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An Anabaptist Meeting in Zollikon, 1525

Translated from the German by Prof. John Allen Moore, Ph.D., Professor of Church History and Missions, Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschlikon-Zürich, and published with Prof. Fritz Blanke's approval.

ON the twenty-first of January 1525, the Zurich authorities dealt their first serious blow against the new Anabaptist movement. They forbade the "special schools," that is, the meetings of the innovators, and condemned the six leaders of the movement. Konrad Grebel and Felix Manz, both citizens of Zurich, were forbidden to speak publicly. The non-Zurichers were dealt with more harshly: Wilhelm Roebli of Rottenburg on the Neckar, Ludwig Haetzer of Thurgau, Andreas Castelberger of Graubunden, and Johannes Broetli, whose place of origin is unknown, were exiled; they had to swear under oath that they would leave the canton within eight days, reckoned from January twenty-first.

Ruedi Thomann, an old peasant from a well-known Zollikon family, did not want this period to pass without having in his home two of the banished men with whom he was apparently connected; he invited Roebli and Broetli to a farewell supper. Wilhelm Roebli, pastor in Witikon near Zurich, had been the first to bring the attack against infant baptism into the pulpit (March, 1524). Broetli, formerly a chaplain in Quarten on the Lake of Wallen, and since the summer of 1523 living without benefice in Zollikon, had from the summer of 1524 carried on open opposition to the church's baptismal practice. The two former Catholic clergymen, now aggressive representatives of Anabaptist thought, had been before going over to the Anabaptist cause just as impetuous disciples of Zwingli, evidenced by the fact that they were among the first priests to marry (in the spring of 1523).

The farewell dinner takes place on Wednesday evening, 25th January, 1525, in the home of Ruedi Thomann in the so-called "Gstad" section of the village of Zollikon near Zurich. Beside the two theologians and the host, Marx Bosshart, the son-in-law of Thomann who lived with his father-in-law, is present. While the four of them are still eating, Manz and Blaurock come in.

Georg Cajakob, called Blaurock (Bluecoat), from Bonaduz in Graubunden and at that time about thirty-three years of age, soon became one of the best known of the Anabaptists. Like Rouebli and Broetli he was a former Catholic priest. He was a zealot; his friends called him a "second Paul." As the son of a peasant he understood very well the feeling of the country people. Ruedi Thomann had not known Manz and Blaurock personally before this. Why do they come on this evening to this house in spite of that? Not because of him personally, but because there is to be in his house this day a (forbidden!) religious meeting. Whether this meeting was suggested by Thomann himself or by Broetli and Roebli, we do not know. In any event, Ruedi Thomann makes his room available for it.

After supper three other visitors appear: Heinrich Thomann, Ruedi's brother; Jacob Hottinger, an old man from one of the best-known Zollikon families; and Hans Bruggbach from Zumikon, a village near Zollikon. Nine men—five farmers, three theologians, and one educated in the secular sciences (Manz)—sit at a table and have a Bible hour. They read from the New Testament and discuss what they read. (Notice that Felix Manz is also taking part, though he has been ordered by the authorities to keep silent.) What are they reading and what are they speaking about? Apparently they speak of the lostness of man's soul in sin and the fact that according to the Scripture only those are saved who repent and are baptised. Suddenly then Hans Bruggbach stands up. He bewails his sin, even "wept and cried out what a great sinner he was." He implores his friends that they should pray God for him, and he desires to be baptised as a sign of his conversion. This strong outbreak of feeling and consciousness of sin on the part of Bruggbach is explained only by the assumption that on this evening they spoke of guilt and conversion, doubtless in an evangelistic manner. (It is likely that Bruggbach was spiritually prepared by similar impressions before this.)

Bruggbach's plea for baptism is granted. The baptismal ceremony is simple, but not without form. Rather is baptism framed in a short liturgy, which is spoken by Blaurock and Manz in turn. First Blaurock directs to Hans Bruggbach the question whether he earnestly desires baptism (Blaurock calls it "grace"). Bruggbach says that he does. Manz now speaks, wording his question in a form similar to that in Acts x. 47: "Who will forbid that I baptize him?" Blaurock answers, "No one." Now Manz takes a ladle (called a "Gaetzi") such as was then used in the kitchen, pours water over the head of the candidate, saying at the same time: "I baptize you in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."

A second baptism follows the first in this same meeting. Jacob Hottinger, who in recent weeks had proved himself an enthusiastic follower of Manz and Grebel, gets up and has Manz baptise him also. These baptisms were surely the most important purpose of the meeting. It was not a devotional meeting in the usual sense, but an evangelistic service which was intended to lead those present to repentance and baptism.

The evening concludes with the Holy Supper. Blaurock points to the bread and wine which are on the table, then breaks the bread into pieces. He precedes the distribution of the elements with a speech from which fragments are preserved for us. Blaurock says (according to the report of Ruedi Thomann): "Whoever believes that God has redeemed him with his death and rose-coloured blood, let him come and eat with me of this bread and drink with me of this wine." The Supper is therefore, according to these words, a celebration by those who know themselves to be saved. Heinrich Thomann testifies that Blaurock said: "Whoever will be counted as belonging to our communion (that is, to our circle) should eat of this bread." According to this statement, those may partake of the Holy Supper who are willing to join the congregation of the Anabaptists. This readiness, not yet baptism itself, is what is required of the guests at the Supper. So it was that all those taking part in the meeting, including those also who had not been baptised (probably with the exception of Heinrich Thomann) partook on this evening of the bread and the wine.

The meeting at the house of Ruedi Thomann was a Bible hour, a preaching service, a cult celebration. But not the least of its purposes was that it should be a means of winning new members for the newly-formed Anabaptist fellowship. From the point of view of this last, the evening was not exactly successful. Two of those present had themselves baptised and were received into the communion. But the others? Manz, Blaurock, Roebli and Broetli had received baptism a few days before—on the 20th January and likewise in Zollikon. Three remained therefore who could not at this meeting make up their minds to be baptised: Ruedi Thomann, Heinrich Thomann, and Marx Bosshart. As for Heinrich Thomann we know that he was repelled by the events of that evening, which had been designed by its organisers to attract him. When he saw the administration of baptism and the Supper, he said that he perspired; if he had been obliged to take part he would have run out the door. It was the sweat of fear which came through the pores of the old man. No wonder! What he saw he regarded as blasphemy. A layman here administers holy baptism, without any liturgical accompaniments, even to adults who have certainly been baptised once already,

while Pastor Zwingli and the Zwingli preachers baptised infants, and still at this time even with breathing, exorcism, making the sign of the cross, and applying spittle and ointment—that is, according to the old Catholic usage. And here one breaks ordinary bread in a farmer's house and distributes it with the wine, while Zwingli and the other evangelical preachers, still presiding at the altar and dressed in priestly vestments, administered the wafer but not the cup to the congregation; that is, they celebrated the Supper in one kind according to Catholic custom.

Heinrich Thomann is the only one to whom the meeting of 25th January was uncomfortable. Apparently he was far in spirit from this circle; perhaps he had joined the pious company only out of curiosity. His brother Ruedi stands near the Anabaptist movement; otherwise he would not have asked Broetli and Roebli to his home. Marx Bosshart also is in contact with the reform movement. It is true that Bosshart was not able on this evening to make up his mind to allow himself to be baptised, but what he had experienced (in the group meeting) continued to work in him. After the visitors had left—only Blaurock and Manz remained at Thomann's for the night—Marx went to his room. But he could not sleep. In the night also "it troubled him," as he expresses it; that is to say, he remains disturbed: he knows no other way out except to ask God that He give him understanding. Toward morning the prayed-for understanding broke forth with irresistibly convincing power. (Marx explains to the judges, "It moved him so powerfully in his spirit that he could do nothing else.") It is a certainty now: he must be baptised. He gets up very early on Thursday, 26th January, and wakes his father-in-law, then Manz and Blaurock. There is a conversation between him and Blaurock about his spiritual condition whose main content is reported by the eyewitness Ruedi Thomann. Blaurock remarks to Marx: "You have been until now a gay young man," then exhorts him (in reference to Ephesians iv. 22-24) to put away the old Adam and put on the new, and repent. Bosshart is ready to do it. After such contrition on the part of the convert (the most important condition preliminary to the act of baptism itself) it is possible now through Blaurock for baptism to be administered to Marx Bosshart. Bosshart meets us again in the same year as a wandering Anabaptist preacher in the Zurich highlands.

Next in order is Ruedi Thomann. He has hesitated until this time, but now Blaurock urges him strongly: "You are an old man and near to death; you also must repent and desire baptism!" Ruedi is willing, and so Blaurock can admit him to the new congregation. Thus the circle is complete. Of those

who took part in the meeting of 25th January all have now, with the exception of Heinrich Thomann, received the sign of baptism. But Blaurock is not satisfied with that. Is it not reported in *Acts* (xvi. 33) of the jailor that he himself and all his house together were baptised? And must it not be in a society such as that of the Anabaptists, which desires to follow the early Christian example, that this characteristic also must be taken into account? That is Blaurock's conclusion and he therefore urges upon Ruedi Thomann that he should also undertake to have his relatives and entire household baptised. Thomann is agreed, and so the farmer's house in Gstad on this January morning sees the renewal of group or community baptism (*Gemeinschaftstaufe*) according to apostolic practice.

FRTZ BLANKE.

The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by William Robinson, M.A., B.Sc., D.D., S.T.D., Professor of Christian Doctrine in the Selly Oak College, Birmingham. 20 pages, 1s. 3d.

This pamphlet, which has the sub-title "A Study in the Christian Doctrine of Hope" contains the fourth Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture, which Dr. Robinson delivered at Birmingham on October 14th, 1950. Its contention is that the Platonic element in the Epistle has been greatly exaggerated and the eschatological element (see especially i, 2; ii, 5; vi, 5, 11, 12, 18-20; ix, 28) unduly neglected. Dr. Robinson maintains that the Platonic interpretation rests upon the references to "copy" and "shadow" in viii, 5; ix, 23; x, 1; which, according to Dr. Robinson, point "not to the difference between the unreal and the real in the Platonic sense, but to the difference between the Law and the New Covenant as eschatological realities." (p. 7).

The evidence for Platonic influence in the Epistle is actually much more extensive than this writer admits. Echoes of the book of "Wisdom" and the works of Philo are numerous, and the philosophy of that literature was largely Platonic.

A. W. ARGYLE.