

A History of the Baptists

By John T. Christian

CHAPTER XI BAPTISTS OF GERMANY AND MORAVIA PRACTISE DIPPING

A BAPTIST church was found in Augsburg, in 1525, where Hans Denck was pastor. In this city Denck was exceedingly popular, so that in a year or two the church numbered some eleven hundred members. Urbanus Rhegius, who was minister in that city at the time, says of the influence of Denck: "It increased like a canker, to the grievous injury of many souls," Augsburg became a great Baptist center.

Associated with Denck at Augsburg were Balthasar Hubmaier, Ludwig Hatzer and Hans Hut. They all practiced immersion. Keller in his life of Denck says:

The baptism was performed by dipping under (*untertauchen*). The men were in thus act naked, the women had a covering (Keller, *Em Apostel der Wiedertaufer*, 112).

Schaff is particular to relate that the four leaders of the Anabaptists of Augsburg all practiced immersion. He says:

The Anabaptist leaders Hubmaier, Derek, Hatzer, Hut, likewise appeared in Augsburg, and gathered a congregation of eleven hundred members. They had a general synod in 1527. They baptized by immersion. Rhegius stirred up the magistrates against them; the leaders were imprisoned and some were executed (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VI. 578).

Immersion was the practice of the Baptists of Augsburg. There is the testimony of a trusted eye-witness in the Augsburg Benedictine, Clemens Sender. This old historian says of the Baptists of Augsburg:

In Augsburg in the gardens of the houses in 1527, men and women, servants and masters, rich and poor, more than eleven hundred of them were rebaptized. They put on peculiar garments in which to be baptized, for in their houses were their baptisteries where there were always a number of garments always prepared (Clemens Sender, *Die Chronik*, 186).

Sender thus hears witness to the large number of persons immersed in Augsburg. It has sometimes been claimed that the baptisms which occurred among the Baptists in houses and cellars must have been by sprinkling. They had especially prepared baptisteries in their houses for immersions.

When it was dangerous and inconvenient to go to the rivers and streams for baptismal purposes baptisteries were erected in private houses. This is the testimony of an eye-witness. Hubmaier is moreover associated with these immersions.

Wagenseil, a historian of Augsburg, says:

In the year 1527 the Anabaptists baptized none who did not believe with them; and the candidates were not merely sprinkled, but they were dipped under (Wagenseil, *Geschichte der Stadt Augsburg*, 1820).

Urbanus Rhegius was likewise a witness to the practice of the Baptists of Augsburg. He was a resident of the city at the time. He was a learned man, a university student, honored by the Emperor Maximilian and a follower of Luther. In 1528 two letters were written by the Baptists of Augsburg. Rhegius answered these letters (*Zwen wunderbar zam sendbrieff zweyer Wiedertauffer, Augsburg, 1528*). He discussed at length the position of the Baptists on infant baptism in regard to the form of baptism there is a picture on the title page that shows the Baptists in the practice of immersion. There is a large expanse of water, an ocean we judge by the appearance of a ship in the waters; and these waters are full of Baptists, nude, and practicing immersion. From one side of the stream the Baptists, in great numbers, are tumbling into the waters. From the other side flows a river which is washing the Baptists out of the sea into a flaming fire. The baptismal waters of the Baptists become the fires of hell, and there even stands one shaking a viper into the fire, while gaping multitudes approve. This is a prejudiced picture of their practice of immersion.

Instances are related, and details given, in regard to the baptisms which took place in Augsburg. "The act of baptism," says Theodore Keim, in his article on Ludwig Hatzler, "was administered in the River Lech, the men being naked, the women wearing bathing trousers." He mentions the wife of the artist Adolf Ducher "who during the absence of her husband in Vienna three days in the Holy Week of 1527 opened her house, which was favorably situated on the River Lech, for the purpose of baptizing" (*Jarbucker fur Deutsche Theologie*, 278. Stuttgart, 1856). At other times, as we have seen, baptisteries were erected in the houses and cellars. Many details of these immersions have recently been published from the original records (*Zur Geschichte der Wiedertauffer in Oberssohaben, von Dr. Friedrich Roth. In Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins fur, Schwaben und Neuberg. Augsburg, 1901*).

Heath, who has written much on the history of the Baptists, and has given particular study to the Continental Baptists, says of these immersions in

Augsburg that "this fact, which seems well authenticated, would suggest that the mode was the same throughout South Germany, Switzerland and, and the Tyrol; since the Augsburg community was founded by the Walshuter Jacob Gross and the Tyrolese Ferber. Moreover Augsburg appears to have been the center most important for the Baptists of South Germany"(Heath, Anabaptists, 94).

Strassburg was associated with Augsburg in the work of the Baptists. Denck came to Strassburg in 1526 and rendered valuable service there. Many of the most distinguished citizens joined the Baptist church. Baptism, at this date, among the Baptists of Strassburg was by dipping. Gerbert states that the baptisms occurred at this time "before the Butcher's Gate, probably in a branch of the Rhine" (Gerbert, Straasburgischen Sectenbewegung, 93). Bertel and Essinger declare that these immersions among the Baptists were performed by a shoemaker (Rohrich, Die Strassburguechen Wiedertauffer, In *Zeitschrift fur die historischen Theologie*. 48. A- D. 186())

One of the best known Baptist preachers of those days was Melchoir Hofmann. On account of his peculiar views of prophecy he plunged himself and the Baptists into grief. His preaching caused much excitement. At Emden he organized a Baptist church.

The probability is that having connected himself with the Baptists of Strassburg he practiced immersion exclusively. It has, however, been confidently affirmed that Hofmann, on a visit to Emden, practiced sprinkling; and by this rite three hundred persons in the great church at Emden were baptized. Such a supposition, however, is not based upon the facts in the case. It is a theory established by guesses. He came, as has been stated, from Strassburg. It is certain the Baptists of Strassburg practiced immersion.

The claim that he practised sprinkling at Emden is based upon the statement of a late German writer, who reached that conclusion upon an inference. The inference was that since the baptism took place in a church house and was performed in a great tub therefore it was by sprinkling. Nothing is said in Cornelius (*Geschichte des Munsterischen Aufruhrs*, II. 222); and Hast (*Geschichte des Wiedertauffers*, 255) that a great tub was used in the baptism, while Frederich Otto zur Linden describes the baptism as taking place in the open air (*Melchoir Hofmann ein Prophet der Wiedertauffer*, 236). Why a great tub should be necessary for sprinkling has not yet been explained.

The baptism of converts in tubs was no unusual thing. Otho, in the twelfth century, directs the Pomeranians to be immersed, and this was

accomplished in the open air in wooden tubs or troughs. These tubs were let into the ground and filled with water. The candidates were immersed in the tubs (Henrici Canisii, Vita Ottonis. Inter Jacobi Basagii, II. vv. 60). This was in a neighboring country to Emden.

Dr. Winkler made a study of these tubs and in an able article he published the results of his studies. He says:

We can prove from ecclesiology and from the testimony of Luther himself that the pail or tub, such as Hoffmann used at Emden (a large pail) was the baptismal font of the Western Churches. There was even a certain sacredness connected with it. We find In Luther's Table Talk (Bohn's ed. p.165) the following incident. Dr. Menius asked Luther in what manner a Jew should be baptized? The Doctor replied: You must fill a large tub with water, and having divested a Jew of his clothes, cover him with white garments. He must then sit down in the tub and you must then baptize him quite under the water. This garb, added Luther, was rendered the more suitable from the circumstances that it was then, as now, the custom to bury people in a white shroud, and baptism, you know, is the emblem of our death.

Here Luther alludes to these immersions which are very familiar to ecclesiologists. . . There is reason to believe that the baptismal fonts in early Europe were tubs. The ecclesiologist Poole (Structures, etc., of Churches, 45) says: The first defined shape which the font assumed in England is that of a circular tub-shaped vessel, some probably of Saxon, many of them of the Norman date, as the antique font of St. Martin's Church, at Canterbury. Knight (Land We Live In. I. 261) says: "It is even supposed to have been built by Christians of the Roman army, A. D. 187. It was certainly one of the first ever made in England. It was about three feet high and capacious within. It has no stand; but rests upon the ground. The sculptures upon it are a sort of ornamental interlacings in low relief. It closely resembles the font delineated by the old illuminators in representing the baptism of King Ethelbert, and it is believed to be the first font in which the first of our Christian kings was baptized."

Under this division, the tub fonts, Poole, an Episcopalian antiquarian, groups the font of Castle Frome, Herefordshire, that at Bride Kirk, in Cumberland, that at West Haddon, in Northamptonshire, and that in Thorpe Emald, in Leicestershire. And in regard to all of the ancient fonts of England he says: The role of the Church of England, however many the exceptions, and however accounted for, is to be baptized by immersion; and for this the ancient fonts are sufficiently capacious (Poole Structure, 59 note).

We learn from Bourasse, a Catholic archaeologist, that the leaden font in the

cathedral at Strassburg has a tub shape, and so has the baptismal font at Espanburg, Diocese of Beauvais. Both of these baptismal tubs are represented on the plates of Bourasse's *Dictionnaire D'Archaologie Sacree*. At Notre Dame, in Rouen, the font was made in the form of a coffin, with a covering of black wood. This sepulchral figure was the symbolical translation of the words of Paul: We are buried with him by the Baptism into death (Dr. Winkler, in *The Alabama Baptist*, 1875).

These circumstantial details and the actual examples. given show that the tubs were large enough for immersions, and that adults were immersed in them.

It is not necessary to depend upon late German writers for the original narrative of the baptizings of Hofmann at Emden. It may be found in the writings of Obbe Philips. He says:

Among these (German Baptists) there arose one Melchoir Hoffman He came to Emden from the High German country, and publicly (in the open air) baptized in the Church at Emden three hundred persons, both burgher and peasant, master and servant. The old count, to be sure, allowed this to be done, and it is said that the count was himself disposed toward the same faith (Philips, *Bekentnisse, Blij. Zur Linden, Hoffmann*, 236).

Hackenroth adds:

As soon as the civil authorities learned that Melchoir began to baptize (*doopen*, to dip) he and all those who adhered to the sect, who allowed themselves to be baptized (*doopen*, dipped) again, were banished out of East Friesland, and all belonging to the sect were obliged to leave (Hackenroth, 652).

This is much like other Pedobaptist accounts of sprinkling among Baptists, the nearer the approach is made to the original sources, the more certainly do the signs of sprinkling recede. Philips does not mention the great tub; but he does declare that the baptism was performed in the open. The possibility is that the preaching took place in the church, and the baptism at some suitable place for the immersion. There is no reference to affusion or anything that would indicate that immersion was not the form of baptism used on the occasion.

The direct testimony is at hand that Hofmann was, at this time, practicing immersion. He had just come from East Friesland to Emden; but in East Friesland he had been dipping converts (Linden, *Melchoir Hofmann*, 283) - Keller speaks of this as follows:

It appears as if by the presence of Melchoir Rink, who, in 1524, dared to attack, and gave the first thrust. In a remarkable manner Rink dipped (*tought*) again in Friesland at the same time with Hofmann in the year 1580. According to some versions the same men had worked in common, from 1524 till 1539, in Sweden, Livonia, Holstein, etc. Both were furriers, both from Swabia. The question needs a closer inquiry whether we shall consider both of the Melchior's one or two persons (Keller, *Geschichte der Wiedertauffer*, 127).

So far as the inquiry goes as to whether there were two Melchoirs or only one is of no interest in this place. If there were two Melchoirs then there were two preachers who practiced immersion; and if the two names indicate the same person then there was one Baptist who preached there practicing dipping. The form of baptism is not in dispute. It stands as a recorded fact that Melchoir Hofmann was dipping his converts in East Friesland before he came to Emden. If he dipped in East Friesland, there is no suggestion why he would have practiced sprinkling in Emden.

Fortunately the practice of Melchior; or Rink, as he was sometimes called, in the form of baptism is not unknown. Justus Menius and F. Myconius wrote, in 1530, a book against the Baptists. The name of Rink is especially mentioned. Of the practice of the Baptists these authors say:

First in regard to baptism which is, that man upon the command of Christ must be dipped into the water and lifted out again (*inns wasser eingetaucht*). That is a symbol of the forgiveness of Christ, though by nature a servant of sin and a child of condemnation, now saved from death and the devil, now eternally living under the grace of God as clearly shown under the Gospel and promised through Christ in the entire gospel in his own and he shall consider it his own for all time to come. To such the meaning of baptism is declared in its signification and to them all doubt will grow less (Menius and Myconius, *Der Wiedertauffer Lure vnd gehemig*. Wittenberg, 1580).

These writers, who were hostile to the Anabaptists, mention Rink, and bear witness to the practice of dipping.

It was in the same year that Hofmann published his book, *Die Ordinanz Gottes*, The Ordinance of God. The book may be found in the Mennonite Library, at Amsterdam. In that book Hoffman says:

Furthermore, it is commanded of the Lord to his messengers; after they have thus taught, called and admonished the people through the Word of God, they shall lead forth those who have given themselves to the Lord out

of the kingdom of Satan and espoused them openly to Christ through the true sign of the covenant, through the baptism, that thereupon henceforth they completely put to death their own wills and am a bride to her beloved bridegroom to be obedient in all things. And thus also in these last times will the true Apostolic Messengers gather together the chosen band, and through the call of the Gospel and through the baptism espouse and bind them to the Lord . . Christ as an example for his own band permitted himself to be baptized by John the Baptist, and was then led of the Spirit of God into the wilderness, there to fast forty days and to suffer the temptations of Satan, but true to his Father unto the end he fought it through and overthrew Satan . . . But the sign of the covenant is established alone for those old enough to understand and for those who are of full age, and not one letter in the Old and the New Testament alludes to the infants. Woe unto those who willfully put lies instead of the truth, and charge against God, what in eternity he has not willed or commanded. God is the enemy of all liars and no one of them has a part in the kingdom, but their inheritance is the everlasting perdition. (Cramer and Pyfer Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica, VI).

This extract from Hofmann is fully in accord with immersion. All of the allusions given above refer to immersion. The baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan by John, the putting to death of the will and the resurrection to a better life are symbolically set forth by immersion. Such references are never in harmony with the practice of sprinkling.

A dispassionate statement of the facts leads to the conclusion that Hofmann practiced dipping.

Moravia became an open field for the Baptists, and in that country the work prospered marvelously. Balthasar Hubmaier, or Hubnor, as he generally wrote his name, was the great apostle of the Baptists of Moravia. He was truly a remarkable man and a preacher of power. He had not the impulsiveness of Grebel, or the brilliancy of Hatzler, or the eloquence of Denck; but for calmness, soberness, logical clearness, and consistency, absolute devotion to truth, and freedom from important errors, he stands unrivaled by any man of the Reformation He approximated truth slowly. This is notable in his rejection of infant baptism. He had progressed so far that on January 16, 1525, he had doubts concerning infant baptism, and had a dedicatory service for children instead of the baptismal rite; but he still baptized children if the parents desired it. In the meantime he became so violently opposed to infant baptism that he broke the font which was used for that purpose (Muller, Geschichte der Eidgenossen, VII. 12 Zurich, 1829). When this act was followed by his book, *Von dem christlichen der Glaubigen* it was apparent to all that he had become a Baptist. He had, indeed, been baptized, with one hundred and ten others, on Easter Day, by William

Roubli, one of the Swiss Baptists who had been pastor at Basel (Fusslin, Beytrage, I. 217).

His view of the form of baptism was also a growth. It is quite certain that at the beginning of 1525 Hubmaier thought that believers' baptism could be administered by pouring. In the book mentioned above he said:

To baptize In water is to pour over (*ubergiessen*) the confessor of his sins external water, according to the divine command, and to inscribe him in the number of these separately upon his confession and desire.

It is not evident at the time that he had given the form of baptism any consideration. He certainly wrote strongly in favor of believer' baptism, and against infant baptism.

In April, 1525, at Waldshut, it being Easter, "there assembled a strong party of adherents in that town," where Hubmaier "called his followers together on Easter eve in the year 1525, and, after having some water brought to him in a milk pail, solemnly rebaptized three hundred persons" (Sohm, Geschichte der Stadt pfarrie Waldshut ein Merkwurdeger, Beitrage zur Weidertauffer Geschichte). At this date, April, 1525, Hubmaier practised pouring. At the same time he held foot-washing to be a Bible ordinance. Only a brief period before this he was dedicating children to the Lord and in the presence of obdurate parents he christened the children. This was a formative period in his life on the subject of baptism.

While Huhmaier was in Waldshut he probably began practicing dipping. Dr. Paul Burckhard, a careful student of Baptist affairs in Germany, says, "that it is also possible that in Waldshut on the Rhine the people were baptized by Hubmaier in the Rhine" (Letter to the author, March 28, 1900). Hubmaier was found in 1527, in Augsburg, along with other Baptist leaders, practicing immersion (Sender, Die Chronik, 186. *Leipzig*, 1894). He had advanced from the practice of pouring in 1525 to that of immersion in 1527. This was no more sudden than many other changes which took place with him. Indeed, it was no more than could have been expected. Schaff, who is usually quite accurate on such points, is certain that Hubmaier, in 1527, practiced dipping.

Zwingli is a witness to the fact that Hubmaier practiced immersion, He says:

He posed like a fool in a carnival, who acts as though he is lifting nothing but straw. His adherents, the bath fellows, are geese who cackle in every direction, but do not know which way to fly; but he himself, the Doctor is clothed in magnificent apparel and, therefore, he considers it unbecoming to

wash little children, as he says himself; although it is not becoming in him, it is perfectly becoming for Jesus Christ and the humble preachers of Zurich (Hosek, Balthasar Hubmaier, ch. VI).

This was November 6, 1526. He was the companion of "bath fellows." What could be the meaning of this if Hubmaier did not practice dipping? More than once Zwingli uses this term to describe immersion among the Anabaptists.

There is another proof that in 1527 Hubmaier was an immersionist Capito writing to Zwingli, November 27, 1527, says: "What I have written lately concerning Balthasar on submersion, I have drawn from, letters from Feneston and Vienna" (Zwingli, Opera, VIII. 112). Hubmaier had been writing upon and practicing dipping.

It is mentioned in another chapter where Farel, September 7, 1527, mentions Hubmaier, where he refers to baptism as dipping in water (Keller, Die Reformation, 386 note). Keller says that this defense of Hubmaier and Denck are not well known. It shows from a contemporary that Hubmaier practiced dipping.

Another contemporary bears witness that in the last days of his life Hubmaier practiced dipping. This is John Fabricius, the learned Roman Catholic writer. In his book against Hubmaier, 1528, he says:

Their leader and founder was a certain doctor Balthasar, who, though he used to write that he was the "mountain of peace," was an incessant recusant of wars and rebellions, he was, I say, a man of such lofty spirit that he boasted that in his learning he excelled and by far surpassed all the Zwinglians, Oecolampadius, and even Luther himself. He was not satisfied because that in Germany in many towns, and above all under the renowned house of Austria be incited horrible tumults and for a long time among the Ligurians, he denied an oath the delusion of rebaptism. He also condemned it, and under a curse he publicly asserted it. Immediately in Moravia the usage of the universal church having been repudiated he treasonably relapsed into the same heresy of the Catabaptists (dippers) as a dog does to his vomit, and the baptism of children having been rejected, he decreed that only old men, drybones, and almost toothless, ought to be baptized, or dipped, in the sacred fountain, concerning this thing he wrote books and tracts surely not a few, and this new and detestable abuse produced new conspiracies of the people, illicit unions in love, and other crimes of this kind almost limitless (Fabricius, Aversus Doctores Balthasarum Pacimontanum).

Hubmaier is himself a witness to the practice of immersion. In an early book he refers to baptism as a pouring; in later books he refers to it as performed

in water. In one of the passages against his enemies who called him an Anabaptist he pithily answers: "Water is not baptism, else the whole Danube were baptism, and the fishermen and boatmen would be daily baptized."

One of his books has the title: *The Form of Baptism in Water.* In another of his books, *Von der Briederlichen straff*, he gives an explanation of the celebrated passage in the sixteenth of Matthew. He not only says that baptism is a dipping but he explains the passage to refer to the ordinary congregation of believers, The passage is as follows:

He commanded her to use them faithfully, according to his Word, when he said to Peter, Thou art a stone, and on this rock, meaning his public and uninterrupted confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, I will build my church (he had just spoken of them as Christian churches), my company, my congregation, and the gates, of hell shalt not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Verily, I my unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. In saying "to thee," Christ sets forth the unity of the churches, as saying, "ye" he implies that many shall be assembled in this unity of the faith and Christian love. It was after the glorious resurrection that Christ committed the power of the keys to the church, bidding them preach the Gospel and thus gather a congregation of believers, and afterwards baptize them in water, and with the first key open the door of the Christian Church and admit them for the remission of sins (Hosek, Balthasar Hubmaier, ch. IX).

Hubmaier always denied that he was an Anabaptist or that he practiced Anabaptism. He claimed that he practiced the baptism of believers, since infant baptism was no baptism at all.

The Baptists of Moravia were not a unit on the form of baptism as they were not a unit on other things. There was published in the year 1545 a Confession of Faith, which was drawn up by Peter Riedermann who died in Pruzga, Hungary, December 1, 1556. In the section referring to the administration of baptism Riedermann says:

Then the baptizer commands the candidate to humble himself with bended knees before God and his church, and take pure water and pour it upon him, and say, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mittheillungen aus dem Antiquariate, I. 309).

This was not the position of all of the Moravian Baptists. This may have been a private statement of Riedermann. How far the Baptists of Moravia agreed

with him is not known. But Erhard, who was an eye-witness, wrote: "Would that Diogenes might see your baptism and make sport of your washings. You will sometimes be called Triton-Baptists, when you are immersed in the Strygian Lake" (Armitage, *History of the Baptists*, 381).