kinder nit mit der milch der lieb, sonder mit einem todten wasser, des inn ein lägl gefasst ist und inn der wuest verzört wirt und ein end nympt, das darnach weder die müterr noch das kind nichts mer hat. Daruß die muter inn verzweiflung das kindt inn der wueschte verlasst, durst und hungers zü sterben. Das sein alle die, so ein kirch und gspons Christi sich ruemen und doch nur egyptische mägt und mueter send und nur Ismaheliten geben und ire kinder nur uß todten bûchstavn und kûnst der schrift, das ist aus legelwasserr, trenncken.” *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 546.

So much concerning the birth of the legitimate and true children of God, who are legitimately born, bred and nourished by the heavenly Father and the spouse and consort of Christ. The breasts of this Father and mother are lovelier than wine.³²

This clearly echoes Song of Songs 1:1-4 which Marpeck quoted from near the beginning of the letter.

The breasts as a place of nourishment have a history in the medieval Christian tradition. Bernard himself used the image of breasts present in the Song of Songs to describe the nourishment of the soul.³³ Medieval artists would portray *ecclesia* as a lactating mother.³⁴ Interestingly, medieval medical theorists argued that breast milk provided more than physical nourishment. The Franciscan Bernardino of Siena wrote that:

The child acquires certain of the customs of the one who suckles him. If the one who cares for him has evil customs or is of base condition, he will receive the impress of those customs because of having sucked her polluted blood.³⁵

This is the exact image Marpeck was using when he was expounding upon the nature of the true Church's role as a mother to the believer's soul. The believer is made a part of the Church by nursing at her breasts. Though the image of the breasts come immediately from the Song of Songs, filtered most likely through Bernard's sermons, it is possible that Marpeck was aware of these medical ideas as well. One of Marpeck's first biographers, the German scholar Johann Loserth, noted a recipe attributed to Marpeck, for curing genital warts and hemorrhoids.³⁶ Additional evidence of Marpeck's interest in medicine is shown in his letter "Concerning the Humanity of Christ." Here Marpeck provided a

³² Marpeck, "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches," 559. "Sovil von der geburt der eelichen und rechten kinder Gotes, so vom himlischen vaterr, gsporns unnd gmachl Christi als mütterr eelich geborn, erzogen und ernörth werden, wölcher vaterr und mütterr prusst lieplicher send dan wein..." *Briefe und Schriften oberdutscher Täufer*, 548.

³³ See sermons nine and ten.

³⁴ For an example see: Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, 95.

³⁵ Cited by Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 71.

³⁶ J. Loserth, "Zwei biographische Skizzen aus der Zeit der Wiedertäufer in Tirol," in *Zeitschrift des Ferdinands für Tirol und Vorarlberg*, III (Innsbruck, DE: 1895), 288. This prescription is in a medical codex in the Vienna Royal Library (no. 11182; entry 36)

prescription for the unspecified illness for the wife of a certain Brother Lawrence.³⁷ Regardless of Marpeck's interest in medical theories, he was using an established medieval metaphor when using this feminine imagery.

Marpeck was evidently well grounded in the medieval interpretations of the Song of Songs. But, like his fellow Anabaptists, he had a new way of approaching the Bible. William Klassen, in his brief comparison of Bernard and Pilgram's usage of the Song of Songs, wrote:

For Bernard the historical line is gone; for Marpeck the Song of Solomon is used to accentuate the historical continuum, especially the place that the incarnation has on that continuum.³⁸

Klassen cites Marpeck's commentary on Song of Songs 2:10-13 from "Unity and the Bride of Christ" as an example of how Marpeck focused on this 'historical continuum.' Marpeck wrote:

But when the sun Christ Jesus appeared on earth in the weakness of his true humanity, from the seed of the woman and the human race, only then did people begin to bloom. The fig tree and the vine developed buds and blossoms, but without fruit, before the setting of this sun, Jesus Christ.³⁹

Christ, the sun, appears and vanquishes winter causing the believers to begin growing spiritually. Klassen compares this approach to Bernard's exposition of the same verses. Bernard's approach is on a much smaller scale. Where Marpeck saw the winter referring to the period between the Fall and the Incarnation, Bernard saw the winter period as a brief period in the life of Christ:

³⁷ Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," in *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, ed. by John D. Rempel (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 365. The assertion that Marpeck was interested in gynaecology is made in *Covenant and Community, The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, and *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch*. William Klassen seems to be the source of this idea as Walter Klaassen has disavowed the idea in a private conversation. *Marpeck: A Life of Conformity and Dissent* includes evidence that Anna, Marpeck's second wife, may have been a midwife and if that is true Marpeck may have been simply passing on her medical knowledge. Klaassen and Klassen, 243.

³⁸ Klassen, 122.

³⁹ Pilgram Marpeck, "Concerning Unity and the Bride of Christ," 111. "Do aberr die sonn Christus Jesus noch inn der schwach als warerr mensch vom weibssomen und gschlecht der menschen auftrich erschein, do haben die menschen erst anfahen zû plueen, die feigenbeum und weinstöckh knöpf und ougen gwunnen, aber noch als on frucht vor undergang dieser sonnen Jesu Christi..." *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer*, 161.

Furthermore the time of winter shown to have passed, seems to signify to me that time when Lord Jesus did not walk openly among the Jews for they had conspired against him wishing to kill him.⁴⁰

He continued in the same sermon:

Would you then deny that it was winter when Peter sat before the fire, with a heart no less cold than his body? “It was cold,” [the Gospel] says. In truth the heart of the denier was seized with a great cold. But that is no astonishing thing since the fire had been taken from him.⁴¹

Bernard continued the allegory by writing that with the resurrection of Christ the season of winter passed and a new season was initiated. In chapter two I argued that Marpeck was dependant upon Bernard for the allegory, however, Klassen is correct in stating that this passage represents a critical difference between Bernard and Pilgram’s works as Marpeck was working to place the Incarnation into the history of salvation while the abbot of Clairvaux intentional use of allegory has no place for history as it stands outside of it.⁴² Though Marpeck’s interpretation of history with the Incarnation as a defining feature of a new season appears to be reminiscent of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), Klassen strenuously insists that there were no connections between Marpeck’s historical viewpoint and Joachim’s.⁴³

Marpeck created a new way of allegorizing the Song of Songs by placing the allegory within the historical context of Genesis. In the case of “Concerning the Heritage, Service and Menstruation of Sin,” this rendering of the allegory allowed him to resolve the multiple interpretations placed upon the Song of Songs by the church fathers and medieval theologians. Christ could form a mystical union with both the Church and with

⁴⁰ “Porro hyemale tempus quod praeterisse significat illud mihi designare videtur, cum dominus Jesus iam non in palam ambularet apud iudeos, eo quod conspirassent aduersus eum volentes eum interficere.” Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon 58,” *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

⁴¹ “Tu ne negaueris hyemem tunc fuisse; cum Petrus sederet ad prunas: non minus gelido corde quam corpe? Denique erat frigus (inquit). Magnum reuera frigus cor negantis constrinxerat.” Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon 58,” *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* (Strasbourg, Martin Flach, 1497).

⁴² Klassen, 122.

⁴³ William Klassen, “Relation of the Old and New Covenant in Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 40, 2 (April 1966), 98. Klassen provides a succinct view of Marpeck’s entire attitude towards the Old Testament and the centrality of the Incarnation in his theology. He also outlines Marpeck’s differences of opinion on the Old Testament with the likes of Zwingli and Bullinger.

the believer's soul at the same time. This allowed for the earlier to be unified into a concise allegory that worked without readers having to suspend their belief. Though he was deeply dependant upon the Pauline book of Galatians for "Concerning the Christian and Hagarite Churches," Marpeck was able to create an allegory that explained the religious ferment of his age. Marpeck had a tendency to use allegories that did not always work completely or make total sense and these two allegories are no different. The allegory of Rachel and Bilhah is short and unexplained while the allegory of Sara and Hagar is long and convoluted; however, both are unique contributions to the exegesis of the Song of Songs.

Conclusion

Eamon Duffy's seminal work, *The Stripping of the Alters: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, described the Reformation as "...a violent disruption, not the natural fulfillment of most of what was vigorous in late medieval piety and religious practice."¹ While Duffy's book focuses specifically upon England, his description here is of the Reformation as a whole. Whether or not Duffy is correct in this estimation is not under consideration here but his quotation has been included to show that Pilgram Marpeck is, at the very least, an exception to Duffy's description. Marpeck did not represent a violent disruption, unlike some of his fellow Anabaptists, but his use of medieval imagery demonstrates that his thinking evolved out of 'late medieval piety and religious practice.' This is significant in that it shows the sincerity of Anabaptists like Marpeck.

Marpeck's letters offer an insight into the workings of his ecclesiology not afforded elsewhere. It is within their pages that the historian can view how indebted Marpeck was to his medieval predecessors and how original he was in his own right. The letters reveal a reliance upon Bernard of Clairvaux that is profound and, at this point, unique among Anabaptists. However, Bernard and Pilgram shared characteristics that make Pilgram's usage of Bernard more understandable. Both men were ardent biblicists and constantly quoted from the Scriptures. Franz Posset has counted 5,526 references to the Bible in the *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum* alone.² A count of Marpeck's references would yield a similarly impressive number. Furthermore both men were reformers, each in their own way. Bernard's association with the Cistercian order was a result of his insistence upon a return to the ideals of St. Benedict's (ca. 490–547) *Rule*. The Cluniacs had corrupted the original intentions of monasticism and Bernard's fervour for reform led him to the Cistercians. Marpeck, likewise, was guided by a desire for the reformation of European Christianity. He belonged to a different era and therefore these

¹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Alters: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, 2nd edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 4.

² Franz Posset, *Pater Bernhardus: Martin Luther and Bernard of Clairvaux*, Cistercian Study Series 168 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1999), 381-382.

reforms were carried out first through the Luther's teachings and then later through those of the Anabaptists.

Bernard was also well accepted by Reformers as one of the last church fathers. Martin Luther admired the Cistercian abbot and regularly quoted from him. Less successful reformers, such as John Hus, did the same.³ Bernard's popularity in the late Middle Ages is unparalleled. Posset has compiled a short list of people influenced by the twelfth-century abbot and it includes some of the most famous and influential people of the following few centuries; this list includes Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, David of Augsburg, Joachim of Fiore, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso, John Tauler, Gottfried of Strasbourg, Dante, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Bridget of Sweden, the *Devotio Moderna* leaders Geert Grote, and Thomas a Kempis. He also influenced Erasmus, Johann von Paltz, Johann von Staupitz, Thomas More, John Calvin, John of the Cross, Ignatius of Loyola, and Blaise Pascal.⁴ This short list illustrates just how influential Bernard actually was. Posset has also counted over 300 editions of Bernard's work having been printed before 1500.⁵ With printing still in its infancy, very few, if any, other authors could boast of such widespread distribution and such a diverse audience. Though Marpeck's usage of Bernard is unusual for an Anabaptist who had broken with the Catholic Church it is not that surprising considering the permeation of Bernard's works throughout the sixteenth-century.

In 2002 John Roth published an article entitled, "Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation." This thesis was originally conceived as a response to at least two of Roth's methodological challenges. The first of these challenges, for Roth, is to qualify what exactly is radical about the Anabaptist movement. He notes that Luther's early writings could be labelled as being even more radical than most Anabaptists.⁶ The question of radicalization is addressed here through an attempt to

³ Posset, 358.

⁴ Posset, 32-36.

⁵ Franz Posset, "Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in the Devotion, Theology, and Art of the Sixteenth Century," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997), 309.

⁶ John D. Roth, "Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation," *Church History* 71, 3 (September 2002), 528.

place Anabaptist thought within the medieval context from which it came. This begs the question of whether or not Marpeck's use of Bernard affects the radicalness of Marpeck's theology. Since George Huntston Williams first used the adjective to describe the Anabaptists in 1962 the word has entered into popular parlance with a mixed range of meanings. In the context of Anabaptism, Walter Klaassen's definition in *Anabaptist: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* is perhaps the most succinct and pertinent definition. He writes:

[Anabaptists] were radical not simply because they were more biblicistic [sic], but also because through really listening to the Bible they developed a thoroughgoing, radical, valid criticism of some of the basic religious assumptions of their times. So when the term *radical* is used, it carries both of these connotations. It would also not be out of place for *radical* to carry some of the colour the word has acquired in our contemporary culture – dangerous, revolutionary, destructive, irresponsible, undependable, immoral. For these very words were used of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century by the representatives of established orders in church and state; sometimes with justification.⁷

The question then is whether Marpeck's use of Bernard made him safe, traditional, constructive, responsible, dependable and moral. Did reliance upon an older tradition make Marpeck traditional? Unfortunately there is no straightforward answer to this problem. As a civil engineer, Marpeck was committed to the welfare of the state and did not hesitate to take oaths of allegiance to the various cities that employed him. However, as an Anabaptist leader, he argued against the godliness of the state government, a position that saw him exiled from Strasbourg. Like a definition of Anabaptism itself, a concrete answer on the nature of radicalism is hard to define. However, because Bernard's works were used by so many people in the sixteenth-century, from the Anabaptist Marpeck to the magisterial reformer Luther to the Catholic Cardinal Contarini, each using Bernard's words to suit his own ends Marpeck's usage does not undermine the radicalness of his Anabaptism. Furthermore, chapter three has demonstrated that Marpeck was not strictly tied to the meanings imparted upon a passage by the Cistercian abbot. If Marpeck felt he could use Bernard's words to illustrate a separate point he has shown no hesitation in doing so. But his use of Bernard did not reconcile him with the Catholic Church and he remained apart from it; this separation is

⁷ Klaassen, *Anabaptist: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, 9-10.

enough to maintain the charge of radicalness in Marpeck's case.

The second methodological challenge that Roth has proposed deals with the origins of Anabaptism. His acclamation for Snyder's work, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, praises it for setting Anabaptism in the "social and theological context" while also giving the magisterial reformers their due credit.⁸ This thesis has sought to continue that process by establishing Bernard as a part of that theological context. It is a continuation of Stayer's *et al.* conclusions regarding the polygenetic nature of Anabaptist origins. Marpeck was a first generation Anabaptist and was at the forefront of the development of South-German Anabaptism. Those interested in the origins of Anabaptism must examine his sources and influences. Unfortunately, the most obvious study of this problem, Werner Packull's *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531*, only treats Marpeck in passing and makes no mention whatsoever of Bernard of Clairvaux. Kenneth Davis's *Anabaptism and Asceticism* is equally unhelpful. Pilgram Marpeck, important as he was, remains but a minor character in these studies. By sketching Marpeck's dependence upon Bernard of Clairvaux, chapter two has demonstrated that Marpeck's Anabaptism developed, in part, within a theological context of late medieval mysticism. This further reinforces the polygenetic theory of Stayer *et al.* by demonstrating that the source of Anabaptist thought was not confined to Zürich or radical groups but rather was drawn from a wide variety of sources. Though his use of Bernard of Clairvaux was not the only way in which Marpeck's theology was distinct from that of Grebel's, it demonstrates a marked difference that would be impossible if Marpeck's theology had to descend directly from Zürich.

Marpeck was representative of the challenges faced in the sixteenth-century. It was an age of turbulence, where old truths were being questioned and new ideals were being implemented. Marpeck, faced with the order to persecute Anabaptists among his miners, had to shirk his duties and flee from imperial power as it conflicted with his religious convictions. He remained loyal to the state though, providing his expertise in civil engineering to solve problems of infrastructure, and he did not fail to make the

⁸ Roth, 530.

necessary oaths of allegiance. Meanwhile he railed against the authorities of Strasbourg claiming that they were not a Christian institution. Throughout this turbulent time Marpeck studied the theology of a twelfth-century abbot who informed him of the mystical union of Christ, the Church and the believer's soul. Armed with this allegory Marpeck proceeded to call for cohesiveness and unity to exemplify the Anabaptist congregations he was in contact with. His letters plead for unity despite the religious intolerance of the age and Marpeck's own confrontations with Bucer and Schwenckfeld. Unity was a concept that was not a part of the Anabaptist psyche and though Sebastian Franck was not the most objective observer, his criticism of Anabaptism contained a just concern:

Even though all sects are divided among themselves, the Anabaptists are especially torn and disunited, so much so, indeed, that I can say nothing with certainty or any degree of finality about them.⁹

Marpeck was not the only Anabaptist, nor reformer, to plead for unity but his life of 'dissent and conformity', to borrow Klaassen and Klassen's title, illustrated how committed Marpeck was to the idea.¹⁰ His use of Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons serves to illustrate that Marpeck was not a partisan polemicist but was willing to use the works of the Cistercian abbot if they were in accordance with Marpeck's view of the Bible. His very knowledge of them confirms that Marpeck lived in a time when medieval ideas were still very much within the realm of public knowledge. Therefore, we must agree with Stayer *et al.* that Anabaptism did not have a single point of origin but grew out of the religious ferment that characterized the centuries preceding the Reformation in a polygenetic fashion. In Marpeck's case this should not be a surprise. Finger and Yarnell have noted that Marpeck's theology was firmly grounded in classical theology and Klaassen and Klassen have demonstrated Marpeck's adherence to the Creeds.¹¹

⁹ Sebastian Franck, *Chronica*, Photographic reproduction of the original 1536 Ulm edition (Darmstadt, DE: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 457; quoted in and translated by Abraham Friesen, "The Radical Reformation Revisited," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984), 124.

¹⁰ Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008).

¹¹ Thomas Finger, "How 'Classical' was Pilgram Marpeck's Theology?," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, 1 (January 2011), 127-129; Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 73; Klaassen and Klassen, 25.

This thesis has depended upon the notion that Marpeck knew enough Latin to be able to read and comprehend Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum*. This is in accordance with most Marpeck scholars who agree that he must have had some training in the language. Unless Marpeck had been able to get a copy of the two existing German translations of Bernard's sermons he would have had to have used a printed Latin edition which were fairly easy to obtain. The German manuscripts were not available to me while I was writing and so it is with limited certainty that I am asserting Marpeck's knowledge of Latin. A textual analysis of these manuscripts in comparison to Marpeck's corpus would be required and that is effectively beyond the capacity of this project.

The sexuality of the Song of Songs has made it a popular source for medievalists interested in the body, sexuality, and gender. Unlike many modern interpretations, the medieval understanding of the book focused more on the relationships between the couple rather than the actual act of copulation. Marpeck was no different. His focus, informed by Bernard of Clairvaux, was upon the relationship of Christ and the Church, the Church being the most important facet of Marpeck's theology. Jarold Knox Zemon has argued that, "[t]hose who insist that the concept of the church was the primary concern in Anabaptist thought are putting the cart before the horse. 'Regeneration was the beginning of the restitution of the church.'"¹² But Zemon's premise is not demonstrated in Marpeck's allegorical exegesis of the Song of Songs. Here the Church is the primary concern and the individual plays a secondary role. Zemon's purpose for this statement is to demonstrate that Anabaptists represent a 'prelude to the modern age' rather than a 'replay of medieval themes'. Marpeck was obviously reusing a medieval theme.

Anabaptists, while representing a new dimension of religious understanding in sixteenth-century Europe, maintained a connection with the beliefs of those who preceded them. Pilgram Marpeck's relationship with Bernard of Clairvaux has demonstrated this relation on an individual level, however it is an example of a wider

¹² Jarold Knox Zemon, "Anabaptism: A Replay of Medieval Themes or a Prelude to the Modern Age?" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 50, 4 (October 1976), 265-266.

trend. Even with a focus on Bernard of Clairvaux, other Anabaptists can be shown to have been influenced by the Cistercian abbot. Melchior Hoffman used Bernard's *Sermones super cantic canticorum* for his commentary on the Song entitled, *Dat Boeck Cantica Canticorum*.¹³ This only reinforces the notion that Anabaptists were medieval people who were aware of medieval culture.

Finally, Pilgram Marpeck's demonstration of independent thinking reinforces the importance of this little known Anabaptist reformer. Marpeck created a functioning allegory that reconciled the differences apparent in hundreds of years of Song of Songs exegesis and that is reason alone for him to command more attention from historians of biblical interpretation. However, no modern commentaries make any reference to him or his innovative interpretation of the Song. Because of an erudition quite uncommon for a layperson of Marpeck's stature, his name belongs with those of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Simons. His devotion to the idea of unity in a century of fragmentation is commendable from a modern viewpoint and though it was a goal he failed to realize, Marpeck's letters used the Song of Songs to promulgate this ideal in a way that recalled the grand tradition of Cantic exegesis and proclaimed the new interpretation of the Anabaptists.

¹³ Richard G. Bailey, "Some Remarks on St. Bernard of Clairvaux as a Literary Source for Melchior Hoffman's Commentary *Dat Boeck Cantica Canticorum* (1529)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22, 1 (Spring 1991): 91-96. Hoffman did not read Latin and Bailey has some trouble trying to demonstrate exactly where Hoffman received his knowledge of Bernard's sermons. Regardless, Bailey has shown a sufficient amount of evidence to positively conclude that Hoffman did know Bernard's work despite not being literate in Latin.

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