Hans Fesenmair, weaver from Augsburg, says: “He was in the basement [at the meeting] all night long. Someone read to them and they held the Lord’s Supper together… Someone brought two jugs of wine and nine or ten rolls, but he doesn’t know who. They shared [the wine and rolls] among one another for the Supper.”

Hans Fesenmair’s account gives us an enticing hint of how Anabaptists might have celebrated the Lord’s Supper in 1528. The appellation Anabaptist or Täufer calls attention to the centrality of adult baptism in the faith, but Anabaptists viewed the Lord’s Supper as an important complement to the sacrament of baptism. Arrested in Augsburg at a meeting held on Easter Sunday, Fesenmair and nearly a hundred others testified under interrogation about their attendance at Anabaptist meetings.

Fesenmair was one of the few who mentioned celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The use of jugs of wine and rolls (Semmeln) indicates that they celebrated the Supper in both forms and also suggests a degree of simplicity to the proceedings. They were not using chalices and wafers. Fesenmair employs the phrase “together” or “among one another” (unter ein ander), which suggests that all those gathered at the meeting, as opposed to just the minister, participated in the Eucharist. Even from this brief account we glean a few observations that reveal central characteristics of the Anabaptists’ liturgy of the Eucharist: imitation of the apostles, simplicity, and communal experience. Surviving documents from the sixteenth century suggest that the Anabaptists designed their liturgy of the Eucharist to strengthen and reaffirm the believer’s faith and dedication to transform his life.

There are very few documents that describe Anabaptist liturgies of the Eucharist, primarily because the religious movement was illegal. In all but a very few places, believers were prohibited from gathering for worship.

---

1 Stadtarchiv Augsburg, Literaliensammlung, Wiedertäuferakten, Hans Fesenmair, 14 April 1528, hereafter StadtAA. Lit.
2 On Anabaptist theologies of the Eucharist, see John Rempel’s contribution to this volume.
In most places, Anabaptists could only meet clandestinely, changing locations and times to avoid drawing unwanted attention from authorities. Because communities were permitted no regular meeting places or church buildings or institutional organizational structures, the keeping of church records was not simply difficult and of little importance compared to the community’s survival, but in fact, dangerous. Even theologians who wrote prolifically, such as Pilgram Marpeck, Dirk Philips, or Menno Simons, focused almost exclusively on polemical writings, in which they sought to explain and defend their ideas to adversaries as well as coreligionists. A second reason for the paucity of sources, however, was the Anabaptist emphasis on inner more than outer experiences. External practices were not unimportant, but the exact form of them was not decisive for determining the spiritual value of the outward sign. Anabaptists had nothing but disdain for the traditional Church; indeed, they are sometimes described as being anti-church or free church. Anabaptist congregations did not aspire to the institutional bureaucracy of state churches that would have created more voluminous records. The most useful documents for studying the subject of Anabaptist liturgies of the Lord’s Supper in the sixteenth century include a eucharistic formulary, a letter, confessional writings, hymns, and legal testimony.

Although Anabaptist theologians lacked institutional authority and could not compel wide-ranging obedience, at least one leader published a formulary intended for dissemination among Anabaptist communities. Balthasar Hubmaier, who was active in Southern Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, wrote a detailed instruction for the form of a eucharistic service.3 It provides an excellent foundation for understanding how Anabaptist theologians translated their beliefs about the Eucharist into liturgical practices for their communities. It does not tell us, however, how closely various Anabaptist communities adhered to such prescriptions, or how they chose one to follow.

Balthasar Hubmaier’s *Form of the Supper of Christ*, published in 1527, provides a detailed program for an Anabaptist celebration of the Eucharist. Editors H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder point out that this detail makes the document unique for the sixteenth century, as so few existing records describe liturgical practices in an Anabaptist church.4 Hubmaier

---
