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The Difference.

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The frank and bold testimony of the Fundamentalists, their courageous stand against liberalism, and their sincere devotion to the Scriptures have deservedly secured for them cordial sympathy and approval also within the Lutheran Church. This applies in particular to certain church periodicals which have fought for the truth with vigor and zeal, stressing with great distinctness the fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christendom, to which all believing Christians must adhere. So much of what the *Watchman-Examiner* (Baptist), the *Presbyterian*, the *Sunday-school Times*, and other kindred papers have published on the deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement, the inspiration of the Bible, the power of the Word of God, etc., was so altogether sound and Scriptural that the Christian reader was moved to praise God

for their excellent testimony to the truth. Indeed, the wearisome controversy has not been without fruits. It has led many to a deeper appreciation of those basic verities upon which the Church of Christ is built.

Nevertheless, after all has been said, there remains a sharp difference between Calvinistic Fundamentalism and confessional Lutheranism, — a difference not in degree, but in kind. This difference must not be overlooked. Honesty compels one to call attention to it. Indeed, the very desire of aiding the Fundamentalists in their struggle makes it necessary. For truth will be victorious only if it is accepted, confessed, and preached in its full glory and absolute purity. The one paramount blessing which we, as true friends, wish the Fundamentalists is the clear visualizing of divine truth, the unqualified acceptance of God's Word, and the absolute rejection of all erroneous doctrines which erring reason may suggest. May the light come to them as it came to Martin Luther when he fought liberalism in the papacy, and may they, as did he, center all they believe and teach in the great doctrines of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*. It is then only that the difference between Calvinistic Fundamentalism and confessional Lutheranism will be eliminated.

This thought was suggested to the writer by an editorial which appeared in the *Watchman-Examiner* (May, 1924) under the caption "Truth Is Immortal," the slogan of Balthasar Huebmaier. The editorial reads: —

"Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and Balthasar Huebmaier were contemporaries, born within three or four years of each other — 1483, 1484, and 1480. They were all men of great ability, of varied learning, of highly popular gifts, the last-named being fully the equal of the others in these respects. They were leaders in the Reformed Christianity. Huebmaier, who is probably wholly unknown to the general reader, worked his way clearly out to the Baptist position as it is set forth in the New Testament — faith and repentance, baptism, the spiritual life, individual responsibility, freedom of conscience, no connection between Church and State, the New Testament as the only authority in religious affairs. There were moments when it seemed that Zwingli and Luther were prepared to go as far as Huebmaier, moments of clear spiritual vision. But they hesitated. They feared to cut loose from dependence on the power of the magistrate and his soldiers in times of disorder. They feared to commit themselves to New Testament voluntary church-membership and a spiritual democ-

racy. Luther and Zwingli prospered through their political friendship, while Huebmaier was taken by the political powers and burned at the stake. . . . The world still needs instruction in the things for which Baptists have stood."

This editorial was penned by a staunch Fundamentalist, a man who stands foremost in the ranks of those who endeavor to defend evangelical truth. It is therefore representative of the attitude of Fundamentalists toward the great Reformer and clearly marks the difference of which we have spoken before. We do not mean the failure of seeing events and persons in their true light, the mingling of fact and fiction, the bias, the intense party feeling, which are glaringly apparent in almost every line. We deeply regret all these faults. We deeply regret also the unionistic spirit that pervades the article, and the misrepresentation of facts in ascribing to Luther a cowardly spirit, which would rather deny the truth than "cut loose from dependence on the power of the magistrate and his soldiers in times of disorder." With all these misrepresentations the Lutheran student of history may rightly find fault; for they are simply not true. However, the difference which we have in mind is more subtle. The writer has failed, first and above all, to comprehend the basic principle of the Reformation. To him the Reformation is a sealed book. He has not learned its paramount lesson. He is as far removed from understanding the real issue involved in the Reformation as the Liberalists are removed from the right understanding of the truths involved in their present controversy with the Fundamentalists. To him Luther, Zwingli, and Huebmaier are alike great leaders in Reformed Christianity, "the last-named being fully the equal of the others in these respects." So he did not see that there was a tremendous difference between Luther and the Anabaptist Huebmaier, — a difference which still exists between confessional Lutherans and Fundamentalist Baptists.

Since Balthasar Huebmaier is virtually unknown to the general reader, it will be necessary to sketch at least the main events in his rather brief life. He was born in 1480 at Friedberg, near the prominent city of Augsburg, in Bavaria, and early in his life received that education which was accorded to those who desired to enter the priesthood. Later he studied theology and philosophy at Freiburg with Eck, the notorious opponent of Luther and past grand master in the art of juggling words. From him Huebmaier no doubt acquired the love for disputation and debate which characterized him throughout his later life. In 1512, at the time

when Luther had already returned from Rome with the divine assurance of the Gospel "that the just shall live by faith" ringing in his ears, Huebmaier went with his instructor to Ingolstadt, where he, already prominent in eloquence and in the knack of influencing the masses, became preacher and professor. His work at Ingolstadt was accompanied with great success; and so, four years later, he was called to Regensburg as preacher at the Cathedral. With Eck he remained on terms of intimate friendship, although the controversies of Luther seemed to have made no lasting impression on him. In his works he rarely mentions Luther and the paramount movement which shook the pillars of the Church. However, already at this early time the fanatical tendencies of Huebmaier were revealed in his persecution of the Jews. Owing to his agitation the Jews were expelled from the city by force. Perhaps the consequences of this act led him to a deeper study of the Reformation movement. So much seems to be clear at least, that already at Regensburg he began to doubt that the Catholic Church is the true Church. In 1521 Huebmaier received a call to Waldshut, in Lower Austria, where after a while he embraced the views of the Swiss Reformed theologians. Two years later he visited Zurich and St. Gall, entering into closer communication with Zwingli. In 1524 he published his *Schlussreden*, which were directed against the Romish mass, image-worship, fasting, pilgrimages, purgatory, and celibacy. In the same year Waldshut embraced the evangelical faith and agreed to defend Huebmaier, whose actions had aroused the intense hostility of the government of Lower Austria. For a while Huebmaier sought refuge at Schaffhausen, but he soon returned and directed the religious and political policy of the city.

About this time Huebmaier deserted the cause of Zwingli and adopted Anabaptist doctrines. Soon Waldshut was the center of religious, social, and political ferment. Huebmaier himself fell under the influence of Thomas Muenzer, and he became convinced that the only way in which a thorough reformation could be made would be by the radical methods suggested by Muenzer. In 1525 he was baptized by the Anabaptist Reublin, and in the controversy with Zwingli, which soon broke out, he published two works, which appeared in 1526: *Von dem christlichen Tauf der Glaebigen* and *Ein Gespraech von dem Kindertauf*, in which he set forth his Anabaptist views on infant baptism. His bold preaching of Anabaptist doctrines involved him in difficulties with Zwingli, and when, in 1525, Waldshut was taken by Austrian forces and the

Roman Catholic religion was reintroduced, Huebmaier, having fled to Zurich, was imprisoned, and fearing he would be delivered to the Austrian authorities, he consented, under torture, to abjure his views. However, as soon as he had left Zurich and had found refuge at Constance, he repudiated this act as having been done under compulsion, which moved Zwingli to characterize him as a man actuated solely by a desire for notoriety and gain. Zwingli has been criticised severely on account of his participation in the torturing of Huebmaier, and his remarks have been reproved as altogether out of place and cynical. Nevertheless, no one will deny that there is more than a grain of truth in Zwingli's characterization of Huebmaier "as a man actuated solely by a desire for notoriety and gain." In 1526 Huebmaier, having for all time repudiated his Zwinglian connections, came to Nicolsburg in Moravia, where, under the protection of Martin Goeschl, he transformed the incipient Lutheran congregation into an Anabaptist community. He converted to Anabaptism the three ministers Oswald Glait, Hans Spittelmayer, and even the noble and learned von Lichtenstein, so that, in consequence of his astounding success, his fame spread through Switzerland and Germany, and Anabaptists flocked from all directions to the Moravian stronghold of Anabaptist communism. At Nicolsburg Huebmaier continued to publish tracts against the Swiss reformers, emphasizing his views on Baptism, the Lord's Supper, communal discipline, and the relation of Christians to established authority. In consequence of his ardent preaching and his extensive writing the Anabaptist movement spread rapidly into Tyrol, Salzburg, and the two Austrias. However, this very success aroused the ire of the Roman Catholic authorities, and in 1527 Huebmaier's surrender was demanded and granted. Taken to Vienna, the wavering, fickle, inconstant character of the man again revealed itself. Within four years, from 1523 to 1527, Huebmaier had changed his religious views four times. He had abjured Catholicism and embraced Zwinglianism; leaving Zwinglianism, he had adopted Anabaptism. Under torture he had rejected Anabaptism and accepted Zwinglianism; and lastly he had once more left Zwinglianism and returned to Anabaptism. Now, when torture threatened again, he sued for peace with the Roman Catholic Church, promising broad concessions in opposition to Luther and Zwingli, refusing, however, to yield on the questions of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In consequence of this refusal he was publicly burned at the stake on March 10, 1528, meeting death apparently boldly and calmly.

His wife was imprisoned with him and put to death a little later by drowning. Such, in brief, is the biographical sketch of Balthasar Huebmaier, the apostle of Anabaptism, the greatest champion of their views, and the only learned scholar in this radical sect.

That the views on Huebmaier's life and work should differ widely from one another is natural. Luther's view is well known. He writes of him briefly: "I know very well, my dear sirs, that Balthasar Huebmohr has expressly and by name referred to me in his blasphemous pamphlet on Anabaptism, as if I, too, were of his foolish mind" ("Ich weiss leider fast wohl, meine lieben Herren, dass der Balthasar Huebmohr mich auch unter andern mit Namen einfuehret in seinem laesterlichen Buechlein von der Wiedertaufe, als sollt' ich auch seines toerichten Sinnes sein"). Baptist historians, as a rule, value him too highly, as the editorial quoted above shows. Henry C. Vedder, Professor of Church History in Crozer Theological Seminary, in his biography *Balthasar Huebmaier, the Leader of the Anabaptists*, which is one of the volumes of that fine series "Heroes of the Reformation," is reasonably fair in judging both his character and his work. Of his character he remarks: "The praise of unswerving constancy to the truth cannot be awarded him. Huebmaier's conduct in these closing months of his life is far from heroic." (p. 236.) The *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* records: "His place is undeniably in the front rank of German Anabaptists. . . . He represents the simple, conservative Anabaptist doctrine, which grounded itself on the Scriptures"; s. v. Huebmaier. McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopedia* states: "Huebmayer is now conceded by all historians to have been a man of very exalted character, and although a fanatic in religion, it is certain that he never favored the extreme views of some of the Anabaptists."

We are at present concerned with the fundamental difference that may be pointed out in the life and views of Huebmaier and Luther. That such a difference exists cannot be denied. It exists with regard to the lives of these two men. Luther's life was like a huge river, flowing calmly from source to mouth, while Huebmaier's life was like a turbulent mountain stream. Luther's development was slow, constant, and progressive, while Huebmaier's was rapid, abrupt, unsteady. Luther coveted martyrdom, while Huebmaier shrank from torture. Luther remained a conservative, retaining a sane and sober outlook on life, while Huebmaier, after severing his relations with the Roman Catholic Church, drifted aimlessly and helplessly. Luther's teachings were intensely prac-

tical, the means to the greater end of bringing back to the Bible the common people, while Huebmaier's love for disputation for disputation's sake is manifest even in his popular works. Luther retained throughout his life his wonderful share of common sense, while Huebmaier under the stress of trials and attacks showed himself impulsive, rash, erratic. Luther was great in all he did, while Huebmaier succumbed to pettishness. Luther was the great Reformer; Huebmaier, though personally noble and honorable, went down with the stream of radicals who followed in the wake of the Reformation.

The *reason* for all this is clear. Luther's spiritual and doctrinal development came forth from a struggle, deep and painful. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit Himself had solved Luther's great problem of how to obtain forgiveness of sins. That problem solved, Luther directed his entire work of showing others how they also might solve this paramount problem. He preached the *sola Scriptura* because neither human counsel nor reason could determine the salvation of man. He preached the *sola gratia* because he knew from experience that works could not save. He preached the *universalis gratia* because he, the greatest of sinners, had been accepted and sanctified. He flouted reason because in the papacy damnable reason had damned millions of souls. Whatever Luther did was accomplished in connection with the vast lesson he had learned when he was rescued from the abysmal pit of doubt and despair.

Huebmaier had not passed through such a struggle. His interest in the truth of Scripture was theoretical and speculative rather than practical. This explains why he was willing to sue for peace with the Roman Catholic Church and make broad concessions, abjuring a large number of views which he had previously taught with great vigor. On the other hand, those very views to which he adhered even under peril of death were manifestly held on grounds of rationalistic consideration. They came from a critical head and mind rather than from a sincere heart imbued with faith so pure and strong as to reject all doctrines at variance with the Word of God. Here is the point where Huebmaier failed. He never overcame Romanistic Semi-Pelagianism and Zwinglian rationalism, because, unlike Luther, he would not bend reason to revelation. Lastly, Huebmaier never attained to that clearness of doctrine which must be expected from a public teacher of the Gospel. Being essentially rationalistic, his religious views remained blurred, and the theses which he at various times sought

to defend fell short of the whole truth. These, we believe, are the predominant faults of Huebmaier's theology.

A few examples might be given by way of illustration. In a series of theses drawn up at Waldshut in June, 1525, he says:—

“Faith alone makes us just before God. This faith is the *knowledge* of the mercy of God which He manifested to us through the giving of His only-begotten Son. Thereby are overthrown all sham Christians, who have only ‘a historical faith’ in God.” In 1528, while imprisoned, in his formal statement of his beliefs (*Rechenschaft*) concerning faith he said: “Faith alone is not enough for salvation. . . . Since mere faith does not suffice for salvation, good works must also be added to it. Whoso permits his faith to stand by itself and does not prove it by good works changes Christian liberty into liberty of the flesh.” This condemns Luther's doctrine and champions the Roman Catholic teaching.

Concerning *free will* he writes in the same connection: “He who denies the free will of men and calls it an empty claim (Luther) is nothing in himself, nicknames God a tyrant, charges Him with injustice, and gives the wicked excuse to remain in their sins.” (This is more than Romanistic Semi-Pelagianism).

Concerning the *Gospel*, Huebmaier declares: “To avoid evil works and repent of our sins is the doctrine of the whole Gospel.” (Huebmaier here intermingles Law and Gospel.)

Concerning the *Church* he says: “The Church is an *external assembling* and community of believers in one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism.” (This is practically the Roman Catholic definition.)

Concerning the *intercessions of the saints* he states: “The intercessions of the saints in our behalf are not in vain.” (Roman Catholic.)

Concerning *Baptism* he argues: “Water baptism . . . is an external and public testimony of the inward baptism of the Spirit, set forth by receiving water. By this not only are sins confessed, but also faith in their pardon, by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, is declared before all men. Hereby also the recipient is externally marked, inscribed, and incorporated into the fellowship of the churches, according to the ordinance of Christ.” (A blend of Zwinglianism and Muenzerism.)

In accord with this lack of clearness and definiteness, on the one hand, and the failure of teaching Scriptural doctrines without perversions, on the other, stands the fact that Huebmaier neither understood nor valued the central, basic teaching of Scripture concerning justification by faith. Professor Vedder rightly remarks in his biography: "There is no [express] mention of justification in Huebmaier's writings, even where we might fairly expect to find it, in his catechism, and of course no distinction between *justification* and *sanctification*. This omission cannot be explained like many others; the importance that these doctrines assumed in the Reformation period, and the amount of attention given them by all writers, preclude any explanation, on grounds of lack of necessity, inadvertence, and the like, for their absence from the carefully elaborated and deliberately printed works of any man of the time. The omission must be deliberate, calculated, wilful. An omission of such character can be accounted for only on one ground, that Huebmaier was anxious to mark clearly his divergence from Luther in some matters that the latter reckoned cardinal in the Protestant theology." Professor Vedder adds to this: "Beyond this we are utterly in the dark." This darkness disappears when we consider that a theologian who holds that salvation is not by faith alone, but also by works, and that man has retained a free and uncorrupted will even after the Fall, cannot teach the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ. If salvation is partly by works, the distinction between justification and sanctification must of necessity fall.

With that Huebmaier's theology falls. It was after all, in its essential features, only a slight modification of Roman Catholic Semi-Pelagianism, blended with Zwinglianism and Anabaptism, and the whole man-raised structure was built upon crass rationalism. Neither the *sola Scriptura* nor the *sola gratia* was understood by Huebmaier and his followers. It was for this reason that it failed, and not "because Huebmaier was taken by the political powers and burned at the stake." It had not in itself the stamina of growth and victory. It perished as soon as the man who sponsored it perished. On the other hand, Luther's Gospel succeeded, not because it "prospered through political friendship," but because it is the truth divine, which is immortal. Not to his own theology, but to the theology of the Bible which Luther proclaimed to the world may the words of Huebmaier be applied which he penned in *Die ander Erbiëtung* (Schaffhausen, 1524): "Die goettliche Warheit ist untoedlich, und wiewohl sy sich ettwan lang fahen

lasst, geyslen, kroenen, creuetzigen und in das Grab legen, wuerdet sy doch am dritten Tag wiederumb sygreich uferston und im ewigkeit regieren und triumphieren." *

Only as the Scriptural doctrines concerning universal grace and justification by grace through faith in Christ alone will be understood by the present-day Fundamentalists, will they be able to comprehend the real issue involved in Luther's battles in the days of the Reformation. And only then will they themselves be benefited in their own fight for the truth. To discredit Luther, to place on his high level other would-be Reformers, to ascribe to erring Huebmaier a spiritual vision which Luther had, but from which he shrank because it implied the surrender of the protection of magistrates in whom he trusted, means not only to misrepresent facts, but to toll their own death-knell in the warfare which is now on. *Quo propior Luthero, eo melior theologus*, is a maxim which applies also to modern Fundamentalists. A little more careful study of Luther's doctrines and methods would soon convince them that Luther's victory did not depend on any magistrate, but upon the invincible Word, of which he said: "It is such a rock and firm foundation that the hellish gates cannot prevail against it. Where it remains and is preached, there at last even some of its enemies will be converted, who have proved themselves hounds of Satan." (St. L. Ed., V, 1277.) Then, too, they would find that Luther at no time of his life was prepared to go as far as did Huebmaier in radicalism and extravagance. Lastly, they would find that the great difference between the two was the difference existing between those who teach God's Word and those who deny it and put in its stead the dictates of reason.

Truth is immortal; it will stand and conquer. However, that truth is a fixed, determined, certain Word, which God has given us in the Bible and from which we dare not depart. The world to-day does not need instruction "in the things for which Baptists stood," but rather instruction in the inspired doctrines for which Christ has stood. As we teach His sayings, we shall stand; otherwise not. Only Christ's revealed truth is immortal, and it immortalizes all those who believe and teach it in its truth and purity.

* Divine truth is immortal, and though it be taken captive, scourged, crowned, crucified, and placed in the sepulcher, it will nevertheless rise victoriously on the third day and rule and triumph to all eternity.