Title
Baptism, Community, and Critique: A Cross-Cultural Study of Unorthodox Religion in Europe and England, 1100-1700

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4w33z614

Author
Kenagy, Eric Russell

Publication Date
2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Baptism, Community, and Critique: A Cross-Cultural Study of Unorthodox Religion in Europe and England, 1100-1700

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree in

Doctor of Philosophy
in
History

by
Eric Russell Kenagy

June 2015

Dissertation Committee:
  Dr. Randolph Head, Chairperson
  Dr. James P. Brennan
  Dr. Dana Simmons
The Dissertation of Eric Russell Kenagy is approved:

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

______________________________

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Rivera Library Staff at the University of California, Riverside provided me with services in a very organized manner. I thank Interlibrary Loan supervisors Janet Moores and Maria Mendoza for locating books so quickly and thoroughly. I am also pleased to acknowledge my dissertation committee: Dr. Dana Simmons and Dr. James Brennan. When I first asked them to be readers, they showed initiative and enthusiasm. Dr. Thomas Cogsell, a historian of early modern England, introduced me to the EBBO database, “Early English Books Online,” which allowed me to construct the primary source base for my chapters on the Quakers and English Baptists.

My family—Sherry and Paul Kruckewitt, David, James, and Loree Kenagy, and Wayne, Joyce, and Gordon Fick—have supported me during the course of the entire program, even in instances when those who care might feel compelled to suggest a different path. Finally, I must single-out my advisor, Dr. Randolph Head, for his steadfast commitment to my progress and ultimate success here at Riverside. Dr. Head has committed a great deal of time from his busy schedule to guide me through difficult research topics and concepts, making sure that I could retain and reiterate them clearly at paper presentations and oral examinations. Dr. Head also paid close attention to my activities and teaching assistantships so his letters of recommendation were particularly detailed and opened up opportunities for me to teach in other departments. I thank Dr. Head for making the most difficult path of my life not only possible, but also enjoyable.
For My Grandmother
Katherine Jane Reynolds
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Baptism, Community, and Critique: A Cross-Cultural Study of Unorthodox Religion in Europe and England, 1100-1700

By

Eric Russell Kenagy

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, June 2015
Dr. Randolph Head, Chairperson

Europe’s history is marked by consistent tension between orthodox institutions and non-conformist communities, radical groups seeking to create new autonomous religious movements. What make the heresies I am studying significant are their shared objections to orthodoxy, and the extent to which leaders expressed themselves through attacks on established Church doctrines. This dissertation is a comparative, cross-cultural study of ritual baptism, which seeks to find commonalities among four groups: the Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers and Baptists. I argue that dissent critiques of prevailing institutions, doctrines, and ways of life were very similar and consistent. Moreover, as the institutional Churches gained in wealth and power, the radical leadership began to attack them through meticulous Scriptural analysis and Biblical interpretation.
I have determined that four key components link these cultures. First and foremost, the dissenters collectively rejected the orthodox Roman, Magisterial Protestant and Anglican Church practices of infant baptism. The communities’ leadership found no Biblical precedent for pedobaptism. The Cathar “elect” conducted a laying of hands; the Anabaptists and Baptists initiated only willing believers—adults; the Quakers did not baptize with water at all. Secondly, a strict asceticism is common among all of these groups, particularly the Anabaptists who dressed plainly and practiced their religion in austere homes. All four dissident groups had shared experiences of persecution that came often in waves of surveillance, fines, imprisonments, and executions. Finally, corruption and decadence angered the leaders above all and consequently persuasive attacks became most apparent in their writings.

Ritual baptism allows us to better comprehend other subjects of contention such as community, eschatology, authority, free will, pacifism, and the separation of church and state. I suggest that struggles between orthodox and heterodox religions are not specific to the European continent in the pre-modern era. We see the same peripheral radicalism today in Western pastoral Christianity and right-wing Fundamentalist Islam, in Hasidic Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism. And all too often, the dominant religion of a certain region alienates the outlying unorthodox faiths. Radicalism exists ultimately as an antithesis to mainstream religious practice. It seeks to check, challenge, and recast conventional orthodoxy.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................ iv
DEDICATION ...................................................................................... v
ABSTRACT ....................................................................................... vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................... viii

Introduction: .................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER I: The Cathars ................................................................. 15

CHAPTER II: The Anabaptists ......................................................... 45

CHAPTER III: The Quakers ............................................................. 83

CHAPTER IV: The Baptists .............................................................. 118

Conclusion: .................................................................................... 145

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................... 165
Introduction

In the early modern societies of Europe and England, it was crucial that all individual Christians be baptized. Baptism was a customary ritual that was administered by an ordained Church authority. The Roman Church for centuries conducted this rite on infants. During the sixteenth-century Reformation, however, pedobaptism was challenged with fervor, particularly by the Anabaptists and Mennonites who baptized only adults. The Cathars, a medieval heterodox religious movement, rejected baptism with water entirely because they believed that conducting the ritual this way had no Biblical precedent. They sharply differentiated the spiritual from the material. The Quakers too baptized differently because they attested to a sacred light within the self; theirs was a
baptism of the spirit. For each of these heterodox groups, baptism remained a transcendent phenomenon that ensured the candidate’s place in the church and among its community of believers. This ritual of passage caused a spiritual transformation that moved the individual from a profane to a sacred status. Although baptism did not ensure salvation, it was an integral moment in a life-long journey marked by steadfast faith and an obstinate commitment to doctrine, law, and leadership.

Each of the heterodox communities above was unique, though they shared a fundamental and radical rejection of the orthodoxy they faced. Radicals often showed great courage when confronted with more powerful opposition, such as the Roman and Magisterial Protestant authorities. In response to their frequent attacks on orthodox ideas and rituals, they were forced to the periphery of society, which led them to express themselves with only more passion. Literate, often itinerant, ministers shaped their communities through the cultural implementation of their own interpretations of Scripture. All of the groups presented in this study can also be distinguished by the diverse ways they looked to doctrine for inspiration and guidance.

The Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers, and English Baptists are the primary focus of this project, which studies of the theory, practice, doctrine, and significance of baptism among dissident movements spanning the High Middle Ages to the early modern era, approximately 1100 to 1700. Baptism constituted a definitive ritual—a rite of passage—and a religious symbol that distinguished one heterodox group from another, and all of them from orthodox establishments. I also explore the continuities and discontinuities—the similarities and differences—between dissident groups’ faith practices and theology
through a cross-cultural, comparative, and interdisciplinary study that links the social activities and historical contexts of radical communities to their respective baptismal practices.

I argue that these movements grew out of a critique of orthodoxy, which fundamentally shaped their unorthodox ideas. Baptism, either upheld or dismissed, was conceived by each religious thinker through a close scrutiny of Scripture, acute Biblical interpretation, and as a reaction to what they believed to be errors of the dominant orthodoxy. Radical groups, in turn, criticized constantly these institutions that continued to grow in wealth, power, and excess. Orthodox Churches thus fundamentally shaped heterodox critique.

Historiographical discussion of dissident faiths is best understood by considering the debates among contemporary scholars of medieval and early modern heterodox Christianity, including historians such as A.G. Dickens, George Huntston Williams, R.I. Moore, and Edward Peters. R.I. Moore argues that there were no real heterodox “movements.”¹ The Cathars never defined themselves and their exact beliefs until the Inquisition backed by Pope Innocent III surveyed and eventually wiped out all of their communities. To Moore, radicals were not connected even by indirect genealogy, but may rather be defined by their collective critique of orthodoxy. Peters likewise suggests that the Roman Church placed the Cathars in categories with the dissidents of Late

---

¹ R.I. Moore is a specialist in medieval heresy and the Roman Catholic Church: politics and society. He suggests that there were no real movements in the Middle Ages, and the dissident communities only defined and asserted their own beliefs when under attack. R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*, (New Jersey: Wiley, Blackwell, 2007), 1-22.
Antiquity. Indeed he argues that they were neglected as independent groups, and surely were not movements.²

George Huntston Williams, by contrast, asserts that critique and communication among dissidents, particularly those advocating change during the Reformation, shaped the formation of heterodox communities.³ The Reformation radicals held different views, but ought to be considered together as a single focused challenge to the Roman and Magisterial Churches. In contrast to Moore, Williams thus sees a connection between radicals over time—a genealogy of dissent.

A.G. Dickens and George Huntston Williams present the most viable explanation of how heterodox communities maintained very similar characteristics and critiques over such a long period of time. Dickens argues that dissent and critique was transmitted by passive genealogy from one group to another by way of text circulation, rarely by person-to-person contact, although in some instances this did occur.⁴ Reformation radicals were connected to their predecessors theologically. We witness this in similar interpretations of Scripture and in their passionate, often contentious, critiques of orthodoxy. This can be understood best by studying the connections from radicals of Late Antiquity to the

---

² Edward Peters follows Moore’s line of thought, particularly his assertion that medieval heretics lacked uniqueness and continuity. The Catholic Church lumped the radicals together in the same categories, often linking them to the dissidents of Late Antiquity. For more discussion of these ideas, see Edward Peters, *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Life*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 6-10.

³ Williams agrees with A.G. Dickens that radicals were linked by passive genealogy, also connected to one another through years of persecution. Communication was key, particularly with the emergence of religious radicals by the Continental Reformation, which is Williams’ area of expertise. For more description, refer to George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 1-22, 432-57.

⁴ Dickens claims that individual communication across centuries was unlikely, although he also suggests that links in transmission—books and religious tracts—were responsible to the dissemination of similar ideas over time. According to Dickens, Lollardy may have indeed shaped early Protestantism in England. Refer to A.G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1959), 1-21.
Cathars, and from Wycliffe Lollardy to the English Protestants and to shared ideas and baptismal practices of the Mennonites, Anabaptists, and English Baptists. This analysis will continue in greater detail below.

Current theory in religious studies provides another important perspective on the phenomenon of baptism and ritual. The study of ritual theory has a distinctive history of scholarship. Scholars of history and religious studies such as Mircea Eliade, Brian Spinks, Arnold Van Gennep, Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Bloch, and Susan Karant-Nunn have introduced works that explore not only the spiritual dimensions of baptism, but of the broader world-wide rites of initiation as well. These experts present baptism as a process of spiritual transformation that can occur through the guidance of a charismatic leader.

Brian D. Spinks states that the Reformation challenged the medieval baptismal rites and practices. Mircea Eliade defines the rite of baptism as one of initiation that can be understood as “a body of rites or oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated—the novice

5 These scholars are all discussing the function of baptism in early modern European communities. Brian Spinks suggests that baptism is a transformative process that marks the end of traditional rites. Mircea Eliade argues that baptism is a ritual that is initiative and thus creates status within the community. Pierre Bourdieu views ritual as a phenomenon that emerges from the social setting of the period: its historical context. Maurice Bloch posits that baptism shapes systems of power and popular conditioning. Finally, Susan Karant-Nunn recognizes the individuality of baptism. It is a ritual administered by a leader possessing charismatic authority. These scholars may differ in their approaches to ritual baptism and its many dimensions, but they do, however, agree that it was a fundamental part of Christian life in the Middle Ages, the early modern period, and today. Refer to Brian D. Spinks, Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practices (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Press, 2006), xii., Mircea Eliade, Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture, (New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), ix-1., Maurice Bloch, Ritual, History, and Power: Selected Papers in Anthology, (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 1-18., consider Susan Karant-Nunn, The Reformation of Ritual, An Interpretation of early modern Germany, (London: Routledge, 1997), 43-71.
experiences a basic change in existential condition . . . a totally different being from that which he possesses before his initiation.’’ Eliade asserts that there occurs a spiritual change as the individual is baptized. Among the Cathars, the status of the baptized initiate through baptism ushered the initiate into an elevated group of elites called the “Perfects.” The postulant chose a life governed only by the will of God.

Baptism affirmed each believer’s place in a cosmic realm, since it was through initiation that the believer joined a community of Saints. The Anabaptist ministry considered baptism as not only a process by which the believer was incorporated into the Christian community. It also meant a promise, a vow to follow in the footsteps of the Church Saints.

While Brian D. Spinks and Mircea Eliade offer insights into the transformative function of baptism, Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Bloch, Arnold Van Gennep, and Susan Karant-Nunn discuss the social and cultural dimensions of the rite. Pierre Bourdieu posits that “Every ritual must be located within the setting which generates it.” In other words, social and historical contexts as well as regional distinctions and particularities are of crucial importance to understanding the complexities of baptism. Maurice Bloch argues that ritual functions as a mechanism of power and social conditioning—a way that one

---

7 Pierre Bourdieu, as cited by Susan Karant-Nunn, refers to the profound importance of historical and regional context. The ritual cannot be understood even at its basic level without a general or particular knowledge of the environment and its culture. Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 3.
group exerts control over another group, usually through the influence of an intermediary leader possessing charismatic authority.⁸

Arnold Van Gennep maintains that “Founded religions are dependent on the unique authority of a charismatic leader, on the teachings or ideology that he or she professes, and on the personal conviction to that teaching or doctrine.”⁹ Academic descriptions of charismatic authority such as these reveal distinct similarities among heterodox communities. Leaders of the Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier, Michael Sattler, Felix Mantz, Dirk Phillips, Pilgram Marpeck, and Conrad Grebel, and Quaker ministers such as John Fox, William Penn, Isaac Pennington, and Robert Barklay were only a few of the many writers—articulate ministers and orators—who possessed the “charismatic authority” which Maurice Bloch, Susan Karant-Nunn, and Max Weber describe. Most of the lay Christians that the earliest founders sought to convert were illiterate and needed to be inspired through the oratory and enthusiastic guidance of articulate ministers and their closest followers. Max Weber was the first scholar, writing in the turn of the nineteenth-century, to discuss charismatic authority as a function of power in the earliest religious communities.

Below I will make connections between the concepts presented by these scholars and more specific characteristics of heterodox communities. These are understood best by

⁸ Max Weber in *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* first coined this term in the chapter “The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization. Charismatic authority is power made legitimate by the radical communities’ leader, the individual’s exceptional skills of oratory and rhetoric, and insight and accomplishment. It is arbitrary whether or not these attributes are fully realized, only that the followers “perceive” the authority figure’s legitimacy. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Theory of Capitalism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), vii-xxviii.

the categories and definitions above. The following is an analysis of how baptism functioned in a cultural context: the way it was shaped by Scripture, heterodox interaction, and particular historical moments.

The Cathars’ rite of baptism was practiced differently than how Catholics, Anabaptists, Quakers, and English Baptists conducted it. Elders did not baptize with water, but rather participated in a laying of hands. Known as the consolamentum, this ritual elevated the postulant to the level of Perfect. The Perfect inherited many responsibilities to their communities following this ritual, but if the status was attained, salvation was assured. The desired outcome of the ritual was thus not only to reach the status of Perfect, but also to become a leader within the Cathar culture.

For the Cathars, the consolamentum had a specific meaning, function, and significance. It gave lay individuals inspiration while also encouraging them to live pious and austere lives. Just as it elevated the postulant to Perfect, it also functioned in an incorporeal manner. The process of becoming a Perfect—the ritual itself—altered the status of the initiate from a profane to a sacred space. It subsequently elevated each postulant to a certain position through which they attained the trust and favor of the other Perfects and those individuals who longed to be ones as well.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Cathar Perfects—the community leadership—administered a ritual very different than orthodox and heterodox baptism. As did pedobaptism and adult baptism, the consolamentum was one of initiation that shifted the status of the postulant from an individual in the community, to one of leadership. It was a desire of all Cathar postulants to attain this status, and to become leaders of the communities themselves. And unlike the reticence of the Christian orthodox and heterodox religions, whose leadership conducted water baptism, this process assured salvation. Lambert discusses the consolamentum in detail in the following book: Malcolm Lambert, The Cathars, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 33, 45-7, 76-7, 141-58. Chapter two will provide a more detailed discussion of the Cathars, the ritual of consolamentum, and its effects.
Cathar Perfects believed that the use of water during ceremonies contradicted Scripture, although the Roman Church had for centuries used water to baptize infants. The Cathars’ rite of initiation was also collective and participatory, rather than centered only on the elder Perfects and the postulants. Everyone present took part in the laying of hands. This was the Cathars’ most fundamental challenge to the existing orthodoxy. Their leadership oversaw the laying of hands only with adults. Biblical interpretation governed the Cathars’ decisions about ritual practice, and surely their ways of living.

The Anabaptists, a movement arising during the Reformation, also practiced baptism in a way that radically challenged prevailing orthodoxy. To the Anabaptist theologians, baptism was a sign, not a sacrament. Their communities baptized only young, middle-aged, and elderly adults. Believer’s baptism was also a sign that linked the Anabaptist individuals to their communities. Anabaptist elders conducted the ritual only on adults because they wanted the initiate to commit to the pledge, covenant, and the new way of life—one of commitment, piety, and austerity. The Anabaptists believed that the Roman Catholics and the Magisterial Protestants were conducting baptism incorrectly. To the Anabaptist leadership, there was also no Biblical precedent for the baptism of infants. How could an infant or a child understand the choice they were making in one complex initiation ritual? Baptism was interpreted through an analysis of the New Testament: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Believer’s Baptism shaped the Anabaptists’ identity as a culture and set them apart from not only the Roman
Catholics, but also the Magisterial Protestants that were challenging Roman Canon at the same time.\textsuperscript{11}

This rite of passage had the following steps: the word, the hearing, baptism and works. This was an acknowledgment of their sins and an acceptance of baptism as initiates. The desired outcome was a transformation to a new state, not so dissimilar to the Cathars: a sacred space, as conceived by Michael Sattler, one of the earliest leaders of the faith. Alongside ministers such as Balthasar Hubmaier and Dirk Phillips, Sattler introduced three tenets that separated Anabaptists, or, as he would say, Christians, from their Roman adversaries: a church “dualism”, pastoral guidance, and similar to the Quakers, a rejection of oaths. The Anabaptist opposition to Roman and Magisterial orthodoxy was clear and concise, passionate and steadfast, and it grew out of the context of Reformation social unrest and theological innovation. The Anabaptists challenged orthodoxy with pride and commitment, often facing death for their devotion to the faith.

Sharing the Anabaptists’ contempt of orthodoxy, the Quakers also challenged the doctrines and laws of the Anglican Church, the orthodoxy of nineteenth-century Britain. The Quakers—The Society of Friends—conducted the rite of baptism in an entirely different way than their orthodox contemporaries. The Quakers dismissed the rite of water baptism for many reasons, all of which were also based on Biblical interpretation.

\textsuperscript{11}The Anabaptist ministers viewed adult baptism as the fundamental way to distinguish themselves from their heterodox and orthodox contemporaries. Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgrim Marpeck, Dirk Phillips, and Michael Sattler are only a few of the early Anabaptist religious thinkers that first recognized that pedobaptism was doctrinally incorrect. Thus they were passionate in the way they challenged and attacked both the Magisterial Protestant and Roman Catholic authorities. For more detail on the theological foundations of adult baptism, refer to Balthasar Hubmaier, \textit{vol. 5 Classics of the Radical Reformation} ed. Wayne Pipkin (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1989), 386-392. Also consider the following discussion of adult baptism and its foundations in the baptism of Jesus Christ: Dirk Phillips, \textit{The Writings of Dirk Phillips vol. 6 Classics of the Radical Reformation}, (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1992), 72-111.
Their leadership interpreted specific books of Bible to better understand baptism. The rite was symbolic not ritualistic: an incorporative spiritual process. The Society of Friends’ notion of an inner-light had five meanings: Christ’s death, conversion, a gift of a spirit, incorporation into the body of Christ, and a sign of the Kingdom. They considered the baptism of the spirit as a way that sins were expunged and broken. The initiate was freed, pardoned by Jesus. Unlike long-held ideas about the human condition, the Quakers believed in the goodness of humanity. Their followers could see the light by becoming “inner-witnesses.”

The Quakers’ belief in the goodness of man profoundly shaped their rituals. They were obstinate pacifists emphasizing justice, an austere existence, and honesty. The Society of Friends spoke the words “Thee” and “Thou” instead of “you” and their communities functioned as a universal ministry. Men and women were members of the congregation and participated in collective ceremonies together. Their entire congregations, including the women, were considered ministers of the faith.

The Quaker religion emerged out of the social unrest of England’s Civil War, accompanied by an explosion of other radical sects. Quaker elites busied themselves with pamphleteering and book writing in order to attract new members to their congregations. However, their assertiveness brought them under the scrutiny of the Anglican Church. Of all the sects that appeared during the post-Civil War period, the Quakers were the most

---

12 The “inner-witness” refers to the Quakers’ notion of a “light of God.” This was a metaphor for Christ’s light shining on them or within them. This concept was also derived from the idea of a “Holy Spirit.” More discussion of The Society of Friends follows in chapter three. Their opposition to water baptism, its significances, and its foundations in Scripture will also be analyzed in chapter three.
persecuted, often rounded up by authorities, arrested, beaten, and occasionally, put to
death.

As did the Anabaptists, the English Baptists set themselves apart by baptizing
adults. Consequently, they found themselves subject to orthodox surveillance and
capture. The most predominant leaders of the English Baptists were John Smyth and
Thomas Helwys. These two men began first criticizing Anglican orthodoxy during the
reign of James I. Smyth was the forefather of the Baptist religion in England. He broke
off from the Anglican Church in the early seventeenth-century, but kept the ideas of his
Puritan contemporaries. He was a prolific writer of pamphlets and books, which
eventually led to the creation of the first sect of Baptists called the General Baptists.13

The first English Baptists ought to be understood as an outgrowth of the Puritans,
Anabaptists, and Mennonites, although the Puritans were not the primary source of
inspiration. Smyth observed the Dutch Mennonites and recognized that they also baptized
Because the Apostles and Jesus did not baptize infants, their own communities ought not
as well. Ministers who conducted the ritual held that infants could not recognize or
understand the covenant they were intended to accept nor the particular responsibilities
that membership would entail.

Three main beliefs guided Baptist ministers as they shaped the rituals that would
initiate their congregations. (1) The meaning of baptism suggested a close relationship
between the community and God. (2) It recognized the initiate’s faith in Christ. (3) The

13 For details on the General Baptists and the following paragraph, refer to Chapter four.
water cleansed and wiped away sins. The ministers wanted their believers to be sure about their decision. English Baptists baptized both men and women, as did the Cathars, Quakers, and the Roman Catholics. The Baptist ministers baptized by immersion. Initiates were held completely under water—submerged—and after a few seconds were brought back up. This process of immersion was intended to anoint the individual. The candidate stood firm and was instructed to say that he or she accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. As indicated here, there were many similarities between the Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers, and English Baptists, though there were also distinctions, differences that will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

This dissertation explores baptism in a way that ought to raise questions about other aspects of heterodox life: critique, invention, pacifism, courage, and persecution. Various topics and questions guided my research and have subsequently created a specific framework for each chapter. First and foremost, I will consider in more detail the place and function of baptism among these four groups. How did the way that this ritual was conducted—collective participation—either separate or connect radical communities to their heterodox or orthodox contemporaries? What kind of opposition did each group face? How were they persecuted and why? Finally, what doctrines did elder leadership advocate that brought the communities under such close scrutiny from orthodox adversaries?

Balancing each chapter’s initial narrative with further analysis, this dissertation will also explore the surrounding historical environment of each group. In the beginning of each chapter, I will provide a brief history of each movement in historical context.
within a broad era of approximately 600 years; for example, the Cathars’ challenges to orthodoxy began in the twelfth-century whereas activities among the English Baptists reached the shores of the Americas by the end of the seventeenth-century. I will then describe the intellectual forces and the inspirational leaders that gave rise to these late medieval and early modern European radical movements. My goal in this study is to place emphasis on the process of baptism and its particular complexities.

The conclusion will tie together the main themes of this dissertation. It will contain a discussion of the current historians in the field, scholars who are examining orthodox-heterodox political tensions. It will end by connecting themes from these eras to similar conflicts in world religions today, drawing similar parallels to contemporary religious Radicalism.
I. The Cathars

The Cathars were a heterodox dualist religious movement that emerged in high medieval Europe. Their earliest leadership can be traced back to 1143 in Cologne. By the thirteenth-century, as their numbers increased, the Cathars populated southeastern France and northern Italy: regions such as Languedoc and Florence. Cathar doctrine, theology, and ritual practice were very different from those of the established Church. They rejected the most fundamental doctrines of the Roman Church clergy: the Sacraments, virgin birth, and bodily resurrection. Like their predecessors, such as the Manicheans, the Cathars believed in dualism, an idea that the “spiritual” and “material” worlds were diametrically opposed to each other. To the Cathars, one was good and the other was evil. In response to what it believed to be the Cathars’ errors in doctrine—divergences from
orthodox principles—the Roman Catholic Church began to survey closely their communities and rituals through the emerging instrument of the Papal Inquisition. The resulting accounts, which have survived eight hundred years, reveal an autonomous culture with distinct social, political, and religious characteristics. The Cathars ultimately became the most significant challenge to orthodoxy throughout all of the Middle Ages.

The primary goal of this chapter is to take a close look at how the Cathars conducted baptism and to contrast this rite to Orthodox Catholic baptism as it was practiced in the High Middle Ages. Cathar elders, or the “perfect,” administered a rite called the consolamentum. This ritual involved a series of doctrinally based dialogues, a symbolic repetition of the Lord’s Prayer, and precise devotions spoken by the perfect conducting the ritual to the postulant, the person receiving grace. The consolamentum was a process that elevated the postulant to the status of perfect. It created a new status that, alongside a life of piety and austerity, led ultimately to the individual’s salvation. Historians of the Middle Ages refer to Cathar clergy to those persons inducted with different terms such as “elder,” “parfait,” “perfectus” or “initiate.” Throughout this chapter, for the purpose of continuity, I chose to use the terms perfect and postulant.14

This cross-cultural, comparative chapter is ordered as follows: First, I will present a brief narrative of Cathar history, looking specifically at who they were, what their

---

primary ideas and doctrines were, and how their relations to orthodoxy changed over time. A discussion of recent historiography, emphasizing topics of baptism, community relationships, and longevity, will follow the historical narrative below. Subsequently, I will illustrate the process of baptism for both groups and then compare water baptism and consolamentum. Finally, I will present in detail the ritual of consolamentum and its surrounding social and cultural exchanges that animated the rank and file Cathars. I am also interested in the relationships to neighboring orthodox groups, the characteristics of their societies, and their complex interpretations of scripture.

The specific goal of this chapter is to explore the many differences between the Cathar ritual of consolamentum and the rite of orthodox baptism by scrutinizing these two fundamentally different processes. For example, I will investigate (1) how the consolamentum in fact critiqued the official Church by rethinking baptism (2) who was baptized, when, and what the effects were? (3) How the consolamentum affected relationships inside the faith community. These are only a few of the varied questions that have prompted this chapter’s research and writing.

Cathar theology was complex. The Cathars’ ideas about Christ, Mary, and the material world were radically different from those of Roman Church orthodoxy at that time. The theological “basis of Catharism was a non-Christian dualism deriving ultimately from Gnosticism.”15 The Cathars verbally attacked those who believed that God was responsible for the creation of the world. To the Cathars, only evil could be responsible for material creation. This dichotomy “posited two principles: one good,

15 Lindsay Jones, Encyclopedia of Religion: The Cathars (Detroit: Macmillan Press, 2005), 1456. The following brief narrative of Cathar history is excerpted from this encyclopedia for a precise summary.
governing all that was spiritual, the other, evil responsible for the material world, including man’s body.”\textsuperscript{16} Orthodoxy was challenged and rejected, and not only in complex speculation: rituals and common law were also a source of discord. The Cathars denied the Sacraments, because they believed they were “founded upon the claim that Christ really had lived on Earth, had been crucified, and then resurrected, events clearly impossible, since God could not have taken form in any way.”\textsuperscript{17}

The consolamentum was central to the Cathar faith. It determined who was a perfect and thus who would attain salvation. It was a rite enacted by a “laying of hands.” When it was administered “the \textit{consolamentum} remitted the consoled sins and the consequences of the soul’s imprisonment in a body, reuniting his soul with his spirit in heaven and releasing him from Satan’s rule.”\textsuperscript{18} This process was similar to that of the Gnostics, who also believed that salvation would come through an initiatory rite. Rising to the status of a perfect required this rite, the Cathar antithesis to baptism. The only way to release the souls of the Cathar followers was through this ritual—a return to their “guardian spirits in heaven.”\textsuperscript{19} The consolamentum was one key ritual that separated their communities from the Roman Catholic Church. The following discussion provides a brief history of the Cathars, how they emerged, the many difficulties they endured, and their final years in the latter half of the thirteenth century.

\textsuperscript{16} Jones, 1456.
\textsuperscript{17} Barber, 2.
\textsuperscript{18} Jones, 1457.
\textsuperscript{19} Barber, 1.
The Cathars lived in regions including Lombardy, Champagne, the Rhine Valley, and the “mountains, hills, and rivers of western Languedoc.” The intellectual beginnings of the Cathar church are not certain. Some say that the dualist Bogomil Church, which emerged in the 930s, was influential. Other historians disagree with this position. There is consensus, however, that the Cathars were influenced in particular by the cities Thrace and Constantinople. Scholars also agree that “Catharism cannot be traced back to any individual or group. Moreover, its dualist philosophy was probably not derived or spread from any one particular strain.” The exact time that they emerged in Western Europe is also debated, but the year and place most agreed upon is Cologne around 1143.

The Cathars consolidated their numbers by 1160 in both northern Italy and southern France. They maintained a firm presence in both regions until in 1176: “a great council of Cathari is reported to have been held at Saint-Felix-de-Caraman where, in addition to the already existing Cathar bishopric at Albi, three more bishoprics were established for Cathar territories.” The Cathar presence in Albi, a region in the south of France, prompted their contemporaries to call them Albigensians or Albigenses. Over the next century, the Cathars settled in northern Italy and in Languedoc.

Over time, the Cathars emerged as one of the most visible, largest, and best organized challenges to Church orthodoxy. Not unlike the Evangelical Protestants, who would emerge much later, the Cathars were highly critical of the established Church,

20 Barber, 2.
21 Barber, 1.
22 Jones, 1458.
which they viewed as entirely corrupt. They believed that the popes and the papal hierarchy were interested only in money and power. The Cathar presence prompted an assertive internal reform of the Orthodox Church. Their consistent challenges to existing Canon Law led to a Church response that “enact[ed] new dogmatic definitions, extended defenses of orthodoxy and [forced a] serious attempt to raise standards of preaching, increasing its incidence and providing a better instructed laity armed against unorthodoxy.”23 The Orthodox Church and the Inquisition began targeting the Cathars around 1170. They subsequently fell under the close eye of the Roman Church and its leadership. In a short time, their communities “unleashed a crisis in the medieval Church. . . . Pope Innocent III backed an organized investigation of repression and surveillance, which ultimately ‘provided a novel and grimly effective machinery to investigate, judge, and repress heresy.’”24

A significant campaign of violence, organized by inquisitors converged in the years after 1170. The papacy “sent a succession of preaching missions, including Waldensians, Cistercians, and the founder of the Dominican order, Dominic”25 to Cathar regions. Henry, Alexander III’s cardinal legate in 1181, led a campaign to overthrow a castle at Lauvaux that was found to be protecting religious heretics. Subsequently, Pope Innocent III “intensified the pressure, using both sanctions and persuasion.”26 and in 1208 “launched a crusade that would change the heretical presence in the south of France

21 Lambert, 2
24 Lambert, 1.
25 Jones, 1458.
26 Jones, 1458.
forever. The lands of the count of Toulouse were overrun.”

The Cathars did survive Innocent’s aggressive campaign, but survived only in significantly less numbers. It was not “until 1243 that [the Cathars] were effectively destroyed as an organized church with the capture of over 200 perfects at Montegur.”

The Cathars were able to hold out this long because of the assistance they received from the urban strata of French society.

The Cathar experience in Italy was a much different story. They did not maintain the numbers they did in France. By 1160 the Cathars in Italy were protected only “by the opposition of the cities to both imperial and papal authority.” By 1243 the attacks of the Albigensian Crusade sent the Cathars out of the region; their presence as a dissident church was ultimately in decline. Their “strength had lain in the widespread support they had received from artisans and members of the professions. For a time before the Albigensian crusade they had overshadowed the Roman Catholic Church in southern France.” It was by the end of the thirteenth century “after the ending of the wars between the popes and Frederick II, the German emperor, that the way was cleared for papal action against the Cathari.” The convictions and executions by the Inquisition in Italy and Languedoc wiped out the Cathars completely.

Writers on medieval heresy ask key questions about the Cathars and their relationships to the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church. For example, why did doctrinal allegiance matter so much to the Cathar perfect? How were the Cathars entangled theologically with orthodox Latin Christendom? What pressures or

---

27 Jones, 1458.
28 Jones, 1458.
29 Jones, 1458.
30 Lambert, 1.
31 Jones, 1458.
developments helped motivate the Cathars’ critique of orthodox ways? Perhaps the most challenging issue that eludes scholars of medieval heresy is which social, political, and economic forces led to conversion. This is to say, why was Catharism so attractive to so many people? Marxist historians, medieval scholars such as Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, and more recently, prominent scholars of the Middle Ages such as Malcolm Lambert and Malcolm Barber all weigh in on these particularly challenging questions with assumptions of their own. This historiography will explore the ways these historians present and respond to such questions—how ultimately they are similar and different.

The Marxist school looked at the political and economic problems of thirteenth century Catharism from an entirely materialist perspective. It focused on class tension to explain the attraction of what they believed to be only the poor to such a radical faith. Lutz Kaelber, for example, compares early twentieth-century Marxist thought with the ideas of historians who followed, Wakefield and Evans, who have created a notable collection of medieval primary sources in the 1960s. According to the Marxists, a rigidly hierarchical society turned the poor against the Church. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels argued that “For peasants and other oppressed groups, religious heresy became the vehicle of this protest, as the dominant Catholic Church sided with the ruling classes and provided the legitimizing ideology for the feudal mode of production.”32 The Marxist historians argue for a simple connection between individual communities attracted to heresy and a peripheral culture forced into economic servitude. Thus Marxist historians

---

such as Koch, Erbstosser, and Werner argue that Catharism emerged as a result of “profound demographic, economic, and social change in western Europe around the twelfth century.” The original Marxist model of wealth inequality was not specific enough, however, according to a recent analysis by Kaelber, a historical transition, social differentiation, “modernization,” and a shifting urban demographic, turned people committed to the Roman Church to Catharism. Urbanization and commercialization led to a shift in the hierarchical character of medieval life.

Wakefield and Evans both argue that additional issues motivated European commoners to convert to Catharism. They suggest that “Catharism was ever present in these parts of the Mediterranean world at the time, but its adherents were vastly outnumbered by those who, because of the increasing social differentiation, popular pressure, and frequent recurrence of famines, diseases, and other misfortunes, had every reason to be economically and socially discontented.” According to Wakefield and Evans, the Cathar perfect were able to interest and eventually convert from orthodoxy individuals from many political and economic levels of society. Wakefield and Evans clearly disagree with the Marxists, who posited that the Cathars existed only within the “proletarian” segments of medieval society. Indeed Wakefield and Evans assert that the Cathars eventually merged into the urban middle class and ultimately the ranks of the elites.

Malcolm Barber, a historian of Medieval Europe, argues that anti-clericalism played a particular role in the attraction of people to Catharism, since Cathars vehemently

---

33 Kaelber, 112.
34 Kaelber, 113.
opposed the institutional Church. Barber suggests that “Catharism represented total opposition to the Catholic Church, which was viewed by the Cathars as a false and fraudulent organisation which had prostituted itself for power and ill-gotten wealth.”

The allure of the Cathars' independence and the movement’s seemingly virtuous elites brought many individuals into its fold. “To [Barber] ‘the [Catholics’] underlying poison’ was obvious, but for many believers what he calls the ‘simulated virtue’ of the Cathars seemed completely genuine. When the moral probity of the perfecti was presented within a familiar context it is not difficult to understand the attraction to contemporaries.”

Although profoundly heterodox in its core doctrines, Catharism remained tied up with orthodox thought. Many long held Catholic traditions still remained. Barber asserts that “Institutions such as the dioceses, patterns of the year in determining periods of fasting, and the cult of relics and prayers for the dead reflected in the memorial of martyrs and the use of their own cemeteries, all provided the comfort and recognition.”

Notions of an afterlife were also not entirely uncommon. According to Barber, “The way Catholic and Cathar worlds overlapped was often quite considerable.” One might expect, for example, that “The Cathars would be uninterested in what happened to their earthly bodies after death, yet their use both of Catholic cemeteries and their own burial grounds contradicts this. . . .” The Cathars also used the Bible—The New Testament—as a way to criticize the papacy. Barber suggests that “The Cathar stress on the Gospels in their preaching offered . . . a yardstick by which the behavior of Catholic priests could be

35 Barber, 1.
36 Barber, 1.
37 Barber, 104.
38 Barber, 104.
39 Barber, 104.
measured, and in that sense did not invariably appear very different from reformist preachers within the Roman Church itself. Reinforced with coloured myths explaining the creation of the world, it is not difficult to see the relevance of Cathar evangelism to the daily lives of many contemporaries.\textsuperscript{40}

Malcolm Lambert also weighs in on many of Barber’s topics and assumptions. For instance, who exactly were the Cathars? What was the character of their faith? How and in what context did they emerge and what were their roots? Lambert argues that the Cathars were a movement born from the ideas of Bogomil, a 10\textsuperscript{th} century Bulgarian priest who “had inherited and made it acceptable to the highest circles in the Imperial capital, where a vogue had developed for dabbling in arcane learning.”\textsuperscript{41} According to Lambert, the Cathar faith was essentially an “ideology, with a body of belief and practice, potentially supra-national, impersonal, exceeding in durability the individual, idiosyncratic teachings of this or that charismatic personality, which had hitherto formed the stuff of the heretical episodes recorded by Western chroniclers.”\textsuperscript{42} The Cathars' charismatic leaders were indeed very appealing to the people of various European regions, making a departure from centuries of orthodoxy for those of the newly found dissident faith. Lambert also suggests that the Cathars were driven by a disdain for the papacy and the clerical hierarchy. They existed as a “direct, headlong challenge to the Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Barber, 105.
\textsuperscript{41} Lambert, 25.
\textsuperscript{42} Lambert, 21.
\textsuperscript{43} Lambert, 21.
Catharism, we may conclude, was a fringe society that emerged in a tumultuous era of social and institutional change—a group of many communities born in a period of significant upheaval. The faith appealed to followers because of its simple asceticism. Lambert indicates that it was “little wonder that Catharism, born of the moral ferment of the twelfth century in the aftermath of Gregorian reform, in an age of much anticlericalism and disappointed expectations, given the capabilities of its leadership and the nature of its appeal in a world which have weight to asceticism, soon began to forge ahead of other more transient heresies.”

Lambert identifies the appeal of Cathar life, apart from the general institutional and economic definitions of his contemporaries. He argues that the success of the heresy rested on the “efficacy” and the “comfort” provided by the consolamentum ritual, the interest in an alternate theory of baptism, a denial of property, and an admiration for the enlightened guidance of its leadership. For example, as did the Waldensians and later the Anabaptists, the Cathars “claimed no property.” They celebrated a “baptism of the spirit,” rather than a baptism by fire; the Catholics’ ritual was one with water. According to Lambert, “The perfect or theotokoi simply and effectively stepped into the place occupied in both systems by the saints.” Moreover, “The belief that the Holy Spirit was to be found in the [Cathar] elite explains the respect [over time] that the rank in file had for the interpretations of Christianity—the creation, the fall, and the mission of Christ.”

44 Lambert, 23.
45 Lambert, 22.
46 Lambert, 30.
47 Lambert, 30.
Lambert argues that the genuine affinity for the heterodox religion sustained it for many generations. Eventually, Catharism reached the upper echelons of society. The Cathars maintained themselves among families of wealth and status. They “attend[ed] mass and conform[ed] to Catholicism while making secret contacts with the persecuted faith.”\(^{48}\) Those who remained after the first waves of persecution were ultimately guided by the perfect, who were still able to exist apart from the watchful eyes of the Papal Inquisition. Lambert suggests that sheer numbers maintained the leadership for a long time. They did not view themselves as a heresy: “The Cathars were sincere in believing they were the bearers of an authentic apostolic tradition.”\(^{49}\) They were their own religion that existed for 250 years alongside a much more powerful one: the Roman Catholic Church.

The rite of baptism was a ritual that the Catholics carried out; the consolamentum defined and shaped the lives of the Cathars in distinctive ways and had different meanings. The discussion below compares the Catholic rite of baptism, which was administered with water, with the Cathar consolamentum, that was performed by a shorter ritual process and a laying of hands. I ask how these opposing rites were distinctive from one another. For example, who was baptized and when? How did baptism affect relationships inside the faith community? Finally, what life-long responsibilities did the initiates take on, or what was expected of them by the community elders? These questions are analyzed below.

Canon Law ruled that baptism would take place following a child’s birth or soon afterwards. This practice is called pedobaptism. Canon Law also stated that baptism

\(^{48}\) Lambert, 229.
\(^{49}\) Lambert, 314.
ought to be administered to a child by a “washing of true water with the proper form of words”\footnote{“Code of Canon Law: Title I: Baptism” (Cann. 849 – 1878) American Canon Law Society of America, last modified November 4, 2003, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P2V.HTM.} [Canon: 849]. The Catholics carried out ceremonies with blessed water, as Catholic priests (or in some instances deacons) poured or immersed the child.\footnote{“Code of Canon Law.”} [Canon: 854]. Infants were baptized as a “rite of initiation.” Parents were obligated to pass on their knowledge to their children. The Cathars, in contrast, baptized through the consolamentum, which was quite different. This process brought the postulant to the status of perfect. The consolamentum differed from the Catholic form of baptism because the minister did not use water. Instead, the ritual involved a laying of hands on the perfect, and ultimately, the congregation participated as well.

Baptism had a profound effect on the Church and the initiate. According to Catholic Canon Law, baptism had to be carried out for the believer to attain in the end, heaven. Furthermore, it had to be willingly received, either by the baptisee or by god parents in an infant’s name. The consolamentum process fulfilled a similar end. It ushered the postulant into the ranks of the perfect, who were ultimately responsible for setting a high moral example for the willing community of Cathars. As in Roman baptism, the consolamentum saved the perfect.

Normally Catholic deacons, bishops, or priests carried out baptism; if a non-minister was assigned to this function, the adult had to be “instructed properly on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it . . . Catholics would allow the baptism of adults if they had ‘attained the use of reason’”\footnote{“Code of Canon Law.”} [Canon: 852,1]. The rite
was usually performed on a Sunday. The Church encouraged baptism to be celebrated soon after birth. Indeed, this issue later became a distinction between Catholic and Anabaptist doctrine. Anabaptists did not allow the parents to take on the child’s recognition, as the Catholics did. The Anabaptists baptized young, middle aged, and elderly adults. In order for the Catholics to administer baptism to an adult, however, the recipient must have understood and willingly accepted the covenant competently. This was true as well for the Anabaptists.

The Cathar consolamentum was very different. Only those individuals worthy of achieving the status of perfect, and all of the difficult responsibilities this entailed, would receive the rite and transcend to perfect status. This decision had to be made strictly and independently. The postulants could only be baptized when he or she was “approved by other perfect and have shown fitness to undertake life by a year’s probation, in which he [or she] fulfilled the fasts of the perfect on every Monday, Wednesday and Friday as well as during these three penitential seasons . . . ”\textsuperscript{53} The Cathar rite could also be administered to the sick and the near-dead; it could never apply to an infant.

The Roman Church preferred that baptism take place in a church or oratory—usually in the adult’s own parish [857: 2].\textsuperscript{54} Performing baptism in the homes of the guardians or in hospitals was discouraged [860: 1].\textsuperscript{55} These rules could be reconsidered by the advice of a nearby bishop. Cathars, in contrast, carried out the consolamentum in

\textsuperscript{54} “Code of Canon Law.”
\textsuperscript{55} “Code of Canon Law.”
secretive houses in order to elude Roman authorities—to protect the ordinary believers and the perfect.

The effects—the consequences—of the rites of baptism and consolamentum were not in all ways distinct. The Catholic baptismal ceremony brought about a change in the physical state of the believer. Baptism freed initiates from sin as they were “reborn as children of God”56 [Can: 849]. The effects of the consolamentum were also profound. The believer was cleansed and prepared for a difficult life of asceticism. The consolamentum brought the postulant into the status of the perfect, and from then on, he or she would serve as a guiding figure for the rank and file men and women. Men and women shared status within the Cathar communities. Only the perfect who had passed the ritual of the consolamentum were ultimately saved. The individual immediately gained particularly difficult expectations from his or her peers—a very difficult life of piety and moral instruction.

Roman Canon Law preferred baptism to be administered by a priest, deacon, presbyter, or bishop. If a minister was not available at the time of baptism, however, “a local ordinary, or in a case of necessity, any person with the right intention, confers baptism licitly”57 [Canon 861: 2]. Adults were to be baptized by a diocesan bishop. Among the Cathars, only the elite perfect could conduct the consolamentum; strict ministers were elected to perform this rite.

For those committed to orthodoxy, baptism could not be repeated. Bishops did not allow the repetition of baptism, even in the instance of a most ardent request of the

---

56 “Code of Canon Law.”  
57 “Code of Canon Law.”
parent. According to Church authorities, “Since the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and orders imprint on a character, they cannot be repeated” [845:1].

According to the Orthodox Church, an adult who was on their deathbed could be baptized as long as they recognized the core doctrines and “promis[ed] to observe the commandments of the Christian religion” [865:2]. A sickly infant, one considered close to death, was to be baptized as soon as possible. An “infant of Catholic parents or even non-Catholic parents is baptized licitly in danger even against the will of the parents” [Canon 868: 2]. To the Cathars, there was only one instance when the consolamentum could be repeated: to the sick who were surely soon to die. Consequently, a much shorter ceremony would occur. If there “was recovery the Provencal ritual required another administration of the consolamentum.” Consolamentum rituals were often performed on the elderly and the sick in these certain circumstances.

A more detailed analysis of the Catholic Church’s rite of pedobaptism is as follows. Baptism most often took place on Sunday. The process of the rite began with The Reception of the Child. The parents or godparents of the child were responsible for presenting the child to the Church in company of family and friends. A “celebrating priest accompanied by ministers, goes to the entrance of the church or to that part of the church where the parents and godparents are waiting.” The celebrant, or priest, asks the parents, “What name do you give your child? What do you ask of God’s Church?” He

58 “Code of Canon Law.”
59 “Code of Canon Law.”
60 “Code of Canon Law.”
61 Lambert, Medieval Heresy, 121.
asks then in a similar manner: “You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of faith . . .”

The “Scriptural Readings and Homily” follows the introductory testaments of faith: John 3:1-6: *The Meeting with Nicodemus*; Matthew 28: 18-20: *The Apostles Are Sent to preach the Gospel and to Baptize*.; Mark 10:9-11: *The Baptism of Jesus*.; Mark 10: 13-16: *Let the Children Come to Me*. After the homily “it is desirable to have a period of silence while all pray at the invitation of the celebrant. If convenient, a suitable song follows.”

The saints are recognized and glorified and a question-and-answer period begins. Next the first anointing occurs. The celebrant “lays his hand on the child in silence.” The celebrant speaks to the baptized and to the community: He explains that God gives water, as divine life, to those who believe in him. The priest continues: “Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism we use your gift of water which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament.” The celebrant sprinkles water on the child for the first time. What follows next is the “Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith.” The celebrant asks the following of the parents and godparents:

Celebrant: Do you reject Satan?

Parents: I do.

Celebrant: And all his works?

---

63 “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library.”
64 “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library.”
65 “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library.”
66 “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library.”
Parents: I do.

Celebrant: Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God’s children?

Parents: I do.

Celebrant: Do you reject the glamor of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?

Parents: I do.

Celebrant: Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?

Parents: I do.

Celebrant: Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

Parents: I do.\(^67\)

The formal baptism begins.

The celebrant baptizes the child.

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, The celebrant immerses or pours water on the child. And of the Son, He immerses the child or pours water upon it a second time, and the Holy Spirit.”\(^68\) The celebrant does this another time and during the water baptism the community sings a short song. The child is taken to arms by the mother or the father.

Three processes occur before the saying of the Lord’s Prayer: the “Lighted Candle,” the “Ephphetha or Prayer over Ears and Mouth,” and the Conclusion of the rite. Facing the congregation, the celebrant says the Lord’s Prayer. All join him:

---

\(^67\) “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library”

\(^68\) “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library”
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name: thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

As the child is blessed and subsequently brought forward to alter, a hymn to express Easter joy (baptisms are often given on Easter) is sung by the congregation: the song of the “Blessed Virgin Mary, the Magnificat.”

The Catholic rite of baptism and how it is administered is entirely different from the Cathar consolamentum. However, a similar end is intended for the initiate and the postulant. The Cathar ritual is shorter and more concise. The following is a discussion of the sequence of the consolamentum ritual as a baptism of the spirit. The consolamentum ritual functioned as a dialogue between the perfect and the postulant. The participants spoke in French and most of the phrases were repeated three times. The perfect would say to the postulant, “Bless us; have mercy upon us. Amen. Let it be done unto us according to Thy word. May the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit forgive all your sins.”

The Lord’s Prayer was an integral part of the service. After reciting the Lord’s Prayer, John 1:1-17, was read. After having read this passage, an invocation to God for a “pardon and penance for all our sins” followed. The perfect explained to the postulant “the significance of what he was about to do.” Next the perfect repeated in detail—line by line—the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer: “At the end of the ministration the postulant is enjoined, in the Latin: ‘Now, you must understand if you would receive the prayer, that it

---

69 “Reception of the Child: The Catholic Liturgical Library”
70 Barber, 77.
71 Barber, 77.
is needful for you to repent all your sins and to forgive all men, for in the Gospel Christ says, ‘But if you will not forgive men their sins, neither will your father forgive your offenses Matthew 6:15.’”\(^7^2\)

In the second half of the ceremony, the ritual transformed the status of the perfect from the “profane” to the “sacred.” The perfect spoke aloud: “Peter [or the given name of the postulant], you wish to receive the spiritual baptism by which the Holy Spirit is given in the Church of God, together with the Holy Prayer and the imposition of hands of God.”\(^7^3\) The perfect said to the postulant that the baptism—the laying of hands had been instituted by Christ. The postulant at this point was told with certainty to “keep the commandments of Christ ‘to the utmost of [his] ability,’ not to commit adultery, kill, or lie, nor swear an oath or steal.”\(^7^4\) He must “hate this world and its works and the things which are of this world.”\(^7^5\) This was the moment in the when the change of state occurred. The perfect placed the Bible on the postulant’s head, and the surrounding perfects placed their right hands on him, performing a laying of hands. This was the final phase of the consolamentum as a service of collective participation. The perfects all forgave the postulant, pardoned him, and offered up an embrace on his cheek, as did the women in the service who kissed each other and the Bible. The postulant at this moment took on the status of a perfect. As “His changed status [was] now established, the new

\(^{72}\) Barber, 78.
\(^{73}\) Barber, 78.
\(^{74}\) Barber, 78.
\(^{75}\) Barber, 78.
perfectus [then] listened to the elder’s exposition of the rules of conduct in the varied situations in which he might find himself.”

The “imposition of hands” was thus a crucial part of the consolamentum that occurred towards the end of the ritual. All believers had to be present at the ritual unless the rite was administered on an individual’s deathbed or to one who had experienced a serious injury. The Cathar perfects believed that the laying of hands on the head or shoulder had to be physical, or the ritual would be useless. The imposition of hands began as follows: The postulant first said “bless, bless, bless [us]. Good Christians, pray that God will lead me to a good end and keep me from an evil death.”

Next the postulate asked the perfect if he would be good to him as God was to the perfect as well. This was said three times. The perfect would reply positively and in the same manner. The consolamentum “remained the key ceremony of the Cathar Church in the West between at least the 1140s and the 1320s, for by this means it maintained the continuity of the episcopal ‘ordo’, continually replenished the elect of perfecti, and provided the means by which dying believers could gain the salvation which had been promised.”

The consolamentum was not intended for the entire community, but rather ushered the postulant into the perfect elite. Moreover, the Cathars viewed themselves as the true successors of the Apostles. “If a perfect committed a mortal sin, all those whom he had laid hands on in the past had been misled and [would] ‘perish if they die[d] in that state.”

---

76 Barber, 78.
77 Wakefield and Evans, 365.
78 Barber, 79.
79 Barber, 81.
The Cathar doctrine of initiation was much different from that of the prevailing orthodoxy. The Cathars emphasized the distinction between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. In the Cathar interpretation of scripture, Jesus baptized with fire and John baptized with water. This is crucial to understanding why the Cathars denied water baptism. It was based on the “key text for Cathars, the words of John the Baptist, ‘I baptize you with water but he that shall come after me is mightier than I . . . HE shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire’, and of Jesus as cited by Luke in Acts, ‘For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.’”\textsuperscript{80} To the Cathar leadership, the Orthodox Church erred significantly by insisting on water baptism. The Cathars believed that they belonged to the “true” Christians because they followed the actions of Jesus who baptized with the spirit. The postulant “was entering into the tradition of the Apostles and following the apostolic way of life.”\textsuperscript{81} Therefore, the Cathars rejected water baptism, participated in the laying of hands, and urged their followers not to join the Catholic Church. According to Lambert, the Cathars’ way of life, and their denial of “stealing, killing or lying, blessing persecutors, made them truly orthodox.” \textsuperscript{82} This ostensible piety has been celebrated as a kind of cultural mythology even today among the people who live in Languedoc, France.

The Cathars who endured the consolamentum shared lives characterized by friendship, cooperation, piety, and austerity, but after the collapse of public Catharism in Languedoc, they also remained cautious as they attempted to avoid confrontation with the

\textsuperscript{80} Lambert, 76.  
\textsuperscript{81} Lambert, 76.  
\textsuperscript{82} Lambert, 76.
inquisitors. Their fear of the authorities was not so dissimilar from the concerns of future radicals, such as the radical dissenters of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras: the Anabaptists, Mennonites, Amish, and Lollards. The “perfect, except in time of persecution, seem never to have been withdrawn from society. If he held office he was continually on the move, preaching, administering the consolamentum, encouraging his fellow perfects.”

The perfects had to move to and from safe houses in a clandestine way to avoid the Inquisition while simultaneously maintaining the leadership of the Cathar communities.

The Cathars engaged in other rituals in addition to the consolamentum such as *The Pater Noster*. This rite played a role in the Catholic and Protestant communions. The Cathars broke bread in a ceremony where the senior perfect repeated the Pater Noster. It is described as “an allegory recalling the super substantial bread of the Cathar version of the Pater Noster or as an imitation of the Catholic eulogia, a distribution of blessed bread, the act served to bring perfect and adherents together.”

The postulant would only listen attentively as the perfect spoke the Pater Noster. This was a way of separating in status the postulant from the perfect. The individual Cathars who had not yet received the consolamentum were strictly forbidden to speak during any ceremony. It was ruled by the elder perfects that non-perfects would not recite anything, because they were “still under the power of Satan” and “the perfect alone could pray for them, interceding for their salvation, a high responsibility giving additional purpose to their existence and providing

---

83 Lambert, 118.
84 Lambert, 119.
an unceasing occupation, which may well have been underestimated by historians." In this sense, the consolamentum was not only a rite of initiation; it also served the function as an ordination of the spiritual elite.

The consolamentum was not the only ritual or social exchange that the Cathars believed to be very important. Other rituals functioned as a cultural language which bound and defined, though separately, both the perfect and the non-perfects of their communities. For example, melioramentum was a rite whose purpose of which was to introduce and to end the consolamentum ritual. It was crucial that the melioramentum was administered first. The Bible was held near the postulant throughout the ceremony. This was a greeting, a way that the believers recognized the perfects in the ceremony. The melioramentum was “the formal salutation and leave-taking at the beginning and the end of the ceremonies. The following phrase was repeated three times: ‘Bless us; have mercy upon us,’ accompanying each request with a prostration or genuflection, and following these with a plea that good be done to the believer.” The phrase, “Let us adore the Father and Son, and the Holy spirit” was said many times before the Lord’s Prayer.

Once the postulant became a Perfect, The Rules of Conduct were firm. Expectations of the perfect were paramount and thus crucial to the faith. In the Cathar faith an individual perfect could be rejected if he or she failed to follow the clearly presented rules and life-long duties. The new perfect had to pray to God as if his person

---

85 Lambert, 119.
87 Wakefield and Evans, 467.
were, in a sense, threatened. If the perfect came across something that was not theirs, they had to “not touch it unless they [knew] that they [could] return it. If they [saw] the persons to whom the object may be returned passed that way ahead of them, let them take it to return it if they [could].”

The individual had to return it to the place where it was found. Likewise, animals caught in traps were left alone. If the perfect wanted to drink or eat in a day he or she had to pray. It had to be a man who led the prayers if a group of women were present.

In many instances, the ministration of the consolamentum was given those who were sick or dying. The sick had to be worthy of a ritual, so there were also rules of conduct demanded by the elder perfect. The first was to ask the sick person whether or not he or she had a debt owed to the church. The postulant must have already paid this debt. If the sick man refused this, according to the perfect conducting the ritual, he would not be recognized because if he “pray[ed] to God on behalf of a lawbreaker or a dishonest man, the prayer [would] be of no avail.”

The postulant could not lie. He had to support the Cathar community, both the men and the women, to the best of his ability. The sick man had to agree to receive The Lord’s Prayer: “He who . . . conducted the administration should [have] exhort[ed] him and preach[ed] to him with suitable texts.”

The Lord’s Prayer followed. The postulant took the “book from the hand of the elder, who [would have] exhorted him scriptural texts and words such as are proper for the consolamentum. And then the elder should [have] ask[ed] if it is in his heart to keep and

---

90 Wakefield and Evans, 492.
honor the covenant as he . . . agreed, and let them have him confirm it."\textsuperscript{91} The perfect took the Bible and placed it on the sick man’s head. Three short prayers followed. If he were to die “[having left] them anything, or if he should give them anything, they [were] not to keep it for themselves or take possession of it, but should [have] put it at the disposal of the order. However, if the sick person liv[ed], the Christians should present him to the order and pray that he [would] receive the consolamentum again as soon as he [could].”\textsuperscript{92} The sick or dying were ultimately in the hands of the perfects.

The agreement, \textit{La Covenenza}, was a ritual that accepted the willing postulant into the community late in life, and in some circumstances, on his or her death bed. It was also conducted if an individual could not move. This ritual was adapted from the Manicheans and subsequently worked itself into the ceremonies of the Cathars. If an illness was recognized the agreement was crucial, especially if the person “lost the power of speech or their memory should have failed.”\textsuperscript{93}

\textit{The Pardon} was also an important part of the ceremonies guided by the Cathar perfect. The perfects and the officials looked to God for forgiveness of sins by saying the pardon. At the “start of the ceremonies and at their conclusion[s]” the pardon was said just “before receiving the consolamentum, [and so] the believer also participated in the Pardon.”\textsuperscript{94} Following the pardon, the believer repeated the short prayer, “May the Father,

\textsuperscript{91} Wakefield and Evans, 493.
\textsuperscript{92} Wakefield and Evans, 494.
\textsuperscript{93} Wakefield and Evans, 382.
the Son, and the Holy Spirit forgive [me] all of [my] sins." The perfect repeated the same prayer.

The Act of Peace—the exchange—occurred at the end of the consolamentum. Throughout this ritual, “Male heretics saluted each other with an embrace and a kiss on each cheek; women kissed the Gospel and each other, sometimes the shoulder or elbow of a man.” The “Six (sezena) of the Provencal ritual entailed six repetitions of the Lord’s Prayer as is shown in the Latin text. ‘The Double,’ (dobla, dupla), which concluded major ceremonies, consisted of sixteen repetitions of the Prayer, accompanied by genuflections.” The Act of Peace concluded the ceremonies. These practiced fundamentally divided the Cathar communities and the Roman Church and thus this would thus cause centuries of discord.

The Cathars and the Church were in significant opposition to one another. This conflict centered on the interpretations of doctrine such as the Sacraments, the virgin birth, and bodily resurrection. The Cathars believed in Dualism—that the spiritual and material worlds did not coexist together, but they were in fact complete opposites. The Cathars refused to accept Catholic Sacraments because in practice they suggested an understanding that Jesus Christ lived and was crucified on Earth. The Cathars believed that God could not take human form in any way.

The most interesting difference between the Cathars and the Orthodox Church was the way they came to understand and practice the rite of baptism. To the Cathars,

95 Wakefield and Evans, 467.
96 Wakefield and Evans, 467.
97 Wakefield and Evans, 467.
baptism did not involve water; it was a spiritual process. Their elders—the perfects—chose instead to establish a detailed ritual involving a scripturally based, repetitive dialogue. This exchange hearkens back to a particular Bible story, the baptism of Jesus by John at Galilee. Indeed the Cathars believed that because Jesus did not baptize John the Baptist, it would be an error for perfects to use water in any manner during the ritual. They instead conducted a baptism of the spirit as did their successors, the seventeenth-century English Quakers, who also refused to use water during the ritual. There are also similarities between the Cathars and the Evangelical camps of the Radical Reformation, who considered the Church’s method of baptism to be antagonistic to “correct” doctrine. In the case of the Anabaptists, there was a stark distinction between baptizing adults and children.

The Cathars believed that water should not be used in a process that was a crucial method of Christian initiation that ensured the salvation of the believer. Therefore, the Cathars rejected any use of water during the consolamentum. They insisted instead that the postulant hold the Bible while the perfect urged him or her to repeat phrases of devotion taken specifically from Scripture. In the end, the witnesses—in this instance the men only—rested their hands on the postulant. At this moment, the postulant became a perfect and he attained the status of those who shared in an assured salvation. This ritual freed the soul’s imprisonment in the body. The soul subsequently reunited with its intended destination: heaven. Although the Cathars shared similar modes of discourse and initiation processes, the consolamentum was surely the most definitive and enduring tradition that they shared collectively.
The Cathars were not entirely an inclusive heresy. Their communities had a distinct connection to the social world, surrounding organizations, and religious institutions. Having situated themselves in northern Italy and southern France, they came to know both lay and clerical communities. Although the Cathars’ shared interactions with neighboring Christians, they were only sometimes cooperative. The Cathars were essentially in conflict with the Roman Church. They were surveyed continuously by its inquisitors. Indeed, the most detailed sources that survived this era are meticulous records taken by those who were instructed to study the Cathars in order to educate them. Surviving Cathar documents have also helped historians of medieval heresies construct narratives.

As did Catholicism, Catharism developed specific rituals of initiation, notably the consolamentum. Comparing them allows us to introduce the Catholic practice, and to establish several enduring critiques of it, as we will see. We also notice that despite the violent antipathy of Cathars and medieval Catholics, their initiation rites still share some elements too. The Anabaptists also had radically different customs, ways of living, and rituals than their neighboring orthodox Church. We will now explore how they were sometimes different, yet in many instances similar to their radical counterparts both before and after their time.
II. The Anabaptists

The first Anabaptists emerged at the same time as Evangelical reformers such as Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, in the early sixteenth-century. The new ideas conceived by Anabaptist theologians were ultimately very different from one another in biblical interpretation, ritual practice, and social, cultural, and institutional criticism. Perhaps the Anabaptist theologians’ most revealing characteristics were the distinctive ways they came to understand, interpret, and preach the Bible, which dramatically impacted the manner in which their own ministers conducted cultural rituals, particularly the ritual of adult baptism. This chapter is intended to create a better understanding of adult baptism and why the Anabaptists found this ritual so crucial to their followers’ sense of community, their protection from evil, and ultimately their salvation. The practice of
believer’s baptism was central to the Anabaptists’ identity and set them apart fundamentally from their Evangelical and Roman Church adversaries, who persecuted them ruthlessly at a time when debates over biblical doctrine were extremely charged and highly contested.

This chapter has six sections. First, I will present a brief history of Anabaptism. Following an introduction to the topic, I take a more precise look at the Anabaptists’ most conspicuous doctrines and explore the many creative ways in which they passionately defended adult baptism. Following this, we will take a look at an interesting response, also scripturally based, by Ulrich Zwingli on what he saw as the Anabaptists’ errors of biblical interpretation. Subsequently, I have located and will present a transcription of an episcopally administered baptismal ritual, a source account taken from Anabaptist leader, Balthasar Hubmaier. I will discuss its significance among a broader Continental culture that found adult baptism not only threatening but even dangerous to communities that Evangelicals sought to protect. The fifth section will present how doctrines of baptism are significant when placed in the theoretical categories of modern academic theory, particularly works in the field of religious studies. Finally, I seek to recognize both continuities and distinctions among medieval and early modern European heterodox doctrines, the most withstanding of which were those of the Anabaptists.

The modern term “Anabaptist” does not capture the full range of ideas advocated by leaders such as Michael Sattler, Conrad Grebel, Dirk Phillips, Menno Simons, Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, Hans Denck, Melchior Hoffman, and Felix Mantz. Their distinct interpretations of biblical doctrine make each reformer quite
unique. By the mid-sixteenth century, the doctrines of the Anabaptists to a large extent began to converge, becoming more similar than different, and by recognizing this general consensus in scriptural interpretation the term “Anabaptist” will be used in this essay—though cautiously—to describe the proponents of adult baptism and the determined leaders who guided them.

Because the terms used to describe this particular period have changed in recent contemporary scholarship, I will address such changes by using the term “Roman Church” instead of “the Catholic Church” or “the Catholics” because the word “Catholic” would have been anachronistic and would not have been spoken during the Continental Reformation. I will, moreover, use the terms “Evangelicals” or “Magisterial Protestants” in place of “Protestants” to refer to the Anabaptists’ most shrewd adversaries. In fact, the sixteenth-century reformers, be they Roman, Evangelical, or radical, were not in any way familiar with the terms, “Catholic,” “Protestant” or “Anabaptist” which were not used until much later.

The Anabaptists first emerged in different regions of Europe, the majority of which were in Germany, guided by the hands of charismatic leaders. The first and most influential ministers were Conrad Grebel (1498—1526) and Felix Mantz (1498—1527). Their goal was to pursue another vision of what would become a genuine new church. There were, however, specific social, political, and economic factors that gave rise to the Anabaptist movement. These were the “peasant unrest brought on by economic injustice; the rhetoric of the fiery German peasant leader Thomas Muntzer (1488—1525); the writings of Martin Luther (1483—1546) and Andreas Karlstadt (1483—1541), [and] the
influence of late medieval mysticism and asceticism. Anabaptism emerged at a time when Europe was undergoing a tumultuous era of Church reform. The origins of Anabaptism emerged in Zollikon, near Zurich, in 1525. Georg Blaurock (1492—1529), Grebel, and Mantz baptized each other and formed a discrete and isolated congregation. The Anabaptists’ alarm with the Church of Rome echoed that of their Evangelical Protestant contemporaries. In fact, “On issues like abolition of theMass, dietary regulations, the authority of scripture over tradition, and the veneration of relics, these first Anabaptists were in complete agreement with Zwingli.” They did, however, contend with Zwingli on the manner and time of baptism, just as they did with Luther and later on Jean Calvin. The additional disagreements with Zwingli were over the proper role of the state and the Church. The Anabaptists believed that no state or council should dictate the lives of the heterodox dissenters.

The first of the Swiss reformers gained particularly passionate support from the commoners because of their denial of state taxation, their passionate anti-clericalism, and their support of the general concerns of their Christian communities. Consequently, “The movement grew rapidly, and with its growth there was increasingly severe persecution.” Felix Mantz was the first of the Anabaptists to be executed by the authorities. He was thrown into the Limmat River in Zurich.

Melchior Hofmann (1495—1543), a preacher particularly influenced by Luther, left Strasbourg because his peers feared that his ideas were dangerously close to

99 Jones, 304.  
100 Jones, 304.
Anabaptism. However, he was not baptized as an adult, which was one of the primary ways to recognize an Anabaptist. When Hofmann arrived in Emden, “[he] soon attracted a large following, in part at least because of his apocalyptic message of the imminent return of Christ; and in a short time more than three hundred persons had been baptized.”

Although Hofman was a dedicated pacifist, waiting for Christ’s return, many of his followers sought to await the kingdom and its judgment with weapons. In 1534 “The city of Munster in Westphalia was declared to be the New Jerusalem and fell under the control of the Melchiorites, though Hoffman himself had returned to Strasbourg and lay in prison there.” The conflicts in Munster were the product of long-spent beliefs from authorities that Anabaptism was threatening and revolutionary. Moreover, in reaction to the events in Munster, “Menno Simons left his nearby Roman Catholic parish and, after going underground for a time of reflection and writing, [he] emerged as the primary leader of peaceful Anabaptism.” Menno Simons and his writings ultimately became the intellectual foundations of today’s Mennonite doctrine communities, which exist on the whole in the American Midwestern States.

Even through constant and ruthless persecution became common, the South German and Swiss Brethren still gained in numbers. Consequently, the movement expanded to more regions, particularly Moravia and Austria. As the displaced Anabaptists began to settle in communities, they became accustomed to sharing goods

101 Jones, 304.
102 Jones, 304.
103 Jones, 304.
over time collective living and shared ownership of land became another defining characteristic. Communal living began in “1529, and by 1533 had become normative for many in the area under the leadership of Jacob Hutter (d. 1536), who made it a central article of faith.”\(^\text{104}\) His followers were eventually referred to as “Hutterites.” More congregations arose at this same time in Germany “under the leadership of Hans Hut (d. 1427), Hans Denk (1500—1527), Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556), the more radical Melchior Rink (1494—1545), and others.”\(^\text{105}\)

The Anabaptist faith, because it arose from so many different areas of Europe and from such a variety of leadership, was far from continuous. It was quite diverse. Over time a common core of beliefs came to bind Anabaptist followers. The Anabaptists can now be recognized by “their statements of faith, the testimony of martyrs, court records, hymns, letters, and records of disputations held with authorities and others, and the writings of major leaders.”\(^\text{106}\)

Moreover, the letters of Thomas Muntzer made the goals of the Anabaptists quite clear. Like Luther, Muntzer placed ultimate authority in the scriptures. To Muntzer, the Lord’s Supper was a “sign” of love among the faithful, and so baptism was a sign as well, not a “sacrament.” The youth of the radical congregations were saved through Jesus Christ; violence could never be committed by the faithful. In 1527, the Anabaptists met in a disputation in Schleitheim, Germany, to discuss the growing disparities in collective doctrine and religious practice. Because many leaders had died or been forcefully

\(^{104}\) Jones, 304.  
\(^{105}\) Jones, 304.  
\(^{106}\) Jones, 304.
martyred, a more diverse faith with tangential canons was taking form. However, “Seven articles constituted the ‘Brotherly Union,’ as it was called, a statement summarizing the central issues of faith in which the framers of the statement differed from the ‘false brethren.’” The writer of the Seven Articles of Faith was Michael Sattler (1490—1527), “a former Benedictine monk from Saint Peter’s monastery near Freiburg, Germany.” Sattler suggested three additional tenets: a church “dualism” that would set apart the Anabaptists from nonbelievers, the urgency of pastoral guidance as a tool of collective organization and faith, and, similar to the Quakers, a rejection of the “oath” as a definitive way to determine the individual’s affirmation of the truth.

The tenets mentioned above “amplify but do not add significant new doctrinal affirmations to the two early statements from Grebel’s letter and the Brotherly Union.” The Anabaptists held in strict distinction the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures—the Old Testament. The Gospel and the letters of Paul were central to their worship and belief. Anabaptists, furthermore, were excluded from work in any civil office. Menno Simons “stressed that the church, as the Bride of Christ, must be pure; he also stressed the importance of witness and mission, which most Anabaptists took for granted as part of discipleship.” It was minister Dirk Phillips (1504—1568) who put in place the necessity of foot washing. Even among the writings and statements of commoners, the goal of restoring the church in the model of the New Testament was still steadfast, and so it became integral to the Anabaptist way of life and methods of worship.

---

107 Jones, 305.
108 Jones, 305.
109 Jones, 305.
110 Jones, 305.
The practice of adult baptism was taken directly from biblical interpretation and scriptural analysis, particularly of the New Testament. The Anabaptist people were shaped by their guiding leaders, and by recognizing this we can better understand their place among heterodox contemporaries, their common ethos of persecution, and their position in the broader narrative of the Continental Reformation.

As the Anabaptists’ positions on adult baptism began to converge, they encountered energetic attacks by other reformers as well as by representatives of the Roman position, who named them “Anabaptists” (re-baptizers) or “Catabaptists” (anti-baptizers).111 These “Anabaptists” were often berated in literature and tracts, usually by those of higher status and power who could not adequately recognize the diversity among such heterodox sects, or who simply did not care to. In fact, the name Anabaptist “deriv[es] its origin from the matter of holy baptism, concerning that which their views differ[ed] for those of all, so-called, Christendom.”112 Anabaptist ministers baptized adults rather than children and believed that only willing adults could understand and accept the covenant they were entering with Jesus and their own communities of Christians. Just as baptism separated the Anabaptists from their Evangelical and Roman Church contemporaries, heterodox ministers also proposed various changes to their rivals’ orthodox doctrines, ritual practices, and ways of life.

111 Labeling the Zurich and Rhineland radicals as “baptizers” assimilated them to certain Late Antique heresies identified in Roman law, which then justified the use of the death penalty by civil authorities to suppress them.
Anabaptist communities were initially as fragmented as their radical contemporaries. They inhabited and worshiped in isolated areas such as abandoned barns, secluded pastures or in homes of friends or sympathetic neighbors. University-trained, self-taught, and sometimes itinerant ministers led the followers of the Anabaptist faith and would eventually assert their doctrines defensively at debates and disputations called together most often by the Evangelical leadership. The Anabaptists lacked the numbers, elite social networks, or the growing influences of their Evangelical contemporaries, who too were surveyed by Roman Church authorities. Over time, this made the Anabaptist movement susceptible to intense and sustained persecution from the authorities. This made it easy for the Roman Church administrators alongside Evangelical magistrates to target Anabaptists in a mass campaign of capture and extermination.

Due to the extent to which the Anabaptists’ seemingly divergent ideologies and different ways of living singled them out, they became conscious of the threat their own biblically derived doctrines frightened the Magisterial and Roman Churches. The Anabaptist communities existed as significant threats to both the Roman Church’s hegemony and to the burgeoning “new church” that the Evangelicals were so ambitiously and passionately attempting to create. This led to extreme tension among all three distinct camps: the Magisterial Protestants, those committed to Roman faith, and the religious radicals.

The following four attributes best distinguish the Anabaptists from the Roman Church leaders and their Evangelical rivals. First and foremost, they adamantly disavowed any participation with or cooperation in the affairs of the state, its conscription
policies, and in particular, its wars against the Ottoman Turks. Most of the Anabaptists were pacifists, with the exception of those associated with Thomas Muntzer whose radical preaching against the rural princes and nobility and subsequent mobilization of the peasantry led ultimately to The German Peasants War of 1525. The Anabaptists also abolished private property and believed the followers should share in the collective ownership of land and material goods. The ownership of large plots of land was considered ostentatious and was an expression of vanity to a community that was particularly austere.

The Anabaptists also defined themselves by their strong collective ethos of persecution and by recognition of their individuals as God’s true apocalyptic “Saints.” Their intellectual leaders could be best recognized by enduring, obstinate attacks on pedobaptism—(the baptism of newborns). They instead preached the necessity of adult baptism—the incorporation of the willingly baptized into a community of followers of the Anabaptist faith. The ultimate conviction of the Anabaptist movement was its belief in “the pure congregation, the society of saints, the congregation of the truly converted, drawn from the world, and drawn not merely as individuals but as a society. This was at the root of the desire to withdraw the members, socially as well as spiritually, from the general life of the world.”

Scholars agree that the Anabaptist leadership who best articulated heterodox doctrine, both Roman and Evangelical, emerged first in Switzerland and Moravia. However, the earliest Anabaptist leaders gained followers and baptized and ministered their “flocks” in many different areas of central, eastern, and northern Europe.

The Anabaptists first became visible in the early sixteenth century. By 1527, persecuted Anabaptists from “Switzerland, the Rhineland, Palatinate, Swabia, Hesse, Franconia, Bavaria, Upper and Lower Austria, the Tyrol, and Selesia”\(^{114}\) found safe havens in Moravia. Some scholars of late medieval heresies (as well Reformation specialists) recognize the Waldensian heresy as an Anabaptist predecessor. No matter where they settled, they too were committed to an austere lifestyle, were peaceful, and denied private property.

The Anabaptists formed a common voice of dissent among a larger, more organized and influential Evangelical presence. The Evangelicals rigorously pursued their plan to reform the Roman establishment comprehensively. Although they lacked the Evangelicals’ eventual influence in Continental politics, princely commitment and sheer numbers, the Anabaptists were nonetheless threatening to the Roman Church and to the Evangelical, yet for different reasons. The Anabaptists’ interpretations of Biblical doctrine contradicted one thousand years of intellectual efforts articulated by the Roman Church’s best theologians. Consequently, the Evangelical leadership viewed the Anabaptists as extremely dangerous heretics whose shared doctrines and increasing numbers compromised their own broader goals as they crusaded against Roman Orthodoxy. The Magisterial Protestants, such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, did agree on a variety of doctrines, rituals and liturgies, and methods and strategies of popular organization, but they opposed each other on few core tenets of faith. It is easy to assume that the Anabaptists became scapegoats who were linked to larger political and doctrinal

infighting between the Roman and the Evangelical Church authorities, but this is not entirely correct. Despite their differences on various issues, Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin did not hesitate at all in a profound and ultimately theological rejection of the Anabaptist understanding of Christianity. This is what ensured their persecution, not necessarily the many disagreements between the Evangelicals and the Catholics. Not only did adult baptism become a marker of identity, as it was from the first “Believers’ baptisms” by Conrad Grebel in Zurich, it also performed the conviction that faith was a choice—it lived in community—a position that was both theologically and sociologically profoundly threatening to European discourses of authority.115

The political realities of the time, which underscored actions taken against the Anabaptists, were typical of historical moments of social disorientation and massive upheaval. Consistent with one thousand years of Canon Law, the Roman Church backed by the Empire concerned itself with any heresies that challenged their steadfast doctrine and thus their authority over Western Christendom. The Roman Church feared a schism in the Christian religion and in the popular way of life in Western Europe. Accordingly, it carried out pogroms against the heretics of the sixteenth century in the same manner it had adopted throughout the Middle Ages.

The Evangelicals, on the other hand, viewed Anabaptists as a threat to their efforts to unify northern Europe under one Magisterial Protestant banner. This explains

---

115 The “Augustinian politics” recognized that secular rulers had a divine mandate to restrain human evil and to force all into membership in a hierarchical church.
Ulrich Zwingli’s harsh response to the Anabaptist leadership as he was trying to create solidarity within the ranks of Switzerland’s many Christian communities. Ultimately the Germans, Dutch, Austrians, Moravians, and Swiss, backed by eager Church reformers, sought to seize and implement their own doctrines that would translate themselves into the foundations, faith practices, and the doctrines of the bourgeoning Magisterial Protestant churches. And as the Anabaptists emerged as active voices in this theological struggle for universality, a subsequent mass campaign of arrests, prosecutions and executions followed. Even the most intelligent and persuasive Anabaptist theologians, if caught and charged, were forced to recant and were subsequently put to death. Some Anabaptists were burned, buried, dug up, and burned again so that they would not cause harm to others, even after death.

On the eve of the Continental Reformation, the Roman Church still controlled the religious life of most of the Christians of Western Christendom. The Evangelicals over time worked to challenge such hegemony. The Anabaptists would attend disputations, debates, and public ceremonies organized by the Evangelical theologians. As the Evangelicals sought to unify their rising numbers of followers, they likewise pursued the creation of a new church founded on their own particular doctrines, reformed worship, and more austere surroundings. Although Anabaptists’ positions on a whole range of issues were similar to those of the Evangelicals (with perhaps the exception of Luther’s more conservative perspectives), they ultimately became an embarrassment. Zwingli’s and the Anabaptists’ precepts were actually not that far apart and only a few disagreements in doctrine made them oppose each other. Luther, on the other hand,
differed fundamentally from the Anabaptists, whose whole theology in general, their practice of adult baptism in particular, rested on the assumption of “free will,” which Luther dismissed with alacrity.

A vast majority of Europe and England, particularly the upper echelons of society—the rulers, the nobility, and the clergy—also disdained the Anabaptists. Those who did not deny their allegiance to the heterodox faith became easy targets because they very rarely defended themselves and even more seldom recanted. Anabaptists believed that when they were captured, if they faced torture and death without recanting doctrine, they would in the end martyr themselves. To be sure, “Anabaptist men and women were devout human beings, not automatons marching en masse to their death.”

Obviously those who were captured and prosecuted wanted to live, but when faced with a forced conversion to an alien faith, they brought upon themselves their own execution. To the Anabaptists, this was the only choice of conscience.

Because the Anabaptists were persecuted and killed on such a large scale, martyrdom, their willingness to face death rather than renounce their religious principles, and its significances became a distinctive aspect of their lives. Many willingly accepted their fate when they were arrested by Evangelical or Roman Church authorities. Some Anabaptists died in prison, while others “‘through the rigor of martyrdom / [were] killed and died.’ Thus was par for the course: ‘Such is the patience / of the saints on Earth; / hence all of us must be tested / through many afflictions.’”

violence over time brought the Anabaptists to view themselves as Christ’s true congregation on Earth. A “consciousness of persecution” connected the Anabaptists to their own brethren and to Jesus Christ. Thieleman Yan van Braght’s book, *Martyr’s Mirror*, documents hundreds of instances of Anabaptist executions; he names them “attacks on the defenseless flock of true believers.” The Anabaptists believed that the process of martyrdom was a call to Jesus and brought them closer to him. Jesus himself is Christianity’s ultimate martyr, and to die in the manner that he did (significant drawn out pain) served to unite the Anabaptists in a shared experience and identity.

The Anabaptist ministers maintained an encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture, and an ability to inspire through energetic sermons and through pious commitments to their congregations—the community of believers. Most Christian commoners in the sixteenth-century were illiterate, and so too were most of the followers of Anabaptism. And even though most lay individuals were not literate,

Many of them demonstrated an ability to memorize scripture and to articulate nuanced theological positions. The fact that humble Anabaptists even existed undercuts the view that the mass of common people were separated from the literate elite by a cultural chasm.\(^{118}\)

At the center of the forced martyrdoms carried out against them was the issue of baptism. To the Anabaptists, “baptism implied the willingness to risk one’s life for Christ, as his own apostles had done. . . . Those who became Anabaptists were preselected for

---

\(^{118}\) Gregory, 206; Leonard Sheimer quoting lines from Books of the Bible on their own without university training: Matthew, Romans, and Acts, 206.
martyrdom. As did their contemporaries, reformers such as Luther and Zwingli, the Anabaptists advocated novel changes to the many doctrines created and sustained by the existing Roman Church. Anabaptists, however, also forged a constant and highly critical voice in opposition to these reformers’ interpretations of Biblical passages, particularly to the resolute defenses of infant baptism made by Ulrich Zwingli.

Adult baptism was not the only issue that distinguished the Evangelicals and those committed to the Roman Church from the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists’ critiques of existing theology were always specific and detailed, complex and often very passionate, and highly millenarian. Luther and the Anabaptists had similar interpretations of millenarian doctrine. Issues of radical eschatology, millenarianism, and apocalypticism, rather abstract considerations merged similar points taken by the Luther and the Melchior Hoffman camps. Thomas Muntzer, who situated himself far left of the more moderate reformers, particularly Luther, developed an entire apocalyptic revolutionary theology. His interpretations of the Bible, particularly the verses from the books of Daniel and Revelations, translated themselves in the end to a militant philosophy of violent popular reform, which was directed to those peasants who took up arms against the German nobility and the princes in the The German Peasants’ War of 1525. The most clear and relevant interpretations of Biblical doctrine emerging from the pens of the Anabaptist ministers were their defenses of the adult baptismal process in opposition to Roman Church law which had for over one thousand years baptized babies and infants.

119 Gregory, 211.
The growing practice of adult baptism among Anabaptist groups came to best define them, as did their corresponding denial of infant baptism. Michael Sattler, Dirk Phillips, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Pilgram Marpeck all fiercely attacked pedobaptism in their writings, demanding that their followers baptize members of their congregations only as willing adults. The Anabaptists believed that a child could not yet in any way understand the “covenant of true conscience with God,” and thus children should not be baptized. It was their belief that initiates were to be baptized “only when it was clear that they believed, and not when they reached a particular age.”¹²⁰ The practice of believer’s baptism would be incorporated by successive denominations such as the Amish, Mennonites, and the English Baptists. This fundamental change to such a crucial ritual would best define the Anabaptist communities as a legitimate part of the larger Evangelical attack on the Roman Church now called the Protestant Reformation. George Huntston Williams makes this one of his primary arguments in the seminal work *The Radical Reformation*.¹²¹ And he marshals this argument by discussing the baptismal theologies of the prominent heterodox radicals such as Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Hut, and Menno Simons.

Balthasar Hubmaier, perhaps the most outspoken and intelligent of the Anabaptist leaders, believed in rebaptism. “On Easter Sunday [1555] Hubmaier rebaptized some three hundred people, resigned as parish priest, and became the pastor of the newly


¹²¹ George Huntston Williams argues that the Anabaptists have for a long time been left out of the broader narrative of Protestant reform.
formed Anabaptist congregation at Waldshut.”\footnote{Spinks, 84.} Hubmaier and his wife were both put to death in 1528. Hubmaier’s contemporary and peer, Hans Hut, argued that “suffering becomes an instrumental part of this Anabaptist understanding of baptism. The sign of water baptism is retained, almost as the outward trigger which anticipates the baptism of tribulation, during which the Holy Spirit will be the comforter.”\footnote{Spinks, 87.} Menno Simons, initially a priest of the Roman Church, later became a heterodox minister. He did not defend rebaptism as Hubmaier did.

In addition to the often complex abstractions of the Anabaptist leaders, baptism also served to bring communities together and bind them in fellowship. Although baptisms were most frequently administered to small groups of people, in some instances the baptized could reach numbers of up to forty people. “On a few occasions the early Swiss leaders baptized large groups of 35 or 40 people, but these were exceptional incidents.”\footnote{Spinks, 87.} Because the Anabaptists were forced to worship in areas free from the surveillance of secular authorities, baptisms were therefore administered in often unusual and surely clandestine places. This did not diminish their leaders’ charisma or reduce the level of excitement among initiates and their supporters.

The particular ritual of baptism is very interesting; it is set in front of a congregation and involves a personal dialogue between a bishop or a minister and an initiate, the individual receiving baptism. The minister questions the believer on the law, “the gospel, the articles of faith, his moral views, and his ability to recite prayers.”\footnote{Classen, 103, 104.} This
process ushers the individual into the congregation and the church while simultaneously granting the believer “grace and power of the Holy Spirit.” ¹²⁶ Hans Hut and Melchior Hoffman suggested that “By this conventicle action one will become a member of the righteous remnant, the true church, outside of which there is no salvation.” ¹²⁷

The Anabaptists’ adult baptism ritual provoked significant criticism from their rivals, many of whom suggested that they cared little for their children and risked their harm. The children would be susceptible to evil forces, even damnation, in the years prior to baptism. Susan Karant-Nunn, a historian of Reformation Europe, argues, “Every baby had godparents (usually at least one woman and one man), and these, as under Catholicism, held their spiritual progeny and assisted during the [baptismal] services. Their duties of instruction in the Christian faith as their godchildren grew were regarded very seriously, more so than in the late Middle Ages.” ¹²⁸ Theologians were aware that many families, especially new mothers, demanded that their babies be baptized; they wanted their child’s baptism conducted immediately following birth. Mothers feared the dangerous years of adolescence and puberty, when children were prone to “wickedness” and highly susceptible to the “snares of the Devil.” And in light of centuries of tradition, various commoners dismissed the relevance of Anabaptists’ highly theoretical and complex musings on baptism and chose rather to have their children baptized directly after birth or when they were very young.

¹²⁶ Classen, 103,104. ¹²⁷ Williams, 84. ¹²⁸ Karant-Nunn, 57.
Anabaptist communities were never entirely homogeneous in doctrine or religious life. Different local Anabaptists, groups independent from one another, had different leaders with different ideas and biblical interpretations. Many of these communities conducted the water stage of the baptismal process differently. Although often it was poured on the head, some ministers conducted baptisms differently. Minister Jan Hut “made a cross on the forehead of the believers while uttering the words, ‘I bestow on you the sign’—or ‘I baptize you’—‘in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.’”\(^{129}\) Baptism was a rite, a symbol that incorporated the believer into the spiritual life of the congregation and into “the community of saints.”\(^{130}\) The practice of adult baptism, which to orthodox authorities clearly designated Anabaptists as heretics, was the central focus for the highly complex and emotional theological conflict that often led to dangerous outcomes.

The roots of these debates lie in biblical analyses of Anabaptist leaders such as Michael Sattler, Pilgram Marpeck, Conrad Grebel, Dirk Phillips, and Balthasar Hubmaier. There were many ministers involved in these intense dialogues, but the following discussion will focus on these five Anabaptists, with particular emphasis on Ulrich Zwingli who responded angrily with his own defenses of orthodoxy. In response to zealous written attacks by their Evangelical contemporaries, the Anabaptists also felt it crucial to develop highly meticulous defenses of adult baptism based on scriptural analysis. To the Anabaptists, baptizing infants contradicted Scripture and thus offended God. Different leaders in disputations advocated their own beliefs on the “correct” form

\(^{129}\) Classen, 104.  
\(^{130}\) Classen, 74.
of baptism. These were based in myriad passages from the Bible, and in many instances, the employment of simple logic became the foundation of believer’s baptism. The five following main points justified believer’s baptism: (1) The initiate must understand that Christ takes away his sins. (2) Children are not endowed with reason, faith and speech so they cannot by free will confess and take on the obligations of the faith, the notion of human free will being in radical contradistinction to Luther and Calvin, but not entirely far from Zwingli’s thought. (3) Comprehending the distinction between good and evil is not possible for a young child. (4) All infants are already saved without faith. (5) Infant baptism is therefore unnecessary, and so it contradicts biblical doctrine. These points formed the shared core of the following Anabaptist theologians’ interpretations of the Bible. What follows are more specific, particularly analytical concepts formed by Anabaptist leaders as they were articulated constantly at gatherings, debates and disputations to defend adult baptism.

In Article I of The Seven Articles, Baptism, Ban, the Breaking of Bread, Separation from Abomination, Shepherds in the Congregation, the Sword, the Oath, Michael Sattler, one of the earliest Anabaptists, argued, “Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and who truly believe that their sins are taken away through Christ.” To Sattler, such teachings could not be entirely understood by the youngest members of the Christian community: Pilgram Marpeck, also one of the most influential of the early Anabaptists, similarly posited, “It would be possible for God to endow a newborn child with reason, faith, and speech” but

---

“[God] does not necessarily exercise it.”¹³² Marpeck thus believed that if God were to bestow children with the competence and wisdom of adults they would choose baptism willingly and independently. In a 1524 letter to Muntzer, Conrad Grebel maintained that “all children who have not yet come to the discernment of the knowledge of good and evil . . . are surely saved by the suffering of Christ.”¹³³ Grebel posited that children have not grown and reached the “[infirmity of adults’] broken nature” and to those who suggested that “faith is demanded of all who are to be saved,” Grebel argued, and “We exclude children from this and hold that they are saved without faith.”¹³⁴ To Grebel and his Anabaptist contemporaries, children were thus unique, and in the time before they realized the urgency of faith and salvation, they were automatically saved by their own simplicity and innocence. Similarly, Dirk Phillips argued that children are of God without baptism. He stressed the children’s “simplicity”—they “‘are innocent and judged by God to be without sin.’” Indeed “there is still something good in children . . . a simple, unassuming, and humble bearing, which makes them pleasing to God (yet purely by grace through Jesus Christ) so long as they remain in it.”¹³⁵ Phillips believed that baptism simply could not take place without faith: “This still cannot take place except through

¹³² Pilgram Marpeck, “The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck,” v. 3 Classics of the Radical Reformation, 256, 57.
¹³⁴ Klaassen, 164, 165.
¹³⁵ Phillips, 185.
To most of these heterodox Christians, there existed another cause that negated pedopatism. The Anabaptists saw no biblical precedent for the baptism of infants. As one who administered baptisms himself, Phillips concluded that “We cannot accept child baptism as a word and service of God. The reason: the holy divine Scripture teaches us everywhere that we should neither accept, believe, or observe anything except God’s Word and command alone.”

The most influential of the Anabaptists believed that there was no command by God anywhere in Scripture to baptize children. In reaction to Zwingli and his contemporaries, who maintained that biblical doctrine linked external circumcision to external baptism, Phillips argued, “The circumcision of Christ, which does not take place on the foreskin of the flesh but in the heart, not with hands nor with a stone” occurred through “God’s Word and Spirit.”

To a large extent, the arguments made by these theologians were directed at the baptism of children, and thus they were in many instances quite similar. Neither Jesus, John the Baptist, nor any of the apostles, particularly John, baptized or spoke of baptizing children.

The responses to the Anabaptist attacks on pedobaptism—the baptism of babies or infants—and the ministers who conducted these rituals were zealous and often became belligerent. Commitments to traditional orthodoxy by Evangelicals such as Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther and by the religious authorities of the Roman Church soon

---

138 Phillips, 83, 84.
gave way to angry and polemical attacks on Anabaptist doctrines of believer’s baptism. The Swiss Evangelical minister Ulrich Zwingli was particularly vexed by the criticisms of the orthodox practice of baptism made by the earliest Anabaptists, and he responded to them with the most thorough and sophisticated interpretations. For his part, the Anabaptist theologian Dirk Phillips obstinately engaged in a very antagonistic dialogue with both Zwingli and the Roman Church on baptism.

In his “Treatise on Baptism, Rebaptism, and Infant Baptism,” Zwingli argued that nowhere in the Bible did it say infants should not be baptized. In consequence, to Zwingli, the Anabaptists were “adding to the Word, not we” and “They should also show where it is written that infants should not be baptized.” Zwingli believed that because the Bible states clearly, “teach and baptize them,” children are included in the community of the baptized. Such disagreements at disputations—places and discussions where orthodox and heterodox met to argue theology and doctrine—led Zwingli to take action. He first reproached the Anabaptists to “forsake their opinions, and when they refused, Zwingli commanded their capture, imprisonment, and in most instances, their deaths.” The Roman Church theologians were similarly alarmed at the Anabaptists’ collective denial of infant baptism, and they took actions of their own.

To the Church theologians, the issue was simple. Berating the Anabaptist leaders, they argued, “You have seen briefly the main basis upon which infant baptism rests:

---


140 Ulrich Zwingli, “The Third Public Disputation on Baptism: Zurich, November 6-8, 1525,” in The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism, ed. Leland Harder, 432.
‘Paul sees circumcision and baptism as virtually one and the same thing.’ As did Zwingli, Roman Catholics equated the rite of circumcision to the rite of baptism. Consequently, they believed that the baptismal rituals ought to be conducted at infancy. Roman Church theologians referred to the specific words of Jesus stating, “Permit little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven.” The Anabaptists maintained that the logic of these defenses of pedobaptism was insubstantial. They did not yet have the ability to discern the complexities of baptism, its meanings, or the subsequent responsibilities its covenant demanded. Phillip argued against Evangelicals such as Zwingli: “The Lord himself testified to this in Deuteronomy thus: ‘Moreover, your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have not understanding of good or evil, shall enter the promised land, and to them I will give it and they shall occupy it,’ Deut. 1:39.” Phillips argued that this passage from Deuteronomy 1:39 is very clear. Children are innocent. They are saved through Jesus Christ.

Phillips’ contemporary, Balthasar Hubmaier, attacked infant baptism assertively in “Chapter VI, Some Questions are Resolved,” excerpted from The Classics of the Radical Reformation. Hubmaier analyzed many biblical passages, and considered all references to children yet dismissed any possibility that children accepted baptism by Christ, John the Baptist, or anyone else. A child could not voluntarily understand or

---

affirm the oath, admit to or conceive of his own sins, or take on the responsibility of renewal through the acceptance of Christ and the life-long fellowship with the community of Christians. As a rather condescending response to Zwingli, Hubmaier argued that although it is not written that infant baptism is incorrect so too it is not written that “[we may not] baptize my dog and my donkey, circumcise little girls, mumble prayers and hold vigils for the dead, call wooden idols St. Peter, or St. Peter and St. Paul, take infants to the Lord’s Supper, bless palm branches, herbs, salt, butter fat, and water, sell the mass as a sacrifice.” Here Hubmaier made an interesting yet altogether comic point. He argued that Evangelical reformers constantly attacked Church traditions (such as relics and indulgences) that lacked scriptural precedent. Yet they [Zwingli and Luther] made an exception for baptism. To Hubmaier, infant baptism simply had no biblical precedent and should therefore be removed from ritual practice, as should the myriad of other “fallacies” that the Evangelicals had so enthusiastically attacked: relics, indulgences, altars, and works-based salvation.

Heterodox baptismal theology and Evangelical and Roman Church orthodoxy were rooted in centuries of close scrutiny of biblical doctrine. Anabaptists focused primarily on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, whereas the Roman Church had long looked to the Old Testament and the letters of Paul to justify the baptism of children. As did Zwingli, other Evangelicals and the Roman Church recognized the Biblical link between baptism and circumcision as concrete proof of God’s preference for pedobaptism. Dirk Phillips, Michael Sattler, Pilgram Marpeck and Balthasar Hubmaier

144 Hubmaier, 136.
were no less zealous in their defenses of believer’s baptism and in their limitless criticism of infant baptism. In fact, Dirk Phillips looked specifically to Matthew, Mark and Luke while explaining that John the Baptist, while baptizing Jesus, subjugated himself and his role as baptizer entirely to Jesus. In the following passage, *The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Dirk Phillips suggests that John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the one who would baptize “the penitent and believing.” Phillips believed that we ought to consider the life and actions of Jesus to best understand baptism and to whom it should be given.

We believe [hold] and confess that there is a Christian baptism which must take place internally and externally with the Holy Spirit and with fire, Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; 11:[30]; Luke 3:16 but externally with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Matt. 28:19. /69/ The baptism of the Spirit is administered by Jesus Christ himself to the penitent and believing, just as John the Baptist said, ‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire,’ Matt. 3:11. 145

Children could simply not take baptism because the spirit was “administered” only to the penitent and believing. To Phillips and the Anabaptists, infants were not yet ready to believe.

Hubmaier referred to the books of the Gospel to explain his understanding of the baptismal process. He referred to John, Matthew and Paul, where he found—an ordered sequence—phases—of the baptismal process: (1) the word, (2) the hearing, (3) baptism and (4) works. These indicate a spiritual process whereby the initiate—the individual believer—acknowledges the word, admits sin, partakes in the water baptism and is finally 

---

145 This passage illustrating the intricacies of baptism—with fire—and with the Holy Spirit and theological foundations in Christ’s baptism by John the Baptist may be referred to in Dirk Phillips’ tract, “The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” in *The Writings of Dirk Phillips*, 72.
ushered into a congregation of believers. The actual form of this ritual is found in the following record of a heterodox baptism. This is an account of a minister conducting a baptism on an initiate. It was penned by Balthasar Hubmaier in Nickolsburg: “He [Hubmaier] publishes as a model for ecclesiastical practice forms which he has already been using in Nikolsburg, after having evolved them ever since his early days in Waldshut. The reference to usage in Nikolsburg suggests final reduction in the fall of 1526.”146 The following illustrates a strict emphasis on the initiate’s faith and pledge, willing affirmations, analogous themes of good and evil, and full obligations to Jesus Christ.

A Form for Baptism in Water of Those who have been Instructed in Faith
Dr. Balthasar Hubmor of Fridberg
Nicolspurg
Truth is Unkillable
1527

Whoever Desires Water Baptism

“should first present himself to his bishop, that he may be questioned, whether he is sufficiently instructed in the articles of law, gospel, faith, and the doctrines which concern a new Christian life. Also how he can pray and speak with understanding the articles of the Christian faith, all of which must necessarily be known first if one wishes to be incorporated into the congregation of Christians through outward baptism for the forgiveness of his sins. If he can do this, the bishop presents him to the church, calling on all brothers and sisters to fall to their knees, to call upon God with fervent devotion, that he might graciously impart to this person the grace and the power of his Holy Spirit and complete in him what he has begun through his Holy Spirit and divine Word.

Thus:

‘Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy believers, kindle the fire of thy love in them, thou who has assembled by manifold tongues, the peoples into the unity of faith. Hallelujah, hallelujah. God be praised. God be praised.’

‘Here the bishop holds forth the baptismal pledge thus:

‘Jan. Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and Earth? If so, speak publicly’:
‘I believe’
‘Do you believe in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried, that he went in the Spirit and preached the gospel to the spirits which were in prison, 1 Pet. 3:19; 4:6, that on the third day he again united with the body in the grave and powerfully arose from the dead, 1 Cor. 15:4; Acts 2:32, and after forty days ascended into heaven. There he sits at the right hand of his almighty Father, whence he will come to judge the living and the dead? If so speak’:
‘I believe.’
‘Do you also believe in the Holy Spirit, and do you believe a holy universal Christian church, a fellowship of the saints, that the same possesses the keys for the remission of sins. Do you believe also the resurrection of the flesh and eternal life? If so, speak’:
‘I believe.’
‘Will you in the power of Christ renounce the devil, all his works, machinations, and vanities, then speak’:
‘I will.’
‘Will you henceforth lead your life and walk according to the Word of Christ, as he gives you grace: So speak’:
‘I will.’
‘If now you should sin and your brother knows it, will you let him admonish you once, twice, and the third time before the church, and willingly and obediently accept fraternal admonition, if so speak’:
‘I will.’
‘Do you desire now upon this faith and pledge to be baptized in water according to the institution of Christ, incorporated and thereby counted in the visible Christian church, for the forgiveness of your sins, Matt. 18:19; Acts 2:38. Amen, so be it.’
Now let the bishop again exhort his church to pray for the baptized neophyte, that God will increase his faith and that of all Christian men and give to us all the strength and constance, that we might all persevere and be found at the end in Christian faith.
After the church has completed this prayer, the bishop lays his hands on the head of the new member and says:
‘I testify to you and give you authority that henceforth you shall be counted among the Christian community, as a member participating in the use of her keys, breaking bread and praying with other Christian sisters and brothers. God be with you and your spirit. Amen.’

Balthasar Hubmaier’s account of this initiate’s baptismal ceremony presents an actual ritual process, yet it also conveys the way in which baptisms were performed differently among different ministries. The preceding description of a ritual baptism illustrates a similar process to one that Hubmaier administered many times. The passage above presents a bishop, an initiate, and a congregation that will collectively usher the believer

147 This is the ritual of baptism’s liturgical process practiced among a community of believers in Nickolsburg, conducted by a bishop, and accounted in particular detail by minister Balthasar Hubmaier in: “A Form of Water Baptism” in Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism, vol. 5 Classics of the Radical Reformation, 386-390.
into a life committed to Jesus. The bishop administers the baptism through a sequential liturgy following a question-and-answer format. Initially, the bishop commands the initiate to confess forgiveness of all sins and asks if he is willing to accept incorporation into the community of Christians and recognize his own power to impart grace and the Holy Spirit.

Following these introductory words, the willing believer must prove that he is “sufficiently instructed in the articles of law, gospel, faith, and the doctrines which concern a new Christian life.” The bishop presents the initiate to the congregation, and the congregation kneels and then calls to God so “that he might graciously impart to this person the grace and power of his Holy Spirit.” Next, the bishop begins the baptismal pledge, worded as follows: “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth?” The initiate must respond affirmatively. Consistent with the doctrines the Anabaptists derived from Peter 3:19, and 4:6, I Corinthians 15:4; and Acts 2:32, the bishop asks, “Do you believe Christ is the Son of God [and] was he crucified under the instruction of Pontius?” “Did he preach the gospel to the spirits while in prison?” “Did he rise on the third day?” “Did he ascend to heaven after 40 days?”, and “Will he come to judge the living and the dead?” The initiate responds affirmatively.

The bishop continues to pose questions to the initiate. “Will you renounce the devil, all his works, machinations and vanities?” This is a question to which the willing believer must respond affirmatively. “Will you live your life according to the Word of

---

149 Hubmaier, 388.
150 Hubmaier, 388.
Christ?” The initiate responds. “If you should sin before your brother, the bishop asks, will you let him admonish you once, twice or three times before the church?” The initiate must respond in the affirmative. The bishop reaches the end of the baptismal process. The bishop says that he may now be baptized and ushered into a community of believers. The initiate is led by the congregation in a final prayer. The congregation is asked if they may pray for the neophyte that God will increase his faith and give all of us strength to “be found at the end of Christian faith.”

The bishop lays his hands on the head of the initiate and says “I testify to you and give you authority that henceforth you shall be counted among the Christian community, as a member participating in the use of her keys, breaking bread and praying with other Christians sisters and brothers. God be with you and your spirit. Amen.” These final words end the ceremony.

That minister Balthasar Hubmaier preferred a “laying of hands” on the initiate rather than a water baptism is perhaps the most interesting part of this rite. The manner in which the one performing the baptism, whether it was by hands or by water, was another aspect of the baptismal ritual that came to distinguish, in part, the earliest Anabaptist leaders from one another. Some ministers chose a symbolic wash—a laying of hands—while others sprinkled or poured water, dunked the initiate’s head, or carried out actual full body washing with water. The following dialogue illustrates the process which occurs that during baptism in sequence—John’s work, baptism, spirit and water, and how this relates to the actual physical (and symbolic) process performed by John the Baptist to Christ in the Jordan River. We recognize this from the writings of Michael Sattler.

---

151 Hubmaier, 389.
152 Hubmaier, 389.
Water baptism

*John’s work*  
John says: I baptize you with water unto repentance.

Water

*Baptism*  
John baptized with water, Acts 1.

Holy Spirit

*Spirit*  
But you shall be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ the Living Son of God

*Water*  
First received water baptism from John in the Jordan, Lk.  
And thereafter the Holy Spirit from His heavenly Father,  
to fulfill all righteousness.  

This dialogue indicates how the rite of baptism—the actual baptism of Jesus by John—  
was ultimately used as a symbolic and actual format for the sixteenth century Anabaptist  
baptismal ceremonies. Initially, John baptizes Christ while saying, “I baptize you with  
water unto repentance” and subsequently, as consistent with Acts I, John baptizes with  
water (Acts I). The third phase of baptism—Spirit—refers to the Holy Spirit. The process  
comes full circle: Jesus Christ “first received water baptism from John in the Jordan,  
thereafter the Holy Spirit from His heavenly Father, to fulfill all righteousness.”

Michael Sattler considered Jesus’ baptism a transformation to a new state—all the stages

---

154 Sattler, 154.
are represented. The Anabaptist ministers incorporated this rite into their own baptismal rituals. And as indicated in various texts of modern ritual theory which explain the actual religious and physical processes of Christian rites, this is entirely a process: a transformative event that changes the physical status of the initiate, moves him to a new sacred space and ushers him into the congregation of Christians.

Baptismal practices were not only a way to define and distinguish between Anabaptist theologians and Evangelical leaders. They also raised an issue which the Evangelical camps ultimately maintained as medieval orthodox practice and so they agreed with the Roman Church. Even considering the many changes that occurred during the Reformation, the Church saw little need to reform its practices. Children were baptized, not adults. The Evangelicals saw little reason to change Roman Orthodoxy.

Both the Roman Church and the Evangelical leadership—particularly Zwingli and Luther—associated the rite of circumcision with the rite of baptism. Although converts were often adults throughout the history of the Roman Church and particularly in the sixteenth-century, in Latin America, baptism was therefore ultimately rooted in Canon Law and Church practice. Overall, it did not become the center of debate as did justification by faith or sacraments, which the Evangelicals rejected. Balthasar Hubmaier presented baptism as the external act whereby Anabaptists rejected the bourgeoning Evangelical churches and the Church of Rome. To the individuals committed to the free churches, baptism was a process that ushered the initiate into the community’s “elect”—a sacred status which implied that the individual believer may attain God’s favor and thus be destined for salvation. This was a privileged rite that occurred only though the freely
willed actions of the baptized, and it held with it eschatological dimensions that assured the believer promise in the coming Apocalypse.

The heterodox and the orthodox ministers believed that the world could come to an end and thus their communities must prepare through intense faith and communal participation. Anabaptist ministers were millenarian in their thinking—they looked to the coming Apocalypse, rigorously overseeing pious church communities in preparation for the event. Adult baptism was not only a way to bind new initiates into cohesive communities. Baptism was crucial to attaining election, and thus it was integral to the preparations or the judgments that would surely occur in the coming Apocalypse.

“Election” was fundamental to this process. God would save the elect, convert the Jews, and damn the “reprobate:” the wicked and the iniquitous.

The Reformation’s earliest Anabaptist congregations were frequently founded, influenced or led by an individual with significant intellect, oratory skills, and biblical knowledge. Many of them were itinerant minister who could travel in and out of urban and rural areas in a clandestine manner. Hubmaier, Sattler, Mantz, Phillips, Marpeck, and Grebel were only a few of the many prolific writers and articulate ministers who possessed such “charismatic authority.”

The Roman Church for centuries prosecuted dissent with physical force—public burnings of charged heretics, torture, and execution as a way to maintain social order and obedience. Even though rituals were, expressions of popular piety and collective creativity, surveillance and intervention by authorities were meant to discourage rural or urban rebellion, dictate culture and create a general framework for popular religious
practice. Protestant attacks on heterodox leadership and their followers were just as severe, and in many instances, affirmed by the institutional Church. As Magisterial Protestant towns and villages became more organized around a centralized region, their strategies for social allegiance, order, and bureaucratic organization became not so dissimilar to their adversaries who were committed to the Roman Church. The smaller Anabaptist congregations and their leadership, the groups most susceptible to Roman Church and Evangelical persecution, were less concerned with baptism as a means to discipline their populations.

With the onset of the Continental Reformation, the Anabaptists assertively positioned themselves among a broader era of religious and institutional change. They were unique. It was not until the seventeenth-century in England that radical communities emerged in large numbers, odd heterodox political dissenters such as the Ranters, Lollards, Fifth Monarchists, Muggletonians, Quakers, and Baptists. Just as England’s highly prolific ministers asserted themselves by writing extraordinarily detailed books and pamphlets, so too did the Anabaptists take advantage of this source of such knowledge and the way it was disseminated: the printing press. The leadership fought

155 The Western Latin Church in the Middle Ages and subsequently was a source of significant dictatorial control, oppression, social conditioning and cultural management. Various Reformation historians such as Steven Ozment, A.G. Dickens, Heiko Oberman and Ernst Troeltsch have argued that the Protestant leaders created a path that would free European Christendom from this persecution and control while simultaneously imposing a new form of religion whose systems of surveillance and control were at least similarly enforced. Steven Ozment has gone as far as to suggest that the Church of the Middle Ages created significant stability for the peoples of Western Christendom, which the “reckless and disruptive” changes made by the reformers unconscionably destroyed. [citation needed for Ozment]. Obviously, therefore, such criticisms of Roman Christianity have been overemphasized. Although the tentacles of the Roman Church’s ruling bureaucracy of friars, clerics, bishops, archbishops, and popes reached all across Eastern and Western Europe for over a millennium, they provided the laity with an organized social and political structure for worship, belief and day-to-day life. Again, the Protestant Reformation—the immediacy of the reformers’ changes—caused significant upheaval and social disorientation at a time when lay Christians were already beset by the ambiguities and uncertainties of religious authority and spiritual life.
over what would become the essential character of the new church. Each reformer had ideas about what would constitute a new reformed church and which scripturally-based ideas—the types of ritual, liturgy, and society—would be crucial to salvation.

Leaders of the Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier, Conrad Grebel, Michael Sattler, Dirk Phillips, and Hans Denck, persuaded their congregations to believe that salvation could only be attained through a very pious life and a firm commitment to the tenets of the Anabaptist faith. A strict adherence to pacifism also characterized the leaders and their flocks: the common followers of Anabaptism. These dissidents would not partake in violence of any kind, and surely they would not accept conscription into the armies of the Empire that in the mid-sixteenth century were trying to hold back the onslaught of the Ottoman Turks in Southeastern Europe.

The Anabaptists may be most clearly defined by their passionate defense of believer’s baptism. They disregarded the baptizing of children because they lacked the rationale or experience to recognize the promise and the institution to which they aspired. Children were simply unable to recognize or understand the complexities of the Anabaptist faith. The Anabaptists also shared a collective sense of oppression that defined their existence among an onslaught of Evangelical and Roman Church persecution. They existed as communities to the far left of the status quo in terms of ideology, status, and office. These differences may seem only marginal to the modern mindset, but to the mentality of the Reformation individual they defined the crucial distinctions between life and death, morality and sin: a great chasm between God and the
The devil. Therefore, Anabaptists recognized these crucial realities with bravery and obstinacy.

The Magisterial and Roman Churches condemned the Anabaptists, arrested them, and in most instances, executed them in often in very violent ways. The Anabaptists became scapegoats, marginalized within a larger feud between two power centers—the Evangelicals to the north and the Romans to the south. The Evangelicals were single minded, busying themselves with what would be the constitution of the new church. These theorists and the centuries-old Roman authorities that in some ways shared the same concerns still recognized radical dissenters as heretics that must either recant, be put to death, or both. Luther and Zwingli lured the Anabaptist leadership to “diets” and “disputations:” set locations where arguments over theology would occur. Many Evangelicals used such occasions to capture and punish the Anabaptists. Most frequently the Anabaptists—common heretics—would be handed over to Church authorities to be taken back to Rome for punishment and sentencing.

Martyrdom came to define this radical culture, and over time this created tension among individuals who had a willing desire to be captured and executed and those who chose life over death and perhaps ultimately recanted their beliefs. In other words, is willed martyrdom actually suicide or the ultimate act of bravery in the face of death? This is a tricky concern that has long puzzled scholars of Reformation history.

At a time of social, religious, and institutional change, the Anabaptists were one of the most interesting of all the myriad groups that colored the complex social and political canvas that was the Continental Reformation. However, today historians place
them in a much more original category—the standard-bearers of the “Radical
Reformation.” This term was coined by the esteemed Harvard scholar, George Huntston
Williams. Although similar groups with similar ideas emerged before and afterwards—
heterodox communities in the late medieval era and into England’s Civil War—no
Christian culture is as unique in theological interpretation, invention, or inherent bravery
as the Reformation’s Anabaptists.
III. The Quakers

The first Quakers, the Society of Friends, emerged in the 1650s and helped shape the social, political, and religious milieu of English society as it was undergoing a tumultuous era of upheaval and change. The Quakers were unique in many ways, and stood apart not only from the institutional Church—the Church of England—but also from their heterodox contemporaries. Other radical communities likewise were developing new interpretations of doctrine that connected them to and made them a part of the uncertainties of the sacred, ritual, and eschatological issues of the time. Perhaps the most definitive way that the Friends separated themselves from the Church was through their adamant rejection of water baptism in all of its forms. Additionally, a universal ministry, a faith-based “inner light” and a “baptism of the spirit” also distinguished the
Quakers from both their orthodox and their heterodox peers who also emerged in the many distinct regions of England. The Quakers dismissed the rite of water baptism because they found no biblical precedent for the centuries-old medieval tradition created by the Roman Church and in most instances maintained by the Continental Protestants.

This chapter will present a detailed explanation of why the Society of Friends dismissed water baptism and how they sought in its place a shared sense of the inward spiritual self.

This chapter is organized into five sections. It begins with a brief narrative history of the Quakers, indicating their significant increase in numbers in an approximately seventy five year stay in England. Many Quakers eventually migrated to the burgeoning colonies of America and formed large communities that have survived, substantially increased, and have become a significant presence among the global association of Protestant churches that exist today. I am interested, secondly, in examining in particular detail the recent literature written by contemporary scholars of the Quakers and the detailed aspects of their religion. This section is a historiographical examination that will highlight historians’ perspectives on the lives and experiences of Quaker elites and their followers. Subsequent to this, I will look closely at a study of the theological aspects of the Quaker way of life and its members’ social, political and religious commitments. The fifth section will center on the most influential Quakers—their most prolific writers—who went into great detail explaining their stances on key issues such as the Christian ministry, water baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. The inner spirit was a defining characteristic of the Friends’ way of life and consequently it set them apart from
traditional society, which would bring to their communities alienation, persecution, and in many instances death.

This chapter will place particular emphasis on the scriptural and rational basis for a collective denunciation of water baptism. This was at the core of the Quakers’ identity; it ran parallel to and justified neighboring religious precepts; it engaged notions of internal and external spirituality and thus its points will be explored in particular detail. I will begin with a brief sketch of the movement that should present context for the analyses that follow.

One concern ought to be addressed: In Quaker society, all church members were recognized as ministers, including women. This was universal. It was a response to the hierarchical structure of the Roman Church, which they believed had become corrupted by centuries of decadence and doctrinally false rituals. The Friends sought harmony and personal autonomy among community members. During a service, if anyone was driven by spiritual inner voice and wanted to share an experience with the congregation, his or her thoughts could be considered sacred. Quaker leaders such as Robert Barkley and George Fox were surely called “minister” (and in various instances, pastor). Considering this, throughout the chapter I will refer to the Quaker leadership as ministers by the term “minister,” instead of others such as “preacher,” “priest,” “bishop,” or “pastor.”

The Society of Friends believed that God exists as a “light” within all people and that everyone had the capacity to be good and thus to reach out to others as a pious, productive member of society. Quakers also believed that each person could recognize and confirm the light by becoming an “inner witness,” or a “seed.” This was a spiritual
act through which “Christ [was] reborn in us,” and it affirmed that “God is in every human.” The Quakers’ way of life was characteristically simple. They believed in justice, non-violence, an ascetic lifestyle, and honesty in every circumstance. The name Quakers was initially derogatory. It was derived from the term “quack” because the Friends were known for their outspoken interferences in the middle of the worship ceremonies of their contemporaries. The criticisms were almost always directed at the liturgies of heterodox ministers.

The Friends were spiritually, intellectually, and theologically influenced by the Baptists, Seekers, and Ranters, who were in turn shaped by the Lollards and the Anabaptists. (The Lollards and the Anabaptists also criticized England’s class hierarchy for its rigid economic inequality.) Quakers rejected outward ceremonies, and in place of such exterior rituals, they acknowledged an inward light—the self. The Society of Friends also believed that men and women existed as their own ministers and consequently they were highly critical of the religious hierarchy that existed within the Anglican Church. To the Quakers, God’s power and love existed in the heart of every believer.

By 1652, the Society grew in membership, particularly in England’s northwest region, a location that initially lacked a strong Puritan presence. One of the earliest Quaker ministers was George Fox, who began preaching in England during the Puritan Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell (1599—1658). George Fox began to hold open-

---

156 The historical narrative in this section draws on relevant entries in the Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Press USA, 2005), s.v. “Quakers.”

air meetings in Yorkshire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland. Fox and the ministers who followed him directed their followers to “sit under the Light, largely in silence, for months of anguished self-searching of their motives and habits.” The Quakers became present among many communities in England, particularly in the years 1654 to 1656. The newly converted Friends spoke out at markets and nearby parishes, even though they were frequently heckled, run out, beaten, or in some instances captured and executed. Persecution became more apparent in the last years of the seventeenth century. The death toll of the Quakers was moderate in comparison to that of the Anabaptists and other dissenters in England and on the Continent, where dissenters were rounded up and executed, often in large numbers. The Friends were also radically millenarian. Moreover, they were ardent pacifists and condemned outward violence as an offensive act against God. Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the Quakers’ manner was their use of “thee” and “thou” instead of “you.” Friends also refused to take oaths, because they believed that honesty was already assumed and that any Quaker individual ought to tell the truth on any occasion. They refused to swear oaths and say “yes” or “no” just as the Anabaptists did; they had considered this unbiblical by 1530. Honesty and truth were assumed and steadfast.

The number of persecuted Quakers reached its apex under the reign of Charles II (1630—1685) when enforcement of Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670 imprisoned 50,000 Quakers; 500 died in prison. Simultaneously, Quaker leaders such as William Penn, Isaac Pennington, and Robert Barklay began to preach among greater numbers.

\[158\] Jones, 7456.
This in turn attracted many more followers and led to numerous conversions. The ministers taught new and unique interpretations of scripture, doctrines, concepts, and ways of living, which were to them much more comforting than the rigid orthodoxies of the Anglican Church.

The Society of Friends was very business-oriented. Quakers set up collective meetings to “register births, marriages, and burials and to aid prisoners, widows, and poor Friends.” Robert Barklay, a Quaker minister and theologian, in 1678 wrote the *Apology*, a complex exegesis on Quaker thought and belief. Barklay’s interpretations of scripture became the most frequently read works of theology among all of the Quaker communities. Barklay recognized that “the power of the Spirit can purify from sinning in the present.” Sacraments were “inward” rather than “outward”; the inward spirit existed to recognize Jesus as part of a church service. Outward signs such as water, bread, and wine were superfluous and thus unnecessary. Toleration was at the core of Quaker religion. William Penn argued that the authorities must allow “dissenting or nonconformist” communities to exist outside of the Anglican Church and its state orthodoxy. This plea was very particularly fulfilled by the *Toleration Act of 1689*, which was also implemented in response to diverse pressures. Quaker leadership asserted a universal policy of nonviolence and opposition to governance and authority.

Recent academic literature on Quaker history has emphasized their commitment to new members, energetic pamphleteering and book writing, gender relationships, and active proselytizing, all of which were a part of the radical dissent milieu of England in

---

159 Jones, 7457.
160 Jones, 7457.
the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Quaker presence in the American colonies contributed to shaping the dynamic political culture of each distinct region.

In *Walking in the Way of Peace: Quaker Pacifism in the Seventeenth Century*, Meredith Baldwin Weddle evaluates Quaker pacifism and its function among broader contexts of political change: England’s Civil War (1642—1651), the rise of Oliver Cromwell, who established the Commonwealth in 1649, and the Restoration of Charles II (1658—1660). Weddle suggests that “Pacifism, the renunciation of violence, has [always] persisted in history.” The Quakers looked to the “‘new covenant’ of Jesus, wherein love was the animating element of all human relationships and where the perfectibility of man, even while on earth, was possible.” That the Quakers insisted that God was present in all persons caused significant conflict with their orthodox contemporaries. The Society of Friends—the ministers in particular—denied that “aggression is inevitable and overriding” and suggested that the “psychological nature of human beings is incompatible with sustained avoidance of fighting and war.” Instead, Weddle argues that the Quakers held steadfastly to the notion that violence in all of its forms was antithetical to the “new covenant and to his [Jesus’] admonition to love one’s enemies.” This is what separated the Quakers from their contemporaries. There were Christians who believed that if war came, particularly against an enemy outside of Christendom, it would be the individual’s responsibility to take up arms and defend his

---


162 Weddle, 3.

163 Weddle, 50.

164 Weddle, 232.

165 Weddle, 232.
own country and people. Martin Luther wrote a tract called *Can a Soldier Too be Saved?* in which he defended those conscripted into wars abroad, so long as the war was just: it was meant to protect Christian civilization.¹⁶⁶

Larry H. Ingle’s primary interest in his book, *The First Among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism*, is the rise of Quaker preachers as influential, outspoken leaders of a burgeoning English heterodox society. Ingle argues that George Fox’s writings were focused mainly on religion, social justice, the importance of community, and the individual’s place in both the spiritual and the worldly realms. Ingle posits that George Fox “hoped that his movement could recapture this disappearing community, that the spirit of Christ he preached so consistently would call people to a new but different order, one in which the divine spirit sparked ordinary people to revitalize primitive Christianity.”¹⁶⁷ To Ingle, George Fox’s dream of a new community went unrealized. The Quakers could not easily remove themselves from their presence and place in England as it underwent political and institutional change. The Friends’ dream of a peaceful society was made more complicated with their arrival in the New World, where their notions of pacifism were tested by an unfortunate involvement in King Phillip’s War. George Fox died on January 10, 1691. And alongside his peers in ministry, such as William Penn and George Keith, George Fox was never able to realize his utopian society, a Christian society that would not have to face the difficult challenges of wartime commitment. The Society of Friends wished to remain autonomous and

¹⁶⁶ Luther wrote in the early sixteenth-century a variety of texts on topics of early Protestantism, its rules and laws.
uninvolved. There were complex scenarios that animated the Quakers’ participation in war; ultimately they would only build weapons and ammunition to be used by other soldiers, not by themselves on the battlefield.

Although the Quakers ultimately merged peacefully into English society, they did encounter in some instances hostile responses from commoners, elites and the courts alike. The Friends gained influence and agency in society, particularly by the 1650s. They challenged the status quo, and many people reacted to their somewhat strange behaviors with significant contempt. For example, Barry Reay argues in “Popular Hostility Towards Quakers in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England” that “Quaker religious practice brought with it more hostility than support.” Indeed many people considered that the Quakers were in fact insane, while some were interested in them—their manner—and did little to contradict them openly. The authorities, however, had a different attitude toward the Friends and their actions. Reay argues that they “fined, whipped, branded, mutilated, banished individuals or even executed their followers and their ministers. The Quakers were among the most persecuted groups in England at this time. The “church courts showed little lenience towards them.” Ultimately, the local authorities took it upon themselves to survey, police, and punish the Quakers.

The Quakers’ insistent challenges to the Church of England’s traditional rituals, ceremonies, and liturgies brought with them very tough repercussions. The sect’s use of the words “‘Thee’ and ‘Thou’ . . . their refusal to doff hat to social superiors, their

168 For more on George Fox’s dream of a utopian society and the isolationism of the Society of Friends, consider Ingle, First Among Friends.
170 Reay, 388.
unwillingness even to recognize titles . . . enraged men, particularly those with property.” In addition to this, authorities attacked the Quakers “as political rebels” even though they made no presumptions to attack the institutions of traditional English society. Essentially the general reaction of English society to the Quakers was mixed; commoners were uncertain yet sometimes supportive; elites and property owners could be either ambivalent or antagonistic; the police and magistrates were almost always cruel. Reay suggests that despite such a culture of varying opinion, the Friends remained entirely critical of the Anglican Church, its orthodoxy, and its rituals.

In “Seditious or ‘Sober and Useful Inhabitants?’ Changing Conceptions of the Quakers in Early Modern Britain,” Richard L. Greaves is more emphatically critical than Barry Reay. He suggests that commoners and authorities were both very hostile to the Quakers. Greaves argues that “A number of things worked against the Quakers, such as their presumption to lecture the king and his magistrates, their confrontational acts, irrepressible meetings, occasional resistance of magistrates. A perceived association with other ‘fanatics’, and the assumption among some that the Quakers were prepared to take up arms against the government.” The magistrates were certainly wrong about the potential for insurrection, but they nevertheless took hasty action toward those supporting or giving refuge to the Quakers.

Greaves argues that “the Friends were lumped in with the Ranters, Seekers, Arians, Socinians, Baptists, Fifth Monarchists, Familists, Seekers, Behmenists,

---

171 Reay, 389.
172 Reay, 391.
Antinomians, Sabbatarians, Muggletonians and ‘Sweet Singers.’ Authorities ultimately misunderstood the Quakers; they assumed that because the heterodox groups were distinct, independent sects that based their understanding of the Bible, its theology and their way on divergent perspectives, they must be heretical and thus surveyed and policed rigorously. In any case, as does Reay, Greaves suggests that “Quakers became more organized and thus accepted over time.”

Because members of the Society of Friends gradually rose to prominent commercial stations, they eventually gained the respect of the English middle and upper classes, the merchants, and the industrial workers.

The contributions of Quaker women to community, ministry, and individual personal care suggest that they took a large role in the creation of early Quaker culture. In *Theology and Women’s Ministry in Seventeenth-Century Quakerism: Handmaids of the Lord*, Catherine M. Wilcox suggests that women were given particular responsibility in Quaker society. In fact, Wilcox argues that their assistance and care extended to “on the one hand poor relief and the care of prisoners and their families; and on the other, the admonishing of women backsliders, authority over the correct ordering of marriages, and advice on the discipline of servants and children.” Over time women rose up to become ministers, which was unique among English churches. They also wrote prolifically on religious matters even though their readers often found the writings of Quaker women disorganized and thus hard to follow.

---

174 Greaves, 30.
175 Greaves, 26.
Wilcox also suggests that “The Quakers [men and women] were highly millenarian, their hopes resting on eschatology—the second coming of Christ was near and they must be ready.”\(^{177}\) The years of the 1760s ’70s brought with them a decline in eschatological beliefs. To Wilcox, “The disappearance of their eschatological framework had, therefore, far-reaching implications for their understanding of women’s place and ministry.”\(^{178}\) Even though ministry initially applied to all members of the Quaker congregation (and in only a limited way), ultimately women were no longer were allowed to minister, and the notion of male superiority in the home and at worship was firmly reestablished. The change in cultural mores and the slow decline of apocalyptic expectations may have caused a shift in the Quakers’ commitment to the concept of the inner light. According to Wilcox, although Quakers spoke and wrote about the inner light from the beginning, their understanding of it did not remain unchanged. In the earliest days “The light was intimately bound up with the Quakers’ belief in the imminent day of the Lord, and in Christ revealed and active in the heart in the last days.”\(^{179}\) Such a profound emphasis on millenarian eschatology among both men and women led to profound apocalyptic expectations.

The analysis below will describe the biblical, theological, and rational bases for the Quaker’s defense of spirit baptism as opposed to water baptism and will also focus significantly on the theology of Robert Bradshaw and his conception of the life of Jesus. Drawing particularly on the work of scholars Brian Spinks, Davis Leal, and Paul

\(^{178}\) Wilcox, 235.
\(^{179}\) Wilcox, 8.
The narrative below will follow the biblical nuances and analytical rhetoric behind these two dramatically opposed rites. I will also discuss briefly the experiences of Quaker preachers and the surprisingly autonomous roles of Quaker women within a highly patriarchal society.

The Society of Friends’ elites looked to Scripture to create their own doctrines of baptism. They dismissed sprinkling or dunking because they believed it was the incorrect way to perform a baptism. To the Quakers, Scripture proved baptism to be an inward rite: “Baptism rested largely in scriptural exegesis, focusing particularly on Mark 1:8: “I indeed have baptized you with water but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost’ (cf. John 1:33, Mat. 3:11).”

Robert Barklay, “further [looked to] Romans 6:3—4, Galicians 3—27, and Colossians 2:12, to show that Paul [was] clear that baptism does not involve water. Christ never baptized with water, nor did he instruct others to do so, even in Matthew 28—19.”

To the Quakers, “Baptism was spiritual, not outward,” and “there was no longer need for an outward rite.” The Quakers’ ritual of baptism was symbolic but otherwise followed conventional liturgies quite closely. The process united the individual with Christ; sins were buried, the burden of sin was broken; and the believer was freed. All those baptized were “pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified by Christ,” and subsequently “baptism [became] a sign and seal of . . . common discipleship.”

The Quakers viewed baptism as a process that would usher the believer into the community of

181 Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 45.
182 Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 24.
183 Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 23.
Apostolic Saints. The Quakers’ 1887 Declaration of Faith clarifies their fully developed position:

We reverently believe that, as there is one Lord and one faith, so there is, under the Christian dispensation, but one baptism (Ephesians 4:4—5), even that whereby all believers are baptized in the one spirit into the one body (1 Corinthians 12:13 RV). This is not an outward baptism with water, but a spiritual experience; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh (1 Peter 3:21), but that inward work which, by transforming the heart and settling the soul upon Christ, brings forth the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the experience of his love and power, as the risen and ascended Savior. No baptism in outward water can satisfy the description of the apostle, of being buried with Christ by baptism unto death (Romans 6:4). It is with the spirit alone that any can thus be baptized. In this experience, the announcement of the forerunner of our Lord is fulfilled, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Matthew 3:11).

Spirit baptism was considerably different than those baptisms administered by their orthodox (and heterodox) contemporaries. Women frequently played integral roles in the baptisms. Ministers did not “sprinkle” upon the foreheads of the believers as did those of the Roman Church and various Protestant groups as well. The Quaker method was inward and presupposed to be an incorporative and spiritual process.

Quaker baptism comprised five elements: Christ’s death and resurrection, conversion, pardoning and cleansing, a gift of the spirit, the incorporation in the body of Christ, and the sign of the Kingdom. Ultimately sins are washed away, set free through Jesus’ death. To the Quakers, the power of sin was diminished. They believed that those baptized “pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ. God bestows upon all baptized

---

184 This is the Quakers’ 1887 Declaration of Faith and stance on outward baptism. Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 63.
185 These five characteristics of baptism are discussed and defined by writers, Leal and Bradshaw. Quakers preferred baptism of the spirit over their contemporaries’ practice of baptism by water. Refer to page 23.
186 The passage above is excerpted from a section named Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry. Refer to Spinks, et.al., 23
persons the anointing and promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal, and implants in their hearts the first installment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God.” An outward rite was no longer necessary. Baptism was inward, not outward.

The Quaker leadership—the ministers and writers—were particularly focused on “correct” Biblical interpretation, and for this reason the excerpts derived from scripture were subsequently made part of Quaker religious practice and culture. When George Fox encountered a “flaming sword” in 1648, he saw this as a command to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Fox looked to “Matthew 3:11, and the only one who had experienced this could recognize God’s power.” Similarly, Robert Barklay also turned to the Bible’s contents. Barklay viewed Romans 6:3—4, Galicians 3:27, and Colossians 2:12 as definitive passages proving that “baptism does not involve water.” The Quakers recognized only baptism of the “inner” spirit.

Meetings where baptism took place involved ministry teams instead of priests. They were very open, and enthusiastic: the congregations took part collectively in the services. These communities, led by pastors, presupposed the incorporative and spiritual processes that accompanied those individuals from groups who practiced water baptism. The Quakers’ unique cultural activities did not extend only to their own religious spheres. Quakers also involved themselves in the affairs of other local churches. They would often interrupt services to criticize, often quite boisterously, the words of their pastor.

187 Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 23.
188 Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 24.
189 Spinks, Leal and Bradshaw, 25.
In one instance, a Quaker yeoman, John Sewell from Gestingthorpe, Essex, called out, “‘Thou . . . are a deceiver’ . . . directed [at] a priest after he had witnessed a baptismal service, ‘prove it from the words that children were ever baptized by sprinkling water upon them.’” This was quite common among the most adamant and outspoken of the Quakers.

To women and midwives, baptism “possessed social significance in that it gave formal recognition to a child as a member of local society.” Moreover, women believed that infant baptism was crucial out of fear that a child could die at birth or soon thereafter. Unfortunately, “this was unacceptable to some Quaker communities and as a result local midwives and other parish women refused to assist Quaker women during labour.” Women in the sixteenth century society were frequently the unwilling victims of a society bound by the powerful force of scriptural interpretation and the strict social mores that became manifest.

The response of the Essex Friends was to choose a midwife of some standing in the community. Ann Burton, wife of Samuel Burton, a tallow chancellor, acted as a Quaker midwife in 1663 and afterwards. In the beginning of the 1680s, in the town of Barker, Elizabeth Mortimer for twenty years assisted Quaker women during confinement.

190 The interruption of sermons by the Quakers has been documented and discussed several times by various Quaker historians. Refer to Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society 1655-1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 23.
191 Adrian Davies, 23.
192 Adrian Davies, 37-38.
193 Because all Quaker mothers concerned themselves with their babies’ immediate protection at birth, they chose to baptize right away, especially if the death of the newborn seemed imminent. Refer to Davies, 38.
194 This also resembles the actions taken by Anabaptist women who were so protective of their babies that they too would demand baptism at infancy regardless of their communities’ adult baptism practices and even when many men disapproved. Nevertheless, Anabaptist women also chose water as the correct way to baptize. Refer to Davies, 38.
The advantage of a Quaker midwife was that she could be relied on neither to use the baptismal ceremony nor to place ribbons on the newborn baby, a practice disapproved of by Quaker men because it was considered ostentatious.

The Society of Friends’ books and tracts were not only disseminated via the printing press. The Quakers were an active pamphleteering culture and they disseminated the most confessional documents of any group at this time, including both radical communities and the Anglican Church. Through active pamphleteering, the early Quaker movement became an influential voice in an effort to achieve “substantial political and religious change.” It was through “. . . systematic and chronological reading of the tracts published between 1652 and 1656, and of the many letters produced by the movement’s leaders, that Quakers [became] highly engaged with contemporary political and religious affairs, and were committed in very practical ways to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth.” The character of Quaker criticism expressed itself through topics such as the denunciation of formal worship, resistance to tithes, and proclamation of God’s law.

The Quaker movement over time in an effort to achieve an active presence among the many dissenting groups began to criticize the Anglican Church. Tensions emerged between the Friends, the Church, and its sectarian contemporaries during the Interregnum (1649—1660) and the subsequent Restoration (1660—1685), when Charles II (1630—1685) subsequently took the throne. Scholars of seventeenth-century England suggest that the Quakers were at best peripheral to the political culture of the time. Kate Peters,

---

196 Peters, Print Culture, 2.
on the other hand, argues that Quakers emerged at a time when England was experiencing a wave of profound radical activity in myriad social, political, and religious spheres. And it was through active and aggressive printing and pamphleteering that the intricacies of Quakers’ faith were solidified. In fact, “Not only did [Quakers] produce, and preserve, a significant amount of tracts; they also wrote and preserved thousands of letters in the course of their extensive campaigning activities.”

197 Pamphleteering was the manner in which the Friends’ voices—interpreters of Scripture—began to stretch beyond the borders of their communities. The “. . . Quakers engaged seriously with contemporary issues, and were able in consequence to build a national, successful movement and maintain a coherent and effective dialogue with the body politic.”

198 Thus it is clear that “printed accounts of local religious persecution or of specific religious disputes were, by virtue of publication, located within national political and religious debates . . .”

199 The Quakers not only recorded incidents of persecution among their own communities; they also catalogued attacks against their heterodox neighbors. The Quakers were not only critics of existing religious establishments. Political events and social activities fell under their close scrutiny as well.

As England underwent a reestablishment of the monarchy in 1660, a wide-ranging and unique wave of print culture emerged, particularly from the heterodox cultures discussed above. At this point English society experienced an unprecedented wave of active dissident communities. The printing press was the medium through which the most

197 Peters, Print Culture, 4.
198 Peters, Print Culture, 5.
199 Peters, Print Culture, 253.
visible sects challenged each other through debates, theological criticism, and massive pamphleteering. The Quakers proselytized aggressively, and so they gained new members and cultivated a particular identity, one that distinguished them from their radical counterparts. It was “the anti-Calvinist thrust of the Quakers’ outlook [that] demanded the widest possible proselytizing.”

Readers were both “hostile and friendly” as they reacted to an overwhelming onslaught of Quaker tracts and books.

A sharp relaxation of state orthodoxy emerged in the mid-seventeenth century. The state leadership was grappling with an executed monarch, Charles I, a bloody Civil War, and the rise of a new interim military ruler. Oliver Cromwell became interested in the activities of the Quakers. In fact, “Oliver Cromwell’s numerous meetings with the Quakers are often cited as evidence of the broadly tolerant Cromwellian church; but such meetings also suggest that the Quakers had sufficient credibility to be taken seriously.”

It was “the rapid growth of the movement, and its immediate recognition by contemporaries as a force to be reckoned with, [which] suggests that they were successful.” The Quakers continued to increase in numbers during the 1650s. The writers of the books and tracts were not in all instances university-educated men. “The main body of Quaker authors came from remote parishes in Lancashire and Westmorland, and form parts of Yorkshire only slightly better connected with the capital.”

---

201 Peters, *Print Culture*, 252.
understanding of other radical groups and other forms of publication,\textsuperscript{204} which flourished in the 1650s when Quaker print culture reached its apex. The Friends’ radical contemporaries such as the Levelers, the Muggletonians, the Diggers, the Family of Love, and the Fifth Monarchists also made themselves visible through preaching and pamphleteering.

Pamphleteering empowered the Quakers with a political voice, and the medium of its dissemination, the printing press, became a way by which both heterodox and orthodox groups communicated and criticized one another. Heterodox leaders such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the prominent Anabaptist, Balthasar Hubmaier, took advantage of this novel new tool, which made communication with people throughout Europe on a wide-ranging scale possible. The extent to which the English printers who followed owed their style and content to their neighboring European voices is not entirely clear.

The following discussion will illustrate the many ways that Quakers made themselves visible during the chaotic years of the English Revolution. It should also contextualize an analysis of the actual books—the sources themselves—that followed. These writings indicate the many ways Quaker writers studied and ultimately professed their disregard of ritual as a sign or a rite—the light within. It was in the embryonic rise of Quakers society that they aggressively “produced hundreds of tracts which fiercely denounced temporal authorities, attacked orthodox Puritanism and Godly ministers, [and]
rejected social hierarchies and set forms of worship.”  

Thomas Corns and David Loewenstein emphasize the collective influences of the “literary, political, and religious dimensions of Quaker writing as it was developed in the interregnum and Restoration.”  

Through mass pamphleteering, the Quaker writers became all too recognizable in a new culture of print communication. Both Quaker women and men “in the form of unpublished and published letters, polemical tracts, spiritual autobiographies, journal essays, testimonies, and accounts of ‘sufferings’ helped to consolidate shape, and authorize the movement and its culture.”  

And within the many attacks on England’s status quo, the Quakers brought an assault on “the social, religious, and political orthodoxies” of the Anglican Church.

The Friends were also very organized and took significant initiative to ensure that their tracts would influence a broad, diverse audience while ultimately their movement would become a centerpiece of the heterodox resistance. Quaker writers were “exclusively the ‘ministers’ of the early Quaker movement: men and women with the power to speak, preach, and carry their ideas across the country.”

As the movement consolidated throughout England after 1652 writing became a “specific tool of an

---

207 Corns and Loewenstein, 3.
208 Corns and Loewenstein, 2.
increasingly mobile and vocal Quaker leadership. By the year 1660 the numbers of Quakers collectively in England reached 40,000.”

At the epicenter of Quaker life was the experience of suffering, which was not so dissimilar to many of their heterodox contemporaries, particularly the Continental Anabaptists. Anabaptists also defined their difficult existence through suffering and martyrdom. Likewise, Quakers involved themselves in assertive activism, “in gathering and publishing their suffering as a way of confronting their persecutors and judges and in developing a legal support system through the Meeting for Suffering, established in London in 1676.”

Although various historians emphasize one aspect of Quaker life—active writing and pamphleteering—some suggest that this activity was much more complex and difficult to understand. In the article “Hidden Things Brought to Light: Enthusiasm and Quaker Discourse,” Nigel Smith argues that Quaker “modes of expression were intrinsic to their ideas.” Not only were Quaker writings revolutionary, they sat “between conservative assertions of natural and divinely sanctioned hierarchies.” The Quakers’ “rhythms, incantations and naming” as well as “their struggles of self-understanding reveal a more diverse, penetrating and absorbing use of words and the body.” The differences among Quaker leadership and the distinctiveness of spirit baptism become

---

212 Smith, “Hidden Things Brought to Light: Enthusiasm and Quaker Discourse,” in Corns and Loewenstein, 57.
213 Smith, 57.
214 Smith, 68.
apparent by detailing and interpreting the written descriptions of successive Quaker writers such as the theologian Henry Boardman, and by considering the seventeenth century books themselves and their writers.

Henry Boardman’s *The Two Sacraments: A Brief Examination of the Views Entertained by the Society of Friends, Respecting the Christian Ministry, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper* discusses the topic of baptism in a more thorough manner. Boardman, a nineteenth-century writer of Quaker theology, described and defended the Friends’ perspectives on baptism and ministry. Although this scholar wrote about Quaker doctrine in the nineteenth century, his analysis echoes in close parallel the rationale of his seventeenth century predecessors. In other words, his writing is entirely relevant to the discussion because it is centered on, if not specific to, the theology and doctrine on which the early Quakers also focused to criticize water baptism. Boardman’s analysis placed emphasis on the New Testament, specifically the life of Jesus. Moreover, Boardman looks closely at the Sacraments and their place in Quaker religious practice, specifically the Christian ministry, spirit baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. He presents three fundamental reasons why the Quakers did not baptize with water.

Boardman argued that the Friends believed that God accepts only a spirit baptism, which was in direct contradiction to their contemporaries, both orthodox and heterodox groups, most of which maintained the ceremonies and rituals of the medieval Church and those of the succeeding Reformation Evangelicals. The ceremony of the Lord’s Supper,

---

to the Quakers, was also entirely spiritual. The Quakers looked closely to the New Testament for their understanding of the significance of this ritual. Just as the early Quaker ministers did, Boardman suggests that Jesus did not set apart the Lord’s Supper until after the Eucharist ceremony. Therefore, to the Society of Friends there was no evidence that communion should be a rite or a part of the Christian ritual. Furthermore, the leading Friends—the ministers and writers—suggested that Jesus said nothing to the Apostles of a water baptism. This is an interpretation that weighed heavily on the Quakers’ philosophy of baptism. Jesus did not command a water baptism during the Lord’s Supper. He ultimately recognized a baptism of the spirit.

As they studied the New Testament, the Quaker readers recognized the Holy Ghost—the spirit—to come first. For example, in Cornelius, Acts 10, Peter is preaching to his family when the Holy Ghost “falls on them.” Moreover, “This, according to the system I am controverting, was all they required—all that the new dispensation admits—the Baptism of the Spirit.” 216 As we consider the exchange between the Ethiopian and Philip in the Bible, Philip states “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest be baptized with water.” 217 The spirit comes before water baptism. To Boardman, there are many places where such examples may be found in the New Testament. The most emphatic justification for Quakers’ insistence on spirit baptism over water baptism is that “the Savior himself did not baptize, and that Paul avows that he was sent ‘not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.’” 218

216 Boardman, 9.
217 Boardman, 10.
218 Boardman, 11.
not Jesus baptized. They focused attention more specifically on Jesus’s command to the Apostles to baptize: “Did the Saviour institute baptism with water as a permanent ordinance of this church?” The ministers asserted, “On the opposite side it is contended, that when he directed the twelve to baptize the nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, he had no reference to water baptism.”

The word “baptism” as it occurs in the New Testament should be considered metaphorically. The Quakers pledged three fundamental arguments that explain clearly why as a collective community they favored spirit baptism to water baptism. These are as follows:

1. The Savior did not order the Apostles to baptize with water.
2. It was not a “commanded” water baptism; it must have been of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, John the Baptist baptized Jesus with water, but sent himself to baptize his followers with “the Holy Ghost and with fire.”
3. The Anglican Church’s interpretation seems to suggest that the Apostles supposedly “were not so competent to understand its import as a person living eighteen centuries afterward.” The above point is founded on the precept that “It was after the ‘Spirit of Truth’ had come upon them, who was to ‘guide them into all truth’ that they fell into this grave error, and set up water-baptism as the initiatory rite of the Christian church. In other words, we must place emphasis on the interpretation of the Apostles more than succeeding writers and understand that their instructions directed them to spirit, not water, and the Holy Ghost, by definition, is questionable. Ought the common Christians to allow centuries of re-definition be taken more seriously that the Apostles themselves who were never instructed, at the actual time, by Jesus first hand?”

To the benefit of contemporaneous theologians, the Quaker writers admitted that even intelligent men could error in scriptural interpretation. Boardman argues that the Quakers

---

219 Boardman, 12.
220 Boardman, 12.
221 Boardman, in a passage from p. 16: three fundamental reasons which explain why Quakers did not accept water baptism.
believed that the instruction given to the Apostles was central to the understanding of the common Christian. God handed down these ordinances as they are and so the individual Christian must not challenge the wisdom that accompanies them. Rituals and ceremonies, to the Society of Friends, were not justified if there was no Biblical precedent for their recognition in a Quaker church service. The words of Jesus, his actions, and the providential events in the Bible took precedent over a thousand years of medieval, Roman tradition.

The Society of Friends’ concept of ministry was profoundly distinct from those outside of the Society. The Quakers were against an “official, permanent ministry in the church.” Their contemporaries, both heterodox and orthodox, maintained that only educated men should be ministers. Furthermore, preachers such as Luther and Calvin, ministers of the Roman and the Anglican orders saw to it that they should and did have the power to ordain the ministers, establish a location for them, and place their entire confidence in them. According to the Quaker ministers, this was entirely contrary to scriptural interpretation. The Quakers believed that a theological education was unnecessary that all members of congregation could take on this role. To the Quakers, the spirit empowered the individual minister.

During a service anyone could address the church if something personal or transcendent came to mind. If God spoke through a man or woman during a service, he or she was encouraged to feel and speak aloud. In this way, God was heard. If one were approached by a legate (a representative of the Church) with particular instructions one

---

222 Boardman, 23.
ought to say: What are your credentials? Do you have any inspiration or heard words such as the Apostles spoke? The Apostles gave instructions and witnessed miracles. Jesus said: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. . . . Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” The Society of Friends accepted this test as proof of a universal ministry just as they considered the following consideration, that “. . . [They] have, then, clear palpable authority of the Saviour’s command, and the example and teachings of the Apostles, to show that there was a permanent, official ministry in the church.” That the Apostles were all instructed to teach the word of Jesus, explains why the Quakers were able to assign a collective ministry to their congregations.

This view was not entirely inconsistent with the concepts and reforms of the Protestant churches. Luther circulated the tract The Priesthood of All Believers, in which he argued against priest-held scriptural authority. Luther favored an individual’s own faith and piety in place of institutional authority, Sola Fide, (grace by faith alone) and a reading and understanding of scripture, Sola Scriptura. However, this concept maintained itself within the construct of a hierarchical society (that Luther favored) in which Luther referred more to ministers and princes, than to the most common of peasants. Luther wanted to take Biblical authority away from the priests and the popes and have people read from Scripture independently and in their own language. Likewise, the Quakers were arguing for change not unlike their Evangelical contemporaries across the channel,

---

223 Boardman, 27.
224 Boardman, 27.
225 As Jesus instructed the Apostles to go out and teach, so too the early Quakers created more autonomy among their congregations' ministries. Boardman, 27.
The Society of Friends believed that followers must worship God “in spirit and in truth” and that one only attains God’s approval through “that which flows from the heart.” Luther chose “grace” and “obedience” to inward faith or a spirit of the heart. This is one fundamental difference between Luther and the Quaker ministers.

Quakers and their opponents wrote often polemical tracts and small books as they contended with each other over myriad religious concerns. Among these, the most revealing were their adversarial discourses over the proper way to administer baptism. Some writers stood with the Church of England, and they defended water baptism. The majority of tracts that backed spirit baptism were written by the Quaker writers themselves. Many of their ideas and opinions were based on the attitudes of the authors; some were of those individuals whose religious commitments shifted over time. For example, political pressure placed on certain radicals by the Anglican Church could change their perspectives—those once defending the Quakers and their understandings of a spiritual baptism into ardent advocates of water baptism. For example, Charles Leslie was part of a ministry team that converted a group of Anabaptists and Quakers through water baptism. Discussed below are four adversarial writers on baptism, each of whom articulates detailed, doctrinal reasons for his positions: Francis Bugg, George Fox, Richard Holland, and Charles Leslie.

Francis Bugg defended the Quakers’ radical opposition to water baptism. Perhaps even more provocative was his criticism of the problematic Roman Church precepts as

---

226 Boardman, 33.
well as many doctrines advocated by the Church of England. Bugg argued vehemently that water baptism was the incorrect form of baptism according to scripture. He also denied the “Sacrament”—the water baptism—as clearly not an ordinance of God. To him, Rome and England were full of “blasphemers, who utter forth your blasphemy and Hypocrisy, that tell people of a Sacrament, and tell them it is the ordinance of God; bleth, bloth, and tremble . . . you live in the Witchery, and bewitch the people, &c.”227 As his tone and writing may be matched only by the fire of Luther’s pen, Francis Bugg likewise insulted the oldest religious institutions. The minister denied the Sacrament as “an institution of the Whore of Rome, and England received it by a popish Initiative.”228

Francis Bugg was characteristically vicious in this writings directed toward the Roman Church.

His position on looking inward as opposed to outward in baptism was perfectly clear. He suggested that the true ministers are Quakers, [because they] preach Christ within. Francis Bugg disdained the ordained preachers of Church institutions. To him they were “false [ministers who] preach Christ without, and bid people believe in him, as he is in heaven above; but they that are Christ’s Ministers preach Christ within.”229

George Fox, the father of early modern Quakerism and most adamant defender of its scriptural tenets, advocated, as did Francis Bugg, the baptism of the Spirit. In a 1689 tract, Fox stated that all must be baptized together—Jews, Gentiles, slaves or freemen—a particularly radical position at this time. George Fox argued “We are all baptised into one

228 Bugg, 45.
229 Bugg, 46.
body; whether we be Jews or Gentiles; whether we be Bond or Free, and have been all
made to Drink into one Spirit: So this is the one Spiritual Baptism, which was set up
above 1600 Years ago." Moreover, George Fox made a distinction between John’s
baptism and Christ’s baptism. John had water; Christ’s was “with fire and the Holy
Ghost.” If Christ was not baptized with water, then a spiritual baptism was necessary to
his people. For example, Fox posited in his 1688 book: “How that John’s Baptism, with
the Elements of Water did he create, and Christ’s Baptism, with Fire and the Holy Ghost
doth increase, who thoroughly purges his Floor, and burns up the Chass with
unquenchable Fire; and how Christ gathereth the Wheat into Garner; and this is our
Baptism and Baptizer.”

Richard Holland once stood with the Quakers on the issue of baptism, but later he
returned to the Church of England and made himself responsible for baptizing radical
Protestants. Holland became an adversary of the most prominent Quakers. In the
document, “A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of St. Magnus the Martyr, By
London—Bridge, On Sunday February 11, 1699,” Holland argued for his own
administration of water baptism, not spirit baptism, which he conducted in order to usher
dissenters back into the Church of England. On Sunday, February 11, 1699, Richard
Holland baptized in order to convert Quakers and Anabaptists. It is unclear whether this
was forced or if they had been willing to conform to Anglican doctrine. Holland’s
justification for water baptism is quite simple: He refers to Peter, Acts II, 38: “Then Peter

---

230 George Fox, Concerning the Antiquity of the People of God, Called the Quakers, (London, [], 1739), 23.
231 George Fox, Concerning the People of God Called the Quakers, 23.
232 Richard Holland, A Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of St. Magnus the Martyr, on London
Bridge, (London: F. Richardson Publisher London Bridge, 1699/1700), 1.
said unto them, Repent, & be Baptized every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ”

Acts.233 Holland argued that Peter referred not to a few, but for everyone to repent and be
baptized. As in tradition, the Church must maintain water baptism and so too must the
heterodox ministers.

Many writers of theology, as did Charles Leslie (1659—1722), changed their
minds as their loyalties to certain institutions changed. Some ministers reestablished their
commitments to the Anglican Church. Charles Leslie criticized the Quakers’ advocacy of
spirit baptism, but attacked many other groups including the Roman Church. The
discussion below, prompted by Leslie, revolved around the authority and the
administration of “rites.” Leslie briefly grappled with the issues of (1) Who was qualified
to administer baptism, (2) What types of baptism the initiate would accept? (3) What the
importance of the Lord’s Supper would be. To Leslie, the initiate must have been
baptized with water. England’s Episcopacy must administer water baptism! Charles
Leslie’s reasons for this were clear:

1 He will prove the divine institution of Water-Baptism
2 Who has the right to administer (Episcopy), not the dissenters
3 There must be an outward communion!
4 A legitimate bishop and a “sanctified” instrument. (water)
5 Other dissenters baptize as pretenders

233 Holland, 1.
According to Leslie, the Friends viewed “themselves as much Qualify’d to administer it as any others; because, I presume, they suppose themselves to have as great a Measure of the Spirit as other Men.” He presented three arguments to the contrary.

1 Personal The Holiness of the Administrator (it takes time to train an outward baptizer)
2 There must be an individual qualification: an “Outward commission”
3 The baptizer must be one who recognizes the water baptism as opposed to the Spirit Baptism.

Leslie suggests that Christ did not become a “priest,” nor was called a priest, until “outward commission” established “Him” through a “Voice from Heaven” when Jesus was baptized. Charles Leslie referenced the Bible to justify Jesus’ own baptism and thus the efficacy of water baptism: Matth. Iv. At this time “Jesus began to Preach: Then He Began to Preach; and He was then about Thirty Years of Age, Luke iii. 23.” Moreover, it must be recognized that “Now no Man can doubt of Christ’s Qualifications.” Jesus was beholden to God, and so the twelve Apostles must be recognized as priests sent out to baptized seventy others. Jesus sent the Apostles out as preachers, so those too worthy of the Apostolic Saints must be recognized as preachers if they were to baptize.

The interpretations made by Quaker ministers ultimately distinguished them from their heterodox contemporaries, scriptural commitments, and religious practices. The Quakers, in opposition to many sects, proposed an inward faith—a light of the spirit.

---

234 Charles Leslie, A Discourse; Shewing Who They Are That Are Now Qualify’d to Administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, (London: W. Redmayne Printer, 1700), 2.
235 Leslie, 3.
236 Leslie, 3.
237 Leslie, 3.
238 Leslie, 3.
Their leadership would frequently interrupt orthodox ceremonies, chiding the minister as he led sermons on topics that ran contradictory to their own doctrine and religious practice. Moreover, Quakers used unconventional salutations such as “thee” and “thou” instead of “you,” conduct that was considered very rude to the existing defenders of the orthodox faith. Behaviors such as these set this community apart—as a universal ministry—where both men and women shared in what ought to be recognized as an embryonic, egalitarian society. The Quakers brought upon themselves a fierce response from their mainstream peers at a time when religious communities were hierarchical and overall very patriarchal.

The Quakers were also obdurate pacifists. They took the scriptures of the New Testament—the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles; the notion of loving one’s neighbor—as unambiguous and sacrosanct. Like the Anabaptists on the Continent, the Quakers refused conscription and they advocated to others that they ought to deny and turn from the violence that accompanies violent conflict. This belief was clear and carried with it a solemn prerequisite to all who wanted to join the active communities of the Society of Friends. With the imposition of the Episcopalians—the influences of bishops—and the watchful eyes of the courtiers and sovereigns, the Quakers’ advocacy of ministries among both men and women became dangerous. Looking inward broke the bonds of traditional ritual practice. A more gendered-based society resting on strands (or elements) of unanimity was at this time progressive and innovative. Including women in central aspects of worship was rare even among heterodox groups at this time and
brought with it significant opposition, particularly from the status quo Churches of English society.

Quaker elites, the prominent ministers and tract writers, were very involved in the common Christian practice of proselytization. They used the printing press aggressively to spread ideas on a wide variety of religious practices and scriptural interpretations. The Society of Friends collectively published more books and tracts than any other dissident community. This reflects their intense participation in the printing culture of this era and the urgency with which they shared their way of life and their unique ideas with others. As a consequence of such evangelistic character, the Quakers were frequently fined, imprisoned, or even executed. Like other heterodox cultures, such as the Anabaptists, Quaker groups showed great resilience to often severe conditions as they continued to assert themselves in a culture of violence and persecution.

The Friends’ leadership used polemical tracts and small books to communicate, argue, and engage on confessional issues with their orthodox and heterodox peers. These polemics tell us a great deal about the lives and beliefs not only of the more visible writers, whose writings are more exclusive among today’s scholars, but of the common Quakers as well. The Quakers’ polemical stance on a variety of contentious issues put them in a precarious position considering the power of England’s orthodox bishops who were most often allied to monarchs such as Charles. The Friends believed that “correct doctrine” and a pious way of life spent in accord with such doctrine was essential to salvation. Quaker evangelists hoped to convert in vast numbers those who found interest in their ideas. As the Apostles were meant to spread the word of Jesus, similarly the
Quaker leadership looked assertively for new initiates who longed to join the Christian congregation of the Society of Friends. “Correct” commitment to the Quaker body and society was integral to survival and thus also to salvation.

The Sacraments were only recognized by the Quakers as symbolic “rites” of inward spiritual faith. To the Friends, the Sacraments were remnants of a bygone 1,000-year-old Roman tradition. They were unneeded for Christian discipleship and thus they were absent from everyday ministry.

Following a seventy-five-year stay in England, the Quakers made their way to the New World—the burgeoning colonies of the East Americas—and their numbers gradually increased. Today a diaspora of Quaker communities has endured opposition, their communities spread out across the globe. The Quakers have currently set themselves apart as a distinctive faith community among a larger milieu of Protestant and Catholic Churches. Just as the Society of Friends has always looked “inward” to understand the place of God in their lives, they moreover remain unique among a long-standing orthodoxy that still accepts millennia-old rituals as vital to the care of their congregations.
IV. The English Baptists

John Smyth and Thomas Helwys organized the first English Baptist congregations in 1609, building upon the ideas of the Puritan communities which emerged earlier under Elizabeth I. Eventually Smyth broke with the Anglican Church, began writing books, and ultimately formed his own groups. As did the Puritans, the English Baptists wanted their initiates to join the church voluntarily, not to be born into the faith. Both men and women joined the community and worshiped as equals. The English Baptists also drew inspiration from the Continental Anabaptists and the Dutch Mennonites. Smyth aligned himself and formed new congregations alongside the Mennonite culture in the Netherlands, and similar to them, his congregations were firm advocates of Believer’s Baptism: the administration of baptism to young adult believers only. The English
Baptists immersed their candidates—dunking their initiates’ bodies fully under water—usually in nearby ponds, streams, or rivers. This was entirely different from the way it was administered by the Anglican Church, which continued the centuries-old orthodox practice of clerical baptism. By the 1630s, Helwys writings and commitments inspired the first sects of Baptists in England, called the General Baptists. Like all Protestants, the General Baptists distinguished between the secular and sacred spheres, and, as did Luther, they looked to the Word alone for spiritual inspiration. Over time, the English Baptists gained the attention of the Anglican Church, whereby they were oftentimes fined and prosecuted.

This chapter has five goals in five sections. It begins with a short history of the movement. Following this, it presents the perspectives of recent historiography on the lives and activities of the earliest English Baptists. I am also including an analysis of the books written by the earliest ministers, and the responses to these writings by their Church adversaries. I will then provide a brief discussion of the baptismal ritual itself that is essential—what form it took and how it was administered. Finally, a look at recent secondary literature will raise relevant questions about the meanings and significances of baptism for the Baptist culture.

Historians Stephen Wright, Mark Bell, and H. Wheeler Robinson pose the following questions about the English Baptist movement. (1) What historical shift accounted for the earliest emergence of English Baptism and its leadership? (2) What was the relationship of the English Baptists to orthodoxy—the ideas and concerns of the Anglican Church clergy? (3) What tensions grew out of such a discourse, either in print
tracts and books or as adversarial battles among minister elites? (4) How did theology connect or separate early on the English Baptists to Puritanism and to Dutch Mennonites? These are the questions I ask initially in order to shape and define this chapter’s themes.

I will also explore the way the English Baptists conducted the ritual of baptism itself. The process was unique, with elements derived from both Catholic and Anglican orthodoxy. As did the Anabaptists and the Dutch Mennonites, the English Baptists maintained that the rite of Believer’s Baptism was essential. The ritual of baptism was simple; the liturgy was clear and concise. After baptism was administered, minsters, sometimes called pastors, urged the believers to state their commitments to God and to express their adamant dismissal of Satan in all forms. The ministers ended the ceremony by repeating a personal prayer in front of the congregation.

The second half of the chapter addresses the following aspects of English baptism in comparison with other cases I have addressed: (1) Who exercised a critique of orthodoxy by re-thinking baptism? (2) What possible social, religious, or political forces impacted the individual’s decision to be baptized into the heterodox church? (3) How did baptism affect relationships inside the faith community? (4) What were the meanings and significances of baptism to the Baptist churches and their followers?

The earliest Baptist leaders aligned themselves with John Calvin’s doctrines, which made them an outgrowth of Continental Protestantism, a diverse large group of movement, undergoing similar changes. The current view is that Continental Anabaptism was less influential in the development of Baptism than English Puritanism. Early on John Smyth became interested in doctrinal commonalities with the Anabaptists, and
consequently aligned himself with the Mennonites. As the Baptist faith evolved and grew in numbers, ministers began to baptize individuals by pouring (or dipping) water over the initiate. By 1641, in England, the practice of full dunking, called “immersion,” became commonplace among rituals of the English “Particular” Baptists.

Baptist ministers encouraged their followers to voluntarily recognize the faith; they initiated congregates through water baptism. Immersion was the ritual whereby the candidate could physically recognize the importance of the process and express an immediate and willingness to join the Baptist faith. The Anglican Church’s clergy associated the English Baptists with the Continental Anabaptists, who also baptized their initiates only as willing adults. Baptist minister Mark Lucar (d. 1676) disassociated his brethren from mainline Church clergy who carelessly, if not willingly, lumped together both faiths. In response, the English Baptists and Anabaptists “labored together to make clear the unfairness of the broad application of the ‘Anabapt’ label.”

Disassociating themselves from the Anglican Church also allowed Baptist leaders to better create and clarify their own rituals and doctrines.

John Smyth was a Cambridge scholar who became the Puritan chaplain to the city of Lincoln at the beginning of the seventeenth-century. Soon thereafter, he separated from the Anglican Church, attracting followers that were intrigued by the Baptist pledge. Elders assured them that “the true basis of the Church was not an arbitrary covenant, but

239 The English Baptist history above is excerpted from Lindsay Jones, Encyclopedia of Religion: The Baptists (Detroit: Macmillan, 2005), 783.
the ordinance of baptism administered to believers only.\textsuperscript{240} Believers’ Baptism was the ritual that early on linked English Baptists to the Anabaptists.

There were elements of Baptist thought that mirrored the principles of the Anabaptists, Mennonites, and the Evangelicals such as the concept \textit{Sola Scriptura}—that faith inspiration is derived from the readings of Scripture. The Baptists sided wholeheartedly with Luther’s strict advocating of Bible truths, which he derived from intense readings and interpretations. According to the Baptists, “Without it [the Bible], as history has shown, the Church is apt to lose its way in mere subjectivities.”\textsuperscript{241} Moreover, the Baptists believed that “The King is a mortal man and not God, there for [he] hath no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them.”\textsuperscript{242} The English Baptists believed in a sharp distinction between the secular and sacred spheres.

English Baptist theology recapitulated themes found in most early modern Evangelical movements. (1) As did the Anabaptists, the Baptists advocated a freedom of the will. Individual believers had to “willingly” accept God’s covenant as they took on a life in Christ, joining the Baptist congregation and community, and upholding its strict rules of living. This stood in stark contrast to Calvin’s ideas that attested that no one could affect their own salvation through will alone. God pre-determined salvation in all instances. (2) The Baptists also aligned themselves with Luther’s “Priesthood of all Believers” which suggested that men existed as collective exemplars of priests, and

\textsuperscript{241} Gaustad, 14.
\textsuperscript{242} Jones, 783.
through a strict commitment to the Protestant faith, must be recognized as so. (3) The
Baptists also believed in the separation of church and state. Just as secular institutions
would rule independently, so too would individuals’ lives among congregations be
guided by their ministers. (4) The soul was crucial to religious independence.

The English Baptists were also an outgrowth of late sixteenth-century English
Puritanism, strict faith communities that emerged under the rule of Elizabeth I. To be
sure, “Modern Mennonites may be more accurately seen as lineal descendants of the
Reformation’s left-wing. English . . . Baptists . . . emerged from the Puritan agitations of
Elizabethan and Jacobean England.”243 Baptists shared a separatist spirit with the
Puritans, maintaining a specific characteristic that distinguished them from the rank and
file Anglicans. They insisted that members should not be born into the church.

These issues have been explored in some detail in the following important studies,
*Early English Baptists, 1603-49* by Stephen Wright in 2006 and *Apocalypse How?
Baptist Movements During the English Revolution* by Mark Bell in 2000.244 Bell and
Wright discuss the characteristics of Baptist communities, and also the particular ways
that tension emerged between the Anglican Church and the Baptists. Sectarian conflict
accompanied simultaneously the rise of many Baptist splinter groups such as the
Seventh-Day Baptists, the General Baptists, the Particular Baptists, the Independent
Baptists, and the Fifth Monarchists.

243 Jones, 783.
244 Mark Bell, *Apocalypse How? Baptist Movements During the English Revolution* (Kirksville Missouri:
Mercy University Press, 2000); Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge,
Various Baptist derivatives and entirely new sects emerged alongside the tumultuous revolutionary fervor of English Civil War of 1642. These dissident contemporaries were outspoken and competitive, expressing themselves through highly analytical and passionate tracts and books. According to Bell, “The process of self-definition and identification . . . so crucial in the development of each Baptist group was accelerated by the proximity of competing Baptist movements.”\textsuperscript{245} Sectarian differences, however, led to the construction of even more specific rules and rituals to govern these heterodox churches; for example, those of the Particular Baptists whose congregations emerged first in the 1630s. Their leaders held that Christ had died for the elect, not for all Christians. Contrary to this, the English Baptists “were later called the General Baptists because they believed in a ‘general’ atonement, that Christ had died for all people and not solely the elect.”\textsuperscript{246}

Wright argues that there was little contact between the two radical movements, whereas Bell maintains that there were interconnected relationships and various theological agreements between Continental heterodoxy and the Baptists. However, he also maintains that the “Continental Anabaptists were not active participants in the events of the 1600s; they did not have a profound influence on the later English Baptist movements.”\textsuperscript{247} They had even less connection later on in the century. By contrast, Wright asserts that even if there were doctrinal similarities between the Mennonites and

\textsuperscript{245} Bell, 4.  
\textsuperscript{246} Bell, 4.  
\textsuperscript{247} Bell, 5.
the Baptists emerging years later—their regions and ways of life—separated them and the many years between them, which made cultural and religious borrowing unlikely.

Millenarianism was also a great fear to the many heterodox and orthodox voices of this era. Eschatology both animated and scared the radical leadership. The earliest Baptist leadership was, like their Protestant predecessors, highly millenarian. The reformers on the Continent such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli warned that humanity was living in the end of days. The Magisterial Protestants and English Baptists alike recognized the Roman Church as the Antichrist. Various pressures and developments motivated the passionate Baptist criticism of traditional orthodoxy: “When the English ecclesiastical system collapsed in the middle of the century, changes transpired at a rapid pace. Individuals could travel through a myriad of religious positions in a brief span of time, going from Anglican, to Presbyterian, to Baptist to Quaker and beyond.”

Agitation and social unrest led to an explosion of heterodox pamphleteering.

Wright provides a background narrative on the earliest English Baptist leadership, their break with the Anglican Church, and the importance of ideas and rituals to their leadership, particularly the act of Believer’s Baptism. Wright also argues that John Smyth’s separation was less because of his interest in new doctrines, and more as a result of his growing discomfort with the pressures of being a heterodox theologian within the Anglican Church. This prompted the move to establish a community in Amsterdam alongside the Mennonites.

---

248 Bell, 2.
Ideas were crucial to the Baptist leadership and thus integral to the religious lives of their congregations. Even though Wright suggests that Baptist ideas about baptism grew out of early Puritanism, he does concede that there was a clear connection between the philosophies that surfaced among the seventeenth-century English Baptists and those of the radicals on the Continent: the followers of Menno Simons. Wright argues that it was significant that both communities stood in opposition to the Anglican Church’s practice of infant baptism. According to Wright, the English Baptists “never experienced the harsh repression and violence that their neighbors to the east, guided by Menno Simons, suffered at the hands of Protestants and Catholics alike, particularly in the 1530s.”

Minister William Waldwyn was attentive to the Continental Anabaptists’ history of overcoming harsh oppression, their passionate commitment to Believer’s Baptism, and the harsh stigma attached to it. In fact, to Waldwyn, the “spectre of Munster haunted all those who baptised anew, however peaceful they were . . . Even in our own day, the passion aroused by the question of the influence of Anabaptist ideas on the Anglo-Saxon Baptist tradition has been fueled partly by the continuing resonance of propaganda accounts of this traumatic event [The German Peasant’s War], ruthlessly deployed by the pedobaptists of various stripes.”

Waldwyn believed that the harsh treatment of Anabaptists by authorities galvanized and shaped the rising dissident movements in England. Ultimately, it is accurate to conclude that while contact with Anabaptists, particularly during the Dutch exile, helped clarify several points in the emerging doctrine of the English Baptists their ultimate views must be considered as they

---

249 Wright, 37.
250 Wright, 4.
related to the divisions in the Puritan wing of English Calvinism that grew rapidly as the Anglican church weakened and radical Puritan preaching expanded after 1630.

Dissident leaders took advantage of a new climate of political distress and relaxed orthodoxy to express themselves, attract new converts, and increase the numbers in their congregations. The Presbyterians, Non-Separating Congregationalists, Separatists and Anabaptists, though often organizationally inchoate, supplied denominations with key concepts and practices. Doctrinal borrowing and sectarian tension characterized rivaled contemporaries in England under the rule of James I and Charles I, both orthodox to heterodox and heterodox to heterodox camps. Although they were interested in each other’s ritual and faith practices, they were at odds with one another.

Even the most clandestine Baptist communities were not entirely free from the retaliations of Anglican Church authorities. Ministers John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were verbally attacked and heavily fined when word of their preaching reached the crown. At “East Retford sessions on 5 October 1604 John Smyth, clerk, or Clyfton, and twelve others, were charged with ‘riot and rout.’”\footnote{251} Moreover, “On 18 April, [Henry] Aldred and four others had been charged with riot, imprisonment and assault; sureties were given that he would ‘keep the peace especially with John Herring.’”\footnote{252} In 1614, “Richard Bancroft was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. It was during his drive against Puritan non-conformity that there developed the separatist current from which a Baptist groups led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys emerged in early 1609.”\footnote{253} The

\footnote{251} Wright, 14.  
\footnote{252} Wright, 15.  
\footnote{253} Wright, 1.
Anglican Church responded more often with fines and prison sentences. They did, however, in some instances put the radicals to death.

There was a delicate interplay between outspoken heterodox voices and the different ways that the institutional Church responded to dissident calls for tolerance and religious freedom. The Anglican Church was state-run and demanded all English men and women to attend regularly. Church attendance was strictly enforced. Individual lay Christians could be penalized through fines; pastors who did not attend Church could be put to death. The bishops of the Anglican Church shared more than just influence over the population; they “commanded extensive rights of patronage and the occupants of sees such as Winchester were very rich indeed.”

Heterodox Baptists, who were experiencing such significant persecution, came to distrust, disdain, and find significant error with the Anglican Church. This is surely one of the main issues that connect all of the heterodox groups in high medieval and early modern European history: passion, independence, and institutional criticism. Heterodox leaders made constant moral attacks on the institutional Church’s material excesses.

In The Life and Faith of the Baptists, H. Wheeler Robinson also discusses the origins and characteristics of the first English Baptists communities. Robinson argues that “though they all belong to Protestant, and for the most part the Puritan, tradition of the Church, they represent difference emphases, and have made different contributions to the Church and the Kingdom of God.”

As does White and Bell, Robinson suggests that their Puritan predecessors had the most influence on their development as a heterodox

---

254 Wright, 2.
church. Moreover, “They [the Baptists] carry on the witness of the Reformation, but they
did it with varieties of accent and expression.”256 The earliest reformers on the Continent
also influenced the English Baptists, particularly Luther’s primary doctrines. Robinson
suggests “That witness is ‘the new conception of the relation of the individual soul to
God’, which found expression in [Luther’s] distinctive doctrine of justification by
Faith.”257

Robinson, furthermore, argues that “Then as now, there were many contributory
forces, such as the rise of nationalism, with its challenge of ecclesiastical imperialism, the
new learning, with its criticism of medieval claims; the consciousness of economic
oppression, with its revolt against the feudal system.”258 Robinson places himself within a
culture of Marxism, indicating that economic factors such as feudalism, doctrinal
influences such as nationalism, and medieval criticism prompted the birth of the first
communities. There may have been contact between the English Baptists and their
neighbors to northern Europe, but “whether in Holland or England, the origin . . . of
English Baptists is to be found rather in their Puritan ancestry.”259 On the other hand, the
Mennonites’ administering of adult baptism interested and ultimately shaped John
Smyth’s own practice. Robinson argues that “John Robinson, who gave this better-known
saying to the world, was a friend and assistant to John Smyth before they both went to
Holland in search of freedom to worship God, and seems to have derived the great

256 Robinson, 11.
257 Robinson, 11.
258 Robinson, 11-12.
259 Robinson, 12.
principle from him.”

Smyth’s preaching suggests “that the true basis of the Church was not only an arbitrary covenant, but the ordinance of baptism administered to believers only.”

Indeed the distinctiveness of baptism as a fundamental tenet of English Baptist faith came about very early in the movement. The type of baptism the elders oversaw early on in the movement was a “pouring,” not an “immersion;” this form would dictate Baptist ceremonies beginning in the early 1640s.

Even though Smyth and Helwys formed the first congregations, the more mainline groups came to be recognized as the “Calvinist Baptists,” which would ultimately create and shape the “Particular Baptists.” They maintained Calvin’s doctrine of election, which attested that because God was omniscient, it must follow that his design was steadfast and eternal. God chose people who were bound for heaven and those who were not. Robinson reiterates that “the Atonement was not made for all men but only for those whom God chose for salvation; it was particular and not ‘general’, i.e. universal.

The first known Particular Baptist Church was also due to evolution from Congregational Separatism, like the first General Baptist Church . . . [that] arose in London between 1630 and 1640.”

The Particular Baptists initially situated themselves among the Puritans who were attempting to worship freely at a time when Cromwell’s army was conscripting men from even the most radical of England’s Protestant communities.

As the Magisterial Protestants gained force in Europe so too did the Baptist leadership who maintained a watchful eye on the reformers’ innovations in theology and

---

261 Robinson, 13.
262 Robinson, 14.
Biblical doctrine. Indeed “the English Reformation has its roots in the native soul, whatever it owed to the Lutherism and the Calvinism of the Continent, and that this soil been compared by Wycliffe’s work in making the Bible accessible.” To Robinson, Wycliffe’s critique of the medieval world and its abuses resurfaced in the rhetoric of the earliest English Separatists.

It was not until 1641 when a shift from pouring to immersion occurred among the English Baptists’ ritual practice. Baptist by immersion, reserved only to those who were truly believers, became the most fundamental marker of Baptist membership from the mid-seventeenth-century onward. Robinson asserts that “the baptism of believers by immersion has not only emphasized conscious faith as essential to the Church, but it has also, by its symbolism, constantly recalled men to the foundation of the Gospel in history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which as Paul argued, are represented in the act of believer’s immersion and his rising form the waters of baptism.”

To better understand heterodox-orthodox and heterodox-heterodox tension requires a closer look at the actual leaders’ discourses from the specific time—a primary source examination. The following analysis will illustrate the hostile exchanges between three different men of three different faiths, heated arguments excerpted from books written early on. The Baptists, Separatists, as well as those committed to orthodoxy viewed baptism in entirely different ways: when the candidates were baptized, who was part of the ritual, and what were the meanings and significances of the rite. The Separatists baptized infants only if parents were pious and committed. The Anabaptists

---

263 Robinson, 16.  
264 Robinson, 16.
believed that only willing believers ought to be baptized. The Church of England clergy, as did the Separatists, baptized infants, and children of all parents could be baptized.

John Smyth in the tract *The Character of the Beast or the False Constitution of the Church Discovered, 1609*, responds to a Mr. R. Clifton’s rebuke of adult baptism. Smyth defended Believer’s Baptism in all ways. According to Smyth, in no instances could infants be baptized. Smyth also posited that “Because there is neither precept nor example in the New Testament of any infants that were baptized by John or Christ’s disciples; only they that did confess their sins, and confess their faith were baptized. Mark 1, 4-5; Acts 8, 37.”

Smyth saw no instance in the Bible which stated that an infant should be baptized. Moreover, he maintained that the initiate must confess sins and profess faith; obviously infants could not do this.

Smyth also posited that “Because Christ commandeth to make Disciples by teaching them: And then to baptize them: Mat. 28, 19, but infants cannot by doctrine become Christ’s disciples: And so cannot by the rules of Christ be baptized.” He asserted that Christ did not baptize infants; he baptized the Apostles who knew the covenant that they professed. Infants were not apostles so they could not be baptized before Christ. Furthermore, Smyth argued that “Because infants be baptized; the carnal feed is baptized; and so the seal of the covenant is administered to them unto whom the

---


266 Smyth, 1.
covenant appears not. Rom. 9.8 which is profanation.” The recognition of the covenant was not attained which meant that the infant’s baptism was false.

Although the Separatists did not align themselves with the Anglican Church, they kept some elements of Anglican doctrine as they related to baptism. Baptism of infants, to the Separatists, was only justified if the parents of the infants were entirely pious believers. The following is an argument between Samuel Chidley and John Spilsbury. Chidley responded to the ideas of Spilsbury on Believer’s Baptism. He referenced medieval practices to defend infant baptism. For example, Chidley asserted that “Infants of believing parents [who] are in this holy and happy estate, hath been proved already by Scripture, and therefore it is evident and apparent that they are the right subjects of baptism.” If the parents were proven pious and blessed, then the infant was also blessed and ought to be baptized. Chidley believed that infants were a part of God’s covenant with the New Jerusalem as considered in the days of Moses and the Messiah; the infants of justified parents were holy. His interpretation was simple and clear: “So, on the contrary, [children] are justified by God’s free grace in Jesus Christ: which could not be, if they were as heathens still in the world.”

In *Seven Questions About the Controversie Betweene the Church of England and the Separatists and Anabaptists 1644*, Immanuel Knutton of Nottinghamshire defended the Anglican establishment. Knutton asked “Whether is the Baptism of Infants a true and

---

267 Smyth, 1.
268 Samuel Chidley. *The Separatists Answer to the Anabaptists Arguments Concerning Baptism or the Answer of Samuel Chidley to John Spilsbury, Concerning the Point in Difference*, London: Printed by J.C., 1651 [Early English Books Online]), 11.
269 Chidley, 8.
lawful Baptism or not?" Children of all parents ought to be baptized, he argued. This distinguished the Separatists from those committed to orthodoxy. Knutton argued that “Because (accepting the difference of the visible ceremony) there is the same analogy of reason of Baptism as of circumcision . . . both of them are Symbols of our Adoption into God’s family.” Traditionally, “both circumcision and baptism [went] hand in hand as symbols of our adoption into God’s family . . .” Knutton referenced Christian history for an explanation: “Origen who lived in the years 213 said that the Church received the tradition from the Apostles to give Baptism to infants. Augustine who lived in the year 420 said the baptism of infants, the Church universal held it not instituted by councils, but always retained it, and most rightly believed it to be delivered by Apostles’ Authority.” Knutton argued that baptism stretched as far back in history as Origen and Augustine. They proposed that the Apostles not only delivered the practice of infant baptism; they commanded it. This is notable because the Baptists hearkened back to the same issue, however, for an entirely different reason.

English Baptist pastors argued that because the Apostles did not baptize, ministers ought not baptize infants either. Anglican Church writers suggested just the opposite. They believed that the Apostles demanded it. The influence of the Apostles, Jesus, and writers as far back as the early third-century served as precedents for the decisions to maintain or dismiss infant baptism. Believer’s Baptism became more commonplace as it

271 Knutton, 8.
272 Knutton, 13.
273 Knutton, 13.
was adopted and furthered by the Anabaptists and Mennonites. As the numbers of
Baptists increased in England, their leaders simultaneously established communities in
North America where their communities increased quite rapidly, particularly in the
Southeast regions of the country.

Today the administration of baptism by the successors to seventeenth-century
Baptists remains unorthodox in comparison to other Protestant denominations. The old
ritual is not dissimilar to the way it is conducted today by the Southern Baptists. Baptism
involves a pastor, a candidate, and a congregation. Ministers administer baptism on
Sunday—the Sabbath—and begin the ritual with brief words about the meaning of the act
and its significances. The candidates are subsequently asked to join him, speak their
names, and explain why they wish to be baptized. Next the candidates joined the minister
“one at a time at the baptismal pool. The minister directs three questions to [each]
candidate.”274 They are as follows:

Are you now trusting in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and the
promise of eternal life?

Do you forsake Satan and all his works and all his ways?

Do you intend with God’s help to obey Jesus’ teaching and follow him as your Lord?

274 East Balsam Baptist: Steps for Baptism, 2014, posted by Gabe Brennan (note that this is a recent
process, contemporary), http://eastbalsam.org/1116-2
This method differs significantly from the way infants are baptized in the Anglican Church and by many of the Protestant reformers on the Continent as well. When the minister anoints the candidate’s body, he baptizes either him or her, as they stand erect facing a direction to the East.

The minister subsequently states the words of baptism: “On the profession of your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and in obedience to his command, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The act of dunking, or later on, full-body immersion was conducted simultaneously. The minister pours water over the candidate while raising the initiate back to an erect posture. He ends the ritual with a short prayer. Indeed this process differed from community to community, and was based on the ideas of the pastors who administered it.

The following analysis, citing the article by William H. Brackney, will describe how heterodox elites, in this instance, the English Baptist Ministers, rethought baptism while simultaneously critiquing Anglican Church practices. This section will also analyze the meanings and significances of baptism from the perspectives of these two authors.

Baptist leaders such as John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, John Murton, and Thomas Grantham challenged orthodoxy by way of a new interpretation of Scripture. According to Brackney, they referenced the Bible: “Instructed to go and teach nations, the disciples were also told to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter called on his listeners to repent and be baptized (2:38—41). The Baptist theologians surmised that because Paul’s converts were baptized after they were converted, this justifies a later willing believer’s baptism.

For centuries, the Roman Church baptized infants. Smyth and Helwys challenged this practice assertively. Brackney argues that they believed, as did the Anabaptists, that “because infants were not yet able to claim the faith for themselves, their baptism was not valid. For these first Baptists, baptism was practiced strictly for those who make a profession of faith, and the mode of the baptism followed the practice of the Puritans and Separatists in pouring or aspersion (sprinkling) over the heads of the candidates.” The English Baptists, according to Brackney, drew its precedent and inspiration from the practices of their Puritan and Separatist contemporaries.

The reformers on the Continent—the Protestants and Anabaptists—also challenged older orthodox practice. The Magisterial Protestants kept the term “sacrament,” but placed more “stress on the role of the parents and, later in the child’s development, individual accountability for personal faith.” To the Anabaptists, “becoming a Christian disciple was a radical step of separation from one’s past that required in baptism an act of high symbolism before the Christian community.” The English Baptists believed that baptism was not regenerative. It did not affect salvation autonomously. According to Brackney, the earliest “Baptists believed that upon the rite

---

277 Brackney, 2.
278 Brackney, 1.
279 Brackney, 1.
of believer’s baptism, each believer received the Holy Spirit, as in (Acts 10: 47).”

Moreover, as did the Cathars, the English Baptist communities “symbolically laid hands on the baptized believers to signify the coming of the spirit into that person’s life (Acts 8:17).” The Baptists were one of the few sects that incorporated a laying of hands into their ceremony, and even more, they gave it symbolic recognition.

Furthermore, the author suggests that the meaning of baptism, to both the pastors and the candidates, illustrated how the will of God was closely entwined with the symbolic aspects of the ritual, and, moreover, how the water itself connected the initiate to the congregation. Their elites believed that “All Baptists to one degree or another recogiz[ed] the importance of a believer’s church and the signal rite or ordinance of baptism.” According to Brackney, baptism “did not convey salvation or transformation . . . but [was] a sign of what has happened in a spiritual sense to a new believer.” The rite of baptism had many symbolic characteristics; the four most apparent were the following: (1) Baptism functioned to show the individual’s faith in Christ. (2) It reflected the candidates’ obedience to Christ. (3) The water represented a cleansing. Sins were washed away and so the process not only renewed the initiate, it recognized the congregation as well. (4) God promised through baptism a forgiveness of sins.

Anabaptists baptized willing adults. The English Baptists, by contrast believed that younger persons could recognize its meaning and the life-long responsibilities that it would entail. Brackney suggests that young people were baptized most often; they

---

280 Brackney, 5.
281 Brackney, 5.
282 Brackney, 2.
283 Brackney, 4.
“catechized, that is, instructed in the basic principles of Christianity, and [subsequently] each candidate [would] give evidence of a personal conversion and desire to follow Christ.”

Those committed to the Anglican Church criticized (or even attacked) the Baptists for refusing to baptize infants. They did, however, provide a service in the place of water baptism, which recognized purity, and, moreover, the crucial role that parents would play throughout their lives. According to Brackney, for example, “Instead of baptizing young children and infants, Baptists prefer to dedicate children to the Lord in a church service where the parents and the members of the church are called upon to live exemplary lives . . . and to teach them the ways of the Lord.” In the place of infant baptism, this ritual involved the parents, whose responsibility it was to ensure their child’s piety, strict attendance at Church, and commitment to God throughout all of their life.

Brackney states also that pastors administered baptism often in rivers or ponds, and as indicated above, by 1641, immersion became the Baptist leaders’ standard method of baptism. Richard Blunt returned to England having observed a congregation of Collegiants (similar to Mennonites) who were the first communities that immersed candidates. Brackney asserts that Blunt “taught and practiced immersion; this became the standard among both the Particular and General Baptists by the mid1600s in England.” The pastors who guided the Baptist communities were also in charge of administering baptism. They were frequently the leaders, but oftentimes also the active theologians who

284 Brackney, 4.
285 Brackney, 6.
286 Brackney, 2.
organized and oversaw the congregations. In almost all instances, the leaders of the communities, those who established the character of the faith in any given region, performed the ritual. In many instances, “Baptist meetinghouses did not have baptismal facilities indoors, a river, stream, or pond frequently sufficed.” In some regions of North America and Canada, baptisms were performed outdoors: “Pastors broke the ice on ponds or rivers and candidates were baptized in ice cold water.”

Baptism had an important effect on each candidate. It functioned as a sign that ushered the initiate into the “faith and community.” According to Brackney, being presented publicly “as a candidate for baptism, the believer affirms personal commitment to God in Christ and the expressed faith of the congregation. And, by being immersed, the candidate professes an adoption of the gospel in personal life.” The candidate’s success also affected relationships inside the faith community. Baptism “was a visible symbol of Christian unity within the church . . . a uniform experience that all believers share.” Brackney also argues that when baptism was received in public, the candidate became a witness, and those people of the congregations who saw the rite, and were already baptized themselves, became witnesses themselves and could identify each other in faith. Since “baptism is a picture of the gospel, it presents all baptized believers with the reality of being ‘in Christ’ (Gal. 3:26—27). This provides a deep sense of unity within a congregation as well as among the larger body of Christ.”

---

287 Brackney, 3.
288 Brackney, 3.
289 Brackney, 2.
290 Brackney, 4.
291 Brackney, 5.
292 Brackney, 5.
personal renewal to the congregation. There “is an important connection between baptism and relationships with local congregation[s]. In the New Testament church, baptism led to fellowship and communion with other believers (Acts 16:15).”²⁹³ In a sense, in baptism, there was consistent reciprocity between the candidate and the congregation, just as in many heterodox faiths born to this era.

Larry R. Oates suggests that the actions of Christ, John the Baptist, and the Apostles, as recognized in the New Testament, proved to be most integral to the English Baptists as they eventually decided to totally immerse candidates. The New Testament’s story of John the Baptist and Jesus was crucial. According to Oates, “baptism was a process of repentance for the remission of sin, a baptism that was the visible, outward expression of an inward change in the attitude toward God, one’s sinfulness and need of repentance . . . toward the Jerusalem-based unbiblical Judaism of the day.”²⁹⁴ The disciples baptized as John did. His was “prompted by repentance, a return to the truth of the Old Testament, and identification of the one baptized with the Messiah concerning whom John preached.”²⁹⁵ In other words, Oates suggests that baptism gave the initiate an opportunity to express their inward commitment to God and through an outward ceremony and that affected the washing away of sin. Jesus did speak of baptism to his disciples: “The great commission (Matt 28: 19-20) and (Mark 16:15-16) records the commandment of Jesus for his disciples to baptize believers. The order of this commandment is to first evangelize the lost, then to baptize those who believe, and

²⁹³ Brackney, 5.
²⁹⁵ Oates, 132.
finally to teach them the things Jesus had taught his disciples and would teach them through the Holy Spirit.”

The New Testament illustrates that Jesus would first have the disciples baptize the believers, then go and teach that which Jesus had taught them. To Oates, baptism “is among Jesus’ commands. He sent the followers to disciple all nations, baptizing them through the triune name (Matthew 18-19).” Jesus clearly looked to the disciples to baptize and to evangelize everyone. The main purpose of baptism was to “please Jesus Christ our Lord.” The purpose of immersion baptism, according to Oates, may also be understood by considering the story of Paul: “The next baptism, recorded in Acts 9:18, is that of Paul, after his conversion on the Damascus Road (see also Acts 22:16). Immediately after his conversion and baptism, Paul is found with the believers in Damascus, engaged in Great Commission work himself.” Thus Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul, and the Apostles all signified the purpose of baptism: John made the inward faith and outward ritual; Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize and teach; and as Paul was converted, he professed God’s word through commission work.

The significance of baptism also had a firm foundation in Scripture. According to Oates, those “called are gathered into communities of believers – local churches . . . Nevertheless, to be part of the gathered church, the believer must be baptized.” Church membership rested on the ritual of baptism and visa versa. Indeed it was Jesus’ command to the Apostles to go and baptize. Oates posits that the authority “of baptism is Christ.

---

296 Oates, 132.
297 Oates, 132.
298 Oates, 132.
299 Oates, 133.
300 Oates, 136.
Our Lord commanded his disciples to baptize; no one has a right to alter his commandment. The author also suggests that the correct interpretation of the New Testament was crucial to understanding this. For example, “Baptist ecclesiology is based on the authority of the New Testament. Baptists generally accept baptism only from those institutions they consider to be truly baptistic, not because Baptists are necessarily opposed to these institutions, but because they had no choice but to accept the authority of Scripture.” Baptists were exclusive to those churches that only practiced religion as they did—from a position of complete commitment to New Testament theology; to Baptist ecclesiology; and to the correct administration of baptism as a rite of church membership. And to them, immersion could be recognized as valid by multiple references to Scripture. Oates argues that Baptists “have historically insisted on immersion, primarily because the form is tied to the meaning. Much of Christendom has changed the form of baptism to pouring or sprinkling, even though most scholars agree that baptism in the New Testament was by immersion . . . a change in the form causes the loss of its power as a witness to the death and resurrection of Christ.” The Baptists believed that true baptism was by immersion alone, certainly not by pouring or sprinkling.

The significance of baptism reached even farther than this. The earliest Baptists, particularly John Smyth, stood with the Anabaptists on this crucial ritual. Oates suggests that the Baptists “insist[ed] on the baptism of believers. Baptists rejected infant

301 Oates, 137.
302 Oates, 137.
303 Oates, 137.
baptism." Moreover, Oates asserts that the Baptists believed there “is significant though no direct evidence of infant baptism in the New Testament. There is significant evidence that only believers were baptized.” The significance of baptism focused on its “meaning.” Baptism “is a public declaration of the believer’s connection to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament baptism followed salvation almost immediately.” As it did for Anabaptists and the Mennonites, baptism invited the candidate into the church community and society. The “Baptists argue that baptism is the means of entry into a New Testament church; therefore Baptists demand it as a precondition for membership.”

In the previous chapters, we have looked in detail at four radical movements: the Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers and Baptists. Obviously, they have major differences. However, they also share profound similarities, which I will demonstrate in the conclusion that follows. The goal of this dissertation’s conclusion is to highlight these similarities and to propose an explanation for them. This will provide the necessary evidence supporting my argument that there are over-arching themes, characteristics, historical contexts, and institutional criticisms that connect all of these radical cultures, as well as their many heterodox contemporaries.

304 Oates, 137.
305 Oates, 137.
Conclusion

At the start of this project, I chose to study early European and English dissidents to see if examining the rite of baptism would reveal any link among the four following groups: the Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers, and English Baptists. As I continued my research, I realized that an analysis of unorthodox baptism revealed further characteristics of these movements. Indeed as I studied baptism in greater detail, I found that it shed light on debates in contemporary scholarship on Europe and England’s heterodox and orthodox Church relations.

Historians continue to grapple with to what extent these communities were connected and in which ways. Were they completely separate entities, placed into
“heretical boxes” by the orthodox authorities that persecuted them, or were these movements linked genealogically, by the transmission of ideas over time from one group to another? Moreover, did their predecessors date as far back as Late Antiquity? Historians such as R.I. Moore and Edward Peters suggest that their similarities were overall insignificant, especially to the mainstream Church of their times. They may have shared some general beliefs, rituals, and institutional critiques, but these characteristics were not nearly distinct enough to place them into separate categories. And surely they did not represent a single ongoing underground movement.

I argue that Late Antique, Medieval, and Reformation radicals shared a genealogical connection similar to the manner that A.G. Dickens describes in his book, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558*. This is a fascinating micro-history that explores the activities of sixteenth and seventeenth-century English Protestants and their predecessors, the Lollards. England’s radicals were connected by the ways they challenged the existing Church, and by the manner that heterodox ministers fought so vigorously to maintain the integrity of their communities. Most of their criticisms were rooted in Biblical interpretations which were inspired by doctrines located in the Gospels and the Epistles of Saint Paul. The Anabaptists also looked primarily to the Gospels to define (and to defend) their ministers’ administrations of adult baptism.

R.I. Moore argues that what united heterodox groups was their shared reaction against and resulting hostile challenge to similar orthodox Churches. Moreover, he suggests that the critique and response among rival churches—heterodox and orthodox—
drove the formation of “movements.” This must be developed even further. Heterodox communities were shaped in particular by the uniformity of the institutions that they were dissenting from. In other words, orthodoxy prompted radical critique, surely not the opposite. Cathar Perfects conducted a laying of hands instead of baptism; Anabaptists and Baptists defined themselves through a steadfast practice of adult baptism; the Quakers chose not to baptize at all. They practiced a “baptism of the spirit” which reflected their emphasis on inward not outward spirituality. While the resulting practices differed, each derived from a similar rejection of orthodox pedobaptism.

This dissertation emphasizes the clear links between baptism and Scripture. Sources clearly demonstrate that most if not all of the leaders’ ideas came from very close and meticulous examinations of Scripture and the interpretations they built on this scrutiny. It substantially shaped the rituals, ways of living, and the characteristics of their communities. Ministers, elders, and Perfects administered their own baptisms in response to what they believed to be errors of prevailing orthodoxy. Radical groups, therefore, ought to be understood in relationship to the orthodoxy they criticized, and, in many instances, by the institutions they were choosing to break with. Religious radicals attacked, often viciously, what they believed to be evil practices of the Roman, Magisterial Protestant, and Anglican Churches.

This conclusion is organized as follows: The first section will explore the historiographical debate among scholars about the longevity and the connections between dissident communities. As noted above, scholars have considered the extent to which radicals were connected through indirect genealogy: a passing along of ideas through
books or religious tracts. Were they recognized by the Churches they rejected as independent movements in any way? The second section will summarize and compare the administration of baptism by the leaders of these four groups. Who were baptized? Who did the baptizing? What was its impact on the initiate? How did baptism affect the relationships and responsibilities of the participatory communities?

The third section will acknowledge the many surrounding questions and concerns that this study has prompted, which are central to understanding European and English heterodoxy in its many forms. What were the particular topics of critique? What types of historical conditions allowed for the endurance of these communities? How did a shared experience of persecution link radicals? What was the impact of the Reformation on Continental movements and on England’s heterodox sects of the mid-seventeenth century? I ask these particular questions in order to broaden the context of the historical analysis and narrative below.


Wycliffe and the Lollards, according to Dickens, were the most profound influence on the early Protestant movement and on

---

308 Dickens, 7.
the systemic reforms conducted by the Anglican Church. Wycliffe’s ideas gave birth to the Lollard movement, and, over time, many similarities between the Lollards and Anabaptists took form as Henry VIII began a campaign of persecution against both groups.

Lollards and Anabaptists were often rounded up and prosecuted because of their critiques of the existing Church; their characteristics and the similarities of their faith practices made it difficult for Church authorities to distinguish them from one another.

Dickens argues that “The origins and character of popular heresy during the two decades which preceded the death of Henry VIII . . .” were Lollard, and “. . . the atmosphere of these cases remains Lollard given the certain fact that Lollardy had locally survived into the thirties [1530s], so we are compelled to regard it as still the predominant ingredient of a new admittedly ‘mixed’ popular heresy.”

What linked these neighboring faiths was this genealogy, despite some scholars’ contention that there was a direct connection between the earliest Lollards and Luther. Dickens makes the following assumption clear. It was the elites—the theologians—that wrote extensively on church affairs—ideas, printed tracts, and itinerancy—which transmitted ideas without individual or cultural contact. Dickens thus concludes that there were some links from England to the Continent, but too few to recognize substantial influences, and relatively no contact reached Luther and his earliest followers. Dickens argues that there is no genealogical transmission connecting the Lollards to Luther. Of course, Luther’s ideas did penetrate England’s radical communities in a significant way.

---

309 Dickens, 51.
after 1517, and certain elements of his ideas, such as the concept *sola fide*, or, salvation by faith alone, eventually informed and inspired the English Protestants. Thus, we do see a genealogical relationship in this direction.

There was a different relationship between the Lollards and the Anabaptists. Dickens discusses the intellectual currents that made the Lollards and Anabaptists almost indistinguishable. The primary issue of contention was transubstantiation—the idea that during communion, or the Eucharist, the bread actually transforms into the body of Christ—which both the Lollards and the earliest Anabaptists could not accept. The mix of Lollardy and Anabaptism continued into the reign of Mary, but was eventually marginalized with the emergence of myriad radical groups that followed around the 1640s.

George Huntston Williams’ book, *The Radical Reformation*, published in 1962, provides another example of a genealogical story of radicalism, one that links the earliest Reformation radicals to their medieval and Late Antique predecessors. Even though Williams describes in minute detail their differences, he, nevertheless places all the Reformation radicals in a single pot. Williams argues that these radicals’ core tenets and institutional critiques mirrored those of the heretics who had asserted themselves as far back as Late Antiquity. To Williams, the Radical Reformation demonstrated a medieval strain of thought brought once again into the light by the earliest Anabaptists. If a diverse pot of Anabaptists and all their “cousins in doctrine” made the same criticisms of the Catholic and Magisterial Churches, they must have been connected in some all-encompassing way, says Williams.
Williams posits that the Anabaptists “may be grouped together as an entity insofar as in the end, if not at once, they or their successors in their congregations, sects, conventicles, fellowships, communes, and synodal churches for a number of reasons became detached from the primary Magisterial Reformation . . .”\textsuperscript{310} The Anabaptists saw themselves as the “correct” congregations, organizing their communities in opposition to an “incorrect” Roman and Magisterial orthodoxy. They were heralds of a new church. Even the most militant of the radicals, Thomas Muntzer, ought to be situated in the combined mix of heterodoxy because he shared a theology not so dissimilar from the earliest Anabaptist forebears. Williams posits that “Thomas Muntzer was clearly called forth from the same late medieval eschatological-mystical milieu as Carlstadt, Denck, John Hut, or Melchior Hofmann. Muntzer was closer to them than to those whose spirituality we have identified as that of a third clustering of radicals embraced in my term Evangelical Rationalists.”\textsuperscript{311}

The way that the Roman and Protestant authorities identified the radicals as similar overall made their persecution in high numbers easier to justify. To Williams, “All the Anabaptists can be seen as an entirety, even with the inclusion of the belligerent, polygamous, and territorial Munsterite Anabaptists who defended their bibliocracy from the combined assault of the Protestant and Catholic forces.”\textsuperscript{312} And their presence as an active voice of dissent was nearly pan-European, reaching from the “North Sea ports of England through the Netherlands and Denmark to the German towns of the Baltic and

\textsuperscript{310} Williams, 9.
\textsuperscript{311} Williams, 16.
\textsuperscript{312} Williams, 15.
Tallin, and the lower tier, from Savoy and Venetia through Slovenia to Transylvania and Volhynia.”\(^{313}\) The Anabaptists became the largest voice of dissent on the Continent throughout the sixteenth-century.

In *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe*, in contrast, R.I. Moore argues that there was no pan-European movement such as the Cathars, but rather heretics with similar characteristics motivated by similar critiques of a “Church and its growing wealth and power.”\(^{314}\) He completely throws out the genealogy model for something simpler. In his book, Moore considers earlier sources, suggesting that there was no specific opposition to Catholicism at this time: “There is no evidence that they [the Cathars] developed formal structures or hierarchy of the kind suspected by their accusers until after the Albigensian crusade, when it became necessary to do so in defence against sustained and systematic persecution.”\(^{315}\) Moore thus completely rejects the work of historians Malcolm Lambert and Malcolm Barber’s work on the Cathar heresy, narratives that detail a large organized movement with specific characteristics that were all their own.

Moore concludes “that there was no European-wide heretical movement. They were indeed to be found all over twelfth century Europe, and especially in the most advanced regions, groups of ardent believers who often were or became heretics, and who often resembled one another in their beliefs and practices.”\(^{316}\) He points out, however, that “The reason for these resemblances, however, was not, as ecclesiastical and

\[^{313}\text{Williams, 15.}\]
\[^{314}\text{Moore, 333.}\]
\[^{315}\text{Moore, 333.}\]
\[^{316}\text{Moore, 333.}\]
lay rulers alike tended to believe, because they were all part of a single movement, a sinister, even satanically directed conspiracy. It was that they were all reacting against the same changes in the Church … [while] finding their inspiration in the Christian scriptures, especially the Gospels, the book of Acts and the epistles of St. Paul." It seems that Moore does agree that radicals shared a deep-seated disdain for the Orthodox Church that often manifested itself in shared criticisms. However, he argues emphatically that this is as far as the linkages went, even though the ecclesiastical rulers that set out to destroy the Cathars in the Albigensian Crusade believed otherwise.

Moore’s statement that medieval heresies shared a common critique, and sometimes a disdain for, a Roman Church that continued to grow in power is entirely true, especially from what we know about medieval societies and the rapid changes that occurred during the Reformation. However, suggesting that independent movements with entirely different beliefs did not exist, and that no society such as the Cathars were a part of the twelfth and thirteenth-century struggles, downplays a substantial body of evidence.

Malcolm Lambert’s *The Cathars* is exhaustively researched and written. It is an impressive study that chronicles the Cathar movement in all of its uniqueness and complexity. Lambert and Malcolm Barber argue that for two hundred and fifty years, the Cathars existed as a significant presence and as an active voice in the social, religious, and political milieu of the eastern French Languedoc and Northern Italian regions.

Moore suggests that there was not a legitimate Cathar movement until “they had to carve out formal structures of belief to guard themselves from the inquisitors of the

---

317 Moore, 333.
Albigensian Crusade.” He states that “The traditional account depends at crucial points not on the earliest or best informed sources, but on texts constructed often long after the events they describe, and often with the expectation, or even the intention, of confirming the presence of an organised dualist heresy.” Moore suggests that contemporary scholars such as Barber and Lambert are overlooking the imprint of orthodox discourses on the evidence.

Moore thus insists that there was no “hidden chain of connection” that explains their similarities. Indeed he argues emphatically that there was no such thing as a Cathar movement, only similar heretics that joined together to affirm and establish in greater detail their own beliefs in an attempt to protect themselves from the Inquisitors. According to Moore, all sorts of critics of the Medieval Church were pushed into categories such as “heretic” and “radical,” but they were not movements and certainly not lasting underground churches. Therefore, to suggest that Catholic Church authorities could not distinguish between the various distinct heretic groups they pursued is at best questionable.

Moore has touched upon an idea integral to the historical heterodox and orthodox relationship. Referencing the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Epistles of Paul places Moore’s research, to a small extent, in agreement with my own conclusions. The Anabaptists looked to the New Testament and Acts to argue against pedobaptism—the administration of baptism to infants practiced by all three Orthodox Churches—and so too did the English Baptists who drew inspiration from their Anabaptist counterparts.

---

318 Moore, 333.
319 Moore, 338.
Scripture, doctrine, and Bible interpretation shaped the guiding rules, laws, and cultures of the established orthodox Churches maintained for hundreds of years. These had a profound effect on the rising heterodox communities that were studying the very same books, yet coming to completely different conclusions, particularly those groups that were guided by ministers who viewed “correct” interpretation as key to shaping the lives of their congregations.

Edward Peters’ *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*, published in 1980 takes a stance similar to R.I. Moore’s position that the Medieval Church lumped most heretics into categories, which were neither unique nor specific. For example, Peters argues that authorities often compared medieval heretics with the earliest radicals of Late Antiquity. Christian Europe “had witnessed two centuries of new forms of dissenting beliefs and had drawn heavily upon the experience of the early Church to conceptualize and define them. The variety of dissenting opinions and the specific contents of heretical beliefs mattered less than the fact that they were heresies.”

Dissidents were routinely compared with heresies such as the Dualists, Monophysites, Arians, and Donatists, even though radicals had most likely never heard of them because of their emergence so long in the past. The Church also compared medieval heretics to the Manichees and the Bogomils. According to Peters, the Church disregarded the fact that many of the labeled dissidents existed as very diverse communities.

Peters argues, similarly, that the orthodox Church defined Cathars as a single group of heretics, neglecting to recognize diversity among Cathar groups. He suggests

---

320 Peters, 6.
that the Church also lumped together the Patarines, Publicans, and Manicheans, groups that sprung up in the regions of the Rhineland, Languedoc, and Italy in the twelfth-and-thirteenth-centuries. Peters states that the “experience of heterodox and orthodox beliefs created structures of authority that affected both spiritual and temporal life in all spheres of activity through the first thirteen centuries of European history.”\(^\text{321}\) The tension created by the contradictory beliefs of heterodox and orthodox groups ultimately led to an even more hierarchical Church structure which, in turn, made surveying and killing heretics an organized and meticulous process. To this extent, Peters would suggest that heterodox and orthodox interactions created the categories of authority and dissent.

Peters also indicates that “It is no accident of historiography that successful dissenting movements—first during the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and later, in civil communities, during the struggles for toleration and political liberty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—looked back to the heretics of the early Church and medieval Church as the precursors of later ideas of freedom of conscience and civil liberty.”\(^\text{322}\) Just as the Churches broke down the distinctiveness of dissenting movements, radicals such as the Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Mennonites would identify with their ancestors of the Late Antique era as they shaped their communities, ones defined by pacifism, free will, and a way of life inspired by the lives and experiences of Jesus and the Apostles.

Let us consider to what extent the detailed practices of initiation or baptism can contribute to this debate thus far. How did orthodox-heterodox interactions become

---

\(^{321}\) Peters, 2.

\(^{322}\) Peters, 3.
visible through the comparison of baptismal ideas? The following analysis is cross-cultural and comparative, and will center on topics of community, baptism, persecution, politics, and institutional critique. I will describe baptism, how it was administered, and its religious significances.

Cathar Perfects conducted the ritual with a group-centered laying of hands, whereby when the administration of the liturgy was completed the participants—most often Perfects themselves—all laid hands on the initiate, the women placing theirs on the Bible. In 1641, by contrast, the Baptist ministers “immersed” their initiates. This was a full-body dunking, an entire submersion of the individual. He or she was placed completely under water then brought up quickly. As did the Baptists, the Anabaptists also dunked the initiate, but they did not submerge them. There is a specific distinction between the two acts. Submersion placed the person completely under water; dunking involved only the head and chest, an action done quickly. The Quaker rite of baptism, on the other hand, was done much differently. Quaker ministers did not even sprinkle the candidate because they too rejected the Anglican Church’s practice of infant baptism. Their emphasis was on an inward spiritual experience. Clearly, the actual form of initiation varied tremendously across these four cases.

Likewise, the inner-workings of community, congregation, and religious status among heterodox groups reveal a diversity of theology and ritual practices. The Cathar Postulants attempting to become Perfects were selected very carefully. During the ritual, hands were laid collectively on the individual who had been observed and chosen based on an early life of piety and commitment. The English Baptists chose their initiates in a
slightly different way than did the Anabaptists. Their candidates could be younger. The Anabaptists conducted baptism on only the most mature of their young adults. The Anabaptists ministers were adamant that only adults could recognize the faith covenant and important significances of baptism.

For the Cathars, baptism was a transformative process that changed the life and status of the initiate, while creating for them a cohesive membership in their religious community. Cathar Perfects also believed that baptism freed postulants from sin and moved them from a profane to a sacred space. Water cleansed the individual and prepared them for a difficult life that was sure to follow initiation. The Cathar Perfect ensured that the ceremony would save the initiate. While raising the postulant to the status of Cathar Perfects, they would achieve an influence and status that would in turn inspire others into the fold of the religious society. The elder Perfects demanded strict honesty from individuals, those that willingly accepted the covenant while taking on the responsibilities of the Cathar way of life. The English Baptists also viewed baptism as a rite of passage, a collective process that prompted the initiate’s willing acceptance of the church and its rules of membership. Baptism was a sign that introduced the new member into the community. The Anabaptists also believed that the rite of baptism freed the candidate from sin and ushered them into fellowship with the congregation.

As did the Cathars, Quakers, and Anabaptists, the English Baptists saw baptism as a rite of passage, and members who accepted it became “witnesses.” Subsequent to this, they would identify each other through faith and unity. The Anabaptists also believed that baptism was an incorporative process, a ceremony that freed the initiates from sin,
prepared them for a place among their community of peers, and, ultimately, saved them.

All four groups shared a common thread. They all believed that baptism was a transformative process that gave the initiate a better understanding of the requirements of leadership, its sacred covenant, and its status among members.

Heterodox groups were also linked by their politics of critique and dissent. The Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers, and Baptists shared similar critiques of the orthodox Churches of their distinct eras. The Cathars did not agree with the principles of the Roman Church’s clergy: the Sacraments, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, or Jesus’ divinity. Rejecting Roman rituals and canon law made them targets for the Inquisitors’ oppressive retaliations. Similarly, the Anabaptists rejected Roman and Magisterial Churches by criticizing the Mass, authority in many instances of tradition over Scripture, and the recognition of relics as sacred objects. Often ignoring the orders of the monarchs and Anglican Church bishops, the Quakers would frequently interrupt services and attack them verbally. They were ardent pacifists that altogether denied orthodox rituals, ceremonies, and customs. The Quakers shared their own religious culture, which defined them distinctively.

These radicals’ refusal to accept and follow orthodox law, ritual, and religious practice prompted reprisal that was often violent. The Cathars had intense dealings with the Roman Church, and by 1170, Pope Innocent III, backed by the Inquisition, unleashed a mass campaign of attacks that ultimately wiped away almost all their numbers from the regions of Languedoc and northern Italy. By this time, only a few Cathars remained and were forced to hide out in the homes of sympathetic families or become reclusive and
itinerant. The Anabaptists on the Continent endured waves of mass-persecution and violent purging; they were hunted, captured, and most often killed by both Magisterial Protestant and Roman Catholic Church authorities. The Baptists’ punishments for practicing non-conformist rituals were much less severe than the actions taken against the Cathars. The English Baptists were, in most instances, treated contemptuously, fined, or imprisoned. Mid-seventeenth-century English authorities were concerned less with executions. Their Quaker communities were initially fined, and over time they also faced capture, prosecution, and imprisonment. Indeed these communities all had a shared experience of alienation, persecution, and in many instances, forced martyrdom.

The Anabaptists, Quakers, and English Baptists endured over time as marginalized sects and had to adapt to social and political change. Indeed the Baptists and Quakers had a shared reaction to the sectarian agitations of England’s Civil War. They remained assertive while expressing themselves through book-writing and pamphleteering; this frequently prompted the interests of their orthodox contemporaries, but too often did the opposite. Competition for the allegiances of England’s Protestants was interminable. Relaxed orthodoxy often accompanied political transitions, changes in leadership, or rebirths of past artistic culture such as the Florentine Renaissance. Times of relaxed orthodoxy also enabled heterodox activity and critique. The Cathars experienced similar periods of growth. Many Italian and French urbanites viewed the Cathars as a unique group that stood bravely against an otherwise oppressive Roman Church. The English Baptists encountered social change at a fast pace. By mid-century, having constantly criticized the Anglican Church authorities and parishioners, the ecclesiastical
system broke down. Ultimately radical agitation and political unrest became the underlying factors that allowed for the endurance of both the Baptist and Quaker faiths in England, and likewise eventually in the bourgeoning American colonies.

The Cathars, Anabaptists, Quakers, and English Baptists shared commonalities in doctrine, theology, and leadership. Elites and their followers defined themselves through cooperation and austerity; values such as pacifism, asceticism, and non-violence were central to the lives of all these groups. Similar to the Puritans and Anabaptists, the English Baptists wanted their initiates to join the church voluntarily, not to be born into it. The very first Baptists aligned themselves with Calvin, which suggests that they were to a large extent a product of the Magisterial Reformation. This proves that the English Baptists and Anabaptists had some shared ideas with the Protestant reformers. Anabaptist leaders such as Michael Sattler, Dirk Phillips, and Balthasar Hubmaier all meticulously interpreted and carefully followed Scripture, viewing the Bible as fundamental and inerrant. Interpretation of the Bible and the shaping of religious communities through interpretation was a steadfast, common thread that connected these four particular radical groups.

I suggest we consider again the four models of orthodox and heterodox relations presented by Dickens, Williams, Moore and Peters. In the Introduction I asked if there was a chain of connection among radical groups over time or did institutional Churches create ongoing points of radical critique. The first scenario above indicates that culture, concepts, and religious ideas were passed along over time through the Biblical readings of intelligent, itinerant elites, often ministers of the emerging heterodox communities.
The second idea suggests that powerful orthodox elites found no reason (or no concern) to classify radicals unless there was cause to do so, such as a rise in their numbers, or a monarchical or Inquisitional mandate to eliminate them. This is the new thesis championed by R.I. Moore.

If there is any way to find common ground in the authors’ debate, it may be done by considering the nature of persecution. We must look closely at the fraught relationships between the Medieval, Magisterial, and Anglican Churches and their ever-present heterodox adversaries. In some instances, Church authorities found little need to classify radical movements because they lumped all of them together as threats to orthodox institutions; they were to be controlled and prosecuted. Authorities assimilated the radicals that they observed to the heretics of the past. However, the radical groups were also classified in detail so that authorities could better recognize each heresy in relationship to others: to use a compilation of beliefs and details against them in trials. This usually happened when the Church was attacking larger groups of heretics such as the Cathars in the Middle Ages or the Reformation’s Anabaptists. The capture and prosecution of religious radicals was most effective in times of powerful Church retaliation such as swift monarch-backed Inquisition attacks when there was little heretics could do to hide or defend themselves.

A distinctive feature of religious initiation in all these movements was the important role played by individual choice. Individual choice is similar, but ought not be considered the same as, “free will.” Baptism is a marker—a prism—that allows us to probe the nature of individual choice in religion. It is one very important aspect of radical
critique that was consistent in meaning, though diverse in form, during the Reformation, despite intense debate on various aspects of Scripture and ritual. The point of dispute was whether believers ought to be baptized as children or adults. This pinpoints aspects of individual choice, which was perhaps the most controversial issue of the European and English eras of religious reform. For the Anabaptists, baptism served as a visible individual commitment to Jesus, the Church, and the community as a collective body of believers. The Baptists also viewed baptism as an act of an individual choice to believe and to join the community. Although the Quakers did not use water in their ritual, they did replace this with an inward, spiritual phenomenon whereby the initiates took it upon themselves to accept Jesus and to recognize the Quaker faith as the “new Church.” The Cathar Perfects allowed a postulant to willingly participate, which also reflects their emphasis on the choice of the individual. Magisterial Protestants, by contrast, guided by leaders such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, were highly critical of choice both as a concept and as an act. To these reformers, individual choice supposed that believers could affect their own salvation: they could, in a sense, change God’s mind. To the majority of the Magisterial Protestants, this idea was not only ridiculous. It was sacrilegious.

Radical ministers also believed that baptism distinguished between forms of decadence and austerity because the liturgy tended to be shorter with less emphasis on pictorial, iconographic, and ritual excesses. Their heterodox ways of life and Scriptural critiques were in fact very similar. They were Biblicists. Radicals interpreted Scripture in
order to shape their manner of worship and laws. Moreover, they also reestablished Biblical truths as a way to distinguish themselves from their adversaries.

In the introduction to this study, I raised a question about contemporary religions, both mainstream and unorthodox: Can we draw parallels from the conflicts of early modern Europe to the large-scale religious discord that manifests today? I suggest the answer to this is yes. Even when we consider the slightest differences in orthodoxy, misunderstandings emerge and battles ensue. Currently, the most dangerous events occur between the two largest religions of the globe: Christianity and Islam. The cultural and geopolitical tension we witness between Western powers such as the United States, England, and France, and Middle Eastern States and Israel, mirror in detail the constant strife that raged on in the sixteenth-century between the Europeans, Turks, and Jews. Wars of religious discord were constant throughout the Middle Ages, Reformation, and beyond.

The nature of religious struggle comes from the simplest aspects of human nature: apathy, fear, and prejudice. These characteristics are inherent in us. Reflecting back on the history of Western Christendom, we recognize aspects of ourselves that are familiar and constant.
Bibliography

Introduction


The Cathars


Primary Sources


165
The Anabaptists


Primary Sources


**The Quakers**


Primary Sources


Fox, George. Concerning the Antiquity of the People of God, called Quakers; their Worship; their Mother. New and Heavenly Jerusalem; their Faith. And who is the Author and Finisher of it . . . London: [S.N.], 1689. ESTC R1314.


Leslie, Charles. A Discourse; Shewing Who They Are that Are Now Qualify’d to Administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Wherein the Cause of Episcopacy is Briefly Treated . . . London: the Gun at the West-end of St. Paul’s Church-yard, 1698. ESTC R25145.


The Baptists


**Primary Sources**


**The Conclusion**


