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John D. Rempel, ed. *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010.

With this twelfth and latest volume in the Classics of Radical Reformation (CRR) series, the Institute of Mennonite Studies editor John Rempel and his team of translators offer for the first time in English a collection of writings by what has been called the Marpeck Circle (Pilgram Marpeck and his associates). It is based on the critical German edition published in 2007, *Briefe und Schriften oberdeutscher Täufer 1527-1555: Das "Kunstbuch" des Jörg Probst Rotenfelder gen. Maler*, edited by Heinold Fast.

This collection was not the product of recent scholars but of the 16th-century Marpeck Circle itself. One of the Circle, minister and painter Jörg Maler, delivered his own handwritten, edited copy to a Swiss bookbinder in 1561. The German edition of 2007 is based on half of this original book, which survives in the Burgerbibliothek in Bern, Switzerland. Names, places, and dates attached to these writings indicate that they were circulated among Anabaptist congregations in South Germany, Moravia (now the Czech Republic), and Switzerland during three decades in the mid-16th century.

The *Kunstbuch*, as we have it now, includes 56 writings. Sixteen pieces were by Marpeck. Eleven were by other ministers in the Marpeck Circle, including Marpeck's closest associate, Leupold Scharnschlager, and other formative figures – Hans Hut, Hans Schlaffer, and Leonhard Schiemer. Maler himself wrote six pieces. Several are anonymous. These writings include treatises, devotional statements, confessions (of faith and sin), didactic poems, sayings, and a good number of dated pastoral letters offering counsel, teaching, spiritual direction, and encouragement to congregations and individuals.

Examples of pastoral letters include Marpeck's letters to the Swiss Brethren concerning their rigid discipline and causes of conflict; Jörg Maler's letter encouraging Ulrich Ageman to make a full commitment to Christ; Hans Bichel's letter to Sophia von Bubenhofen, who was burdened with guilt; and prisoner Hans von Halstatt's letter of comfort while awaiting his death.

Rempel provides introductions for each main piece and an introduction to the entire collection. He lays out historical and theological contexts,

relates the various texts to one another, provides summaries, and offers open-ended interpretive comments and questions. These introductions are very informative and insightful, and make the writings accessible, particularly to the nonspecialist.

The editor compares this collection to “an album of photographs of a family and its friends over a period of thirty years” (31). The “family” and “friends” depicted here represent one expression of urban Anabaptism. It’s an expression with theological reference points that include the Apostles’ Creed, the doctrine of the trinity, Anabaptism reflected in the Schleithem confession, and the thought of Pilgram Marpeck. Evident in Marpeck’s writing are his concepts of discipleship and church framed in the incarnation, and his search for unity while avoiding the pitfalls of legalism and spiritualism.

Nevertheless, this collection also reveals diversity and tension. Jörg Maler inserts frequent qualifying glosses and confesses his tension with absolute prohibition of the oath. Marpeck takes issue with the Swiss Brethren in their rigid church discipline and even tells one congregation that it is not a true church. Scharnschlager allows for the holding of public office if a person faithfully follows Christ. Several authors represent other traditions (Catholic, Lutheran, and Spiritualist). There are also an apocalyptic prophecy and a militaristic allegory of Christ as emperor. A few pieces refashion older works of medieval mysticism.

To read the *Kunstbuch* is to listen in on conversations among a group of Anabaptists of the 16th century. They talk with one another, Maler adds his comments and glosses, and either he or others add footnotes that cite related Scriptures. This volume is a sample of *gemeinde theologie* but not mere abstract theologizing. To be sure, it greatly expands our understanding of the life and thought one group of Anabaptists, but its theological reflections are embedded in testimonials, confessions, and pastoral letters. In Rempel’s words, they are “impassioned attempts to be the body of Christ faithfully and to trust God utterly in the midst of terrifying insecurity” (31).

Originally intended to instruct and nourish ordinary Christians, this translation is now offered to us for the same purpose. This makes the *Kunstbuch* more than a composite of historical theology. After 500 years, these writings continue what Maler predicts in his introduction: “Many a

divine mystery lies in this book; if you so desire, it will illuminate your heart, courage, and understanding. Therefore make room for it with heart's devotion" (34).

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Gerald W. Schlabach. *Unlearning Protestantism: Sustaining Christian Community in an Unstable Age*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010.

Schism is something that seems to be almost second nature for Mennonites. When one reflects on the traditional stability and unity of the Mennonite community in the midst of the assimilating pressures of the broader society, this seems counter-intuitive. Gerald Schlabach identifies "the Protestant dilemma" as the source of the instability that plagues Mennonite churches in particular and Protestant churches in general.

Before the Protestant dilemma, there was "the Protestant principle" (as articulated by Paul Tillich): "because all human institutions fall short of God's standard, they are always subject to 'prophetic' critique and reform" (24). But when this principle becomes the foundation of community life, the result is "the perpetual *unmaking* of community life." The modern world and the modern Protestant church undermine tradition and authority by elevating individualism into a primary virtue. This turns the virtue of the Protestant principle into the vice of the Protestant dilemma (as articulated by Stanley Hauerwas): "a form of social life that undermined its ability to maintain the kind of disciplined communities necessary to sustain the church's social witness" (41).

The two practices that Schlabach sees as vital to avoiding the corrosive individualism of the Protestant dilemma and sustain a community of faith are those of stability and dissent. To articulate these practices, he turns to the examples of the Mennonite and Roman Catholic traditions. Mennonites have managed to develop a tradition of *dissent* that is also a *tradition* of dissent. That is, while dissenting from the structures of the violent world order, Mennonites have built "a community enjoying significant discipline