

Anabaptist Heritage
Sunday, January 8, 2017
Paul Brubaker

[1st slide:] **Balthasar Hubmaier (title)**

Paul/Narrator: [Prolegomena before 2nd service]: I'm aware that many of us didn't grow up in this tradition. And I have very mixed feelings about *Martyr's Mirror* and some of the ways we've used it! (First service felt so dark.) Warning: trigger alert: and they all die at the end of this story. But—I don't want to romanticize that. And I don't want us to get hard on ourselves.

Actually, many of these early Anabaptists' ideas won: religion as a voluntary choice; and the state/nation and church are separated, less coercive now in many of our Western liberal democracies.

Paul/Narrator: I am not trying to raise a founding hero and build a chapel around him and ask us all to worship there—we all, in every one of our denominations, tend to do that.

[Slide 2: Balthasar Hubmaier (1480?-1528) and map of 1550s Europe]

Narrator: Rather, what I like about Hubmaier is his human-ness. And he lived in terrible times. I want to evoke that context. I wrote this two years ago, when our news was full of reports of ISIS beheading people publicly. And we in the West were all righteously indignant about their barbarity. And just this week I listened to a long interview on public radio's Reveal program with a very articulate white supremacist, advocating for building a new America along ethnic lines, and privileging "European heritage" Americans. So remember these things as we look back in time. Five short vignettes, glimpses, into Hubmaier's life.

[Slide 3: "Balthazar Hubmor" portrait]

Hubmaier: I am Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier. That "Doctor" is important to me. I am peasant-born, in a time when only the very wealthy could afford an education. It took me many years—until I was 35—to receive my doctorate in theology. I had to stop out and work, in order to be financially able to return to university. ~~But I learned languages, and to read and write and speak, and well.~~ Throughout my life I have loved to debate theology, ~~and~~

challenged many of my opponents to “disputations.” I always treated my debating opponents fairly, honestly, even when I did not receive such treatment back from them; And I have my whole life long been open to the truth, to being willing to change my mind, to learn something new.

[Slide 4: **Vignette 1: 1519—1st church job: chief preacher at new cathedral at Regensburg**)
with photograph of cathedral]

Hubmaier: “As your beloved priest, I congratulate you, citizens and Christians of Regensburg! We have rid our fair city of the blight of the Jews, Christ-killers, unbelievers in Christ and His Holy Roman Church, usurious money lenders whom Christ drove from the Temple in Jerusalem with a scourge, as we have done!

[Slide 5: interior of Regensburg cathedral]

Hubmaier: Today I commemorate with you our driving out every last Jew! Now our great city is freed of debt, and I claim this site where we destroyed their synagogue for our holy Church.”

[Slide 6: The Entrance Hall of the Regensburg Synagogue]

Narrator: Here is a drawing from that time of that synagogue.

Hubmaier: “I today pledge to build here a chapel dedicated to our beautiful Mary.”

[Slide 7: interior shot of this chapel “zur schönen Maria,” still standing today]

[Slide 8: **Vignette 2 (1523-4, now priest in Waldshut, Bavaria)** map, Waldshut in blue]

Hubmaier: These last two years I’ve been studying the New Testament, and oh, have I changed! I was influenced by the Lutherans, but consider myself an ally of Ulrich Zwingli and the Swiss reformers. I married, Elizabeth Hügline, and have been gradually introducing reforms to this church in Waldshut.

Narrator: From a letter he wrote to old friends in Regensburg:

Hubmaier: “...Therefore says Christ, Search the Scriptures. He does not say, Follow the old customs—though I did nothing else when I was the first time with you.... Therefore I openly confess before God and all, that I then became a Doctor and preached some years among you and elsewhere, and yet had not known the way unto eternal life. Within two years has Christ for the first time come into my heart to thrive. I have never dared to

preach him so boldly as now, by the grace of God.”

[Slide 9: **Vignette 3 (early 1526, Zurich)** map, Waldshut—Zurich closer]

Hubmaier: Less than one year ago, I openly joined the Anabaptists, allowing Wilhelm Reublin to baptize me, and then I baptized more than 300 people on Easter Sunday 1525, from a milk bucket filled at the town fountain.

Many blame me for starting the Peasant’s War. I tell you, I did not. True, I did help them compose letters, and interpreted and improved their Articles, and gave counsel when asked—but that is all.

Now Ferdinand I, with his mighty Austrian army, in alliance with the Bishop of Constance, has defeated the peasants and marched on Waldshut. I resigned my pastorate and escaped, to try to protect my beloved town.

Narrator: Sick and terribly depressed, he and Elizabeth came to Zurich.

Hubmaier: My wife and I were soon imprisoned. I was granted a theology debate with Zwingli, and when I did not back down, I was imprisoned again, tortured (stretched on the rack), and I recanted, publicly from the pulpit and in writing as demanded by Zwingli. Zwingli ordered the beheading of 22 others, but I escaped that fate.

Narrator: Discredited and disgraced, they slunk out of Zurich. And he wrote this *Short Apology*:

Hubmaier: “I may err—I am a man—but a heretic I cannot be, because I ask constantly for instruction in the word of God... One single man and his followers...by capture, imprisonment, sufferings and the hangman, tried to teach me the faith. But faith is the work of God and not the heretic’s tower, in which one sees neither sun nor moon, and lives on nothing but water and bread.... Oh God, pardon me my weakness.”

[Slide 10: **Vignette 4 (1526-27, Nikolsburg, Moravia [now the Czech Republic])** map, Nikolsburg]

Hubmaier: After my ordeals in Zurich, I came to Nikolsburg, Moravia, because of the tolerance of the lords here. I finally got to preach and teach here as I longed to do—in this one year we baptized more than 6000, and some estimate 12,000 Anabaptists have congregated here. And write! In this year I’ve published 18 pamphlets—treatises—booklets, with the help of Froschauer, an Anabaptist printer who came here after being

forced to flee Zurich.

Hubmaier: But oh, so short a time!

Narrator: ...It was less than a year. Then Ferdinand I inherited Moravia, and in August 1527 Hubmaier was captured and extradited to Vienna.

[Slide 11: **Vignette 5 (March 10, 1528, Vienna, Austria)** portrait of Hubmaier]

Hubmaier: I am charged with treason, for which everyone knows the sentence is execution. I have been imprisoned here for six or seven months now, and tortured, unspeakable tribulations known only to God. They have broken me again—I compromised on many things—but I have not backed down on believers' baptism or the Lord's Supper—and that is not enough for them.

Narrator: The testimony of his wife, Elizabeth Hügline:

Elizabeth Hügline: Balthasar was led to the place of execution, a great company following and watching. I was in that company, telling him to be strong.

Hubmaier: "O my gracious God, grant me grace in my great suffering!"

Elizabeth: he cried. Then, to those gathered he said,

Hubmaier: "Oh dear brothers [and sisters], if I have injured any, in word or deed, may [you] forgive me for the sake of my merciful God. I forgive all those that have done me harm."

Elizabeth: When the wood was burning, he cried out,

Hubmaier: "O my heavenly Father! O my gracious God!"

Elizabeth: and when his hair and beard caught fire,

Hubmaier: "O Jesus, Jesus!"

Elizabeth: —and he died.

Elizabeth: Three days later I was thrown from the large bridge over the Danube with a stone tied around my neck, and drowned.