

Baptism, Brotherhood, and Belief in Reformation Germany

ANABAPTISM AND LUTHERANISM, 1525–1585

OXFORD HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS

BAPTISM, BROTHERHOOD, AND BELIEF
IN REFORMATION GERMANY

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Baptism, Brotherhood, and Belief in Reformation Germany

*Anabaptism and Lutheranism,
1525–1585*

KAT HILL

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Preface

When my supervisor Lyndal Roper suggested at the start of my Master's year that I might look at the printing history of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, I could never have guessed where this task would lead me. Sitting in my office trying to make sense of the then rather primitive interface of the new online version of VD16 (the index of printed books in the German-speaking lands in the sixteenth century), I noted down names of authors and publishers, and the titles of numerous works about baptism, the Eucharist, and many other aspects of faith. Then unfamiliar, they are now like old acquaintances, and almost ten years on from that initial foray into radicalism in the Reformation, I have been able to craft my initial inchoate thoughts about the importance of Anabaptism in the story of the German Reformation into this book. In the process, my work has taken me on a physical journey across the archives of central Germany and on an intellectual journey to think about the meaning of confessional change and the lives of men and women who faced a series of emotional and individual struggles as they negotiated the challenge of the Reformation.

This project would not have been possible without the support of many individuals, institutions, and organizations. I am very grateful for funding I have received which has given me the time and resources to research and write this book. The Arts and Humanities Research Council financed me through three years of doctoral research, while the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst enabled me to spend several months in the archives of central Germany. Generous contributions from the Royal Historical Society, Balliol College, Oriel College, and the History Faculty at the University of Oxford have funded further archive trips and conference visits to test out my ideas. While in the German archives, I received inestimable help from the staff of the Stadtarchiv in Erfurt, the Bavarian Staatsarchiv in Nuremberg, and the Saxon Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden. In particular, Dagmar Blaha at the Thuringian Hauptstaatsarchiv in Weimar and Roswitha Henning and Helge Wittmann at the Stadtarchiv in Mühlhausen assisted me in locating invaluable material, both archival and printed. At the Thuringian Staatsarchiv in Meiningen, Johannes Mötsch was not only beyond helpful in sourcing documents but also left me a chocolate to cheer one gloomy afternoon in late December.

My thanks also go to the staff of the Bodleian Library for helping me find numerous books, modern and early modern, and the librarians

and enquiry staff at the British Library. My gratitude also to Claudia Ulbrich and Claudia Jarzebowski, and the rest of the faculty at the Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut at the Freie Universität in Berlin who kindly hosted me when living in Germany. Grateful mention must also go to Giles Darkes for creating the map of Anabaptist communities in central Germany. His superb sleuthing of tiny Thuringian hamlets not only produced a wonderful map but also confirmed my instincts about the remoteness and size of Anabaptist locations.

Numerous colleagues, friends, and family have read and commented on chapters and drafts, discussed research, and shaped my thoughts about Anabaptism. My thanks go to Sarah Apetrei, Kathryn Beebe, Wolfgang Behringer, Martin Christ, Clare Copeland, Johannes Depnering, Jared Diener, Brad Gregory, Tom Hamilton, Bridget Heal, Pam Hill, Tim Hill, John Jordan, Chris Kissane, Paul Kosmin, Simone Laqua-O'Donnell, Suzie Lipscombe, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Jan Machielsen, Hannah Murphy, Leigh Penman, Katharina Reinholdt, Alan Ross, Carla Roth, Ulinka Rublack, Monica Stensland, Edmund Wareham, Masatake Wasa, Roisin Watson, and Jonathan White. Without their insightful criticism this book would have been a less rich work.

I am also very grateful for the countless suggestions from colleagues and acquaintances at conferences in England, Europe, and America. In particular I would like to thank the members of the informal early modern workshop who met regularly in Oxford over the last decade, drinking tea and coffee and exchanging edible treats from working trips abroad while providing a forum to test, retest, and dismiss ideas.

At the centre of this was always Lyndal, who joined Balliol in the same year that I did, to my good fortune. Tutor, supervisor, and friend, her unerring support and words of encouragement, incisive analysis, and tireless editing of numerous drafts have steered my journey from staring at VD16 to writing the Preface to this book. My intellectual and personal debt of gratitude to her is immense.

And finally my eternal thanks go to my husband Tom without whose love and support this book would never have been written. He has listened to every conference paper, put up with every deadline fret, proofread, edited, and photoshopped. In return for this, he now has the ability to make Anabaptist jokes for which I hope he is as grateful as I am for his constant, unflappable encouragement.

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List of Abbreviations

ARG	<i>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte</i>
Berbig, 'Franken'	'Die Wiedertäufer in Ortslande zu Franken, im Zusammenhang mit dem Bauernkrieg, <i>Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kirchenrecht</i> 22 (1912), 378–403
Berbig, 'Königsberg'	'Die Wiedertäufer in Amt Königsberg in Franken in den Jahren 1527/1528', <i>Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kirchenrecht</i> 22 (1912), 291–352
CRii and CRiii	<i>Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melancthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia</i> , ed. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, 28 vols (Halle and Braunschweig, 1834–60), vols ii and iii
Hochhuth I and II	Karl Hochhuth, 'Mittheilungen aus der protestantischen Secten-Geschichte in der hessischen Kirche; i. Theil: Im Zeitalter der Reformation; I. Abtheilung: Landgraf Philipp und die Wiedertäufer; II. Abtheilung: Die Wiedertäufer unter den Söhnen Landgraf Philipps', <i>Zeitschrift für die Historische Theologie</i> 28 (1858), 538–644 and 29 (1859), 167–234
Jacobs, 'Harz'	Jacobs, Eduard, 'Die Wiedertäufer am Harz', <i>Die Zeitschrift des Harz-Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde</i> 32 (1899), 423–536
LW	Martin Luther, <i>Luther's Works</i> , various translators (St Louis, 1957–86)
MQR	<i>Mennonite Quarterly Review</i>
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
QGTii	<i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i> , vol. 2: <i>Markgraftum Brandenburg (Bayern I. Abteilung)</i> , ed. Karl Schornbaum (Leipzig, 1934)
QGTiii	<i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i> , vol. 3: <i>Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter I</i> , ed. Lydia Müller (Leipzig, 1938)
QGTvi	<i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i> , vol. 6: <i>Hans Denck, Teil. 2, Religiöse Schriften</i> , ed. Walter Fellmann (Gütersloh, 1956)
QGTvii	<i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i> , vol. 7: <i>Teil 1, Elsass. Stadt Strassburg 1522–1532</i> , ed. Manfred Krebs (Gütersloh, 1959)
QGTix	<i>Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer</i> , vol. 9: <i>Balthasar Hubmaier: Schriften</i> , eds Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten (Heidelberg, 1962)

SAE	Stadtarchiv Erfurt
SAM	Stadtarchiv Mühlhausen
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
Sehling i	Emil Sehling (ed.), <i>Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts</i> , vol. i: <i>Sachsen und Thüringen nebst angrenzenden Gebieten</i> , 1. Halbband. <i>Die Ordnungen Luthers. Die Ernestinischen und Albertinischen Gebiete</i> (Leipzig, 1902)
Sehling viii	Emil Sehling (ed.), <i>Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts</i> , vol. viii: <i>Hessen. 1: Die gemeinsamen Ordnungen</i> (Tübingen, 1965)
SHStAD	Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden
TAH	<i>Urkundliche Quellen zur hessischen Reformationsgeschichte</i> , ed. Walter Köhler, Walter Sohm, Theodor Sippell, and Günther Franz, 4 vols (Marburg, 1915–55), iv: <i>Wiedertäuferakten 1527–1626</i>
ThHStAW	Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar
ThStAM	Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Meiningen
WA	Martin Luther, <i>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> (Weimar, 1883–)
Wappler, <i>Stellung</i>	<i>Die Stellung Kursachsens und des Landgrafen Philipp von Hessen zur Täuferbewegung</i> (Münster, 1910)
Wappler, <i>Thüringen</i>	<i>Die Täuferbewegung in Thüringen von 1526–1584</i> (Jena, 1913)

1

Introduction

In 1534 Georg Knoblauch was arrested for being an Anabaptist, for refuting the validity of infant baptism and denying that God was present in the sacrament of the Mass. Knoblauch was an otherwise unremarkable copper miner from the small village of Emseloh on the edge of the deeply wooded forests of the southern Harz Mountains. Married to a woman named Greta, he had two children with her, Liese and Hosan. Georg was not Greta's first husband.¹ She had been married once before to Vind Wedekind, who had been arrested in Frankenhausen at the end of the Peasants' War in 1525, the wave of violent unrest which swept through the German lands from 1524–5 and which looked to the Gospel to justify its demands.² Georg and his wife came into contact with the Anabaptist movement in 1533, as a man known only as Alexander travelled around northern Thuringia and the Harz Mountains with his associates Heinz Kraut and Peter Reuße, teaching Anabaptist ideas to anyone who would listen. As Knoblauch, his family, and those who worked with him were drawn into Anabaptist circles, he heard teaching on the Lord's Supper and baptism, and sang prayers and psalms. He even travelled to Vacha, a distant village on the Hessian border, and was present when a letter written by exiled Hessian and Thuringian Anabaptists in Moravia and addressed to the Anabaptist leader Hans Both was read aloud. In March of the following year he was apprehended and tried in Sangerhausen alongside his wife.³

Knoblauch was not exactly a model Anabaptist. At the time of his arrest he had not been re-baptized, and he recanted with some speed after being imprisoned and probably tortured, promising to abstain from

¹ Knoblauch's children were mentioned by Hans Hane, tried in 1535; Jacobs, 'Harz', 521.

² Johann Karl Seidemann, 'Das Ende des Bauernkrieges in Thüringen', *Neue Mittheilungen aus dem Gebiet historisch-antiquarisch Forschungen* 14 (1878), 491; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 108.

³ For Knoblauch's case see Wappler, *Thüringen*, 107–9, 355–9; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 206–10. On Hans Both and the Hessian Anabaptists in Moravia see Wappler, *Thüringen*, 103–5.

Anabaptism and accept any penalties to expiate his crimes.⁴ He tried to prevail on his wife to follow suit and recognize 'how evilly they had all been seduced', but she was not moved by his pleas and was executed in the spring of 1534.⁵ Despite Knoblauch's assurances to the authorities, he quickly fell back in with Anabaptism. On 6 September 1535 the *Amtmann* in Sangerhausen, Philipp von Reibitsch, reported that Knoblauch had been re-baptized, along with his three stepchildren, Ursula, Anna, and Hans Wedekind.⁶ They had left his house in Emseloh and gone to Halberstadt, where he was at the heart of a renewed circle of Anabaptist activity in the mid-1530s.⁷ He had also remarried. His new wife, Anna Scheidemantel, was pregnant with his child by the time she was arrested in autumn 1535, and she would later claim that she had been forced into the movement by her mother.⁸ Knoblauch's extended family and his servants made up some of the group, but the people with whom he associated had diverse origins. Anna Reichard, for example, was originally from Ummerstadt located to the west of the Bavarian town of Coburg, but she stated she had been living in Bad Lauterberg in the Harz region since the Peasants' War. Like Knoblauch, she had married a fellow Anabaptist called Herman Gerucher, although a priest had not sanctioned the union—which was hardly surprising, since Gerucher had been married for twenty-two years to another woman with whom he had fathered fifteen children.⁹ Anna claimed she had been baptized by a man named Bernhardus long before and that she had also met the Anabaptist preacher Alexander in the early 1530s.¹⁰

The authorities soon started making arrests. At the end of 1535 a large crowd, including Knoblauch, was apprehended in the village

⁴ Knoblauch's first interrogation occurred on 22 March 1534, and he was questioned again on 15 April.

⁵ 'wie ubel sie alle vorfurt weren'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 358; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 209r.

⁶ In the Saxon territories, local administrative duties were carried out by three levels of officials: *Amtmänner*, *Schösser*, and *Geleitsmänner*; see Susan C. Karant-Nunn, 'Luther's Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernestine Countryside', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69.8 (Philadelphia, PA, 1979), 65.

⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 392–3; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 195v–6r.

⁸ Jacobs, 'Harz', 509–12; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 398–9, 405; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 999, fo. 17v; No. 1017, fo. 106v.

⁹ Gerucher confessed that he had left his previous wife because she was not an Anabaptist and had met Anna in Werningshausen; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 416; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 111r. For Anna's interrogation see Jacobs, 'Harz', 529–31.

¹⁰ Anna confessed on 21 September 1535 that she had been baptized ten years ago in Lutterholz; Jacobs, 'Harz', 529. Wappler argues that it was unlikely that the preacher Bernhardus was active this early and that Anna had misremembered; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 90, n. 1. In 1533 one of Alexander's associates was listed as 'Anna, ein Frenkin', probably the same woman; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 351; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 122v.

of Kleineutersdorf, just north-east of Orlamünde where Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt had famously been invited to take up the position of pastor in 1523. Sixteen people were held in the castle of Leuchtenberg, which occupies an imposing position high up in the Thuringian forest overlooking the Saale valley. They were then split into four groups. The five women in the group were to remain at Leuchtenberg; three men were sent to Kahla; Knoblauch and three others to Neustadt; and the remaining four were given over to the authorities in Jena for questioning by the Lutheran reformer, Philipp Melancthon.¹¹ For some months Knoblauch refused to recant, but by February 1536 the *Amtmann* in Dornburg and Kamburg wrote to tell Duke George of Saxony that he had renounced Anabaptism once more and had been freed. After his release, Knoblauch disappears from the judicial record. Perhaps he finally abandoned Anabaptism, but there may have been another end to his story. Anabaptist chronicles from Austria and Hungary, subsequently collected by Josef Beck in the nineteenth century, refer in 1564 to a certain 'Jörg Knofloch' who disagreed with other brethren on the issue of divorce.¹² Possibly Knoblauch had once again moved on to a different Anabaptist community after being released in 1536.

We have become familiar with Anabaptism as a tale of endurance in the face of persecution. Anabaptists, those who rejected infant baptism and undertook the rite as adults, seemed to inspire a particular hatred in Catholics and Protestants alike, and hundreds of Anabaptists were executed in the Holy Roman Empire in the sixteenth century. More than any other religious group of the period they have been associated with sacrifice and fortitude when confronted by an intolerant society. Greta Knoblauch's story would seem to mirror the martyr stories that were told in Anabaptist collections of hymns and execution narratives; her steadfastness in the face of death apparently inspired admiration in others in

¹¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 399; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 36r.

¹² 'Anno 1564 haben sich etliche Brüeder, als nämlich: der Christl Schmidt, Hanss Neuhöfl vnd Jörg Knofloch (Knobloch) vnd andere mer, wider der gemain sin, der Eeschaidung halber, wider die Diener vnd Eltesten Brüeder auffgelaindt, sie sein deswegen von der gemain ausgeschlossen worden. Etlich haben wider Buess gethan, die ander tragen ir vrtail'; Josef Beck (ed.), *Die Geschichts-Bücher der Wiedertäufer in Oesterreich-Hungarn: Betreffend deren Schicksale in der Schweiz, Salzburg, Ober-und Nieder-Oesterreich, Mähren, Tirol, Böhmen, Süd-Deutschland, Ungarn, Siebenbürgen und Süd-Russland in der Zeit von 1526 bis 1785* (Vienna, 1883), 215. Wappler concludes that this was the same man. Bearing in mind that there were established connections with the Hutterite communities and Anabaptists had fled to Moravia before, this is not implausible, especially as Knoblauch already knew of Both and émigrés to Moravia. There is, however, no definite proof.

the region.¹³ In contrast, her husband's experience is hardly a standard account of conversion and martyrdom. His commitment to the movement seemed uncertain; he did not go into great detail about theological issues and recanted twice; and despite the two arrests, the authorities were not prepared to execute him. But Knoblauch was quite typical of Anabaptists in central Germany. Dedication to Anabaptism was inconsistent and dependent on circumstances; people were willing to recant if they needed to. These Anabaptists were mobile, independent, and did not have a simple allegiance to one Anabaptist leader or even to Anabaptism itself.

However, despite the incarcerations and repudiations Knoblauch did not relinquish his association with the movement, and he was able to survive his brushes with the law. Like many Anabaptists, Knoblauch travelled. After the first arrest, he made the forty mile journey from Emseloh to Halberstadt, and distancing himself from the scene of his initial crime allowed him to re-establish his links with Anabaptism without being immediately discovered. Following the death of his first wife and his confession, Knoblauch's involvement with Anabaptism was sustained or perhaps rekindled by family and friends; he evidently chose as his second wife a woman who was already an Anabaptist. Marriage and filial relationships allowed him to associate with a wide circle, scattered across north Thuringia, who were closely connected despite being separated by significant distances. Even opposition from those in power could not dissolve these bonds. Many, like Anna Reichard, recalled a longstanding association with the movement, and shared experiences stretching back several years drew individuals together. Memory of people and places was important to these Anabaptists, and always hanging in the air was the vague, half-expressed connection between Anabaptism and the Peasants' War. Had the experience of her first husband's rebellion and capture driven Greta to radicalism? Had Knoblauch met Greta during the conflict? As with many of the allusions to the unrest of 1524–5, one senses that there was more to the tale than was recorded. Perhaps most revealing is how self-sufficient men like Knoblauch and his contemporaries could be, for they did not depend on a single leader to provide the focal point for their communities, but relied on families and friends. Knoblauch's experiences are not easy to document or describe, but they are certainly

¹³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 393; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 196r. For an overview of Anabaptist martyr collections see Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 197–249. See also Peter Burschel, *Sterben und Unsterblichkeit: Zur Kultur des Martyriums in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 2004).

worth recovering; the uneven nature of attachment to Anabaptism that was the norm for Knoblauch sheds light on what being an Anabaptist really meant to people in central Germany.

While trying to conceptualize how to reconstruct the experiences of recanting, seemingly doubtful Anabaptists in these regions, I was struck by a comment made by Nick Stargardt in his analysis of childhood experiences under the Nazis during the Second World War. The 'search for historical empathy and understanding' is, he argues, a more demanding but rewarding process, for those whose actions we might find distasteful, even repulsive. Horrific stories of youths who were sent to their deaths or abused under the Nazis naturally strike a chord as we sympathize with these young victims of savage cruelty, whereas tales of the children and teenagers who found themselves involved in criminal, violent activities, perhaps complicit in the Nazi regime, are harder to square.¹⁴ A modified but similar claim might be made for Anabaptism. In many ways it is easier to empathize with the Anabaptists who went to their deaths. While perhaps not a choice we can even imagine making, we can sympathize with and indeed respect those who sacrificed their lives rather than beliefs in the face of intolerant officials. Such tales hold a certain appeal for the liberal principles of western morality (if not its secularism).

In a magisterial study of martyrdom in Reformation Europe which drew on an expansive range of material from different confessions, Brad Gregory identified what he called a 'collective dynamic of martyrdom' in the sixteenth century. He argued that the decisions of those who were martyred must be taken seriously on their own terms, not seen through the spectacles of modern or postmodern hermeneutics; toleration and accommodation were principles that would have been inconceivable in this cosmos of warring truths for which proponents were prepared to die. This insistence on comprehending the integrity of martyrs' motivations, characteristic also of Anabaptism's own account of its evolution, has had the effect of familiarizing and normalizing the experience of religious persecution in early modern Christianity. It seems much harder to take seriously those who recanted and relapsed in the way that Knoblauch did. For Gregory such cases are proof that Anabaptists did not 'march like automatons to their death'; martyrdom still pervaded their worldview but fear got the upper hand.¹⁵ We can certainly empathize with Knoblauch's desire to live, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that he and others like him were not 'good' Anabaptists and that their convictions were

¹⁴ Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London, 2005), 17.

¹⁵ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 208, 342–52.

weak when faced with the final test. Yet this only matters if we remain intent on measuring Anabaptism's influence against the yardstick of a defined set of theological beliefs and the test of persecution. Not everyone who was an Anabaptist fully understood, or perhaps was even interested in, a meticulous explanation of theological ideas, nor did they all choose martyrdom. But this did not make their experience of the movement any less meaningful or intense, nor should we equate lack of precision with lack of passion when they made their decisions.

Even if someone alternated between being a stubborn Anabaptist and an obedient Lutheran or Catholic, their choices could still be heartfelt, seriously considered, or driven by strong emotions, and the thought processes that lay behind theses reversals and recantations must be understood. Hermann Gerucher, for example, was convinced enough to leave his wife of twenty-two years because she was not an Anabaptist. He went to live with Anna Reichard but subsequently deserted her too when she rejected Anabaptism. Yet later Gerucher recanted, made a public confession in the church in Kahla, and returned to his first wife. He was obviously put under some pressure to do so, although there is no definite confirmation that violence was used. In addition to the threat of punishment, the pull factor of a more stable family life and the communal coercion of a public recantation may have induced him to return to his former life.¹⁶ It is too easy to reduce his actions to fragility or insincerity.

This book is an attempt to reconstruct the processes by which people became Anabaptists in central Germany, predominantly in the lands of the Wettins (the princes who ruled Saxony), over the course of the sixteenth century. It is a study of Anabaptism in the Lutheran heartlands, although in the patchwork of territories in the region, Catholic domains sat right next door. This then is also a story of the way Anabaptism evolved outside an urban reforming context and in an environment where towns were sparsely scattered, jurisdictional boundaries insecure, and rather perversely, since central Germany was Luther's birthplace and the centre of his Reformation, where uniformity was impossible to enforce. As such it addresses an important gap in Anabaptist historiography, while setting a new agenda for how we understand the way in which religious identities were forged in Reformation Germany. At a time when Lutheranism battled with the demons of the Peasants' War and tried to reassert control of the preaching explosion that had carried it to success but now threatened to disrupt it, Anabaptism gives us an insight into the religious choices that people made in early modern Europe. By taking seriously the

¹⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 420–1; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 119–20.

recanting and seemingly ambivalent Anabaptists, as well as the martyrs, this account reveals something of the reaction on the ground to religious changes that swept through central Germany as Martin Luther mounted his challenge to the Catholic Church.

ANABAPTIST IDENTITIES

Anabaptism in central Germany assumed its own unique character within the particular political and religious topography of the Saxon lands. It was unlike anything documented in Nikolsburg, Moravia, south Germany, or the Swiss lands, harder to define and less easy to trace. It had no clear leaders, no printed books or even manuscripts to spread ideas, no settled hubs of activity in major towns or cities. Indeed, the immediate impression which emerges from the sources seems to be one of isolated and often incoherent groups of radicals who failed to form stable communities. Some Anabaptists recanted like Knoblauch, only to relapse later, some were executed like Knoblauch's first wife, and others seemed to vanish off the record. Unlike groups such as the Hutterites in Moravia who were driven by exile and persecution to form coherent if separate communities, the central German Anabaptists apparently conformed once put under sufficient pressure and so died out as the century progressed.¹⁷ The hostile reaction of the authorities, the region's geography, scattered clusters of individuals, illiteracy: all seemed barriers to the development of a successful movement. Historians have not attributed any great significance to groups in this area in relation to the wider picture of Anabaptism. People here, it has been argued, were not part of a meaningful Anabaptist tradition in the sense that they did not show much theological sophistication and the movement was not numerically strong.¹⁸

However, the picture of Anabaptism in Thuringia can just as easily be read as one of survival in difficult circumstances. Deep connections permeated the communities of central Germany, and people were hauled before the courts in the same locations again and again. Anabaptism endured, as men and women developed relationships held together

¹⁷ For a brief outline of Hutterites see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (2nd edn, London, 2008), 23–6; Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore, MD, 1995). On later Hutterite communities see Astrid von Schlachta, *Hutterische Konfession und Tradition (1578–1619): Etabliertes Leben zwischen Ordnung und Ambivalenz* (Mainz, 2003).

¹⁸ John S. Oyer, 'Anabaptism in Central Germany, II: Faith and Life', *MQR* 35.1 (1961), 22–3.

through the memories of shared experiences and places. Being an Anabaptist did not mean demonstrating a persistent and fervent attachment to a defined ideology and charismatic leader. Individuals could recant just as Knoblauch did and yet remain profoundly involved with Anabaptism. Understandings of what it meant to him and his associates to be an Anabaptist had to be fluid enough for Knoblauch to be readmitted.

It will not do, therefore, to simply count heads to appreciate the influence of Anabaptism in central Germany, although this approach has often dominated assessments of the movement as a result of Claus-Peter Clasen's extensive numerical analysis of Anabaptism in all its forms.¹⁹ His research on the social composition of Anabaptist groups has been invaluable to historians of the movement, but his conclusion that it had little impact on the general history of Reformation Europe has had the negative impact of side-lining Anabaptist studies. This is particularly true for Anabaptism in central Germany. Clasen estimated that between the years 1525 and 1618 a total of 336 people were associated with the movement in Thuringia, 662 in Franconia, and 674 in Hesse, totalling little more than 10% of overall Anabaptist activity in this period. Hesse and Thuringia saw more significant activity in the 1530s, but by 1537 the movement was in decline, and Clasen argued that only two Anabaptists were found in electoral Saxony after 1550, with none in ducal Saxony.²⁰ Clasen himself was circumspect about his work, admitting that accessing material was difficult and defining Anabaptists problematic, and he also acknowledged that he struggled to split the Empire into analytical units due to the myriad political and administrative entities that existed in the sixteenth century. Yet despite his reservations, his work has reinforced the impression that central German Anabaptism was inconsequential.²¹

¹⁹ Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618: Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1972); Clasen, 'Anabaptist Sects in the Sixteenth Century: A Research Report', *MQR* 46.3 (1972), 256–79; Clasen, 'Executions of Anabaptists, 1525–1618: A Research Report', *MQR* 47.2 (1973), 115–52; Clasen, 'Anabaptist Leaders: Their Numbers and Background; Switzerland, Austria, South and Central Germany, 1525–1618', *MQR* 49.2 (1975), 122–64; Clasen, 'Anabaptists in South and Central Germany, Switzerland and Austria: A Statistical Study', *MQR* 52.1 (1978), 5–38.

²⁰ Clasen, 'Anabaptists in South and Central Germany', 9–10, 33–4. Clasen's figures are questionable since a group of fourteen Anabaptists were arrested in the rural regions round Mühlhausen in 1564, and further trials occurred in the town in the 1570s and 1580s.

²¹ Clasen, *Anabaptism*, 28. Seebaß also argues that in Franconia Hut merely converted a handful of individuals; Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben, und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Göttingen, 2002), 205.

If we leave aside for the moment the question of what Anabaptism was like in the region and focus on the numbers, it seems clear that Clasen's figures are an underestimate. Of course according to the accounts of Anabaptists themselves in central Germany, they were everywhere. The Anabaptist Hans Hut claimed optimistically in 1527, for example, that the movement had already gathered 16,000 followers and used this impressive number to try to attract more followers.²² Hut was exaggerating wildly for dramatic effect, but a study of the sources suggests there were approximately double the number of the 336 Anabaptists which Clasen records for Thuringia: using Clasen's criteria (all those accused of or suspected of Anabaptism) over 700 individuals at one time or another became involved with the Anabaptist movement. This total includes individuals in border regions over which the Saxon dukes had control or influence, which incorporates some of the individuals whom Clasen classified as Hessian or Franconian.²³ The geographical remit for this study is also admittedly somewhat different to Clasen's analysis, focusing as it does on the Wettin Saxon lands in their totality, rather than splitting the region according to the modern boundaries of Thuringia, Franconia, and Hesse. It scrutinizes Saxon involvement across central Germany, examining exchanges about cases in border regions near Hesse, or concern regarding Anabaptist activity, for example, in the imperial town of Mühlhausen or the lands belonging to the counts of Henneberg. This replicates the confused and often patchy nature of early modern governance. Following individual stories across borders also helps us appreciate the way Anabaptists moved around territories, escaping punishment by fleeing to neighbouring jurisdictions. Clasen's figures are incomplete but there is a more fundamental problem with attempting to crunch numbers: making an unequivocal decision

²² Wappler, *Thüringen*, 259; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 79v.

²³ We can choose any number of examples of Anabaptists which Clasen may have missed in Thuringia and Franconia, without access to the archival sources. The arsonist Anabaptists led by Melchior Stoer were mentioned by Paul Wappler, whose work Clasen used, and Wappler himself consulted the archival material but did not include all the names and details of the individuals involved; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 155–7; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 4426; Loc. 10328/1, 105–12; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 73–9. A group of twenty-one Anabaptists were discovered in Sagan (now Żagań), a Saxon enclave in modern day Poland, in 1539; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 30–3, 38–48. The Stadtarchiv in Mühlhausen has many details of Anabaptists arrested in the 1550s; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 69r–72r, 76r–80v, 91, 96r–105r, 111r–120r, 123r–134v, 137r–150v, 152. The Staatsarchiv in Weimar has provided evidence of individual cases. For example, in 1544 the pastors in Marksuhl and Ockershausen were suspected of Anabaptism, although there are a mere three folios on this case; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1019. Documents in the Staatsarchiv in Meiningen record the case of Anabaptists in Sennfeld in Franconia, under the influence of the counts of Henneberg, eleven of whom were interrogated in December 1528; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 2–23.

about whom to count. Such an approach means identity is reduced to a black and white category; either you were an Anabaptist or not.²⁴

It might seem that when it comes to Anabaptism the proof was in the proverbial pudding: if someone showed disdain for infant baptism and embraced the rite as an adult their confessional allegiance was clear. Alongside a set of beliefs about the absence of Christ's bodily presence in the Lord's Supper and separation from the world of secular oaths and military service, it was adult baptism, condemned by opponents as the crime of re-baptism and contained in the very name *Wiedertäufer*, which marked these individuals out as different. Defining an Anabaptist, however, is not so straightforward. Individuals, like Knoblauch, could be tried as *Wiedertäufer* and consider themselves to be Anabaptists without being baptized as adults; they could have Anabaptist sympathies, perhaps having relatives who had joined the movement. Anna Lursin from Dittersbach failed what we might assume would be the litmus test of Anabaptism as she claimed 'she did not know whether infant baptism was right or wrong'; however, she was confident enough to make the radical assertion that 'the body of Christ is not under the bread but in heaven'.²⁵ Of even more doubtful status would be the brother of Anstad Kemmerer, Georg, who met Anabaptists with his brother in Eisleben in 1527, conversed with them about their ideas, but then expressed disapproval of the movement; or the father of Balthasar Armknecht, Hans Hasenei, who looked after his son's four children after Balthasar and his wife fled their home in Zella St Blasii.²⁶

Many people may not have publicly declared themselves as Anabaptists but nonetheless would have sympathized with the movement, or at the very least may have housed family members and even strangers who were more demonstrably non-conformist. Indeed, this was the only way that a movement which was scattered over large areas of central Germany can have survived. Anabaptists were not and perhaps could not be dogmatic about their associates. Individuals often could not practically separate themselves from their day-to-day lives for the sake of Anabaptism. Relatives and friends may not have been baptized devotees, but they were part of the networks which enabled others to access new ideas. Like Georg Kemmerer, they would have had at least some knowledge of the alternative

²⁴ For the issues surrounding statistical analysis see James M. Stayer, 'Numbers in Anabaptist Research', in C. Arnold Snyder (ed.), *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull* (Kitchener, ON, 2002), 51–73.

²⁵ 'weis nicht ap die kinder tauff recht aber vnrecht sei, der leichnam Christi sei nicht vndern brott sonder in hymnell'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 33r.

²⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 304; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1025, fo. 3v. See also Robert Scribner, 'Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas', in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), 60.

that Anabaptism offered.²⁷ The only real way to analyse the movement therefore is to attempt to study all those people whose lives were changed by the arrival of Anabaptist preachers. This might not mean a permanent or complete change, or even approval of Anabaptism, but to understand the impact Anabaptist ideas had on people's lives we must appreciate its low-level, almost untraceable legacy. Large numbers of devoted converts was not the only way in which Anabaptism could be influential.

Figures, even if adjusted upwards, can obscure as much as they reveal.²⁸ We need a qualitative as well as a quantitative approach to Anabaptism. Counting new converts, for example, does not indicate much about the movement's continued significance and impact. A similar exercise for Lutheranism would most likely return a similar result: the number of newly won adherents declined over time. Often Anabaptism proved threatening and disruptive not because it was constantly gathering new followers, but because it was able to affect people's behaviour over an extended period. The menace of this phenomenon was made explicit in the visitation ordinance produced in 1537 by Philipp, Landgrave of Hesse. Notorious for his policy of comparative tolerance, or at least his unwillingness to execute, this ordinance made provision for people recanting for a third or even a fourth time.²⁹ Knoblauch's relapse was not an isolated incident. Erhard Pulrus was arrested for the first time in January 1530: he recanted and was released. His obedience did not last long, and he was arrested again in the middle of 1530. Once more he promised to abstain from Anabaptism, but he was apprehended for a final time in 1532 and was executed for his beliefs. One of the most startling examples of this pattern of behaviour was Christoph Rudolph, also known as von der Eichen, who was arrested no less than six times over a period of forty years.³⁰ Sometimes he was released after recanting, sometimes

²⁷ Mathilde Monge has indicated the importance of just these types of networks for Anabaptism in Cologne; Mathilde Monge, 'Überleben durch Vernetzung: Die täuferische Gruppen in Köln und am Niederrhein im 16. Jahrhundert', in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täufertums/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009), 295–313. See also kinship networks in Augsburg; Michele Zelinsky Hanson, *Religious Identity in an Early Reformation Community: Augsburg, 1517 to 1555* (Leiden, 2009), 79–106.

²⁸ This is echoed by Yutzy Glebe, who argues that focusing excessively on numbers does not allow us to consider 'the much more important information contained in the Anabaptist sources'; Ellen Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts?: Religious Dissidence and the Reformation in the Landgraviate of Hesse', DPhil dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 2008, 52.

²⁹ Sehling viii: 88.

³⁰ Von der Eichen was first arrested in 1533 when he was released after swearing on oath. He was apprehended again in 1535 but soon released. In 1545 the authorities arrested him, and this time he was exiled from Mühlhausen. However, by 1564 he was once more

he was expelled. The final fate of this persistent thorn in the side of the authorities is uncertain.

Tales of recanting Anabaptists serve as a reminder that tallies of executions in central Germany say little about the dynamics behind the movement. Clasen counted seventy-four executions for Anabaptism in central Germany in the years 1525–1618, less than 9% of the total of 845 executions for this period. Eight further executions took place in the Saxon enclave of Königsberg in Franconia.³¹ Executions can give an idea of the extent and spread of the Anabaptist movement and can certainly indicate times when the authorities felt the threat of Anabaptism particularly keenly, such as the discovery of a group of Anabaptists in the abbacy of Fulda which prompted twelve executions in 1532.³² However, executions only give us one part of the judicial record. Simply because the Saxon authorities did not condemn Anabaptists to death, it did not follow that there was no discernible threat or that there were no Anabaptists. Execution was not the only option, as von der Eichen's case dramatically illustrates. Given how easy it was to evade the authorities in the patchwork of the Empire—people could often simply cross the border—and how reluctant the authorities themselves were to drive people to martyrdom, an enduring adherence to Anabaptism was possible for many. Perhaps at times identifying Anabaptists was not always straightforward. At other times, as with von der Eichen who must have been an unwelcome familiar face by the 1560s, it seems that recognizing Anabaptists was not the problem, but that these men and women were deeply embedded in their communities and difficult to root out. Visitation records reveal that Anabaptism continued to provoke debates and discussions that could disrupt pastoral life, though no criminal record was left.³³

We must look behind the figures to understand the real nature and extent of the Anabaptist movement in central Germany. The impact of Anabaptism may have been almost imperceptible at times, certainly as far as the historical record is concerned, as not every case would have come before the courts, and the reaction of individuals like Georg Kemmerer,

in custody, released under strict conditions, which he soon transgressed, and was banished once more in 1565. In 1571 he was involved in an altercation with Franciscus Strauss and was apprehended for the sixth time; Wappler, *Stellung*, 184–5; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 474–9, 495–8; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 152, 240, 249r, 251–2, 275–6; Loc. 8211/6, fo. 312–15, 321–2, ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1001, 6r–8r.

³¹ Clasen, 'Executions of Anabaptists', 119.

³² Wappler, *Thüringen*, 336–44; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 57r–66v.

³³ See for example Päivi Räisänen, 'Obrigkeit, Täufer und ländliche Gesellschaft: Auf der Suche nach den "gemeinen" Täufern und Täuferinnen in Württemberg im späten 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert', in Schubert et al. (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferturns*, 186–213.

for example, who never embraced Anabaptist ideas, might seem to have only tangential relevance for a study of Anabaptism. But these marginal cases speak to a more expansive question about the nature of religious identity. How did Kemmerer understand the choices he made in relation to our confessional categories such as Lutheran or Anabaptist? Identity is a slippery concept, at once something that seems to reside within us but which is also contingent on others. Scholars disagree as to whether it refers to a feeling of individual uniqueness, a sense of commonality with the ideals of a group, or even 'an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience'. Erik H. Erikson, the psychologist and social theorist who tried to put Luther on the couch, remarked of identity: 'The more one writes about the subject, the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive.'³⁴ Locating the words to write about something which people themselves find difficult to pinpoint is not an easy task.

The multifaceted, elusive nature of religious identity has dominated studies of early modern Europe.³⁵ As much recent work has shown, confessions were not 'monolithic entities' that were formed overnight, and living alongside different religious groups involved negotiation and compromise.³⁶ Any number of examples might be used to exemplify the confessional melting pot that was Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the strategies that people used to manage such diversity. Transformation of pre-Reformation identity was slow in Protestant Perth, for example, and the traditions associated with St John the Baptist were retained, but under a Protestant guise; the survival of the austere Protestant church of St Maria-Horebeke in Oudenaarde, Belgium, in what was a Catholic society, stands as a symbol of the possibility of religious coexistence and diversity.³⁷ For some, religious identity may have

³⁴ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York, 1968), 9, 208. See also Ingrid Creppell, *Toleration and Identity: Foundations in Early Modern Thought* (New York, 2003), 6.

³⁵ See for example Eszter Andor and István György Tóth (eds), *Frontiers of Faith: Religious Exchange and the Constitution of Religious Identities 1400–1750* (Budapest, 2001); Wim Janse and Barbara Pitkin (eds), *The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2006); C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Friest, and Mark Greengrass (eds), *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2009); Kaspar von Greyerz (ed.), *Interkonfessionalität-Transkonfessionalität-binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität: Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungstheorie* (Gütersloh, 2003); Jesse Spohnholz, *The Tactics of Toleration: A Refugee Community in the Age of Religious Wars* (Lanham, MD, 2011).

³⁶ 'Introduction', in Janse and Pitkin (eds), *Clerical and Confessional Identities*, 1–2.

³⁷ Margo Todd, 'What's in a Name? Language, Image, and Urban Identity in Early Modern Perth', in Janse and Pitkin (eds), *Clerical and Confessional Identities*, 379–95; Wayne te Brake, 'Emblems of Coexistence in a Confessional World', in Dixon et al. (eds), *Religious Diversity*, 53–79.

been relatively clear cut, a sudden spark of transfiguration or unshakeable commitment, but more commonly there existed an array of experiences which involved making concessions and accommodating difference.³⁸

On an individual level, it is possible to map the emotional journeys that someone undertook as they picked their way through religious changes in the early modern period. Judith Pollmann has written about Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641), a lawyer in Utrecht, for whom one confession was not enough. Raised a Catholic, he first became a Libertine Protestant, and finally a Calvinist.³⁹ As Pollmann herself observes, identity is a broader cultural concept, which is expressed through membership to and differentiation from certain groups.⁴⁰ Buchelius's choices were individual but were also influenced by cultural assumptions about how the various available confessions addressed contemporary concerns regarding salvation.⁴¹ The question of religious identity becomes more problematic when we go beyond studying the mentality of one or even a few individuals and attempt to map these individual experiences onto the broader, myriad confessional divisions of the period. We have a sense, for example, of how the range of religious choices affected Buchelius's individual journey; we know much less about the impact his decisions had on the concepts of Calvinist or Protestant identity themselves.

Individuals did not simply interact with existing confessions; varied personal experiences were part of the process by which religious identities came into being. How this happened is a question which has not been as widely addressed by the literature on the diversity of early modern belief, which has tended to retain a vocabulary of confessions and alliances, leaders and boundaries giving the impression of discernible confessional groups which possessed something definitively Anabaptist, Lutheran, Catholic, or Calvinist.⁴² Part of the explanation for this lacuna in scholarship is that much of the literature on the religious identities of early modern Europe has focused on the later sixteenth century, when confessional

³⁸ Yutzy Glebe, for example, argues that we can 'view "Anabaptism" more as a tendency in the spectrum of early modern piety than as a restrictive category'; Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts', 51.

³⁹ Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)* (Manchester, 1999).

⁴⁰ Creppell, *Toleration and Identity*, 8–9; Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, 22.

⁴¹ Pollmann, *Religious Choice*, 201.

⁴² For examples see Keith P. Luria, 'The Power of Conscience? Conversion and Confessional Boundary Building in Early-Modern France', in Dixon et al. (eds), *Religious Diversity*, 109–25; Schubert, Anselm, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferturns/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009); Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Aldershot, 2002).

groups were arguably more clearly delineated. Much less attention has been paid to how people understood their identity amidst the labyrinth of ideas in the first half of the sixteenth century. Religious identity, especially in the complicated market of the early Reformation, was not always expressed through precise theological differentiation or coherent confessional positions; it was driven by communities of individuals who made varied choices, not just formed by preachers and their theologies. How else can we explain the experiences of Georg Knoblauch and his first wife?

If we want to discuss religious identity as a fluid entity we must take great care over the language we use. Men and women's relationship with Anabaptism was not constant or simple and cannot be understood with straightforward patterns of conversion and recantation, of ring-leaders, recruitment, and missionizing. The name Hans Hut stands out as an important element in the Anabaptist movement because of the legacy he left elsewhere, but in central Germany he was just one among a succession of transient preachers, and the resultant communities were not bound together by his or other teachers' theologies but a set of shared experiences and concerns. We face an epistemological and semantic problem when searching for the appropriate vocabulary to discuss the type of Anabaptism that existed in central Germany, but thinking about identity in a different way will help us to recapture the dizzy, turbulent experience of the opening years of the Reformation, a cauldron of ideas and options in which choices were made and unmade as people sought answers to the questions that religious change forced them to ask.

The concerns of Anabaptists in this region reveal a set of hopes and anxieties which developed out of individual reactions to Lutheran theology and to ideas they heard from preachers like Hans Hut and Melchior Rinck, in conversation with Catholic tradition. What is needed, therefore, is a 'thick description' of Anabaptism as a phenomenon understood in its cultural milieu, not a discussion of leaders and deviations from other confessions.⁴³ The recent work of scholars such as Hans-Jürgen Goertz, Ellen Yutzy Glebe, and Päivi Räisänen has already started to uncover the experience of ordinary Anabaptists and made it clear that we cannot think of Anabaptism as a movement which was cut off from the rest of the Reformation or from local religious and social contexts.⁴⁴ My work builds on this historiography but

⁴³ Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973; rev. edn, 2000), 3–30.

⁴⁴ See for example Driedger, *Obedient Heretics*; Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts'; Goertz, 'Die "gemeinen" Täufer: Einfache Brüder und selbstbewußte Schwestern', in Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen* (Göttingen, 2007), 363–76; Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf: Visitationsverfahren, Täuferbekämpfung, und lokale Handlungsmuster in frühneuzeitlichen Württemberg* (Constance, KY, 2011); Katharina

also extends and alters it in important ways. It goes beyond case studies of individual Anabaptists, such as Anselm Schubert's meticulous reconstruction of the thought of Augustin Bader. It also challenges the approach taken by both Yutzy Glebe and Goertz who focus on social ethics among ordinary Anabaptists and their appeal to an uncomplicated, morals-based form of piety.⁴⁵ While not neglecting doctrine, theological concepts take a back seat in these studies of ordinary Anabaptists who seemed unable to differentiate between the finer points of ideologies espoused by preachers.⁴⁶

Without returning to a confessional history of the Anabaptist movement only interested in its unique theological position, the Thuringian sources suggest a different way of conceptualizing popular Anabaptism. Dissent from the Lutheran church was not just about morality and discipline but concerned everything else that changed with the Reformation, for religion does not consist only of a collection of social practices but theological convictions, ritual symbolism, and emotional responses. The cluster of theological ideas which characterized the responses of ordinary Anabaptists did not have to be entirely coherent to be powerful: whether fretting about Christ's presence in the sacrament, agonizing about how to react to the death of an unbaptized child, or mulling over issues such as the nature of evil and the path to salvation, theological changes disrupted the emotional and psychological frameworks of people's lives.

It was clear to the reformers and the authorities that Anabaptism led people to ask searching questions on issues like the essence of human nature and the meaning of sin. Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's colleague in Wittenberg and one of the leaders of the Reformation after his death, questioned four men in Jena, who were members of the group arrested in Kleineutersdorf in 1535. He was not particularly complimentary about their understanding of Christian doctrine. As 'unlearned people' they were not able to make good report of many tenets of faith, but Melanchthon said 'we nevertheless did not want to examine them dangerously about other subtle articles, or rush them into them, but we asked about the central articles, especially on what their new sect and holiness is

Reinholdt, *Ein Leib in Christo werden: Ehe und Sexualität im Taufertum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2012); Anselm Schubert, *Taufertum und Kabbalah: Augustin Bader und die Grenzen der Radikalen Reformation* (Gütersloh, 2008); Schubert et al. (eds), *Grenzen des Taufertums*; Hans-Jürgen Goertz and James M. Stayer (eds), *Radikalität und Dissent im 16. Jahrhundert/Radicalism and Dissent in the Sixteenth Century* (Berlin, 2002), 88.

⁴⁵ Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts', 350–5; Goertz, "gemeinen" Täufer', 360–9.

⁴⁶ Goertz, 'Historie und Theologie in der Täuferforschung—ein altes Problem stellt sich neu: Geschichtstheorie Überlegungen', in Schubert et al. (eds), *Grenzen des Taufertums*, 21–48.

based'.⁴⁷ Despite his dismissive attitude about their ability to comprehend the intricacies of faith, Melanchthon was aware that many people were attracted to the alternative presented by Anabaptism and spent a considerable amount of time contesting the essential points of belief with the Anabaptists, although he worried that he might introduce new heresies if he debated theology in too much detail.

The discussion between Melanchthon and Heinz Kraut about children and the right age for baptism developed into a much broader argument about faith. Kraut said that even if children possessed sin, it did not matter because children could not understand the nature of good and evil.⁴⁸ Melanchthon then asked the prisoner if he thought children had to be made blessed through Christ, and Kraut answered 'yes'. Melanchthon replied that if Kraut truly believed that children did not have sin, then logically Christ did not need to suffer for them.⁴⁹ Melanchthon tried to force Kraut into a corner to admit the illogical nature of his arguments. He demanded whether any evil inclination could be counted as a sin, and once again Kraut responded in the affirmative. Convinced he had found a loophole in Kraut's reasoning, Melanchthon declared then we are all born with this fatal weakness, even children.⁵⁰ What had started as a debate about baptism, ended in an attempt to define the essence of humanity and the meaning of sin. Even without a theologian's training, Kraut was able to engage meaningfully in this dialogue.

To the numerous high-profile reformers like Melanchthon who tried, sentenced, and advised on the treatment of Anabaptists, the threat was never marginal or unimportant.⁵¹ Anabaptists' individual and emotional

⁴⁷ 'haben wir sie gleichwol nicht wollen in andern subtilen Artikeln gefährlich examiniren, oder übereilen, sondern haben die groben Artikel vorgenommen, darauf besonders ihre neue Secte und Heiligkeit gegründet ist'; CRii: 1003.

⁴⁸ 'ob sie gleich Sünde haben, so schade sie ihnen doch nicht, denn sie verstehen nicht, was böse oder gut sey'; CRii: 1000.

⁴⁹ 'ob die Kinder auch durch Christum müssen selig werden? . . . wenn sie keine Sünde haben, so dürfen sie Christus Leiden nicht'; CRii: 1000.

⁵⁰ 'ob er auch böse Neigung bei sich fühlet, und ob dieselbigen auch Sünde wären? Darzu saget er: ja. Philippus M.: diese Schwachheit werde je mit uns geboren, und sey in den Kindern'; CRii: 1000.

⁵¹ Luther's numerous references to the Anabaptists and other 'enthusiasts' are scattered throughout his writings. His most complete work was *Von der Widdertauffe an zween Pfarherrn. Ein brieff Mart. Luther* (Wittenberg, 1528); see *WA Schriften*, 26: 144–74. In 1528 Philipp Melanchthon completed a treatise in Latin against the Anabaptists which was translated by Justus Jonas in the same year, entitled *Vnderricht Philip. Melan. wider die Lere der Widerteuffer aus dem Latein verdeutschet durch Just. Jonas* (Wittenberg, 1528). Melanchthon also wrote a refutation of the Münster Anabaptist, Bernhard Rothmann: *Etliche Propositiones wider die lehr der Widerteuffer gestelt durch Philip. Melanth.* (Wittenberg, 1535). On 10 April 1536 a mandate against Anabaptism was published in electoral Saxony and attached was Melanchthon's *Verlegung etlicher vnchristlicher Artikel welche die Widerteuffer furgeben* (Wittenberg, 1536). In May 1536 he drew up

responses mirrored reformers' wider concern that the practical effects of religious change did not always match up to expectations. Most Anabaptists were not learned thinkers but had their own ideas about faith and religious practice. We must take these ideas seriously if we want to understand not only the Anabaptist movement, but also the way communities were responding more generally to the Reformation in the Lutheran heartlands.

Believer's baptism, rejection of tithes and oaths, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, bans on private ownership of property, and a set of ideas about acceptable levels of obedience to authority have been seen as the salient issues for Anabaptist communities, debated by preachers and followers alike. Anabaptists in central Germany had a different agenda. As elsewhere, the baptismal rite was, indeed, crucial to central German Anabaptists, but whereas the study of Anabaptism usually considers this to be a question about justifying baptism for adults, often known as believer's baptism, the Thuringian records demonstrate it was an issue which affected families and children and was inextricably linked with reforming debates about the proper practice for infant baptism. The Eucharist elicited similarly passionate responses. Unlike other Anabaptists, individuals in central Germany were less concerned with the memorialistic significance of communal Eucharistic meals, but fretted about whether they were truly eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ. Such debates were propelled not only by Luther and his circle, but also Karlstadt, Müntzer, and preachers of all kinds, as well as ordinary men and women in central Germany. Baptism and the sacrament of the altar, alongside the legacy of the Peasants' War, brotherhood, marriage, and gender relations dominated Anabaptist identity in central Germany.

a tract advising on the punishment of Anabaptists with the title *Das weltliche Oberkeit den Widerteuffern mit leiblicher straffe zu wehren schueldig sey* (Wittenberg, 1536). Justus Menius wrote four works directed at the Anabaptist threat: *Die Widdertauffer lere und geheimnis aus heiliger schrift widerlegt. Mit einer schoenen Vorrede Martini Luther* (Wittenberg, 1530); *Wie ein iglicher Christ gegen allerley lere, gut und boese, nach Gottes Befehl, sich gebuehrlich halten sol* (Wittenberg, 1538); *Von dem Geist der Widerteuffer. Mit Vorrede Luthers* (Wittenberg, 1544); *Von den Blutfreunden aus der Widertauff* (Erfurt, 1551). Menius also advised the Lutheran princes about dealing with the Anabaptist threat, and Frederick Myconius was an adjunct to these discussions; see for example Wappler, *Thüringen*, 353–4; Wappler, *Stellung*, 176–8; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 989, fo. 1r–3r; No. 991, fo. 2r–3v. Martin Bucer and Matthias Flacius Illyricus were both summoned to advise on the treatment of Anabaptists in Hesse; *TAH*, 212–45, 357–8. See also Amy Nelson Burnett, 'Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation', *MQR* 68.1 (1994), 95–122; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon, and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague, 1964; repr. Paris, AR, 2000); Oyer, 'Bucer Opposes the Anabaptists', *MQR* 68.1 (1994), 24–50.

It seems no coincidence that the two rites which were retained by Luther as sacraments—baptism and the Eucharist—and which attracted so much discussion should also be those debated most by Anabaptists in central Germany. They responded to the challenges of Lutheranism which raised questions but did not always provide answers, positioned ambiguously between the rich ritual immersion of Catholic faith and the more austere and explicitly memorialist theologies of reformed Protestantism. But it is erroneous to talk about the central German experience as some sort of new variety of Anabaptism, which can sit on a shelf next to Mennonites, Hutterites, and Swiss Anabaptists. It makes more sense to understand it as a process of dialogue with other religious reformers. Anabaptism was a dynamic and mutable movement. As the century progressed, it naturally changed and developed as the priorities of the Lutheran Reformation also altered. Adopting this perspective, we need not see the different Anabaptist outcomes from this as deviancy or decline but an organic product of the variety of preaching, teaching, and thinking that developed from the early years of the Reformation.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

It will come as no surprise to scholars of early modern religious and social history that the majority, though by no means all, of the sources relating to Anabaptism are interrogation records. In his study of the Lutheran reformers' reactions to Anabaptism in Thuringia, John Oyer commented on the difficulty of interpreting statements which were made under torture, and trial records certainly need to be read with an appreciation that they were created in a hostile context and are never the unmediated views of Anabaptists.⁵² However, since Oyer published his work, a significant body of literature has appeared on crime and the role it played in defining concepts of order and disorder, inclusion and exclusion in early modern communities. Understanding the narratives of power and negotiation that underpin tales of crime has allowed us to interpret interrogation records in a more subtle, nuanced fashion.⁵³ Historians, particularly of

⁵² Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 44–6.

⁵³ See for example: Marco Bellabarba, Gerd Schwerhoff, and Andrea Zorzi (eds), *Criminalità e giustizia in Germania e in Italia: Pratiche guidiziarie e linguaggi giuridici tra tardo medioevo ed età moderna/Kriminalität und Justiz in Deutschland und Italien: Rechtspraktiken und gerichtliche Diskurse in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Bologna, 2001); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA, 1987); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison Idea*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977; repr. 1997); J.R.D. Falconer, *Crime and Community in Reformation Scotland: Negotiating Power in a Burgh*

witchcraft, have studied the psychological confrontation between interrogated and interrogator in an attempt to recover obscured mentalities and human experiences from criminal records.⁵⁴

In the context of trials and visitations, Anabaptism was constructed as a dangerous 'other', a challenge to religious and social order. *Wiedertäufer* (re-baptizer) was after all a derogatory label given to these individuals, not a title that they chose themselves; Anabaptists understood the act of adult baptism not as 're-baptism' but the one, true baptism.⁵⁵ One of the only studies that has attempted to address how the crime of Anabaptism was fashioned in trials is Gary Waite's *Eradicating the Devil's Minions*. He argues that the scapegoating mentality of the sixteenth century was the trigger not only for Anabaptist trials but also witchcraft prosecutions. The manner and content of Anabaptist interrogations and the way Anabaptists were demonized by authorities laid the groundwork, Waite argues, for the witchcraft persecutions later in the century. Approaching his topic by studying ritual and sacramental issues, in his view there are structural similarities between the trials of Anabaptists and witches, since they addressed analogous concerns about the misuse of the sacraments, magic, and spiritual power.⁵⁶

This approach, while it promises much, is flawed. While Waite may be correct that there were some structural similarities between witchcraft and Anabaptism, it is not clear that the concern over issues such as baptism was related only to the question of demonic influence nor that

Society (London, 2013); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds), *History From Crime*, trans. Corrada Biazio Curry, Margaret A. Gallucci, and Mary M. Gallucci (Baltimore, MD, 1994); Ulinka Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 1999); Richard van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Oxford, 1990); Rebekka Habermas and Gerd Schwerhoff (eds), *Verbrechen im Blick: Perspektiven der neuzeitlichen Kriminalitätsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009); James A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550–1750* (Harlow, 1984); Pieter Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience: Disciplinary Institutions and their Inmates in Early Modern Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991); Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003); Michael R. Weisser, *Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Europe* (Hassocks, 1979).

⁵⁴ Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2002); Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD, 1992); Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, CT, 2004).

⁵⁵ *Wiedertäufer* was a term of insult. In recent German historiography, scholars have dropped the 'Wieder-' and refer to such groups as 'Täufer'. However, the term 'Baptist' in English already has a specific meaning, and therefore it seems to make sense to continue to use 'Anabaptist', while recognizing its limitations.

⁵⁶ Gary K. Waite, *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe, 1525–1600* (Toronto, ON, 2007).

perversion of baptism or of the sacrament of the Mass was perceived in the same way when committed by Anabaptists and witches. Waite's argument rests on analogies between the two types of criminal cases, not a detailed description of the actual process of interrogation. Approaching Anabaptism through trial records requires a close and subtle reading of the responses of the interrogated as well as the perceptions of the interrogators in specific contexts in order to reveal the narrative formulae with which these sorts of crime were actually understood. Luther, in typical fashion, grouped Anabaptists with other enemies and labelled them as agents of the Devil; and other commentators like Justus Menius followed suit in their published tracts. But this rhetoric of diabolic activity drew heavily on the generic trope of Anabaptists as *Schwärmer*, prophets of the Devil who spread his lies and perversions, which was different from the devilish pacts of witchcraft trials. Furthermore, in trials themselves in the central German territories, Anabaptists were not generally referred to using diabolical imagery, contrary to Waite's assumptions. Here the after-shocks of the Lutheran Reformation and the socio-religious consequences of the Peasants' War in Saxony provided the setting for Anabaptist trials. Under questioning and even torture, narratives about Anabaptism were constructed, but demons and devilish minions were rarely mentioned.

In the early days of the movement in particular, in the shadow of the Peasants' War, the primary concern of those who questioned the *Wiedertäufer*, was to gather information about the appearance of those leading the movement, of their travels, details of who else was involved, and where events took place. But interrogated Anabaptists were not passive bystanders in the trial process. Accounts given were affected by individuals' own social context or existing attitudes and were further moulded by the dialectic with the authorities. Two processes were at work in trial accounts: suspected Anabaptists reflected on their own comprehension of events, but at the same time wrestled with the preconceptions of the authorities.⁵⁷ Without relegating the concept of Anabaptism to a mere dialogue up for debate, we need to think about how and why suspected Anabaptists talked about their experiences in particular ways in interrogations, to understand why certain narratives about their behaviour were more compelling than others.

Natalie Zemon Davis's *Fiction in the Archives* exemplified this approach to trials, picking apart the stories which people told in sixteenth-century France in the hope of being pardoned for homicide.⁵⁸ While these tales

⁵⁷ Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf*.

⁵⁸ Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*; Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA, 1983). See also Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical*

might be in many senses fictional, this does not mean they were false perjuries: rather they were moral narratives whose power lay in the coherence of those constructed fictions. As Malcolm Gaskill has suggested, by blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, Davis's research does not simply touch on the history of legal procedures but allows us 'to reach early modern perceptions of reality'.⁵⁹ Anabaptists were often able to construct tales in their interrogations to satisfy their questioners, and probably those that confirmed the authorities' suspicions of widespread rebellion while holding the promise of future obedience carried the most weight.

Yet Anabaptists were not only giving accounts to the authorities but also to themselves. It is, perhaps, a stretch to term trial records 'ego-documents'. Trying to access the 'self' always presents the problem, as Claudia Ulbrich has pointed out, that the 'ego' the historian is trying to examine is not necessarily the same as the author, a particularly pertinent concern regarding trial records.⁶⁰ Yet we can use trials to attempt to understand how individuals constructed accounts of traumatic or difficult events and the ways in which they characterized themselves. Joel Harrington, for example, analysed the case of Jörg Mayr, a prolific juvenile criminal, who was arrested in Nuremberg in 1604, teasing out the strands of his stories. He suggests that we understand Mayr's defence by examining his carefully selected self-representations, which were all different but nevertheless drew on his actual experience.⁶¹ Adopting this approach allows us to fathom how people at one moment recanted their Anabaptism yet at a later date might embrace the movement once more. When Anabaptists said they had only been persuaded by preachers because they were afraid or drunk, this may have been partially true; once back within their community, discussing theology with family and friends, Anabaptist arguments might again seem persuasive.

In trial narratives, expressive language filled professions of allegiance to Anabaptism, as well as recantations. Gerucher's wife Anna said she joined the movement after a spiritual voice told her, 'Do not be afraid, do not be afraid, I will protect you like a mother hen protects her chicks, and

Representation (2nd edn, Baltimore, MD, 1990), in particular the essay: 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', 1–25.

⁵⁹ Gaskill, 'Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England', *Social History* 23.1 (1998), 3–4.

⁶⁰ Claudia Ulbrich, 'Zeuginnen und Bittstellerinnen: Überlegungen zur Bedeutung von Ego-Dokumenten für die Erforschung weiblicher Selbstwahrnehmung in der ländlichen Gesellschaft des 18. Jahrhunderts', in Winfried Schulze (ed.), *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte* (Berlin, 1996), 216–18.

⁶¹ Joel F. Harrington, 'Tortured Truths: The Self-Expositions of a Juvenile Career Criminal in Early Modern Nuremberg', *German History* 23.2 (2005), 143–71.

Gerucher was encouraged by his interrogators to repudiate his beliefs by praying to God with “great thanksgiving” and for “heartfelt pity”.⁶² This was not always a matter of mere convention; it reflected the emotional pressures which may have prompted individuals to make certain decisions, and understanding how people felt about Anabaptism is important. Scholarly literature on the history of emotions is now well established. Older analyses of emotional frameworks tended to see the history of emotions as a progressive process, with the medieval period a time of immaturity, undeveloped emotionality. In Johan Huizinga’s view, emotions in the Middle Ages had a sharpness and directness akin to the way emotions are experienced by a child.⁶³ With the development of a civilized and mature society, emotions also grew up. In *The Civilising Process*, Norbert Elias argued that the development of structured social connections brought about a concept of restraint, and he sought to link a Freudian analysis of the psyche with the history of social systems. With the evolution of the modern state and its correspondent processes of bureaucratization and rationalization, people’s drives and emotions were brought under control in a triumph of the super-ego over the id.⁶⁴

However, historians, led by the work of Barbara Rosenwein, have distanced themselves from a method which links emotions to disciplining power structures and used approaches taken from cognitive psychology, psychoanalytic theory, and the social sciences to try to understand the way emotions were expressed and what they might mean.⁶⁵ Rosenwein cites the example of Gregory of Tours who described a happy baby in one of his saint’s lives. Do we know that the baby was happy? Probably not. But according to Rosenwein we can assert that Gregory found the image of a child laughing with joy convincing, which tells us something

⁶² ‘eine stymme von hymmel herabe zw ihr geretth und gesprochen: “Furcht dich nicht, furcht dich nicht, ich will dich behuten wie dye klucke ihre kükten thut”; Jacobs, ‘Harz’, 530; ‘mit grosser danksagung. . . herzlich leid’; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 420; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 119.

⁶³ Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance*, trans. Fritz Hopman (London, 1924). This approach is also reflected in Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter: Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, 1996). Dinzelbacher argued that there was a transition from a structured, ritualized idea of ‘Furcht’ in the medieval period to a more subjective concept of ‘Angst’.

⁶⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (revised edn, Oxford, 2000).

⁶⁵ Barbara Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1998); Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2006). See also William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001); Jan Plamper, ‘The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns’, *History and Theory* 49 (May 2010), 237–65.

about emotional norms. Different groups within the same society might have different emotional communities with different values.⁶⁶ Susan C. Karant-Nunn has used Rosenwein's methodology to analyse the shifting emotional regimes that developed over the course of the sixteenth century as each confession sought to provide guidelines for the laity about how they should feel.⁶⁷

The history of emotions promises much, but it is not clear that it provides us with a framework that accounts for historical change. Whether we recognize the alterity of another era's emotional responses or the similarities (based on ingrained physiological characteristics) change is difficult to build into these paradigms, since accounts become a discourse about types of emotion rather than a dynamic model. What types of emotional communities were formed by Anabaptism, and how did individuals think themselves into different emotional responses? Being sensitive to the ritual context in which Anabaptism developed, and the theological detail of the issues with which men and women were confronted, as well as accounting for highly individual and sometimes irrational responses can help us develop a dynamic model for emotional change. Parents were expected to be concerned about the state of their children's souls and their place within the Christian community, and baptism was supposed to assuage these worries. Yet Anabaptist parents, who took a different view of the practice of baptism, seem to have felt very differently, as Kraut and Melancthon's exchange suggests. Questioning sacraments like baptism, marriage, and the Eucharist evoked strong personal reactions and had implications for family structure and gender roles, as well as the way people expressed membership of religious communities. As Zemon Davis suggests, thinking about the 'I' in early modern Europe is not just the story of the self but the history of where the boundary between self and other was located; in other words, how people related to others and their communities.⁶⁸

Utilizing the history of emotions to investigate how people engaged on a personal level with religious change allows us to put back the actors, as Geertz might call them, into a 'thick description' of communities and cultural contexts. 'Symbols' are intrinsic to an anthropological

⁶⁶ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 28–9.

⁶⁷ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (New York, 2010). On the history of emotional cultures in Lutheran Germany see also Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York, 2012).

⁶⁸ Davis, 'Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France', in Thomas C. Heller (ed.), *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford, CA, 1986), 53–63.

approach like that of Geertz: symbols are the loadbearing acts or events which carry the conceptual meanings of culture and, in the case of religion, the signs which configure humanity's relationship to a cosmic order.⁶⁹ Thus anthropology provides an interpretive framework for understanding the many layered symbolic functions of baptism or the Lord's Supper, taking religious ritual beyond the realms of theology. The moment at which Eucharistic bread and wine is consumed represents not only spiritual communion, but expresses a pantheon of ideas about the social solidity of a community and draws boundaries between the corporeal and the divine. However, anthropological analyses of this kind assume a monolithic view of culture because they rely on the interpretive system preceding the sign, so that the ritual is the mere expression of an extant set of concerns. Such an approach does not permit a meaningful examination of conflict or interruption of this symbolic framework. In the 1520s ritual changes were enacted, as the practices of the sacrament of the Mass or baptism were altered. Yet ritual and theological modifications did not just alter practice but could actually change how people felt about key events in their lives. The way individuals subsequently responded to these disruptions in their social and psychological worlds created new systems of understanding. In a story that defies any easy notions of causality, combining anthropological understandings of ritual with an appreciation of the role of individual, emotional responses to religious change allows us to reconstruct the fragmentary process of identity formation in central German Anabaptism.

CENTRAL GERMAN ANABAPTISM IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The major work on Anabaptism in central Germany was undertaken a hundred years ago by the German historian Paul Wappler. His volumes on the Saxon and Thuringian regions, which contain printed collections of large amounts of archival material, are invaluable to any student of Anabaptism and radical movements in general in central Germany.⁷⁰ Wappler argued that Anabaptism developed as a reaction to Luther's conservative attempts at reform, the moral bankruptcy of his church, and

⁶⁹ Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 87–125.

⁷⁰ Wappler, *Thüringen*; Wappler, *Stellung: Wappler, Inquisition und Ketzerprozesse in Zwickau zur Reformationszeit: Dargestellt im Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung der Ansichten Luthers und Melanchthons über Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit* (Leipzig, 1908); Wappler, *Thomas Müntzer in Zwickau und die 'Zwickauer Propheten'* (Gütersloh, 1966).

people's disappointment over the outcome of the Peasants' War. As the Lutheran church became increasingly secure and stable, the Anabaptist movement, which had degenerated into extreme branches, disappeared. Its legacy, however, could be seen in the fanatical propaganda of Esajas Stiefel and his nephew Ezechiel Meth in Langensalza at the beginning of the seventeenth century.⁷¹ In addition to Wappler's archival work, there are some notable late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century essays on Anabaptism in central Germany, also with collections of original sources. Georg Berbig analysed the development of groups in various areas in Franconia in the aftermath of the Peasants' War, drawing on documents in the Herzogliches Hausarchiv and the Staatsarchiv in Coburg.⁷² He also examined Hut's influence on the Saxon enclave of Königsberg in Franconia in the years 1527–8.⁷³ Eduard Jacobs gathered a substantial amount of material on Anabaptists in the Harz Mountains in the 1530s.⁷⁴ Günther Franz edited four volumes of documents on the Reformation in Hesse, the last of which was devoted to the Anabaptist movement.⁷⁵ Also of note is Karl Hochhuth's study of the attitude of Landgrave Philipp to the Anabaptists, which included excerpts of archival material.⁷⁶

However, since these collections were compiled there has been little detailed research on the region and very limited original archival material studied in relation to Anabaptism in the Saxon lands. In general, historians of Anabaptism have not attributed any great significance or importance to groups in this area in relation to the wider picture of the Anabaptist movement. This is due in large part to the work of Clasen, but there is also an ideological and historiographical reason behind the lack of focus on Anabaptism in Thuringia and Saxony. In the models of Anabaptist history that have evolved, whether the Benderian school of normative Anabaptism or the famous polygenesis thesis developed by Stayer, Packull, and Deppermann, which argued that Anabaptism had several traditions which shaped one another but had distinct origins,

⁷¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 220–7. For a recent account of these seventeenth-century radicals see Ulman Weiß, *Die Lebenswelten des Esajas Stiefel, oder, Vom Umgang mit Dissidenten* (Stuttgart, 2007).

⁷² Berbig, Georg, 'Die Wiedertäufer in Ortslande zu Franken, im Zusammenhang mit dem Bauernkrieg', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kirchenrecht* 22 (1912), 378–403.

⁷³ Berbig, 'Königsberg'.

⁷⁴ Jacobs, 'Harz'.

⁷⁵ TAH.

⁷⁶ Karl Hochhuth, 'Mittheilungen aus der protestantischen Secten-Geschichte in der hessischen Kirche; I. Theil: Im Zeitalter der Reformation; I. Abtheilung: Landgraf Philipp und die Wiedertäufer; II. Abtheilung: Die Wiedertäufer unter den Söhnen Landgraf Philipps', *Zeitschrift für die Historische Theologie* 28 (1858), 538–644 and 29 (1859), 167–234.

Anabaptism in Thuringia and Saxony has not played a major role.⁷⁷ Bender and other Mennonite scholars, who looked for a basis for their own religious life in historical tradition, distinguished between different strains of the movement in order to stress the importance of pacifist Anabaptism in the face of anti-German sentiment stirred up by two world wars. Violent, rebellious, and disruptive elements, including any radicals with links to Thomas Müntzer and Karlstadt, were disregarded, and those Anabaptist groups which did not conform to the Swiss model were considered to be aberrations from normative Anabaptism. In this picture there was no room for the violent Saxon radicals whose possible connections to Müntzer and the Peasants' War were too close for comfort, nor even for the groups that were peaceful but maintained a very different agenda from that of the Schleithem articles, a statement of Anabaptist faith compiled in 1527, probably by Michael Sattler.⁷⁸

After the Second World War, left-wing historians mainly in East Germany, such as Gerhard Zschäbitz, became interested in the Anabaptist movement as an expression of social discontent in sixteenth-century Europe and challenged the Benderian model.⁷⁹ Above all, however, it was the polygenesis model which deconstructed the school of normative Anabaptism and rejected the idea that all Anabaptism could be traced back to the Swiss groups.⁸⁰ Instead, Stayer, Packull, and Deppermann split the movement into three groups with separate points of origin: Swiss Anabaptists, central and southern German Anabaptism, and Anabaptist groups in the Netherlands, though Stayer and others have emphasized there was much more diversity in reality.⁸¹ Yet Saxon and Thuringian Anabaptism did not fit in this influential model, as it did not clearly lie in any one group. In his formative study of Anabaptist attitudes to violence and authority, Stayer wished to demonstrate the variety of attitudes that existed within Anabaptist groups to the 'sword' and political order, and the importance of the legacies of Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and Thomas Müntzer. Dedicating only twelve pages to Anabaptists in central Germany, the regions of eastern Hesse, Fulda, Henneberg, and the Thuringian lands of ducal and electoral Saxony formed only a minor part

⁷⁷ Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision', *Church History* 13 (1944), 3–24; James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, 'From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins', *MQR* 49.2 (1975), 83–121.

⁷⁸ See Bender, 'The Anabaptist Vision'; Bender, 'The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer, and the Anabaptists', *MQR* 27.1 (1953), 3–16.

⁷⁹ Gerhard Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung nach dem grossen Bauernkrieg* (Berlin, 1958).

⁸⁰ Goertz (ed.), *Umstrittenes Täuferum, 1525–1975: Neue Forschungen* (Göttingen, 1975); Stayer et al., 'Monogenesis to Polygenesis'.

⁸¹ See for example Goertz, *Anabaptists*, 6–35.

of what Stayer loosely defined as the Upper German sects of Anabaptism. He depicted the Saxon, Hessian, and Thuringian Anabaptists and their leaders as mere shadow puppets of Müntzer's crusade. They were poorly instructed, scattered, and lacking in clarity of statement, but all drew in some way on Müntzer's political theology.⁸²

While Stayer and others have relaxed the polygenetic methodology, central German Anabaptism has still not found its place in historical scholarship.⁸³ Even Stayer's discussion of Saxon radicalism in a later article focused predominantly on the historiography of the relationship between figures like Karlstadt and Müntzer, and Swiss Anabaptism, rather than the impact in the Saxon lands itself. The offspring of the Saxon radicals were, he admits, Anabaptists like Hans Denck, Hans Hut, and Melchior Rinck in southern and central Germany, who inherited the legacy of Müntzer's faith as the early Anabaptist movement developed. Stayer, however, has little to say about this part of Müntzer's legacy.⁸⁴ Since Wappler, the only extensive discussion of Anabaptism in Thuringia has come from the pen of John S. Oyer, although his interest lay in the Lutheran response to Anabaptists rather than in the radicals themselves.⁸⁵ Scattered references are made to some of the Anabaptists who appear in the central German records in various individual studies. Of particular note is the recent research undertaken by Katharina Reinholdt on the *Blutsfreunde*, a group of Anabaptists with radical views about sex and religion who emerged in Thuringia in the 1550s.⁸⁶ Günter Vogler has worked extensively on the ideas of Thomas Müntzer and his legacy, and in the process analysed some of the Anabaptist groups in Thuringia, in particular in the town of Eisleben.⁸⁷ Ruth Weiß wrote a monograph which examined the social origins of the east Hessian Anabaptists and extended her

⁸² Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, KS, 1973), 189–201.

⁸³ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON, 1995); John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (eds), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden, 2007).

⁸⁴ Stayer, 'Sächsischer Radikalismus und Schweizer Täuferum: Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten', in Günter Vogler (ed.), *Wegscheiden der Reformation: Alternatives Denken vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1994), 151–78; Stayer, 'Saxon Radicalism and Swiss Anabaptism: The Return of the Repressed', *MQR* 67.1 (1993), 5–30.

⁸⁵ Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*.

⁸⁶ Reinholdt, "durch fleischliche vormyschung geheilliget"—Sexuelle Devianz und spirituelle Ehen bei den "Blutsfreunden aus der Wiedertauff", in Schubert et al. (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferums*, 295–313; Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*, 77–80.

⁸⁷ See for example the collection of essays Günter Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer und die Gesellschaft seiner Zeit* (Mühlhausen, 2003). The essays with particular relevance are 'Sozialethische Vorstellungen und Lebensweisen von Täufergruppen: Thomas Müntzer und die Täufer im Vergleich', 156–64 and 'Gab es in Eisleben eine Täufergemeinde? Eine Episode aus dem Jahr 1527', 165–73. See also Stayer, 'Swiss-South German Anabaptism, 1526–1549', in Roth and Stayer (eds), *Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 83–118.

analysis to the town of Vacha, the Hessian controlled area of Hersfeld, the joint electoral Saxon and Hessian areas of Hausbreitenbach and Berka, the town of Treffurt, the *Vogtei* Mühlhausen in the north-east of the Landgraviate of Hesse, and the Fulda region.⁸⁸ In his study of Erfurt in the Reformation era, Robert Scribner traced the matrix of religious activities of the city's inhabitants, including Anabaptists like the furrier Hans Römer and his following in Erfurt.⁸⁹ The more general accounts of Anabaptism in central and southern Germany also shed further light on what is a rather murky picture, including Zschäbitz's Marxist-influenced analysis of Anabaptist origins, and Hans-Dieter Schmid's account of Anabaptism in Nuremberg. Characteristic of both studies is the insistence on the overweening importance of Hut in central Germany and his relationship with Müntzer; an approach exemplified by Gottfried Seebaß' biography of Hut.⁹⁰ Work on Anabaptists in Hesse has fared slightly better than that for Thuringia and Saxony, largely due to ease of access to the archival material before German reunification. (Anyone reading the notes to the bibliography of Susan Karant-Nunn's work on Zwickau cannot fail to be struck by the lengthy procedures which were needed to gain access to the Staatsarchiv in Weimar.⁹¹) Of particular note is the recent study by Ellen Yutzy Glebe on the experiences of Hessian Anabaptists.⁹²

Even as approaches to Anabaptism have diversified, accounts of radical movements have still been dominated by attempts to classify and categorize different strains of the radical Reformation. In this taxonomic mire, scholars have looked in particular for points of origin and formative intellectual influences.⁹³ Recently Andrea Strübind has

⁸⁸ Ruth Weiß, 'Die Herkunft der osthessischen Täufer', part 1, *ARG* 50 (1959), 1–16, part 2, *ARG* 50 (1959), 182–99.

⁸⁹ Scribner, 'Reformation, Society, and Humanism in Erfurt, c. 1450–1530', PhD thesis, University of London, 1972, 248–51.

⁹⁰ Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung*; Hans-Dieter Schmid, *Täuferium und Obrigkeit in Nürnberg* (Nuremberg, 1972); Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*. See also Gottfried Seebaß, 'Bauernkrieg und Täuferium in Franken', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 85 (1974), 284–300.

⁹¹ Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition, 1500–1547: The Reformation as an Agent of Change* (Columbus, OH, 1987), 283.

⁹² Burnett, 'Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation'; Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts'; Franklin H. Littell, *Landgraf Philipp und die Toleranz: Ein christlicher Fürst, der linke Flügel der Reformation, und der christliche Primitivismus* (Bad Nauheim, 1957); David Mayes, 'Heretics or Nonconformists? State Policies toward Anabaptists in Sixteenth-Century Hesse', *SCJ* 32.4 (2001) 1003–26; John C. Stalnaker, 'Anabaptism, Martin Bucer, and the Shaping of the Hessian Protestant Church', *Journal of Modern History* 48.4 (1976), 601–43.

⁹³ Emmet McLaughlin, for example, broke down the so-called Spiritualist movement into three major categories of Biblical/Charismatic, Platonic/Noetic, and Platonic/Sacramental; R. Emmet McLaughlin, 'Spiritualism: Schwenckfeld and Franck and their Early Modern Resonance', in Roth and Stayer (eds), *Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 119–61.

reacted negatively to the polygenetic model but has not moved beyond the terms of the genesis debate. She rejects the suggestion that Swiss pacifism and separatism developed as a result of the experiences of persecution and suppression after the Peasants' War; these ideas were evident from the movement's inception.⁹⁴ Even Yutzy Glebe's recent study, which has attempted to move the debate forward, is preoccupied with the question of genesis, proposing the alternative theory of pangensis. She contests that Anabaptism had dual origins—the point of derivation for the ideas and the juncture at which they were received and accepted by an individual. Her analysis has the advantage of considering the responses of ordinary Anabaptists to new ideas, but relies on an overly stratified and centralized model of the spread of ideologies.⁹⁵

The search for origins has deformed the picture of Anabaptism. Studies have often been set up as a dialogue of Anabaptist theologians with Zwinglian ideas on reform or with Thomas Müntzer's religious vision.⁹⁶ In the case of Strasbourg, the story has focused on the seemingly unique atmosphere of tolerance and diversity, where the influences of various branches of Anabaptism were felt.⁹⁷ These lines of investigation have seemed to be the most fruitful in the search for the origins of ideas that polygenesis has fostered. Yet Saxony and Thuringia have been neglected, in part the result of the desire to move reforming impulses away from Luther-centric explanations, and little work has been done on how Anabaptism developed as part of a conversation with the early Lutheran Reformation.

⁹⁴ Andrea Strübind, *Eifriger als Zwingli: Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz* (Berlin, 2003). Strübind's provocative comments about other historians have produced several responses: Stayer, 'A New Paradigm in Anabaptist/Mennonite Historiography?', *MQR* 78.2 (2004), 297–307; and her retort: Andrea Strübind, 'James M. Stayer, "A New Paradigm in Anabaptist/Mennonite Historiography?"', *MQR* 78.2 (2004), 308–13; Snyder, 'The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism, 1520–1530', *MQR* 80.4 (2006), 501–684; Goertz, 'Response to Snyder', trans. Stayer, *MQR* 80.4 (2006), 675–80; Goertz, 'Historie and Theologie'.

⁹⁵ See in particular her diagrammatic representation of the movement in Hesse; Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts', 260, 264–72.

⁹⁶ See for example Goertz, *Anabaptists*, 8–21; Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531* (Scottsdale, PA, 1977); Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 93, 135–6.

⁹⁷ For just a small sample of the work on the Reformation in Strasbourg: Thomas Brady, *Protestant Politics: Jakob Sturm (1489–1553) and the German Reformation* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1995); Miriam Usher Chrisman *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change* (New Haven, CT, 1967); Marc Lienhard, *Un temps, une ville, une Réforme: la Réformation à Strasbourg* (Aldershot, 1990). On Anabaptism in Strasbourg see Goertz, *Anabaptists*, 26–9; Stayer, 'Swiss-South German Anabaptism', 99–105; Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 117.

This study addresses the neglected problem of Anabaptism's intimate involvement with religious change, specifically Lutheran reforms, in central Germany. Yet it will not delve for the 'antecedents' or origins of Anabaptist ideas, but examine the dialogue that moulded Anabaptism. After a brief introduction to the political and religious background in the Wettin lands, Chapter 2 analyses what Anabaptism in central Germany was like, how people came to join the movement, and how identity evolved. Chapter 3 faces head on the problematic legacy of the Peasants' War through an examination of the way people remembered particular places and individuals. While these chapters deal with social aspects of the movement, Chapters 4 and 5 turn to theology and practical piety. Chapter 4 looks at Anabaptist attitudes to baptism by analysing first how infant baptismal practice was altered, and then how adult baptism was carried out and justified among Anabaptists. Chapter 5 scrutinizes Anabaptist responses to changes to the sacrament of the Mass. Anabaptists rejected any idea of the real presence, but they did talk about the body—the flesh and blood—in highly charged, symbolic terms. Their piety seemed to be concerned with access to the body of Christ rather than eating the Saviour, whether actually or commemoratively. Chapter 6 surveys Anabaptist views on gender, sex, and marriage in central Germany through an examination of the ideas of brotherhood and sisterhood which were essential to Anabaptists. By breaking free of a model that assesses whether or not Anabaptism made women more or less equal, it is possible to look at the radical ways in which Anabaptists shaped gender relations as part of a shared debate with Lutheranism about sex, marriage, and kinship. Chapter 7 uses a study of one of the last cases of Anabaptism to be documented in the Thuringian records, the trial of Hans Thon, to suggest how the Anabaptist movement developed in the course of the sixteenth century and exemplify the ways in which Anabaptism was an ongoing pastoral problem.

This is not simply an account of Anabaptism in a previously overlooked area, but an account which challenges our assumptions about how people made the decision to become Anabaptists and what it meant to them to be part of Anabaptist communities. While central German Anabaptism did not produce dramatic martyrs and separatist communities, it still witnessed individuals making risky choices that seemed to set them apart from their contemporaries in radical ways. But instead of viewing Anabaptism as a separate strand of Reformation religiosity, this study suggests that we should appreciate how people felt about baptism or the Eucharist, and how they engaged with Lutheran reforms; by doing so, Anabaptism emerges as a viable religious choice for ordinary men

and women in central Germany as they came to terms with theological and ritual change. This sets a new agenda, about what was important to Anabaptism and how we understand it, while also demanding that we think again about the reaction on the ground to the Lutheran Reformation and the conceptual space it opened up after the old church was removed.

2

Being an Anabaptist in Central Germany

Writing the preface to a work on Anabaptism by his fellow reformer Justus Menius in 1530, Luther lamented that Anabaptists were a maleficent influence in central Germany.

They are simply infiltrating preachers. They come into strange houses and places, to where no one has called them, nor were they sent by anyone, they can also give no reason or sign for such creeping and running.¹

Luther's comments reveal his anxiety about Anabaptism as a form of unlicensed preaching which was not sanctioned by the authorities or local community, but was instead inspired by the Devil who was a 'poltergeist'.² After the peasant conflicts of 1524–5, Lutherans had to come to terms with the disastrous effects of uncontrolled appeals to reforming ideals, and condemned any sign of such renewed unrest, Anabaptists included.

Luther's denunciation was full of typically evocative rhetoric, but there was some truth in it. Anabaptist preachers in central Germany travelled to places they did not know, where people would not always recognize them. Martin Luperant, questioned in Mühlhausen in 1533, spoke of the nameless teacher whom his friend Ludwig Spon had brought with him from the village of Sorga on the Hessian border.³ A veil of mystery seemed to shroud

¹ 'sind eitel meuchel prediger, komen auch jnn frembde heuser vnd ort, da hin sie niemand beruffen noch von jemand gesand, können auch solchs schleichens vnd lauffens, keinen grund noch wahrzeichen bringen'; Luther's foreword from the 1534 edition of Menius's first polemic against Anabaptists, which bound the 1530 tract together with works by other reformers; see Justus Menius, *Der widderteuffer Lere vnd geheimnis, Aus heiliger schrift widerlegt. Justus Menius. Von der Widdertauffe an Zween Pfarher, Ein Brieff. D. Martinus Luther Vnterricht widder die lere der Widderteuffer. Philip. Melancht* (Wittenberg, 1534), A3r.

² 'Vnd jnn Summa, der Teuffel jst ein polter geist vnd rumple geist'; Menius, *Der widderteuffer Lere*, A2v.

³ Wappler, *Stellung*, 239; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 91v.

the movement: preachers might stay for only a short time, and people might not know many of their fellow Anabaptists at meetings. Even when it came to baptism, individuals were frequently hazy on the details. Georg Braun, a member of a group of Anabaptists in the imperial village of Sennfeld in Franconia apprehended in 1528, said that he had been re-baptized by 'a stranger' whom he had not seen before, although he and his associates had met many times in Moritz Pfeiffer's house.⁴ Suspects may have sometimes chosen not to name names because they were protecting their associates or simply playing up to interrogators' anxieties about 'foreign' preachers. But at times individuals genuinely seemed to know little about the person who had baptized them, even if they could provide a name, and contact with itinerant preachers was often infrequent. Elisabeth Horcher, also part of the group in Sennfeld, said she had only heard preaching twice, once before her second baptism and once after.⁵ However, behind the stories of the roaming preachers about whom Luther was so concerned were the people they left behind, the scattered, disparate groups that emerged in Saxony, Thuringia, Franconia, and Hesse.

The bare bones of the history of Anabaptism in central Germany can be briefly told. Hans Hut began preaching in the summer of 1526. He came from the small village of Haina near the *Grabfeld* on the southern edge of the Thuringian border, and his erstwhile profession as a book peddler had brought him into contact with Thomas Münzter, who had delivered a manuscript to Hut in 1524 in the hope that he could find a printer. After the Peasants' War, Hut spent time in Augsburg where he encountered Hans Denck, the spiritualist and mystical theologian who baptized him, and then he returned to the region of his birth, preaching throughout southern and central Germany in 1526–7.⁶ As he travelled back and forth between the villages of Thuringia and Franconia, he gathered a sizeable following, drawing on friends and colleagues he had known from the Peasants' War. Towards the end of November or the beginning of December, he travelled further south to Erlangen and Bamberg. From there Hut went on to Nuremberg, Uttenreuth, and Nikolsburg, also journeying on to Austria; but he never made his way back to Franconia and

⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 308; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 36r.

⁵ 'Item es hab Einmal vor der tawff vnd ein mall hernach predig gehort'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 9r.

⁶ Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben, und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Göttingen, 2002), 204–51. Seebaß notes that the sources do not allow us to construct a complete itinerary, 204. For other accounts of Hut's activities see Günther Bauer, *Anfänge täuferischer Gemeindebildungen in Franken* (Nuremberg, 1966); Berbig, 'Königsberg'; Berbig, 'Franken'; Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531* (Scottsdale, PA, 1977), 88–99; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 25–37.

Thuringia. After arriving in Augsburg once more in August 1527, he was subsequently arrested and died in prison.⁷

Hut was not the only preacher to be active in the later 1520s: Melchior Rinck taught in the borderlands between Hesse and Thuringia; Hans Römer in Erfurt and its environs; and a collection of other, less well-documented preachers in west Thuringia, such as Volkmar von Hildburghausen, Michael von Uettingen, Georg von Staffelstein, and Bernhardus, who fostered activity in Frankenhausen, Zella St Blasii, and Fulda, among many other places.⁸ As the likes of Rinck, Volkmar, and Staffelstein disappeared from the scene, whether executed, exiled, or imprisoned, new groups emerged, although echoes of their influence were still felt. In the early 1530s the most extensive impact in northern Thuringia was made by a colleague of Georg von Staffelstein and Volkmar von Hildburghausen named 'Alexander', who said he had been baptized by Volkmar in Esperstedt in the house of one Hans Hane.⁹ Alexander travelled and preached all over north and west Thuringia, yet for all this busy activity, we never find out his second name.¹⁰

Alexander was arrested and executed in 1533 but Anabaptism persisted. In the mid- and late 1530s it was an ongoing presence in the Harz territories, northern Thuringia, and in the west of the region in particular.¹¹ In some instances Anabaptism manifested itself in a disquieting form, including a band of murderous, arsonist Anabaptists discovered in Fulda in 1532, and a similar group who appeared in north Thuringia in the mid-1530s, led by Melchior Stoer.¹² Equally worrying for the authorities in northern Thuringia were the *Blutsfreunde* (Blood Friends), active in the 1540s and 1550s. Convinced that Christ had made mankind completely free of sin through his sacrifice, they developed the idea of the *Christierung* as the one true sacrament, by which they meant the sexual communion of fellow believers.¹³ Into the 1560s and 1570s Anabaptists were still appearing before the courts, although cases were more infrequent and less widely

⁷ Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 252–315, 526.

⁸ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 72–94.

⁹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 349; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 120r.

¹⁰ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 92–100.

¹¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 106–89.

¹² SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 105–12; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 73–9r. See also Wappler, *Thüringen*, 155–6; Wappler, *Stellung*, 63–4.

¹³ For documents relating to the *Blutsfreunde* see ThHStAW, EGA, Reg. N, Nos. 795, 993, 994, 997 (fo. 61–97), 1029, 1030; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 19r–27r, 29r–38v, 40r–42v, 45r–48r, 49r–67v, 69r–72v, 76r–82v, 85r–91v, 96r–110v; Hochhuth ii: 182–8; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 480–94. Menius was also moved to pen a tract condemning the group: Menius, *Von dem Blutfreunden aus der Wiedertauff* (Erfurt, 1551). For accounts of the *Blutsfreunde* see Katharina Reinholdt, *Ein Leib in Christo werden: Ehe und Sexualität im Taufertum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2012), 77–80; Reinholdt, “durch fleischliche vormyschung geheilligett”: Sexuelle Devianz und spirituelle Ehen bei den “Blutsfreunden aus der Wiedertauff”, in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Taufertums*/

dispersed. Mühlhausen seemed to have a peculiar importance for central German Anabaptists. Over the autumn and winter of 1564 fourteen individuals from the imperial city and its surrounding villages were arrested and questioned, many of them 'usual suspects' who had already appeared before the courts and would do so again. One of them, Christoph von der Eichen, was arrested and questioned again in 1571; another, a shepherd from Niederdorla, Hans Thon, was arrested for the second time in 1583. He was, in Wappler's assessment, the last Anabaptist to be tried in Thuringia.¹⁴

Truncated, rather uninspiring tales of this fashion have dominated accounts of central German Anabaptism, reinforcing the perception that an in-depth study would shed little light on the movement as a whole. This does central German Anabaptism a disservice, for although the movement was not as coherent as in the Swiss territories or in Moravia, for example, it was a significant feature of the religious landscape of Saxony. Anabaptism pervaded large parts of the Saxon territories. Anabaptists were found in a startling array of places, even if not in large numbers (see Fig. 2.1). Most were small hamlets and villages which spread out in an arc from the Franconian regions above Bamberg, west towards Hersfeld, and then back north-east towards the Harz Mountains and Sangerhausen. Few Anabaptists were to be found in the larger towns such as Weimar and Nordhausen, and after an early flurry of activity around Erfurt, the only towns with significant numbers of Anabaptists were Mühlhausen and to a lesser extent Frankenhausen, both of which were heavily implicated in the Peasants' War.¹⁵

The peculiar pattern of dispersal that characterized central German Anabaptism needs some explaining. Dissemination along the crescent of small flashpoints suggests that the movement must have been diffused via local, rural relationships rather than through urban networks. Paul Peachy has suggested that Swiss Anabaptism started in towns and then spread to rural areas; this does not hold true of the movement in

Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen (Gütersloh, 2009), 295–313; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 189–206.

¹⁴ For the Anabaptists in Mühlhausen in 1564–5 see Wappler, *Thüringen*, 494–516, 206–17; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 217r–26v, 249r–78r. On Christoph von der Eichen's arrest in 1571 see SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 227r–243r; Loc. 8199/7. For Hans Thon see Wappler, *Thüringen*, 217–20, 516–22; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, 287r–327r.

¹⁵ Fig. 2.1 maps the locations of Anabaptists in central Germany. It does not include the full extent of Hut's preaching across southern Germany but documents his activity in Franconia and on the Thuringian border. A handful of locations have been omitted due to the feasibility of the area which could be mapped, most notably Saxon-controlled Sagan far to the east in modern Poland.



Fig. 2.1. Anabaptist communities in central Germany

central Germany, even though individuals gravitated to certain centres, such as Mühlhausen, Königsberg, and Sorga.¹⁶ Against the backdrop of the patchwork of confused political territories of central Germany, Anabaptism developed piecemeal, as a set of connected but fluid and migratory groups which leave a more complicated documentary record than do more settled and discrete communities. Understanding how such groups existed at the boundaries of society is at times as puzzling for us as for the sixteenth-century authorities, challenging us to rethink how we might define the concept of community in central German Anabaptism.

SAXONY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

In the sixteenth century, Saxony extended beyond its modern borders, occupying an eminent place in the Holy Roman Empire. The powerful Wettin family acquired the Duchy of Saxony in 1422, and with it came the much prized electoral title. The duchy and existing Wettin possessions of the Margraviate of Meissen and the Landgraviate of Thuringia were incorporated into a unified territory, and the Wettins embarked on a campaign of territorial expansion, during which many small lordships between Magdeburg and the Erzgebirge (a great chain of ore-rich mountains dividing Saxony from Bohemia) were annexed to their rule.

In 1485 the lands were split between brothers Ernst and Albert. Older brother Ernst, who took the electorship, held the area around Wittenberg and Torgau; a strip of land along the Mulde river around Grimma, Leisnig, and Colditz; the main part of Thuringia between Eisenach and Allstedt; the west Erzgebirge as far as Zwickau and Schwarzenberg; lands to the east round Altenburg; and the collection of lands in the east, known as the *Vogtland*, as well as enclaves in Franconia and Bohemia. Albert, the younger of the two, had the Meissen lands in the Erzgebirge as far as Annaberg and a stretch of territory from Leipzig through the north of Thuringia up to the River Werra. Neighbouring the Ernestine and Albertine lands, and sometimes intruding on their jurisdiction, were the Landgraviate of Hesse to the west, the prince bishoprics of Bamberg and Würzburg,

¹⁶ Paul Peachey, 'Social Background and Social Philosophy of the Swiss Anabaptists 1525–1540', *MQR* 28.2 (1954), 102–27; Gerhard Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung nach dem Grossenbauernkrieg* (Berlin, 1958), 157.

the archbishopric of Mainz, and the kingdom of Bohemia (see Figs. 2.2 and 2.3).¹⁷

With a position as elector at stake, inevitable struggles for power meant that the division of territory between the Albertine and Ernestine branches shifted in the sixteenth century. Competition for land and political influence was always a spur to rivalry between the two wings of the family, and religious conflict stirred up by the Reformation only added fuel to the fire. The Ernestines were quicker to embrace religious change, and although Albertine ducal Saxony accepted the Reformation after the death of Duke George (1500–39) and the accession of Duke Henry (1539–41), this failed to bring unity to the Saxon lands. Elector Frederick the Wise (ruled 1486–1525), his brother and successor Elector John (1525–32), and John's son, Elector John Frederick (1532–47), maintained their superior political position against Duke George, but this dominance soon disappeared; religious warfare was a decisive factor in Ernestine decline. Despite his Protestant faith, Duke Henry's successor Maurice (1541–7) did not join his father-in-law Landgrave Philipp of Hesse and his cousin John Frederick in the Schmalkaldic League, a Protestant military alliance formed to rebuff Catholic aggression. When the Schmalkaldic War broke out in 1546, Maurice sided with Emperor Charles V and his brother Ferdinand, King of the Romans. The forces of Elector John Frederick were defeated at the battle of Mühlberg in 1547, with the result that the balance of power in Saxony shifted. With Landgrave Philipp and John Frederick in prison, Maurice was granted the title of elector along with a large portion of the Ernestine lands (see Figs. 2.2 and 2.3).¹⁸

Electoral and ducal Saxony, therefore, were not stable nor discrete territorial units but fragmented (the western Thuringian part of the Ernestine lands, for example, sat isolated from the main block of the elector's possessions), and the boundaries between the Ernestine and Albertine lands were complicated and easily crossed. Numerous independent principalities and religious foundations were also nestled in these territories. The bishoprics of Meissen, Merseburg, and Naumburg lay among the Wettin possessions, and as they had been instituted by the emperor they were, in

¹⁷ Karlheinz Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Gütersloh, 1970); Thomas Klein, 'Ernestinisches Sachsen, kleinere thüringische Gebiete', in Anton Schindling and Walter Ziegler (eds), *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500–1650, iv: Mittleres Deutschland* (Münster, 1992), 8–39; Herbert Smolinsky, 'Albertinisches Sachsen', in Schindling and Ziegler (eds), *Territorien des Reichs, ii: Der Nordosten* (Münster, 1991), 8–32.

¹⁸ For an account of the first Schmalkaldic War see James D. Tracy, *Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War: Campaign Strategy, International Finance, and Domestic Politics* (Cambridge, 2002), 204–28.

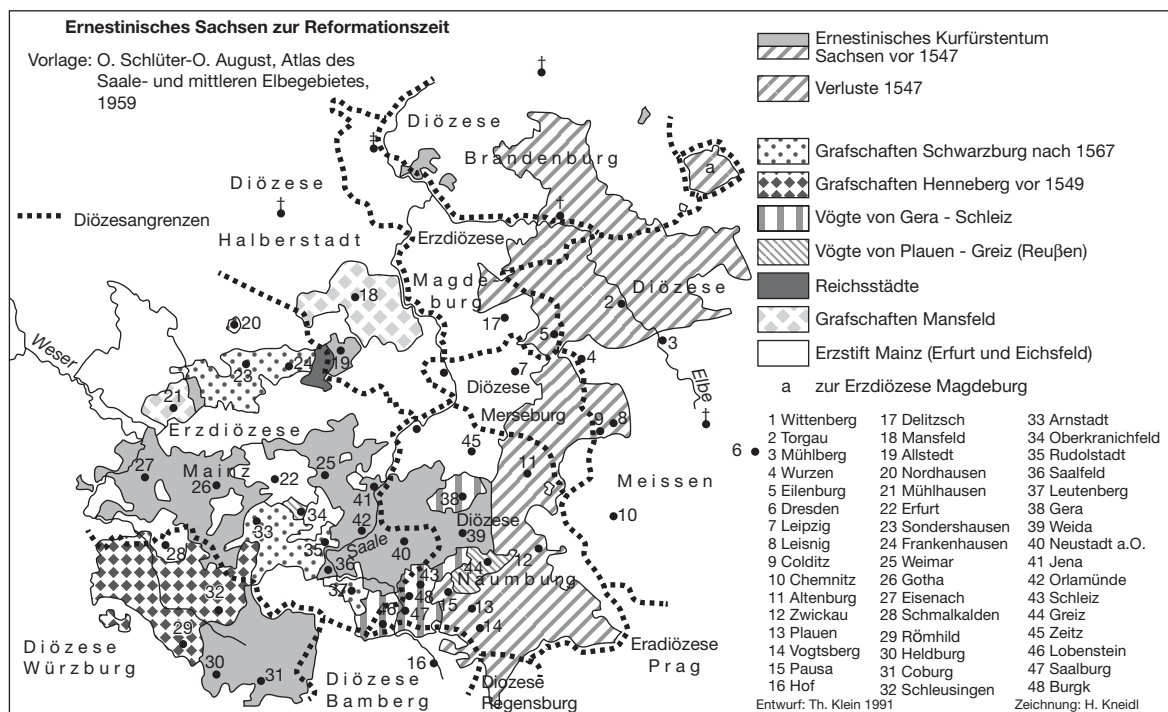


Fig. 2.2. Ernestine Saxony in the sixteenth century

Reproduced from Thomas Klein, 'Ernestinisches Sachsen, kleinere thüringische Gebiete', in Anton Schindling and Walter Ziegler (eds), *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500–1650*, iv: *Mitteleres Deutschland* (Münster, 1992), 8.

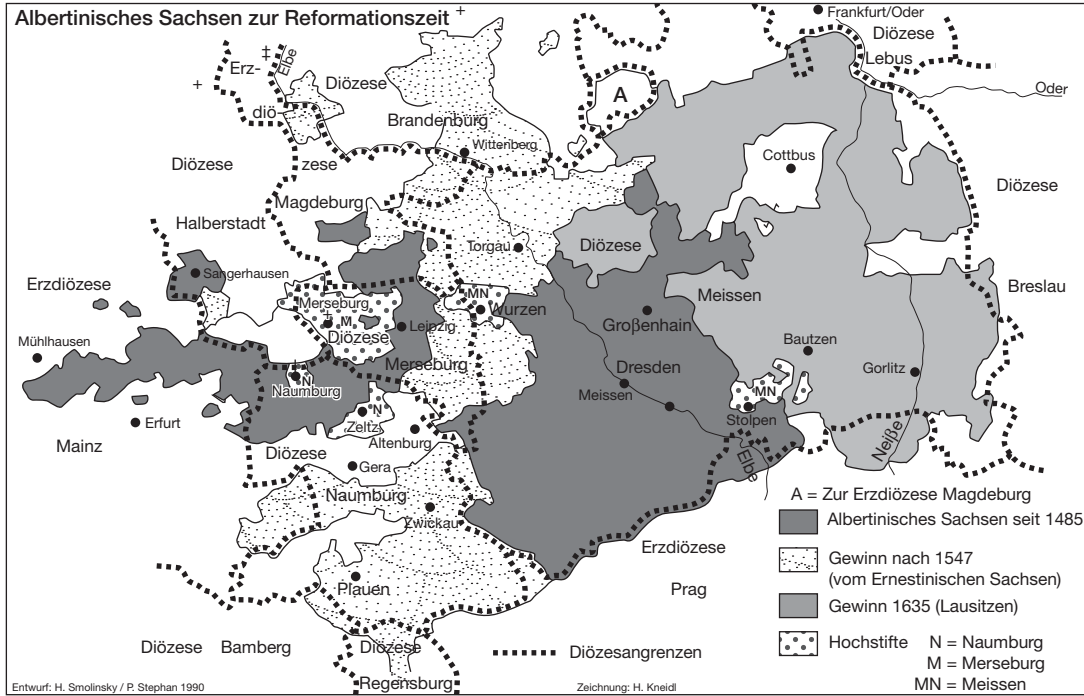


Fig. 2.3. Albertine Saxony in the sixteenth century

Reproduced from Herbert Smolinsky, 'Albertinisches Sachsen', in Anton Schindling and Walter Ziegler (eds), *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500–1650*, ii: *Der Nordosten* (Münster, 1991), 8.

theory at least, autonomous from the Saxon princes. The position of these foundations increasingly brought the bishoprics under pressure from the Wettin family, the bishops of Meissen for example preferring to reside in Castle Stolpen as it was as far as possible from the residence of the Albertine dukes in Leipzig. The Bishop of Meissen was forced to exchange *Amt* Stolpen for the less significant *Amt* Mühlberg in 1559, and eventually in 1581 the last bishop gave up his offices.¹⁹

Having survived Wettin expansion in the late medieval period, the counts of Schwarzburg, Mansfeld, and Henneberg occupied independent territories in the Thuringian region.²⁰ The house of Henneberg–Schleusingen in particular retained considerable importance under Count William VI (1478–1559), who had made an advantageous marriage to a daughter of the Elector Prince Albrecht Achilles of Brandenburg, while his son, John, was abbot of Fulda from 1529. This ancient imperial foundation in south-eastern Thuringia was, in theory, subject to the emperor alone, granting the prince-abbot membership of the imperial council and the office of imperial chancellor. However, it was effectively controlled by the counts of Henneberg, as well as being subject to pressures from the archbishopric of Würzburg.²¹

More minor territorial rulers in the Saxon lands included the Reußen lords, who had once possessed sovereign demesnes in the *Vogtland* as former imperial protectors or *Reichsvögte*, and still held on to Schleiz, Greiz, Weida, and Gera, although the Saxon electoral princes claimed dominion over them; the lords from Schönburg; and the Burggrave of Meissen, a councillor and high chancellor to the king of Bohemia, lord of a handful of villages.²² Completing this complicated picture were two imperial towns, Mühlhausen and Nordhausen, both of which were theoretically independent but whose jurisdictional situation was confused. In 1512 both had been designated as part of the lower rather than the upper Saxon imperial circle in an attempt to secure them against the power of the Wettins.²³ Despite the Wettins's battle for dominance, achieving territorial uniformity was virtually impossible, and the Saxon lands still seemed

¹⁹ Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter*, 14–16. The *Amt* was a local administrative unit governing a group of municipalities.

²⁰ Klein, 'Ernestinisches Sachsen', 30–1; Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter*, 14–15; Johannes Mötsch, 'Der Aufstand im südlichen Thüringen', in Günter Vogler (ed.), *Bauernkrieg zwischen Harz und Thüringer Wald* (Stuttgart, 2008), 113–14; Mötsch, 'Grafen von Henneberg', *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* <http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/artikel/artikel_45640> accessed 15 August 2012.

²¹ Johannes Merz, 'Fulda', in Schindling and Ziegler (eds), *Territorien des Reichs*, 4: *Mittleres Deutschland*, 128–45.

²² Klein, 'Ernestinisches Sachsen', 31–3; Blaschke, 'Sachsen im Zeitalter', 14–15.

²³ Klein, 'Ernestinisches Sachsen', 34–5.

like a convoluted jigsaw with fluid jurisdictional boundaries, rather than a unit of coherent principalities.

The economy of the central German territories was as multifaceted as its political set-up. While many in Thuringia and Saxony were peasants engaged in agriculture, various crafts and trades flourished in urban areas, initiating a battle for privileges and production rights between villages and towns in the fifteenth century.²⁴ One such business was cloth. Both weaving and linen production were profitable elements of the Saxon economy, with much of the linen going to Nuremberg where it was dyed and then passed on to traders.²⁵ Dye was made in woad production towns like Erfurt, and while growing weeds for the pigment was straightforward, processing leaves into dry dyeing material was time-consuming and expensive, requiring significant capital investment.²⁶ Viticulture was also widespread in Franconia and Thuringia with 40,000 acres of wine-producing land spread across 400 communities.²⁷

Perhaps the most important and distinctive element of the economy of the Saxon lands was the mining of silver, copper, and tin.²⁸ Luther himself was the child of a successful mining entrepreneur, a detail which was woven into biographical accounts written by Lutherans after the reformer's death. Shortly after the birth of their son in Eisleben, Hans Luder and his wife moved to Mansfeld, where Hans prospered running copper mines.²⁹ Mining required capital, and the technology of liquation needed space and substantial investment. Wealthy families, like the Augsburg merchant house of Fugger with their mines in Hungary, became involved in the industry, owning a smelter at Hohenkirchen in the Thuringian forest conveniently placed

²⁴ On the economic history of Saxony see Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter*, 33–47.

²⁵ Gerhard Heitz, *Ländliche Leinenproduktion in Sachsen 1470–1555* (Berlin, 1961).

²⁶ Tom Scott and Robert W. Scribner, 'Urban Networks', in Robert W. Scribner (ed.), *Germany: A New Social and Economic History, i: 1450–1630* (New York, 1996), 138.

²⁷ Scott, 'Medieval Viticulture in the German-Speaking Lands', *German History* 20.1 (2002), 98–9; Roy L. Vice, 'Vineyards, Vinedressers, and the Peasants' War in Franconia', *ARG* 79 (1988), 138–57.

²⁸ Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter*, 38–44; Adolf Laube, *Studien über den erzgebirgischen Silberbergbau von 1470 bis 1546: Seine Geschichte, seine Produktionsverhältnisse, seine Bedeutung für die gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen und Klassenkämpfe in Sachsen am Beginn der Übergangsepoche vom Feudalismus* (Berlin, 1974).

²⁹ Johannes Mathesius, the pastor in Joachimstal from 1545, called Luther the son of a noble 'Bergman oder Schiferhewer' and explained that by God's grace, Hans Luther possessed two profitable smelting ovens; Johannes Mathesius, *Historien von des ehrwürdigen in Gott seligen thewren Manns Gottes Doctoris Martini Luthers Anfang, Lehr, Leben und Sterben* (Nuremberg, 1566), A1r–2v. See also Rosemarie Knappe (ed.), *Martin Luther und der Bergbau im Mansfelder Land* (Eisleben, 2000).

at the point of intersection of trade routes to Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Leipzig.³⁰ While the costs were high, the rewards could also be great, and in the Erzgebirge new towns sprung up which were built on the profits of the mining industry, such as Freiberg, Marienberg, Scheibenberg, and Annaberg.³¹

Rural and urban areas may have competed for economic privileges in sixteenth-century Saxony, but they were also connected by a network of travel routes which enabled trade to be conducted over large distances in this varied and busy economy, with extensive agrarian production alongside the industry-heavy business of mining. Erfurt sat at the intersection of the *Hellweg*, which ran east to west from Cologne to Breslau; the Hanseatic routes going north to south; roads from Hannover, Hildesheim, and Braunschweig, which passed through Nordhausen to Erfurt; and a main route from the north via Sangerhausen from Magdeburg. Leipzig owed its important place in the economic networks of the region not only to its productivity but its position at the centre of three important road networks: the *Hohe Straße* which went from Frankfurt through Erfurt; the road from Leipzig through Chemnitz to Prague; and the *Frankenstraße* which led from Nuremberg through Hof, Plauen, Zwickau, Chemnitz, and Freiberg to Dresden.³² Along these excellent transport links, wine produced in the Saale valley around Jena, on the Unstrut River, and on the Gera River supplied most of Saxony; woad dyes made in Erfurt and its rural hinterlands were shipped to cloth production centres in Hesse. Mining in particular involved large-scale transportation of natural resources. Copper ores mined in northern Thuringia and in Saxony-Anhalt, around Mansfeld, Eisleben, and Sangerhausen, were carried to smelteries situated far to the south above Erfurt and Weimar, where the landscape was covered in forest and watered by the rivers Gera, Ilm, and Saale.³³ Saxony was a dynamic and dominant economic and political power in the sixteenth century, and it also took centre stage in religious affairs with the advent of the Reformation.

³⁰ Scott, *Town, Country, and Regions in Reformation Germany* (Leiden, 2005), 196.

³¹ Herbert Pförr, *Freiberg: Stadt auf silbernem Boden* (Erfurt, 2012); Harold Marx and Eckhard Kluth (eds), *Glaube und Macht: Sachsen in Europa der Reformationszeit: 2. Sächsische Landesausstellung: Eine Ausstellung des Freistaates Sachsen, ausgerichtet durch die Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Katalog* (Torgau, 2004), 57.

³² Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter*, 46–7; Herbert Krüger, *Das Älteste Deutsche Routenhandbuch: Jörg Gails 'Raißbüchlin'* (Graz, 1974), 97, 161–5; Scott, *Town, Country*, 238; Scott and Scribner, 'Urban Networks', 137.

³³ Scott, *Town, Country*, 194–5, 207, 214, 237–8.

THE REFORMATION IN SAXONY

Somewhat surprisingly, Saxony and central Germany have received little attention from historians of the Reformation. While we have detailed and extensive studies of many of the towns in the south and south-west of the Empire in particular, research into Luther's home territories and the impact of his ideas in these lands have remained something of a backwater.³⁴ Apart from Susan C. Karant-Nunn's study of Zwickau and her work on Ernestine pastors, and Robert Scribner's research on Erfurt, few historians have attempted to unravel the story of the changing nature of religious life in the region in the early years of the Reformation, although the picture is much healthier for the second half of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries.³⁵ Of course Luther himself has received attention from various biographers, and there is a more substantial body of literature on those places associated with him than elsewhere in central Germany, including archaeological excavations of the places where Luther lived.³⁶ Furthermore, research on the Reformation has been dominated by studies of towns, where

³⁴ Thomas A. Brady, *Ruling Class, Regime, and Reformation at Strasbourg 1520–1555* (Leiden, 1978); Brady, *Protestant Politics: Jacob Sturm (1489–1553) and the German Reformation* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1995); Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Lay Culture, Learned Culture: Books and Social Change in Strasbourg, 1480–1599* (New Haven, CT, 1982); Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change* (New Haven, CT, 1967); Christopher Close, *The Negotiated Reformation: Imperial Cities and the Politics of Urban Reform, 1525–1550* (Cambridge, 2009); Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zürich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (Cambridge, 1995); Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford, 1989); Paul A. Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521–1525* (Cambridge, 1985).

³⁵ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, 'Luther's Pastors: The Reformation in the Ernestine Countryside', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69.8 (Philadelphia, PA, 1979), 1–80; Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition, 1500–1547: The Reformation as an Agent of Change* (Columbus, OH, 1987); Scribner, 'Reformation, Society, and Humanism', PhD thesis, University of London, 1972; Scribner, 'Civic Unity and the Reformation in Erfurt', *PP* 66.1 (1975), 39–40. On the later sixteenth century see for example Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); Enno Bünz, Stefan Rhein, and Günther Wartenberg (eds), *Glaube und Macht: Theologie, Politik, und Kunst im Jahrhundert der Reformation* (Leipzig, 2005); Jay Goodale, 'Pastors, Privation, and the Process of Reformation in Saxony', *SCJ* 33.1 (2002), 71–92; Michael J. Halvorson, *Heinrich Heshusius and Confessional Polemic in Early Lutheran Orthodoxy* (Farnham, 2010); Karant-Nunn, 'Neoclericalism and Anticlericalism in Saxony, 1555–1675', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24 (1994), 615–37; Karant-Nunn, 'Popular Culture as Religious Dissent in the Post-Reformation Era', in Hans-Jürgen Goertz and James M. Stayer (eds), *Radikalität und Dissent im 16. Jahrhundert/Radicalism and Dissent in the Sixteenth Century* (Berlin, 2002), 189–202; Bodo Nischan, *Lutherans and Calvinists in the Age of Confessionalisation* (Aldershot, 1999); Stefan Rhein and Günther Wartenberg, *Reformatoren im Mansfelder Land: Erasmus Sarcerius und Cyriakus Spangenberg* (Leipzig, 2006).

³⁶ A selection of some of the most famous biographies of Luther includes: Ronald H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York, 1950); Martin Brecht,

the course of the reform movement is easier to document and describe, and where the Reformation seemed to have a particular appeal.³⁷ In Saxony, however, the picture was rather different. Wittenberg was clearly the focal point for Luther and his circle, but understanding the rural environment is important to the story of the Reformation in Saxony.³⁸

After Luther initiated his challenge to indulgence selling in 1517, it took time for a coherent reformation movement to evolve, as Luther was forced to clarify and develop his ideas in set-piece confrontations in Augsburg (1518) and Leipzig (1519). Elector Frederick did not go so far as to openly declare himself for reforming ideas, but his protection of and support for Luther allowed the Wittenberg theologian's beliefs to flourish, in the Ernestine lands in particular. The publication and dissemination of Luther's works (especially his three major treatises of 1520), the efforts of evangelical preachers, and the explosion of lay pamphlets all promoted his cause, with popular support for reformed ideas often taking a more direct form than the verbal battles waged by theologians. The clergy, especially monks and nuns, became a key focus for the attacks of the reformers and the laity, and complaints turned to open aggression.³⁹ Justus Jonas and

Martin Luther, trans. James L. Schaff, 3 vols (Philadelphia, PA and Minneapolis, MN, 1985–93); Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1958); Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther* (Darmstadt, 2006); Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven, CT, 1989); Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebelle in einer Zeit des Umbruchs* (Munich, 2012). For work on memorialization of Luther's homeland and archaeological studies see Friedrich B. Bellmann, Marie-Luise Harksen, and Roland Werner, *Die Denkmale der Lutherstadt Wittenberg* (Weimar, 1979); Carola Jäggi and Jörn Staecker (eds), *Archäologie der Reformation: Studien zu den Auswirkungen des Konfessionswechsels auf die materielle Kultur* (Berlin, 2007); Helmar Junghans, *Martin Luther und Wittenberg* (Munich, 1996); Rosemarie Knappe, *Martin Luther und Eisleben* (Leipzig, 2007); Knappe (ed.), *Martin Luther und der Bergbau*; Stefan Laube and Karl-Heinz Fix (eds), *Lutherinszenierung und Reformationserinnerung* (Leipzig, 2002); Harald Meller (ed.), *Fundsache Luther: Archäologen auf den Spuren des Reformators* (Stuttgart, 2008); Stefan Oehmig (ed.), *700 Jahre Wittenberg: Stadt-Universität-Reformation* (Weimar, 1995).

³⁷ Close, *Negotiated Reformation*; Michele Zelinsky Hanson, *Religious Identity in an Early Reformation Community: Augsburg, 1517 to 1555* (Leiden, 2009); Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. H.C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr (Philadelphia, PA, 1972); Sven Tode, *Stadt im Bauernkrieg 1525: Strukturanalytische Untersuchungen zur Stadt im Raum anhand der Beispiele Erfurt, Mühlhausen/Thür., Langensalza, und Thamsbrück* (Frankfurt am Main).

³⁸ A collection of studies have analysed the impact of the Reformation in rural areas, particularly in relation to the Peasant's War: Peter Blickle, *Communal Reformation: The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1992); C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1528–1603* (Cambridge, 1996); Karant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors*.

³⁹ Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Pfaffenhaß und groß Geschrei: Die reformatorische Bewegungen in Deutschland 1517–1529* (Munich, 1987).

Johann Lang had been preaching in Erfurt since 1520. En route to Worms in April 1521 Luther had stopped off there, and shortly after, anti-clerical sentiment in the city led to aggression when students, soon joined by journeymen and rural visitors, attacked clergymen's houses in the so-called *Pfaffensturm* on 10–11 June.⁴⁰ Events in Erfurt initiated a wave of similar actions in Thuringian towns directed against clergy and cloisters, such as an attack in 1521 on the foundation of St Egidien in Schmalkalden, a town under the joint lordship of Hesse and Henneberg.⁴¹

As Luther lay in hiding in the Wartburg after the Diet of Worms in 1521, his colleagues in Wittenberg and reformers elsewhere started to make the changes that seemed to be called for by his teachings. Professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg, Andreas von Karlstadt, initiated a set of reforms of religious practice, most famously attacking the Mass. He produced a series of theses on the sacrament on 19 July 1521, and on 22 December announced that

on the coming feast of the circumcision of the Lord [1 January], which he had to perform, he would give public communion to anyone who wanted it, under both forms with the bread and the wine, and before he would give a short sermon and would simply speak the words of consecration and leave out all the other signs performed over the Host.⁴²

Ultimately the day was brought forward to Christmas Day for this first reformed communion service in Wittenberg, performed in German. Change was in the air, and the tense atmosphere was further heightened by the arrival of the 'Zwickau Prophets' in Wittenberg, Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel, and Marcus Thomae, who appealed to divine revelation and insisted that God would destroy the unrighteous.⁴³

The Wittenberg reformers continued to transform religious life. Karlstadt broke his clerical vows, the first of the Wittenberg professors

⁴⁰ Scribner, 'Civic Unity', 39–40; Brecht, *Martin Luther*, ii: *Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532* (Minneapolis, MN, 1990), 2–4.

⁴¹ Reinhard Jonscher, 'Die Reformation in Thüringen bis zum Vorabend des Bauernkriegs' in Vogler (ed.), *Bauernkrieg*, 37.

⁴² 'er vf das kunftig fest Circumcisionis domini, welchs er halten muß, offenberlichen comminiren yderman, wer do well, sub vtraque specie panis et vini vnd davor ein kurtz sermon thun, vnd welle slechts sprechen verba consecrationis vnd die anderen schirmslege alle aussen lassen'; see the letter from the electoral Saxon councillors to Christian Beyer dated between 22 and 25 December 1521; Nikolas Müller (ed.), *Die Wittenberger Bewegung 1521 und 1522: Die Vorgänge in und um Wittenberg während Luthers Wartburgaufenthalt: Briefe, Akten u. dgl. und Personalien* (Leipzig, 1911), 125. For the ongoing debates concerning the Mass in Wittenberg see Brecht, *Defining the Reformation*, 26–34.

⁴³ Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, 126–9; Brecht, *Defining the Reformation*, 34–8.

to do so, and married fifteen-year-old Anna von Mochau on 19 January; Jonas and Melanchthon both demonstrated their support for Karlstadt by attending the engagement, a reminder that Karlstadt did not act as a lone wolf but with the support of the reforming party.⁴⁴ On 24 January a church ordinance, prepared principally by Karlstadt, Melanchthon, Jonas, and Nicholas von Amsdorf was approved by the Wittenberg council. It proposed, among other things, the removal of altars and images of the saints, at the same time as Karlstadt endorsed these reforms in sermons.⁴⁵ Official sanction and popular unrest coincided, resulting in forcible removal and destruction of images rather than an orderly pattern of change.⁴⁶ Luther returned to Wittenberg at the beginning of March and preached the famous series of *Invocavit* sermons, urging caution on his fellow Wittenbergers.

In the years 1522–3 preachers and new ideas spread throughout the towns and villages in central Germany, even in Albertine territories.⁴⁷ From the time of his return to Wittenberg, Luther was engaged in putting into place measures for the organization of religious life, frequently giving sermons and advising on specific problems, such as the performance of the sacraments. Luther had translated the New Testament into German by the beginning of 1522, and printed editions, prepared for the Leipzig book fair in September, were eagerly bought up.⁴⁸ Luther also set about reforming liturgy. In May 1522 he produced the *Betbüchlein*, a prayer book, and in 1523 the first German reformed baptismal rite appeared, as well as a revised Latin liturgy for the Wittenberg Mass.⁴⁹ Other questions which demanded Luther's attention were the election of pastors and management of wealth that had come in from the church. A crucial test case was the small town of Leisnig on the banks of the River Mulde, south-east

⁴⁴ Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, 170–3.

⁴⁵ Brecht, *Defining the Reformation*, 38–9. See also Christian Beyer to Hugold von Einsiedel, 25 January 1522: 'Dye bylde wollen sie auch in der pfar nit leidenn vnnd mit der zeit abethun, haben starck schrifft dawider gefurth'; Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, 174.

⁴⁶ On iconoclasm in the Reformation see Peter Blickle, André Holenstein, Heinrich R. Schmidt, and Franz-Josef Sladeczek (eds), *Macht und Ohnmacht der Bilder: Reformatorischer Bildersturm im Kontext der europäischen Geschichte* (Munich, 2002); Wandel, *Voracious Idols*.

⁴⁷ For the story of the Reformation in Erfurt, Mühlhausen, Salza, and Thamsbrück see Tode, *Stadt in Bauernkrieg*; Jonscher, 'Die Reformation in Thüringen', 38–40.

⁴⁸ John L. Flood, 'Martin Luther's Bible Translation in its German and European Context', in Richard Griffiths (ed.), *The Bible in the Renaissance: Essays on Biblical Commentary and Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Aldershot, 2001), 50–3.

⁴⁹ *Betbüchlein* (1522); WA *Schriften*, 10.ii: 331–501; *Das Taufbüchlein verdeutscht* (1523) and *Formula Missae et Communionis* (1523); WA *Schriften*, 12: 38–47, 197–220.

of Leipzig, which Luther visited in September 1522 after the town asked his advice on how to choose pastors and how best to reorientate society towards reform. Following Wittenberg who had established a common chest in 1522, *Ordinance of a Common Chest* was produced in 1523 which suggested the community should elect its pastor, emphasized household and communal responsibility for faith and morality, laid careful rules for the use of church income by the community, and made provision for education of the young.⁵⁰ Luther was impressed with the reforms the Leisnig inhabitants had suggested, although also flattered by the deference they showed to his authority. He said in his foreword to the published version, 'I have seen fit to have this ordinance of yours printed, in the hope that God will so add his gracious blessing that it may become a public example to be followed by many other congregations'.⁵¹

Despite these measures, it was impossible for Luther to be in complete command, and his dramatic break with Karlstadt after 1522 was not the last time that he was confronted with what he saw as over-hasty or unchecked reform. Seen in this context, Luther's complaint that the Anabaptists were unauthorized preachers is entirely explicable, one more example of the way in which reform had got out of control and ended up in the hands of those who had no authority to speak. Anabaptist preachers, particularly those who held clerical office such as Sebastian Thiel in Niederdorla or the pastor in Schalkhausen, both of whom stopped performing infant baptisms, were part of a tradition of preachers who went independent ways. They were like Karlstadt, Müntzer, and Jakob Strauss, a preacher in Eisenach who argued with Luther about usury.⁵² Luther's consternation over unsuitable preachers was an admission that some of those who lectured from the pulpit and in the street (sometimes even those who had once been allied to the Lutheran cause) did not espouse correct doctrine, nor follow his lead.

Events in 1524–5 dramatically revealed this lack of control. The Peasants' War was a sharp wake-up call to Luther that although the peasants of Germany may have welcomed the Gospel, this did not mean that

⁵⁰ Brecht, *Defining the Reformation*, 69–72.

⁵¹ *Ordnung eines gemeinen Kasten* (1523); LW 45: 169; WA *Schriften*, 12: 11.

⁵² On Menius's concerns regarding Sebastian Thiel see Wappler, *Stellung*, 227–30; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023; 'der pfarr zu Schalkhausen predig öffentlich auf der canzel, man sol kein kind taufen, pis es sein vernunft habe, und wen man ime ein kind pring, und das ers dauf, so sei es nichts wol also darauf beharren'. For Schalkhausen see QGTii: 142. For Strauss see Joachim Rogge, *Der Beitrage des Predigers Jakob Strauss zur frühen Reformationsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1957). Karant-Nunn points to the variety of ideas preached: Karant-Nunn, 'What Was Preached in German Cities in the Early Years of the Reformation? *Wildwuchs* Versus Lutheran Unity', in Phillip N. Bebb and Sherrin Marshall (eds), *The Process of Change in Early Modern Europe* (Athens, OH, 1988), 81–96.

they shared his vision of reform. In Luther's eyes they had perverted the true Word of God in the name of personal gain and revenge.⁵³ Spreading the right message to rural areas was always difficult. The first Saxon visitation of 1528–9 revealed not only ignorance but worrying signs of non-conformity across rural Saxony, and the Lutheran visitors could not even complete their task in some instances, hindered by jurisdictional restrictions.

The Franconian village of Zeilfeld, for example, was partly under the control of the elector of Saxony and partly under the control of count Hermann of Henneberg–Aschach–Römhild, a spring in the village marking the dividing line between the two. The church lay on the Henneberg side, so the visitors did not have the authority to make enquiries.⁵⁴ Conformity remained elusive. Local magistrates and the superintendent Justus Menius complained in 1544 that the pastors in the villages of Marksuhl and Ockershausen, on the edge of the Thuringian border below Eisenach, were Anabaptists and taught 'unchristian and rebellious error from the chancel itself'.⁵⁵ Even by the end of the century, no great progress appears to have been made in the education of the ordinary laity in parts of the Saxon countryside, although the institutional structure of the Lutheran church was undoubtedly more secure.⁵⁶ With the lack of a dominant framework provided by Lutheranism, Anabaptist ideas could gain currency.

PATTERNS OF ANABAPTISM IN LUTHERAN SAXONY

Saxony's political and geographical topography fundamentally shaped the Anabaptist movement. It is hardly surprising that Anabaptism was dispersed across a variety of small settlements rather than concentrated in towns, for this mirrored the nature of Saxony itself, which did not boast great urban conglomerations like Strasbourg, Basel, or Augsburg.

⁵³ In his most vitriolic work against the peasants, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants/Wider die räuberischen und mörderischen Rotten der Bauern* (1525), Luther criticized them for cloaking their sin with the gospel; LW 46: 50; WA *Schriften*, 18: 358.

⁵⁴ Karant-Nunn, *Luther's Pastors*, 23; Georg Berbig, 'Die erste kursächsische Visitation in Ortsland Franken, I', *ARG* 3 (1906), 395. See also Philipp Melanchthon, *Vnterricht der Visitatorn an die Pfarhern ym Kurfurstenthum zu Sachsen* (Wittenberg, 1528).

⁵⁵ 'solch vnchristlich vnd auffrurisch Irthumb von der Cantzeln selbs leren solten'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1019, fo. 2r.

⁵⁶ See the pessimistic assessment of Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, MD, 1978).

Metropolitan centres were sparser than in many regions in Germany, and whereas the free cities of Augsburg and Strasbourg became melting pots for any number of religious ideas in the early years of change, the towns of central Germany did not serve quite the same function. Erfurt was the largest city in Saxony, although still comparatively modest in terms of its territory, and the only free imperial cities were Nordhausen and Mühlhausen, both of which suffered from the encroaching influence of the Wettin princes.⁵⁷ The other major urban focal points of central Germany, such as Leipzig and Dresden, were dominated by the Albertines, and Wittenberg was under the strict control of the Elector of Saxony. Its university and its printing presses made it a centre of intellectual importance, but unsurprisingly it served Luther's and Lutheran interests almost exclusively.⁵⁸

Where Anabaptism did enjoy success in towns, it seemed to profit from competition between overlords. The persistent presence of Anabaptism in Mühlhausen and its environs was partly due to the city's complex position, in theory independent but torn between the tripartite rule of Hesse, Saxony, and Mainz. Erfurt too, where Römer gathered followers, had an uncertain status since it was neither an autonomous entity nor completely subject to an overlord, but from the late fifteenth century was forced to accept and pay for the protection of both the Archbishop of Mainz and the Wettins.⁵⁹ Enforcing jurisdiction in the patchwork of overlapping territories that characterized Saxony was fraught with difficulties, and in contrast to a city such as Strasbourg, whose independence allowed at least semi-official toleration of radicals, the lack of a central authority in central German towns allowed Anabaptists to slip between the cracks and flourish in the rural hinterlands. In October 1534 Klaus Scharf was detained in Mühlhausen. Born and bred in the town, the son of a linen weaver, his first encounter with Anabaptist preaching was beyond the town walls in Oberdorla, a village which lay close to Mühlhausen but which was

⁵⁷ Scott, *Town, Country*, 237–8; Scott and Scribner, 'Urban Networks', 124–7.

⁵⁸ Blaschke, *Sachsen im Zeitalter*, 68–79. Dresden became the Albertine capital under Duke Moritz, with a building programme beginning in 1545; Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, 'Chivalry and Professionalism in Electoral Saxony in the Mid-sixteenth Century', in D.J.B. Trim (ed.), *The Chivalric Ethos and the Development of Military Professionalism* (Leiden, 2003), 213–17, and her monograph, Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Court Culture in Dresden: From Renaissance to Baroque* (Basingstoke, 2002). On the importance of Wittenberg for Elector Frederick the Wise see Karlheinz Blaschke, 'Wittenberg vor 1547: Vom Landstädtchen zur Weltgeltung', in Oehmig (ed.), *700 Jahre Wittenberg*, 29–38; Helmar Junghans, *Wittenberg als Lutherstadt* (Berlin, 1979), 44–77.

⁵⁹ Scribner, 'Reformation, Society, and Humanism', 18–23, 27–8; Tode, *Stadt im Bauernkrieg*, 81, 144.

not actually under its control.⁶⁰ Even when Anabaptists were apprehended, procedure was not straightforward. When Jakob Storger and his followers were arrested in Mühlhausen in 1537, justice trickled down through several levels. Duke George of Saxony had to write to the council and mayor in Mühlhausen to get his wishes known, which were then relayed to local officials.⁶¹ In 1571 Franciscus Strauss, superintendent of Langensalza, wrote despairingly that despite appeals to the authorities in Treffurt and Mühlhausen to deal with the Anabaptists, nothing had come of it, and he had been forced to write to the elector of Saxony himself.⁶² Consequently territorial fragmentation did not preclude the development of Anabaptism but often played into its hands.

From the beginning, the movement hugged the border regions of the Saxon lands, paying little heed to territorial distinctions, deliberately taking advantage of the greater security offered by moving from place to place and across jurisdictional boundaries. After a trip south from Thuringia to Coburg probably sometime in the summer of 1526, Hut met Eukarius Binder, who became a regular companion on trips, and whose brother Wolf Schominger, a carpenter in Königsberg, soon became part of the circle. Schominger received Hut in his home town which became a rallying point for over twenty individuals from Königsberg itself and surrounding villages, such as Ostheim.⁶³ Located in Franconia just north-east of Coburg, Königsberg was a Saxon enclave under Ernestine jurisdiction, but it was cut off from the rest of the elector's possessions, and the *Amtmann* in Königsberg, Cunz Gotsmann, endeavoured to keep a far-distant ruler informed of the urgency of the Anabaptist threat. To complicate matters further, he had to persuade the surrounding jurisdictions, including the authorities in Coburg, Nuremberg, and the representatives of the bishop of Würzburg in Bamberg, to cooperate in a manhunt since it was all too easy for Hut and his companions to travel from one region to another. As the many-cogged machine of justice in early modern Germany creaked into action, Gotsmann emphasized in a letter to the elector in February 1527 that this matter concerned all the princes and lords, who should act to destroy the threat of Anabaptism. Their joint efforts thus far had

⁶⁰ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 374–83; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 127/3r, 128r–130v, 133r–134r, 136r–139v, 144, 155r–157r; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 19r–31r.

⁶¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 430; SAM, Sign. 10/E6, No. 4b, Acta religionis 1535–1539, fo. 139r–140r.

⁶² SHStAD, GA10024, 10328/1, fo. 231; 8199/7, fo. 17r.

⁶³ See details confessed by Thomas Spiegel, and the long list provided by Beutelhans in his interrogation; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 228–35; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 360r–367v; Berbig, 'Königsberg', 314.

resulted in several Anabaptists being imprisoned, including Beutelhans, Wolf Schominger, the Aurach miller, Kaspar and Thomas Spiegel, and Hans Furster.⁶⁴ On the basis of the information gleaned from the initial interrogations, further arrests were made in Königsberg, Münnerstadt, Königshofen, Haßfurt, and Staffelstein, and after lengthy examinations, many Anabaptists were sentenced to death or handed shaming punishments.⁶⁵ But the ringleaders had left already, and Hut himself escaped the area. He was not apprehended until 1527 in Augsburg.

Aside from the Wettins, the major player in the complex jurisdictional situation that moulded central German Anabaptism was Landgrave Philipp of Hesse, the seemingly beneficent, tolerant ruler of the principality next to Thuringia, who must have constantly frustrated his Saxon neighbours by expelling Anabaptists rather than executing them, with the result that they often resurfaced in the Wettin lands.⁶⁶ Philipp's policies decisively influenced the fate of Melchior Rinck, the Anabaptist preacher in central Germany who, apart from Hut, has received the most scholarly attention.⁶⁷ He first encountered Anabaptism in Worms in 1527 when he met Jakob Kautz, Hans Denck, and Ludwig Hätzer, as well as the reformer Johannes Bader. By 1528 Rinck was in Hersfeld (he had formerly been schoolmaster there but was expelled in 1521), preaching Anabaptist ideas both clandestinely and in public.⁶⁸ Rinck soon came to the attention of the authorities, but instead of acting decisively to rid himself of

⁶⁴ 'damit sein gn. dies sachen welichs alle fursten und herren bedrefft, ausgerett mocht werden'; Berbig, 'Königsberg', 304.

⁶⁵ See the promulgation produced by Elector John for the authorities in Coburg; Berbig, 'Königsberg', 322–7. Clasen estimates at least seven Anabaptists were executed in Franconia in 1527; Claus-Peter Clasen, 'Executions of Anabaptists, 1525–1618: A Research Report', *MQR* 47.2 (1973), 119.

⁶⁶ For the motivations behind Philipp's policies and a discussion of his reputation see Ellen Yutzy Glebe, 'Landgrave Philipp's Dilemma: The Roots of Tolerance and the Desire for Protestant Unity', in Christopher Ocker (ed.), *Politics and Reformations*, ii: *Histories and Reformations: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr* (Leiden, 2007), 293–312.

⁶⁷ In the early 1520s Rinck had been a schoolmaster and chaplain in Hersfeld, where he and his colleague Heinrich Fuchs embraced the new evangelical doctrine. As a result, both were expelled from Hersfeld but were soon awarded pastorates, Rinck in Eckhardtshausen and Fuchs in Marksuhl. While in Eckhardtshausen, Rinck started to drift towards the more violent Müntzerite doctrines, and Rinck and Fuchs participated in the battle of Frankenhausen in 1525, although only Rinck lived to tell the tale. Wolfgang Breul-Kunkel 'Vom Humanismus zum Täuferturn: Das Studium des hessischen Täuferführers Melchior Rinck an der Leipziger Artistenfakultät', *ARG* 93 (2002), 26–42; Eric Geldbach, 'Die Lehre des hessischen Täuferführers Melchior Rinck (c.1493–nach 1553)', *Jahrbuch der hessischen kirchengeschichtlichen Vereinigung* 21 (1970), 371–84; Gerhard Neumann (ed. and trans.), 'A Newly Discovered Manuscript of Melchior Rinck', *MQR* 25.3 (1961), 197–217.

⁶⁸ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 50–3; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 52–5.

the preacher, Philipp invited him to his hunting lodge in Friesewald for a personal interview. Rinck would not recant.

On 17 and 18 August he was cross-examined by the rector of the University of Marburg, who used a statement of Rinck's doctrine drawn up by the pastor in Hersfeld, Balthasar Raid, for the interrogation. Rinck was banished, yet the Anabaptist preacher paid little attention to the order of exile. He was arrested in 1529 and held in the Cistercian monastery in Haina until May 1531, where he had the opportunity to put his ideas on paper. Rinck was released and banished once more, and the newly issued Hessian mandate stipulated that if he were to return, he would be executed. However, Rinck remained disobedient and revisited his former haunts in Hersfeld and *Amt* Hausbreitenbach to preach. In November 1531 he was arrested in Vacha with eleven of his followers.⁶⁹ After lengthy discussions between Landgrave Philipp and Eberhard von der Tann, the *Amtmann* at the Wartburg, Philipp decided he would commit him to life imprisonment.⁷⁰ We do not know when or how Rinck died, though he may have survived in prison until 1561.⁷¹

Anabaptists continued to take advantage of the border area between Thuringia and Hesse, encouraged by the leniency of the Landgrave. Sorga, a village to the east of Bad Hersfeld, became a focal point for much of the activity in western Thuringia in the late 1520s and early 1530s, attracting people from far and wide, even from Moravia. Ludwig Spon from Mühlhausen said that he had been directed to the Anabaptist meetings in the village by Römer and reported that as many as fifty people could gather here for instruction and companionship.⁷² Anabaptism was sustained by these types of interrelated, nodal communities, which were able to take advantage of the jurisdictional complexity of Saxony, for one solution to hostility or persecution was simply moving, even temporarily, to a different village or town which might be more secure. Expulsion and banishment was a well-worn tactic designed to delineate territorial borders by excluding anyone who was unworthy and troublesome. It was therefore intimately related to the process of defining community, serving as a means of purification and a visible demonstration of order.⁷³ But such

⁶⁹ Wappler, *Stellung*, 145–57; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 294–302, 326–36; TAH, 47–8; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 996.

⁷⁰ Wappler, *Stellung*, 145–8, 152–4, 155–7; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 996; No. 1001, fo. 4r–7r, 9r, 19r.

⁷¹ Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts', 50, n. 103.

⁷² Wappler, *Stellung*, 185; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 50; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 996, fo. 8v–9r.

⁷³ Jason P. Coy, *Strangers and Misfits: Banishment, Social Control, and Authority in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2008).

a policy was only effective if enforceable, and rarely did the ideal match up to reality.

A confrontation developed between the authorities who wanted to define and delimit their boundaries, and the Anabaptists whose idea of community was much more fluid. Much of this dispute hinged on who to blame for Anabaptism. Assuming that they could uncover coherent communities with definite leaders, the authorities wanted ringleaders. In a mandate issued in 1534, Count William von Henneberg–Schleusingen warned that:

the error of Anabaptism, along with its following, for the most part had its origin in the secret and clandestine preaching, so that the poor people, who do not understand, have been pitifully seduced. Also from such secret and clandestine preaching and gatherings, revolt and rebellion have sprung up in many places.⁷⁴

Like Luther, the count's main gripe was that Anabaptists had no right to preach scripture, and he regarded Anabaptism as a form of conspiracy against spiritual and temporal authority. The solution seemed relatively simple: cut off the monster's head, and the rest would wither. When arrests were made, therefore, interrogators wanted to know where preachers had travelled, with whom they had stayed, and who else was involved in the movement.⁷⁵

In reality, matters were not so clear cut. Hut's, Römer's, and Rinck's activities seem to provide coherence to the picture of emerging Anabaptism in central Germany, but the movement was not focused on a few educated preachers, nor did it spread coherently from defined centres. While certain names stand out in the records, mapping a clear genealogy of Anabaptist leaders and followers in the region is a virtually impossible and fruitless task. A group of thirteen Anabaptists arrested in Frankenhausen in 1530 were typically eclectic. Volkmar, Georg von Staffelstein, and Bernhardus had spent some time spreading Anabaptist ideas in Frankenhausen, but seven of the prisoners had been part of Hut's community in Königsberg who had made the journey up to Thuringia.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ 'der irthumb des widertauffs sampt seinem anhang merertheils sein vrpsrung gehabt hat, aus den heimlichen vnd winckelpredigen darmit erbermlich die armen vnuerstendigen menschen verfurt sein worden, auch sonst aus solchen heimlichen und winckelpredigen und zusamen komen an viel ortten entborung unnd auffruhr entsprungen'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 72r.

⁷⁵ See the questions put to Veit and Martin Weischenfelder when they were tried in March 1527; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 236–43; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 369r–377v, 379r–383v.

⁷⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 310–15; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 65–9.

Individuals were not sustained by constant encouragement from their baptizer, but through contact with one another, regardless of who had baptized them. Preachers who organized activities and instructed others might occupy a position of authority but the sorts of defined structures the authorities sought were lacking.

With itinerant leaders and scattered locations, it was local, personal connections which helped people assimilate into this new movement and sustained interest when preachers were absent. When Thomas Spiegel was interrogated in 1527, he said that he was baptized in his brother's house although there were several strangers present, one of whom was known to him only as 'Johannes' (Hans Hut).⁷⁷ From its inception, Anabaptism in central Germany relied on families and friends in this manner, as well as relationships forged through trade and commerce. When Moritz Pfeiffer was baptized in Sennfeld, he knew one of those present through his son's trade of linen-weaving, although the other man was not known to him at all. Similarly the four key figures named by the council of Schweinfurt on 3 January 1529—Valentin Pfeiffer, Martin Seifrit, Heinz Muller, and Georg Braun—were all linen-weavers.⁷⁸ For ordinary Anabaptists, questions such as whether one's spouse or neighbour was part of the movement, how to find the way to meetings in more distant locales, and knowing whom to trust were equally as important as a rarely seen preacher.

Unlike some other manifestations of the movement, therefore, Anabaptists in central Germany did not rely on stable, separate groups. The gatherings in Sorga were about as close as Anabaptists came in central Germany to forming a coherent community. In this respect Anabaptists and authorities seemed to have had different understanding of space. Rulers were concerned with exerting control, and conceived of space as radial. In their assessment, influence fanned out from centres, and they wanted to know about attendance and locations, and leaders to punish. Anabaptists' experience of space was very different; it was node-like, based on a chain of connected pockets of activity established across a wide area, which were held loosely together by personal contacts and the journeys people made. Knowing that there was someone in a nearby village who too had come into contact with Anabaptism was encouraging, and individuals also trusted in networks that spread further afield. It might take Anabaptists in the Harz, for example, a few days to travel to a more distant stronghold such as Sorga. And travel Anabaptists did.

⁷⁷ Berbig, 'Königsberg', 309.

⁷⁸ ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 21v, 32v. Bauer has indicated the importance of linen-weaving in Hildburghausen for facilitating rapid transmission of information; Bauer, *Franken*, 18.

TRAVEL

Anabaptism was sustained by the journeys made by individuals such as Hut, Römer, and Alexander; all were prolific travellers. After returning to the place where he had been born, Hut toured the nearby Thuringian villages such as Milz and Römhild, moving on east to the village of Großwalbur, and then continued south to Coburg in the autumn of 1526. Zilgendorf and Uetzing lay even further south, and here Hut preached to Hans Hübner and the brothers Hans, Martin, and Veit Weischenfelder.⁷⁹ It is hard to estimate exactly how many kilometres he travelled, but Hut must often have been on the road, relying on people for food and a bed. Thomas Spiegel and Georg Volck undertook a small tour of the villages on the edge of the Thuringian border going from Ostheim, to Sternberg, Burglauer, and finally Grosseibstadt, a sort of 'sounding-out' trip for Hut. Volck met a carpenter in the last destination but did not baptize him, merely getting his assurance that he would join the movement and would welcome Hut when he came to baptize him.⁸⁰ Women such as Barb Presslerin provided lodging, and some of Hut's circle even extracted financial support from their hosts—the Weischenfelders, for example, confessed that Endres Weiss had once provided a gulden.⁸¹

Römer too journeyed far. Along with Fischer, Christoph Peisker, and Christoph von Naumburg, he ventured well beyond the environs of Erfurt. Aside from the twenty-five followers in Alich and Ilversgehofen, villages near Erfurt, there were five Anabaptists in Karsdorf, a village on the River Unstrut 65 km north-east of Erfurt; three in Holdenstet near Sangerhausen; in Niederdorla near Mühlhausen, far to the north-west of Erfurt, two; and a small pocket of Anabaptists was discovered in Eisleben, which was even more remote.⁸² Alexander followed this itinerant pattern,

⁷⁹ Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 210–11; Hans-Dieter Schmid, *Täuferium und Obrigkeit in Nürnberg* (Nuremberg, 1972), 8.

⁸⁰ 'do hat Volck einen schreiner gefordert, ime auch gepredigt, der in diese taufe auch gewilligt; do hett Volck gesagt: Johannes werde komen ine auch taufen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 229; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 360–7.

⁸¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 240, 242; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 379–83. See also Bauer, *Franken*, 35.

⁸² Römer also found followers in Balnhausen, Schwerstedt, Sondershausen, Alperstedt, Saalborn, and Sömmerda; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 38–47, 251–65, 269–73, 274–8, 283–90, 293, 362–4; Wappler, *Stellung*, 131–2, 185; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 20r–21r, 32r, 37r–41v, 52r–v, 57r, 44r, 49r, 70r–74v, 85r–87v, 90r–95r, 96r, 99r, 100r–101r, 104r–109r, 112r–v, 117r–118v, 125r–v, 128r–129r; Loc. 10328/1, fo. 140r–140v; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 998; No. 1021, fo. 8v. See also Vogler, 'Gab es in Eisleben eine Täufergemeinde?', in Vogler, *Müntzer und die Gesellschaft* (Mühlhausen, 2003), 165–73.

spreading his message round Esperstedt and the southern Harz mountains, but also making his way on more than one occasion to Sorga.⁸³

It was not just the preachers who travelled extensively but also ordinary men and women. Hut's associates from the Saxon Franconian lands, for example, had diverse origins, and though they often met in or near Erlangen and Königsberg they came from small rural villages and hamlets. Of sixty-six followers named by the Spiegels and Weischenfelders when they were interrogated, only eighteen actually hailed from the larger towns such as Coburg and Erlangen; some came from tiny hamlets, such as Burglauer roughly 70 km to the west of Coburg, although they still made the journey to urban areas for gatherings. It is not clear how the exact time and place for these meetings was agreed, but rural Anabaptists were certainly not afraid to go long distances. Spiegel described one particular meeting in Erlangen towards the end of 1526. Some present were from the town itself, and three from the village of Eltersdorf which was about an hour and a half's walk. Others travelled much further. Eukarius Binder had come down from Coburg, and Kilian Volkaimer from Grosswalbur. 'Caspar' journeyed all the way from Altenstein, the location of a now ruined castle.⁸⁴ This journey was a little more daunting, over 75 km, and while Binder and Volkaimer travelled regularly with Hut, Caspar (whose second name was not even recorded and is otherwise unknown) clearly also felt secure enough to make the trip.⁸⁵

The routes that people took are harder to establish although willingness to travel is hardly surprising; it was nothing new in central Germany, which boasted a well-established network of routes linking the major economic and political centres. Anabaptists, however, may have chosen less well-travelled roads. When individuals were brought in for questioning in Frankenhausen from the end of 1529 onwards, Count Günter the Younger of Schwarzburg wrote to Duke George to express his concern that some of the people were from Franconia and had appeared in his lands without his knowledge, having reneged on earlier promises that they would have nothing more to do with the error of Anabaptism.⁸⁶ Given the notoriety

⁸³ Alexander also preached in Sangerhausen, Emseloh, Holdenstedt, and Oberdorla; Wappler, *Stellung*, 18; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 344–52, 356, 374–5, 377, 380, 382, 393, 442; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 120r–123v; Loc. 10328/1, fo. 60r–v, 72r–74r, 75r, 76r–77r, 78r, 128v, 132–134r, 138v, 156v, 205r; SAM, *Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534*, fo.19r, 143v; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, 5v; No. 1021, 4r–11r.

⁸⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 234.

⁸⁵ Bauer suggests there was a whole Anabaptist community in Altenstein, though support for this is thin; Bauer, *Franken*, 39.

⁸⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 310–11; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 65.

of Frankenhausen after the Peasants' War, it was not an entirely surprising destination. To get there, these individuals may have chosen the main road which took travellers from Nuremberg to Coburg and then carried on north via Ilmenau and Sömmerda. But bearing in mind the pattern of dispersion which characterized Anabaptism, it was perhaps more likely that they headed slightly to the east in the direction of the concentration of communities along the River Werra, side-stepping more well-trodden paths, but exploiting possible contacts in various villages that Hut and others had visited.

This conjecture is supported by snippets of evidence: Katherine Fursterin from Königsberg said that after being expelled from her home town she had spent a night in Hersfeld, where other Anabaptists could be found. The location of these communities along the Rivers Werra and Unstrut may give us a further clue to Anabaptist travelling patterns. There was barely an important focal point that was not on a waterway, and the mills situated on them provided an excellent place to meet. Several of Hut's large gatherings took place in the mills in Herzogenaurach and in Hellringen. Since mills were situated on rivers they were near trade and travel routes but located outside towns and villages, meaning their isolation also offered security.⁸⁷

SIGNS

If Anabaptism was to survive across these dispersed groups, people had to be able to recognize other Anabaptists to work out who might be on their side. Those in power also wanted to establish methods to identify Anabaptists, because the ability to travel threatened the authorities, undermining their sense of control. Individuals were forced to play the authorities' game, entering into a dialogue about identification and codification, as interrogators attempted to discover the distinguishing signs that would enable them to find leaders and uncover networks. Authorities always relied on *Zeichen* [signs] to control certain social groups and identify criminals. Clothing, marks on

⁸⁷ To support Hut's teaching, several large gatherings were organized in the Aurachsmühle near Ostheim, the Hellinger Mühle in the Königsberg area, and the Hopfenmühle near Uetzing; see Wappler, *Thüringen*, 231–2; Berbig, 'Königsberg', 310–11, 313, 315; Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung*, 156–7. Because of their lonely position there was much folklore surrounding mills as places for hauntings and devilish seductions; Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927–42), vi: 602–8.

the skin, words, and insignia could be signs of authority, but equally their meaning could be inverted so that they became clues to pin-pointing malefactors.⁸⁸

Signs also had religious connotations. *Zeichen* were physical tokens bought by those who had undertaken pilgrimages as proof that they had performed the journey.⁸⁹ *Zeichen* was the word used to indicate the significations of divine favour revealed in miracles; it could be a mark that one was blessed; or a sign might indicate that the Last Judgement was near at hand. Such signs played a powerful role in establishing Anabaptist identity. For Anabaptists themselves a distinctive sign could facilitate travel, make it clear whom to trust, and create bonds with possibly distant associates.

Clothes were one of the most important means of identification, a visual key to understanding the social ordering of a society.⁹⁰ Clothing made the invisible enemy visible, and, just as police do today, authorities in different regions exchanged details of the appearance of wanted criminals.⁹¹ In December 1527 the council of Erfurt distributed descriptions of Römer, Fischer, and the two Christophs to Duke George of Saxony; Ambrosius Tietz, who was the *Schösser* in Weimar; his fellow magistrate in Weißensee, Mathius Potdinger; and to the *Amtmänner* in Langensalza and in Herbesleben. With his red tights, yellow garters, and blue tunic with tailored sleeves and white trim, one suspects that Peisker would have been hard to miss. Most startling of all seems to have been his grey long-tailed hooded cloak and multicoloured buttons. Perhaps the rainbow palette was reminiscent of the apparel of beggars, who often had kaleidoscopic patches of materials made up from scraps of clothing taken from those of better standing, but in truth, Peisker seemed rather fashionable.⁹² Römer appeared to have been more soberly dressed. Aside from a distinguishing circular scar over his left eye, he could be recognized by his curly hair and grey coat.

⁸⁸ Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Mark Kyburz and John Peck (New York, 2007), 41–62, 74–94.

⁸⁹ See for example Denis Bruna (ed.), *Enseignes de pèlerinage et enseignes profanes* (Paris, 1996).

⁹⁰ Robert Jütte and Neithard Bulst, 'Zwischen Sein und Schein: Kleidung und Identität in der städtischen Gesellschaft: Einleitung', *Saeculum* 44 (1993), 2; Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010).

⁹¹ Groebner, *Who Are You?*, 75, 78, 80–1.

⁹² Wappler, *Stellung*, 132; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 33r–34r, 69r–70r, 77r; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 24r. On colours of clothes see Robert Jütte, 'Stigma-Symbole: Kleidung als identitätsstiftendes Merkmal bei spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Randgruppen: (Juden, Dirnen, Aussätzige, Bettler)', *Saeculum* 44 (1993), 68.

Despite Peisker's outlandish garb, however, the authorities could not catch him. Much time was wasted on a case of mistaken identity when Christoph Lumpe from Erfurt was arrested. Despite the fact that he had a wife and was a baker, whereas the Anabaptist preacher was single and employed as a sexton, the council seemed convinced that he must be Peisker because of his appearance: he wore a blue tunic and red hose.⁹³ Lumpe was considered a likely suspect for other reasons. He had travelled extensively, mainly between Naumburg, Leipzig, and Erfurt, and he was a troublemaker, for he had reportedly smashed out the iron from a window in a brothel in Leipzig, hastening to make his escape through the back of the building.⁹⁴

In his defence, Lumpe's father said that the only reason his son had left Erfurt and travelled so much was because his wife had leprosy, and Lumpe feared that he too would catch the disease if he did not stay away. Presumably this was also one of the reasons why he visited prostitutes.⁹⁵ The mix-up over Peisker highlights the importance of clothing in defining identity, and the confusion that could arise as a result. Indeed, a key point of Lumpe's defence related to his attire. When asked where his long-tailed hood was, he denied he had ever owned such a piece of clothing and only wore a little, yellow cape which he had got at the junk market in Erfurt.⁹⁶

Dress, therefore, was not a reliable sign for the authorities, nor did they have a monopoly on the interpretation of clothes. The emphasis on *Zeichen* was a way of labelling Anabaptists as secretive or conspiratorial, but they could turn this expectation on its head by exploiting the inherent ambiguity of signs. Suspects portrayed Hut and Römer as learned and honourable men, and Melchior Rinck was called 'the Greek' because of his linguistic abilities, a possible source of pride for his followers.⁹⁷ With the exception of Peisker's extrovert clothes, the leading preachers

⁹³ 'Nuhn ist einer jn frawenhouse alhier antroffen, Cristoff Kursener genant von Erffurdt welcher ein blawen Rock, Rothe hosen vnd einen Schwarzen breyten hut gehabt, . . . weil sich dann solche Cleydunge vnd der nahme mit Ewer furstlichen gnaden anzeygunge fast vorgleicher'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 36r.

⁹⁴ 'Er auch jm frawenhausen hinden auss, jn einen fenster, ein eysern Creutze ausgebrochen'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 36r, 64r.

⁹⁵ 'Item er habe ein weip, ungeuerlich xl jahr alt die sey am leybe wanderlwar wurden, das nichts anders dann der aussatz zubesorgen, Nu habe er geforcht, das er mit solchem aussatze auch beladen werden mochte, vnd habe sie nicht vorstossen ader ins Spittal thun, auch auss angezeigter vrsach nicht bey yr bleyben wollen, Sonder furgenommen sich ein vierthel jahrs vngeuerlich von yr vnd ausserhalb Erffurdt zuenthalten vnd einen andern handel vortzunehmen'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 67r.

⁹⁶ 'Gefragt wu sein grosse zipffelte kappen sey, Sagt er habe nye keine getragen dann eine cleine gelbe kappen, die hab er zu Erffurdt vffn grempelmarckt kaufft'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 63r.

⁹⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 333.

were described as dressed in grey and black and wearing the headwear of scholars or churchmen. Anstad Kemmerer said Römer was a grey, pale, short man, with a cap in the Dutch style, trimmed in marten fur, and he wore a black fur tunic down to his knees and grey coloured hose.⁹⁸ The very nature of their garb signified the men's authority, which mirrored the dress of other reformers. Ulinka Rublack claims that Luther often wore vibrant red underneath the more familiar black robes, as Lucas Cranach's paintings suggest, yet he certainly cultivated the image of the learned doctor, and his students in Wittenberg wore dignified, scholarly black.⁹⁹

It may be that the Anabaptists sought to imitate some of this eminence through the clothes they wore. Thomas Spiegel at first only knew Hut by his first name, but his description seemed to imbue him with gravitas. 'He wears a long, black coat, a black wide biretta, grey hose, and is rather tall, over thirty years old and approaching forty.' Even the authorities in Nuremberg, whose description of Hut echoed Spiegel's, admitted rather grudgingly that he was a 'rather learned, clever fellow'.¹⁰⁰ Unlike Lumpe whose borrowed garb indicated low social status, Römer's clothes did not suggest a rebellious peasant, for although he wore grey (the colour of peasants), fur and long robes set him apart.¹⁰¹

Dressing in a certain way could certainly give the illusion of respectability. In the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, a collection of satirical Latin letters published in support of the humanist scholar Johannes Reuchlin, one of the correspondents, a certain Magister Johannes Pellifex, described how he travelled to the market in Frankfurt with two men, who appeared to be honourable. They had black coats and large hoods with long tails, which looked like monastic habits. Pellifex swore, with God as his witness, that he took them for 'Magistri nostri' (that is Dominicans) and he showed them respect, removing his biretta. However, for all their seeming standing, it turned out the pair were Jews.¹⁰² Anabaptists were able to

⁹⁸ 'also sei ein abelisch, bleich, kurz mennelein, das habe ein niderlandisch parret, mit marder gefuttert, ein schwarz gefuttert leiprocklein biß zu halben knie und ascherfarben hosen angehabt', Wappler, *Thüringen*, 259; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327, fo. 79r.

⁹⁹ Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 99–101.

¹⁰⁰ Spiegel said 'er habe ein langen, schwarzen rocke an, ain swarz, breits pirett auf, grae hosen und sei einer zimlichen lenge, uber die dreissig biß in die vierzig jare seins alters'. On 26 March 1527 the council and mayor in Nuremberg wrote to Margrave Casimir of Brandenburg calling Hut 'ain vast gelerter, geschickter gesell'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 232, 245; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 13.

¹⁰¹ Robert Jütte, 'Daily Life in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany', in Scribner (ed.), *Germany: A New Social and Economic History*, i: 1450–1630 (New York, 1996), 337.

¹⁰² 'Nuper fui in missa Francofordiensi, tunc ivi cum uno Bacculario per plateam, ad forum, & obviaeverunt nobis duo viri, qui apperauerunt satis honesti, quantum ad aspectum, & habuerunt nigras tunicas, & magna caputia cum liripipiis suis. Et Dei sunt testes mei, quod putavi quod sint duo Magistri nostri, & feci ipsis reverentiam deponendo

manipulate outward appearance in a similar way to counter the suggestion that they were rebels.

Clothing was not the only way to recognize someone. There were also passwords, gestures, and secret symbols which provided a tangible and verbal embodiment of the relationships between people, and helped to guarantee someone was friend not foe. Passwords were often used by political and criminal conspirators, and were also associated with disorderly youth groups, such as the students who initiated the anti-clerical *Pfaffensturm* in Erfurt in 1521.¹⁰³ The author of a poem about these events wrote:

The crowd rushed here and there,
Four, five, six, seven, and more,
Each person had their password,
So that one might recognise,
Who belonged to their crowd.¹⁰⁴

However, as with their clothes, the Anabaptists were often keen to stress that their passwords did not imply any secretive, rebellious, or conspiratorial activities but rather reflected the essentially respectable nature of their fellowship. Hans Ludwig provided a particularly detailed example of these verbal exchanges.

Then the brothers also instructed them how they should behave towards the other brothers when they met one another, and stated how one brother revealed himself to another: 'By this sign you should recognise our brothers: when they come together, they give one another their hands and embrace them, saying: dear Christian brother'.¹⁰⁵

The actual wording of some Anabaptist greetings could be intentionally vague. Klaus Scharf said their greeting was simply this: 'The eternal father

birrereum'; *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* (Leipzig, 1869), 6. See also James V. Mehl, 'Language, Class, and Mimic Satire in the Characterization of Correspondents in the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*', *SCJ* 25.2 (1994), 289–305.

¹⁰³ In September 1517 in the Basel area, the administrator of Röteln reported that a group of conspirators used the secret password 'Saint George!'; Groebner, *Who Are You?*, 86.

¹⁰⁴ *Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation*, ed. Otto Clemen, 4 vols (Halle, 1907–11; repr. Nieuwkoop, 1967), i: 368–9, 'Die hauffen zogen hin vnd her./ vier, fünff, sechs, sibem, oder meer./ Ain yeder auch sein loßung het,/ darab man die erkennen thet,/ Die zu dem hauffen gehorten dar'; Scribner, 'Reformation, Carnival, and the World Turned Upside-down', *Social History* 3.3 (1978), 315.

¹⁰⁵ 'dorneben haben sie die bruder auch gelernet, wie sie sich gegen den andern brudern, woe sie die antreffen, halten soltin und wie sich einer gegen dem andern erzeigte, gesprochen: Bei dem zeichen solt ir unser bruder erkennen: Wen sie zusammenkommen, geben sie einander die hend und Herzen inen, sprechende: Lieber christlicher bruder'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 262–3; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, 83v.

protect you with his eternal peace and be with you.¹⁰⁶ Such generic fraternal greetings did not suggest isolated sectarianism and may have helped to integrate Anabaptist identity with people's more local networks.

Even the most radical groups could play this game of manipulation, as is dramatically evident with the arsonist Anabaptists, the so-called *Mordbrenner*. Fears about arson were prevalent in early modern society, so much so that in central Germany the authorities published a work in 1540 devoted to arsonists and their secret signals, though it is unclear how much truth lay behind the hyperbole (see Fig. 2.4). The book was clearly used, for a scrawled note on the final page of one copy stated that some of the signs had been seen in Erfurt in 1555.¹⁰⁷ Anabaptist arsonists in central Germany deployed a range of identity markers. They had a code word, 'Jubi', so that they could recognize one another, and over the table they passed knives to one another with the sharp end pointing towards the receiver.¹⁰⁸ Some signs incorporated spiritual symbolism. Melchior Stoer had the shape of the cross cut into his hair and claimed that his group inscribed religious signs on their bodies:

He confesses that all Anabaptists mark their forehead with the cross as a sign, and especially on the right or left leg over the knee a sign of a second cross, cut out with a blade, which is black or blue.¹⁰⁹

Stoer and his group seemed to be defacing themselves with stigmata-like signs. Marks on the skin were ambiguous in their meaning, for they could be permanent signifiers of past wrongs.¹¹⁰ Many crimes were punished with defacement of some kind, and branding was certainly used for Anabaptists. Erhard Pulrus stated 'he was branded on the cheek in Frankenhausen because of his baptism'.¹¹¹ Yet scars could also be signs of

¹⁰⁶ 'Der ewige vater beschirme dich mit seinem ewigen friede und sei mit dir!'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 377; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 133v.

¹⁰⁷ Ambrosius Trota, *Der Mordbrenner Zeichen vnd Losunge* (Wittenberg?, 1540), A2r, B2v.

¹⁰⁸ 'Idem sagett auch das jne zu eynen zzeichen sey vnder andern eynder, an fremdem orttern zu erkennen, vnd zum zeichen gegeben, das wortt, Jubii, ader vber tische eyn brotmesser mit der Spitzen kegen jnen gekertt, darbey sie sich erkennen, vnd zu weither kunde khommen'; ThHStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 74v.

¹⁰⁹ 'bekennett das alle widderteuffer zzeichen als Creutze an den stiernen gerwben vnd sunderlich awff den Rechten ader Linken beyne vber den knie eyn zzeichen als eyn Andre Kreutze mit eyner Glitten gehauben, daselbst schwartz oder blaue'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 74v–75r.

¹¹⁰ Groebner, *Who Are You?*, 95–116.

¹¹¹ 'Herumb der tauf willen ist er zu Frankenhausen durch die backen gebrant'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 345; SHStAD, GA10024, 10328/1, fo. 74r. On the severity of branding as a punishment see Richard van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Oxford, 1990), 49.

Der Mordtbrenner Zeichen vnd Losunge/ etwa bey Dreihundert vnd Viertzig / ausgeschildt.



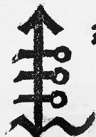
Dieses Zeichen / bedeut der Mordtbrenner Losung.



Dieses Zeichen bedeut / das die Mordtbrenner sind weg gegangen / so es gebrandt hat.



Dieses Zeichen bedeut / wenn das Feuer ist in der Stadt angangen.



Dieses Zeichen bedeut / auff welche strasse die Mordtbrenner sind weg gangen.



Dieses Zeichen / hat man zu Langen Salze vnd Northausen

A ij Dieses

Fig. 2.4. Title page from Ambrosius Trota, *Der Mordtbrenner Zeichen vnd Losunge* (Wittenberg?, 1540)

sanctification. Medieval theologians emphasized that when the bodies of the redeemed were resurrected they would be perfect and free of any earthly blemishes, apart from the bodies of martyrs who would bear the scars of their torment as signs of their status.¹¹²

The dialogue about signs, so emphasized by the authorities, converged with a variety of understandings about spiritual signs, and Anabaptists seemed to have used the inherent ambiguity of the meaning of clothes, scars, and greetings to carve out an identity for themselves. They drew on the preconceptions of the authorities but also subverted them to suggest respectability and brotherhood, sanctification even, instead of the sedition with which they were charged, while also putting in place means to recognize one another as they travelled.

* * *

Whatever the methods of travel and however people recognized one another, such patterns of mobility and association explain how this type of Anabaptism survived in central Germany as a phenomenon distinct from the close-knit circles which developed in cities and which were often deeply involved in the intellectual and cultural networks of the town. Somewhat surprisingly, Anabaptism in this region thrived because it was *not* an urban phenomenon and because it established pockets across a spread of rural villages and hamlets. This gave the movement longevity in a way that more static communities could not achieve, for even when preachers disappeared, Anabaptism endured.

When Alexander was arrested with ten others in 1533, tried in Frankenhausen, and executed in July of that year, his fellow prisoners recanted and were released, although many of them quickly returned to the Anabaptist movement.¹¹³ By recanting, these Anabaptists paradoxically ensured the survival of Anabaptism in central Germany, as they regrouped and continued the legacy of others who perished for their ideas. Individuals such as Martin Herzog, Heinz Kraut, Georg Knoblauch, and Peter Reuße held gatherings which reinvigorated Anabaptism in the Harz region.¹¹⁴ The connections of this group spread far; the Möllers, for example, married into Knoblauch's family but were originally from Haara near Zwickau and were in contact with their brother-in-law in Schneeberg, Hans Hamster, who was also an Anabaptist.¹¹⁵ They also

¹¹² Groebner, *Who Are You?*, 100.

¹¹³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 352; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 123r; Loc. 10328/1, 78r.

¹¹⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 110–11, 115; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 89; Jacobs, 'Harz', 423–536.

¹¹⁵ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 386–93; CRii: 997–1004; CRiii: 14–20; Wappler, *Inquisition und Ketzerprozesse in Zwickau zur Reformationszeit: Dargestellt im Zusammenhang mit der*

established contacts with Anabaptists in east Thuringia, who often met in the house of Hans Peisker in Kleineutersdorf. Peisker had himself been baptized by Melchior Rinck, although most of the other members of this group had originally been introduced to the movement by Alexander and his comrades.¹¹⁶ The authorities soon took notice of these activities, and a series of arrests and interrogations took place in 1535, but this did not put an end to Anabaptism in the region. Valentin Krautheim was arrested in June 1538 and confessed to associating with many of the same circle.¹¹⁷ When the Augsburg Anabaptists were discovered after the so-called Martyrs' Synod in August 1527, the authorities were able to carry out a targeted campaign of prosecution; this was never the case in central Germany.¹¹⁸ A dizzying number of places and names, many of which cropped up time and again, were involved in these overlapping circles of Anabaptist activity.

In his second major work on the Anabaptists written in 1544, *Von dem Geist der Wiederteuffer*, Justus Menius lamented the fact that the Anabaptists did not reveal their secrets to anyone outside their sect and 'in particular, that they name none of their teachers, leaders, prophets, and baptisers with names'. In a career of fifteen years he had discovered and tried over a hundred Anabaptists, but not once discovered their teachers.¹¹⁹ Caught up in a rhetoric which was common to Lutheranism about unauthorized preachers and religious disorder, the lack of any tangible target worried him, as he envisioned radical prophets who headed up extensive clandestine networks but who could not be found. Anabaptism was like a closed, if very dangerous, book. The authorities' attempts to

Entwicklung der Ansichten Luthers und Melanchthons über Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit (Leipzig, 1908), 99.

¹¹⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 395–423; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 999, 2, 9r–10r, 13r–26v; No. 1009, fo. 2r–6r, 7, 19r–20r, 21r, 28–9; No. 1011, fo. 2; No. 1015, fo. 2; No. 1016, 1, 5r–6r, 9; No. 1017, fo. 65, 97–100, 106, 109, 111r–122r; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 36r–37r, 103r, 104r–105r.

¹¹⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 458–61; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, 197r–200v.

¹¹⁸ Hut was arrested at the end of August 1527, and in September Urbanus Rhegius published *Wider den neuen Taufforden, Notwendige Warnung an alle Christgleubigen durch die Diener des Euangelij zu Augspurg*. A wave of arrests and anti-Anabaptist mandates in south Germany followed. Targeted raids were carried out in Augsburg and Anabaptists apprehended into the spring of 1528. Eighty-eight individuals were arrested at a meeting on Easter Sunday, 12 April 1528; Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531* (Scottsdale, PA, 1977), 118–27; Christian Hege and Harold S. Bender, 'Martyrs' Synod', *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1957); <<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M378595.html>> accessed 13 March 2013.

¹¹⁹ 'sonderheit, das sie ja jrer Lerer, Vorsteher, Propheten vnd Teuffer keinen mit namen nennen'; Menius, *Von dem Geist der Wiederteuffer. Mit Vorrede Luthers* (Wittenberg, 1544), C5–C2r, H3.

control and subdue Anabaptism, certainly in the early years, reflected this perception. A policy of targeted execution or expulsion designed to get rid of leaders, with leniency in other cases, was adopted in the hope that poor seduced people might see the error of their ways. But Anabaptism in central Germany was able to adapt and survive, and much to the authorities' dismay, whenever they tried to cut off the monster's head, it seemed to sprout several more in its place.

The travelling, unfamiliar preachers were only one, and not the most important, part of the story. Because contact with preachers was fleeting, Anabaptist communities in central Germany did not rely on leaders in the same way as in other regions. Instead, the sources tell a story of shifting patterns of association which functioned across clusters of mainly rural communities, rather than defined groups focused on dominant individuals. Anabaptists were deeply embedded in localized networks; they travelled and talked; they stayed with people who were not Anabaptists; they moved from place to place and did not seem to be choosy about leaders and branches; they developed ways of recognizing and associating with one another which emphasized equality and fraternity. Anabaptists sometimes used familiar methods to define their communities—ritual, shared memories, a common linguistic register—but they also presented a concept of community which diverged sharply from more recognizable models, since it was expressed across distances, without clear authority structures, and with inconsistent membership.¹²⁰ Identity was tied to the places people visited, journeys they made, and the companions that they met. Local knowledge, not leaders and ideologies, was the key to survival.

¹²⁰ See Michael J. Halvorson and Karen E. Spierling (eds), *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2008).

3

The Memory of the Peasants' War

For Hans Römer and his associates, the new year of 1528 brought with it anticipation of a better future. With only eleven months before the world came to an end, they would restore the destroyed Kingdom of Jerusalem in the town of Erfurt. Anyone who did not toe the line would be expelled into the wilderness to face the impending apocalypse or be slaughtered.¹ Römer, Volkmar Fischer, Christoph Peisker, and Christoph of Meissen spent the winter months working out the details and enlisted the services of various individuals to help. Nikolas Hofmann, who lived within the city walls, was instructed to open one of the gates to 'Christoff and his band'. Four fires would be lit in the city as a diversion, and then Hofmann would make a huge din on his newly made trumpets signalling that he was about to unlock the *Krämpferthor* for his confederates, the gate on the east side of the city.² The Anabaptists would gather at the *Fischmarkt* just next to the town hall, appealing to the citizens to stand by the word of God. Then they would stab everyone who disagreed, although they were confident that the Lutherans at least would join them.³ Aside from these eschatological delusions of grandeur, Römer also had a personal score to settle: he wanted revenge for the way his spiritual 'father' Müntzer had been treated in the Peasants' War.⁴

¹ 'haben vntther andern gepredigt got habe sie ausgesandt, das verstohert Jherusalem wyddervmb auzurichten, item die welt werde nichte lenger dan xi Monatten stehn'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 131; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 33r.

² Wappler, *Thüringen*, 265, 273, 277; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 44r, 51v, 85r.

³ 'szo wolt er mit seinem haufen alle diejhenigen, die es nicht mit ime hielten, alle erstochen haben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 265; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 51v. Georg Fuchs said: 'haben sich aber versehen, die Lutterischen wurden alle zu ihnen treten'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 272; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 44r. See also Willibald Gutsche (ed.), *Geschichte der Stadt Erfurt* (Weimar, 1986), 129.

⁴ 'das er mit seinen gesellen aus sunderlichem hasse, also er zu der stadt Erffurt, dorumb das sie seinen vater Thomaßen Munzern erwurget, getragen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 363; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 125v.

But by the end of November these dreams were in tatters. On the thirtieth of the month the plot was discovered as reports reached the council in Erfurt that laymen had been preaching and baptizing in the villages of Alich and Rohrborn. The council acted as swiftly as possible and managed to apprehend those who had housed the preachers, but the ringleaders had already fled.⁵ According to Römer, a contingency had been put in place for this eventuality. He had advised those whom he baptized to have a gulden and a good pair of leather shoes so they could make good their escape if the plan did not work out.⁶ Descriptions of Römer, Fischer, Peisker, and Christoph of Meissen were circulated to officials in central Germany at the beginning of December, and over Christmas and New Year the incarcerated Anabaptists were tried as the search went on for the instigators of the plot.⁷ Proceedings rumbled on until March 1528, and in total twelve members of the apparent conspiracy were executed. Römer and Fischer, however, still eluded capture, and would do so until 1534.⁸

The abortive attack on Erfurt seems to be a fairly familiar example of residual rebelliousness in central Germany after the Peasants' War. Römer was a veteran of the peasant insurrections, expelled from his hometown of Eisenach for his allegiance to Müntzer, and it appeared that he had taken up the task of reversing the bitter disillusionment after defeat at Frankenhausen: he travelled the countryside, preached Müntzer-like apocalypticism, and incited his followers to violence in a battle between the blessed and faithless. To what extent was Anabaptism shaped by the lingering legacy of the Peasants' War? Was it simply a series of aftershocks as individuals attempted to re-enact the failed experiments of 1524–5?

⁵ 'etliche leygen jn vnsern gepiethe zu Alich vnd Rorborn zupredigen vnd anderwets zuteuffen vnderstanden haben sollen. Vnd wie wol wir als paldt eylendts nach solchen schwermern getrachter sie jn vnser heffte zubryngen so sein sie doch kurtz vor dreyn tagen von damen komen vor haben'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 33r.

⁶ 'das sie uf ein gut par schue, leder, koller und ein halben gulden in den beutel schicken solten, in meinunge, so ire anschleg mit eroberunge der stadt nicht ein furgang gewinnen wurden, das sie damit aus dem land komen mochten'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 364; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 112v.

⁷ The description was circulated as part of an extensive manhunt; I have found no less than six copies of these details in Meiningen, Weimar, Mühlhausen, and three in Dresden; Wappler, *Stellung*, 132; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 33r–34r, 69r–70r, 97r; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 24r; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1022, fo. 4r; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 5r. Duke George wrote to the bishop of Merseburg on 5 July 1528 to say Römer and Peisker had fled but were supposed to be in Lützen and that the bishop should arrest them; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 293; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 52.

⁸ Römer appeared before the authorities on 3 September 1534 and Fischer on 6 November; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 363–4; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 125, 104. For details of the twelve executions see Wappler, *Thüringen*, 370; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 108r.

Römer's daring escapade would have been unimaginable without the Peasants' War, but his story also tells a more complex tale about the inheritance of its violent disappointments.

LEGACIES OF VIOLENCE

The problem of the Peasants' War has loomed large in the historiography of Anabaptism, intertwined with a debate about whether it attempted to continue a botched communal revolution. In his study of how the peasant rebellions stimulated a range of Anabaptist ideas on the ethics of social and economic equality, Stayer proposed a strong causal link between Anabaptism and revolts in central Germany. Contrary to Harold Bender's assertion that Müntzer and violent political action had no place in the story of Anabaptism, Stayer insisted that Anabaptism in south and central Germany was directed by 'alumni' of the Peasants' War, who recruited fellow survivors. Gerhard Zschäbitz likewise argued that Müntzer's political theology permeated Anabaptism in Thuringia; every man and his dog in contemporary Germany knew that Anabaptists in the region clung to the legacy of the Mühlhausen preacher.⁹

The Peasants' War undoubtedly left an indelible mark on the physical and emotional landscape of central Germany. Castles and monasteries had been sacked, thousands had died at Frankenhausen, and villages and towns were burdened with demanding financial sanctions—an ongoing reminder of the heavy price to pay for defying territorial lords.¹⁰ Like some sort of bogeyman, the threat of social unrest preyed on the minds of the authorities, and early exchanges with Anabaptists demonstrated

⁹ Stayer commented that the importance of Müntzer was proven and needed no further discussion; 'Sächsischer Radikalismus und Schweizer Täuferum: Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten', in Günter Vogler (ed.), *Wegscheiden der Reformation: Alternatives Denken vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1994), 154. See also Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady and H.C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore, MD, 1981); Blickle, *Communal Reformation: The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1992); Gottfried Seebaß, 'Bauernkrieg und Täuferum in Franken', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 85 (1974), 284–300; James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and the Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal, QC, 1991); Stayer, 'Anabaptists and Future Anabaptists in the Peasants' War', *MQR* 62.2 (1988), 99–139; Stayer, 'Neue Modelle eines gemeinsamen Lebens: Gütergemeinschaft im Täuferum', in Goertz (ed.), *Alles gehört allen: Das Experiment Gütergemeinschaft vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute* (Munich, 1984), 21–49; Günter Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer und die Gesellschaft seiner Zeit* (Mühlhausen, 2003); Gerhard Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung nach dem Grossenbauernkrieg* (Berlin, 1958).

¹⁰ Johann Karl Seidemann, 'Das Ende des Bauernkrieges in Thüringen', *Neue Mitteilungen aus dem Gebiet historisch-antiquarisch Forschungen* 14 (1878), 392–543.

that the Thuringian and Saxon rulers had clearly not forgotten the experience of the Peasants' War.¹¹ The atmosphere in Erfurt, for example, had remained tense since 1525, and the authorities feared an outbreak of renewed violence—suspicions which were only confirmed by the unmasking of Römer's conspiracy. On 31 December 1527 Duke George of Saxony issued a mandate warning that Anabaptists were establishing new sects and leagues, threatening fresh disturbance and rebellion against the authorities.¹² Describing Anabaptism as another 'league' (*bundnus*) drew an unmistakable parallel with the revolts of the mid-1520s.

Phrases which drew on the programme of the Peasants' War punctuate the Anabaptist records, especially in the early years. Even as late as 1536 Heinz Kraut, on seeing his executioner, recited the stock phrase of peasant rebellion which had echoed around Europe: 'When Adam delved and Eve span, where then was the nobleman?'¹³ Scholars have argued that Müntzer's theology of the 'community of goods' and *Gelassenheit* (the sense of giving up all attachment to earthly things) were adopted by Anabaptists who held to a general principle of communal ownership of money, goods, and even women; although Stayer points out that the radical or separatist models of Münster and Moravian Anabaptists were not the only ways of practising the community of goods. The Swiss Brethren's ideals of sharing and banning exploitation, for example, were part of the same conceptual universe.¹⁴ Stayer defines the community of goods as a general attempt to follow Acts 2, 4, and 5, where the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, instruct believers to share all their possessions for the needy.¹⁵ Some groups did seem to aspire to an apostolic ideal of equality and inclusivity which came from the peasant uprisings. Hans Höhne, one

¹¹ For a recent study of the importance of the Anabaptist threat in early modern political rhetoric see Astrid von Schlachta, *Gefahr oder Segen? Die Täufer in der politischen Kommunikation* (Göttingen, 2009).

¹² 'in nawe secten und bundtnus zu verderb ihrer seele, leibes und guts gefürt werden, daraus anderweit entporung und aufstand wieder die oberkeit nicht wenig zu befahren'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 267.

¹³ 'Do Adam rewte vnd Eva span, wer war diezeit ein idelman?'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 417; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 104v. Stayer cites this as proof that Anabaptists in central Germany clung to the ideals of Müntzer and the Peasants' War; Stayer, 'Neue Modelle', 29. For the use of this phrase see Josef Ehmer, 'Discourses on Work and Labour in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Germany', in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Work in a Modern Society: The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 2010), 22.

¹⁴ Michael G. Baylor (ed. and trans.), *Revelation and Revolution: Basic Writings of Thomas Müntzer* (Cranbury, NJ, 1993) 35–6, 115–38. The concept of *Gelassenheit* was taken from the mystical medieval text the *Theologia Deutsch* widely cited in this period. Karlstadt also wrote a tract on the subject; Andreas Karlstadt, *Missive von der aller höchsten tugent gelassenheit* (n.p., 1521).

¹⁵ Stayer, *Anabaptist Community of Goods*, 8–9; Stayer, 'Neue Modelle'.

of the Anabaptists arrested in the Harz region in 1535, advocated communal use, if not possession, of goods: 'whoever has more than another should share it with the other person, for amongst the children of God, when it came to their goods, all should be shared alike.'¹⁶

Most statements by ordinary Anabaptists, however, did not amount to as much as a full-blown exposition of the community of goods. Anabaptist also mirrored much broader debates on socio-economic affairs, such as the dispute between Luther and Jakob Strauss over usury. The Eisenach preacher condemned all interest on lending while Luther admitted interest was permitted in some cases, but specifically attacked the *Zinskauf* (the special type of interest on capital investment), since the lender did not share in the risk that came with property. Particularly contentious was Strauss's apparent claim that the debtor as well as the lender shared in the sin of usury.¹⁷ When Römer's followers said they were told not to commit usury, they could have derived some of their ideas from this altercation. Questioned in 1535, Hans Schleier said a man could not serve two masters and that usury was clearly forbidden, even explicitly mentioning Luther's writings.¹⁸ Sometimes Anabaptists mirrored demands for a more inclusive and socially responsible fraternity, certainly when it came to the poor; at other times sharing food and money was simply born of necessity to provide travel costs, a form of fund raising to help itinerant preachers. Yet the scattered communities of central German Anabaptism did not propose a clear model of communal reformation, and in this respect they differed from the experiments associated with Karlstadt or Müntzer's reformation of the 'common man'.¹⁹

¹⁶ 'welcher mehr hat teiletz mit den andern; denn unter den kindern gottes soll es alles gleich geteilt sein mit ihren gutern; Jacobs, 'Harz', 524.

¹⁷ Jakob Strauss, *Haubstuck unnd Artickel Christlicher leer wider den vnchristlichen wucher* (Erfurt, 1523), reproduced in Joachim Rogge, *Der Beitrage des Predigers Jakob Strauss zur frühen Reformationsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1957), 168. Luther said in certain cases interest of up to 6% could be charged, as long as this was done in accordance with Church law; *Sermon von dem Wucher* (1519); *WA Schriften*, 6: 6. On the dispute see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, ii: *Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532* (Minneapolis, MN, 1990), 142–3; John S. Oyer, 'The Influence of Jacob Strauss on the Anabaptists: A Problem in Historical Methodology', in Marc Lienhard (ed.), *The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism/Les Débuts et Les Caractéristiques de L'Anabaptisme* (The Hague, 1977), 62–82; Rogge, *Jakob Strauss*, 71–86.

¹⁸ Römer instructed his followers: 'seinen nechsten als sich selbst lieben muß, nicht wuchern, des geizes genzlichen entschlahen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 277; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 86v; Schleier said: 'Ein Christ sol geben vnd etwas nachlassen. Aber der wucher sey auss der kirchen geschlagen. Man könne nicht zweien herrn dienen. Die lieb vnterscheidt es, wie dan Petrus Christum gelobt, vnd Judas yn vmbs gelt gekaufft hette dorum'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 32v.

¹⁹ Goertz, 'Karlstadt, Müntzer, and the Reformation of the Commoners', in John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (eds), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden, 2006), 1–44.

Aside from its ideological inheritance, the Peasants' War created bonds between individuals who had responded with vigour and sometimes violence to religious change, relationships which outlasted the defeat of 1525. During his interrogation in January 1528, one of Römer's band called Georg Fuchs confessed that he had taken part in earlier revolts in Erfurt and that he knew the tailor Master Andreas who had started rebellion in Meiningen. Andreas stayed with Fuchs in his house and introduced him to Römer and Peisker.²⁰ It is doubtful whether Römer could have gathered so many followers without relying on the contacts forged during the period of unrest. Even if people did not know Römer already, they were more likely to be receptive to his ideas if they had been active rebels. Steeped in a tradition of anticlerical and anti-authoritarian belligerence, Hofmann turned up like a bad penny at all the major flashpoints of hostility provoked by the Reformation in Erfurt: the Peasants' War, Römer's plot. He had even participated in the *Pfaffensturm* of June 1521, when trouble erupted after students marched on the houses of two deans.²¹ For Hofmann, Römer's arrival must have seemed like a welcome continuation of popular reform.

The Peasants' War also left a more intangible residue: memories in people's minds which might be evoked by the mention of certain places or individuals who had played a decisive role in the uprisings. Memories of the Peasants' War were woven into the very fabric of the central German landscape. Frankenhausen was synonymous with the crushing defeat suffered by the 8,000-strong peasant army; Mühlhausen was unavoidably linked to Müntzer and Pfeiffer's socio-political experiments.²² Above all, the name of Müntzer elicited an emotional response. His personal charisma as a fiery preacher was the cornerstone of the Peasants' War in central Germany; and his public beheading in Mühlhausen, was a triumphant victory for his opponents, a crushing defeat for his followers. The nature of this magnetism remains somewhat obscure. No contemporary image of Müntzer survives. A rather unflattering woodcut, the first

²⁰ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 270; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 37r.

²¹ In the copy of his trial in the *Stadtarchiv* Erfurt additional details were added not copied over into the versions held in Dresden and published by Wappler, suggesting that Hofmann had aided a student during the *Pfaffensturm*: 'der hab jme jn roten dorffers haus ein fliehen weddel gegeben, vnd ein kleyn salzmassgein'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 264–5; SAE, 1-1/XVI-I, Acta des Magistrats zu Erfurt (no folios); SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 31. Robert W. Scribner, 'Reformation, Society, and Humanism', PhD thesis, University of London, 1972, 157, 250; Scribner, 'Reformation, Carnival, and the World Turned Upside-Down', *Social History* 3.3 (1978), 315.

²² Sven Tode, *Stadt im Bauernkrieg 1525: Strukturanalytische Untersuchungen zur Stadt im Raum anhand der Beispiele Erfurt, Mühlhausen/Thür., Langensalza, und Thamsbrück* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994) 178–91.

depiction of the preacher of Mühlhausen, was not produced until the end of the sixteenth century, and subsequent editions exaggerated the fat, protruding lips and wide-set eyes; hardly a leader of men.²³ Yet the power of his personality was essential to the legacy of the Peasants' War. Müntzer's name echoes in the Thuringian sources—Jakob Storger even recycled his famous insult hurled at the Lutherans about their 'beshitten mercy'.²⁴

However, the references do not indicate a direct, uncomplicated causal link between defeat and continued Anabaptist unrest, or even perpetuation of his ideology. Rather the allusions suggest that here was a person who had significantly impacted the collective memory of central Germany. Even those who were horrified by that name knew the power it possessed. Philipp Melanchthon said Hans Schleier was not an Anabaptist since he shrank back as soon as Müntzer was mentioned.²⁵ Not everyone who followed Römer knew Müntzer (Konrad Friedrich and Caspar Veit did not seem to have played an active role in the Peasants' War) but they may have nonetheless found themselves fighting for a cause ostensibly in his name.

Anabaptism did not spring Athena-like, fully formed from the Peasants' War. The peasant uprisings were not the only context in which Anabaptist identity was forged. One of the most interesting aspects of Römer's story is the fact that the interrogations of his band of Anabaptists took place several years apart. The first series of examinations were held over the winter of 1527–8, but the questioning of Römer and Fischer themselves did not occur until between September 1534 and March 1535 when the pair were finally apprehended. The priorities of Römer and Fischer, and those of the interrogating authorities, may well have changed during the seven-year gap; certainly different experiences moulded their tales. By the time the pair were arrested the Anabaptist threat had mutated. Memories of the Peasants' War had begun to fade and the terrifying menace from rustic labourers had diminished; but there was a new horror on the horizon. In early 1534, Anabaptists had taken over Münster, a town in north-west Germany in Westphalia, and under the leadership of their self-proclaimed king, Jan of Leiden, they dispatched messengers to gather fellow followers in the recreation of the heavenly Jerusalem.²⁶

²³ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary*, trans. Jocelyn Jaquiere, ed. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh, 1993), 1–6.

²⁴ 'beschiessene barmherzigkeit'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 429; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 112v. See for example Müntzer's letter to Frankenhausen in 1525; Georg Theodor Strobel, *Leben, Schriften und Lehren Thomä Müntzers: Des Urhebers des Bauernaufbruchs in Thüringen* (Nuremberg, 1795), 103.

²⁵ 'Und in ersten Wort, da sie ihn den Montzer genannt, habe er alsbald eine Scheu vor ihnen gehabt und Mißfallen'; CRiii: 18.

²⁶ Ralf Klötzer, *Die Täuferherrschaft von Münster: Stadtreformation und Welterneuerung* (Münster, 1992); Klötzer, 'The Melchiorites and Müntzer', in Roth and Stayer (eds),

Fischer, who confessed and recanted, was keen to blame a violent Römer for the planned takeover of Erfurt. He presented himself as a reformed character. Not only had both his children been baptized according to the 'old ways', but killing people for refusing re-baptism was wrong, he now realized, and he had said as much to his fellow Anabaptists in Basel, their refuge when they fled Thuringia.²⁷ It seemed he did not want to be tarred with the same brush as the Münster Anabaptists or his former associates. The authorities' desire to connect these events with wider rebellion also seemed to be underlined by their interest in tracking Fischer's more distant journeys to Basel and Prague. They asked him too if he knew other Anabaptists who were incarcerated at the time, such as Ludwig Spon and Hermann Gerucher. With the image of Münster in their minds, possibly they sought to uncover what, in retrospect, must have seemed a similar conspiracy in Erfurt. In the case of Römer and Fischer no explicit link with Münster was made, but references to events in Westphalia creep into the interrogation records elsewhere in central Germany.²⁸

In Fischer's mind too, events in Erfurt now seemed to be linked to something more significant. After nearly a decade of mulling it over, the local plot was connected to a general plan for revolution. He said that the movement required them to swear to destroy all those who rejected their beliefs:

They bound themselves together and pledged to one another that they would try to gather a people of their faith, and if they were to find someone, who would not be of their belief, they would have stabbed him. If, however, they had succeeded in gathering a people of their faith, then here in Erfurt and in other places they would have forced the authorities and anyone else with fire, sword, and however else they could, to join their faith.²⁹

Companion to Anabaptism, 217–56; Sigrun Haude, *In the Shadow of 'Savage Wolves': Anabaptist Münster and the German Reformation during the 1530s* (Boston, MA, 2000), 10–16, esp. 12.

²⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 373; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 118v.

²⁸ For example, a letter from the *Schösser* in Arnshaugk to Elector John Frederick in September 1539 linked the views of Anabaptists in this region, Karlstadt, Anabaptists in Moravia, and Münster; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 462; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1028, fo. 2v. Sigrun Haude's study has shown that these events provoked complex responses often transcending confessional divisions, rather than frantic, knee-jerk persecution; Haude, *Anabaptist Münster*.

²⁹ 'haben sich mit einander verbunden und zusammen vorpflicht, si wolten versuchen, ob sie konten ein volk ires glaübens zusammen bringen, und wen sie funden, der ires glaubens nicht sei wolt, den wolten sie erstochen haben. Wann sie aber nun ein volk ires glaübens zusammenbracht hetten, so wolten sie hin Erfurt und andern orten mit dem feuer, mit dem schwerdt, und wie sonst gekont hetten, di oberkeit und sunst jedermann gedrunge haben, sich in iren glauben zubegeben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 366; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, 105v–106r.

Fischer's emphasis on the role of fire may also have borrowed from contemporary fears of arsonist violence. In the sixteenth century panic erupted all over Europe about sprees of fire-raising, which was often combined with political and religious radicalism. In the years after the fall of the kingdom of Münster, one such group of Anabaptists emerged, led by Jan of Batenburg, whose apocalyptic enthusiasm disintegrated into widespread brutality as they robbed, murdered, and razed buildings to the ground.³⁰ As the activities of Stoer and Hans Krug indicate, Thuringia and Saxony were no exception to this pattern of violence in early modern Germany. When Römer confessed to his activities in the mid-1530s, he too made worrying, grandiose claims: after the Anabaptists had set up their rule in Erfurt, brothers from all lands would gather on St John's Day, a feast day celebrating (appropriately enough) the birth of John the Baptist.³¹ The hyperbole hints that the story may have gained something in the retelling. In 1527 a meeting was certainly planned in Erfurt; there was talk that the end of the world was nigh; there was discussion that those who received the chosen sign of baptism would be saved and others would be destroyed. These ideas combined with the unstable legacy of the Peasants' War and other religious violence were threatening enough for the authorities. But it is far less clear that back in 1527 there was anything like a coherently structured plan, mingling a universal apocalyptic vision with a programme of social and economic rebellion.

As is often the case when a group of people are asked to recount a memory of the same event, the Erfurt conspirators produced different narratives, prioritizing incidents with relevance to their specific emotional and moral frameworks. The planned Erfurt conspiracy was something of an Anabaptist *Rashomon*—Akira Kurosawa's famous film about an apparent rape told from different perspectives. Details of the Erfurt takeover differed from person to person—Hofmann thought four fires were going to be lit, Römer said it was seven—and working out the 'real' version in this obscure tale is fruitless. Perhaps Römer and Fischer provided more details

³⁰ Gary K. Waite, 'From Apocalyptic Crusaders to Anabaptist Terrorists: Anabaptist Radicals after Münster, 1535–1545', *ARG* 80 (1989), 173–93; Waite, 'Apocalyptical Terrorists or a Figment of Governmental Paranoia? Re-evaluating Anabaptist Violence in the Netherlands and Holy Roman Empire, 1535–1570', in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferturns/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009), 105–25. For the problem of arson in early modern Europe see Penny Roberts, 'Arson, Conspiracy, and Rumour in Early Modern Europe', *Continuity and Change* 12.1 (1997), 9–29; Scribner, 'The Mordbrenner Fear in Sixteenth-Century Germany: Political Paranoia or the Revenge of the Outcast?', in Richard J. Evans (ed.), *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History* (London, 1988), 29–56.

³¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 363; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 125v.

because they were in charge and had more knowledge; they may have been asked different questions; certainly the different contexts of contemporary events would have shaped the way they remembered events. As Münster Anabaptists sent out missionaries, it is hard not to suppose that Römer's account and the authorities' response in 1534–5 was influenced by this context. The memory of 1524–5, however, had not dissipated completely. With a wistful air, Römer looked back to the aspirations that had never come to fruition. 'If he and his followers had got money, they would have bought swords and instituted peasant wars.'³²

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

The tale of Römer's attack on Erfurt and its connection with the legacy of the Peasants' War suggests that the way that people remembered the conflicts and how they chose to deploy the details they recalled was as significant as the fact that individuals had taken part. The Peasants' War was not just a collection of programmatic ideas; it was an emotional event whose significance was measured in the people involved and the places affected, becoming intertwined with a variety of other imaginative contexts as people were asked to recall their experiences. Being interrogated was a process of dialogue, a hostile encounter, an opportunity for explanation or excuse. It was also a forum where people were invited or forced to exercise their memories. Anabaptist identity was moulded by the memories which surfaced in these interrogations, whether of the Peasants' War, absent Anabaptist preachers, or an individual's first encounter with the movement. Indeed, memory may have been particularly important to these communities in central Germany which were often distant, always fluid, and never shaped by a definitive ideology.

The relationship between memory and history has stimulated significant debate, much of which has been built on the theories of Maurice Halbwachs, once a student of Emile Durkheim. In his landmark study, *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925), Halbwachs argued that memory should be understood as a sociological construct; memory is not essentially an individual affair but is socially acquired and fashioned. Distinct social groups determine what is remembered and what is not—a process which is fundamental to communal identity. Social memory of this kind might even allow individuals to 'remember' events in which they

³² 'Wan er dan und sein anhang geld uberkommen, wolten sie schwerter gekauft und bauern kriege angerichtet haben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 364; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 112r.

did not participate, through a process which resembles the workings of a hive mind. Halbwachs saw social or collective memory as an active, oral process and used it as a counterpoint to written history, which encoded and classified events no longer part of living recollection. History marked the point at which collective memory failed, when, in the language of Pierre Nora, the *milieux de mémoires* became the *lieux de mémoires*.³³ The popularity of the concept of memory as way of studying communities and identity in historical scholarship shows no signs of abating.³⁴

While this study owes much to Halbwachs's theories, it does not apply them unquestioningly. In much the same way that Geertz's 'thick description' utilized a rather static symbolic system, Halbwachs believed that social, group identity preceded memory; reminiscence reflected identity. Social memory is mutable, Halbwachs argues, and one individual might be a member of several groups (indeed, this is why people can construct identities variously in different contexts).³⁵ In his analysis, the process of forgetting and recalling in social memory therefore provides a means of smoothing over problems in the group and of eliminating the individual in a pre-existing collective identity. But social memory is not the only way of remembering. Personal recollections are important too. Memory may be a sociological concept but is also a psychological one, and by reversing Halbwachs's logic of the relationship between recollection and identity we can appreciate how an active process of remembering by individuals could create new identities. Crucial here is the process by which these memories were constructed. We need to ask who remembered; what they recalled; how; and in what context. How did individual memories

³³ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter Jr and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, 1980); Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations* 26 (1989), 7–24; *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, under the direction of Pierre Nora, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols (New York, 1996–8). See also Erika Applebaum, 'Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (eds), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010), 77–92; Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (1st English edn, New York, 2011); Peter Burke, 'History as Social Memory', in Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (London, 1997), 43–59; Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, IL, 1996).

³⁴ For examples of the broad range of literature looking at memory and community across different periods see: Susan Boettcher, 'Late Sixteenth-Century Lutherans: A Community of Memory', in Michael J. Halvorson and Karen E. Spierling, *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2008), 121–42; Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (eds), *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana, IL, 2002); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Rosamund McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004); D.J.B. Trim, *The Huguenots: History and Memory in Transnational Context: Essays in Honour of Walter C. Utt* (Leiden, 2011).

³⁵ Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 44–9.

mould the experience of collective memory? What were the linguistic, literary, and social models for remembering, and how did people appropriate them for their own devices? How were memories contested when different groups remembered the same event? In the interplay between memories as individual, emotional experiences, and memories as socially constructed narratives, identity was formed.

The diffused nature of Anabaptism in central Germany with its foreign and often absent preachers meant the people engaged in creative processes of talking about their experiences. But this was a two-way process: the authorities too relied on memories, myths, and recollections, whether of Müntzer or anticlerical violence, as they formed their ideas about Anabaptism. Magistrates and theologians referred to the movement in language which made it clear that they believed Anabaptism was secretive and fractious. Whether those questioned chose to accept accusations of sedition or whether they sought to rebut them, such interactions left their traces on Anabaptism. Interrogations thus represented a clash of memories, and the way in which people excused, explained, defended, or justified their actions in trials reveals how individuals articulated divergent memories.

Evading questions or providing answers that were economical with the truth was not simply a tactic but part of the dialogue that contributed to the formation of Anabaptism. Perez Zagorin suggests that dissimulation was an important feature of nearly all forms of early modern religious dissidence and could create a discourse that was part of how people defined themselves.³⁶ Not telling the truth (or at least not the whole truth) was not a question of bare-faced mendacity. In 1376 the Dominican inquisitor Nicholas Eymerich compiled an instructive manual for his fellow interrogators and warned of the deceptive techniques that Vaudois heretics might use. When asked whether they agreed with Catholic teaching that marriage was a sacrament, they would reply that they did it as God willed it, knowing of course in their own minds that God did not consider it a sacrament.³⁷

The equivocal answers that Anabaptists might provide were strikingly similar. Hans Kluber, who was interrogated in Tann in 1535, provided an almost identical response when asked about marriage, declaring that 'we want to believe that marriage is instituted by God'.³⁸

³⁶ Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

³⁷ Zagorin, 'The Historical Significance of Lying and Dissimulation', *Social Research* 63.3 (1996), 877.

³⁸ 'wir wollen wenen, die ehe sei von got eingesetzt'; *TAH*, 88.

Others might be a little blunter. Heinz Lautenbach, questioned in March 1535 in Grossenbach, was asked what he thought of infant baptism; he answered 'not much, the same for the holy sacrament'.³⁹ His answers would hardly have satisfied his interrogators, but at the same time he did not give a full confession of Anabaptist beliefs, and this may have been a manner of self-exculpation, helping him reconcile his actions with the demands of the interrogation process. In the context of the trial, individuals often told how they had come to be 'converted' or 'seduced', narratives sometimes designed to excuse their actions, sometimes to defend. Matthes Gerhard and Joachim Karpe said Römer came to them one evening and 'in drunkenness convinced them, so that he wetted his hand in water and on each of them drew a cross on their foreheads as a sign of perfect faith'. They seem to have woken up with sore heads and heavy hearts, excusing their actions by simply claiming they had drunk one too many.⁴⁰

We cannot tell now whether the two men were telling the truth, actively lying, or whether they had convinced themselves that this was how events had unfolded, but we can examine the way in which they structured the memory in the trial. Anabaptists drew on numerous contexts when they moulded their accounts: the language of Reformation pamphlets, biblical stories, apocalyptic predictions, and dreams. Whether telling tales to one another, to themselves, or to the authorities, Anabaptist identity was developed through the way people remembered words and encounters, times and places.

THE REFORMATION DIALOGUE

Fritz Erbe, an Anabaptist from the village of Herda, was arrested in October 1531 in Hausbreitenbach. He described his first contact with Anabaptism when he met Katharina Valebs. His tale had hints of an almost Damascene conversion, as the traveller is waylaid by an unexpected but ultimately transformative encounter.

³⁹ 'Gefragt, was er von der kindertauf halt, sagt: nicht viel, desgleichen von dem heiligen sacrament', *TAH*, 86.

⁴⁰ 'Habet uns derselbige Hans Romer, der furfurer, uff einen abend in der geniemt wochen in trunkenheit uberredt, das er seine hand in wasser genetzt und einem itzelichen ein cruce an seine stirne gestrichen zu einem zeichen eins volkomen gelaubens. Als wir armen vorfurten uff den morgen unser schwacheit und irrung bedacht, sind wir in groß bekommer gefallen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 284; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 100r.

There was a woman, called Katharina (who was executed about a year ago in Frankenhausen for the error), who came to him on the road to Berka and talked with him about several things, and amongst others mentioned re-baptism. To that he said, 'If there were someone at hand and if they had a reason for it, I would like to hear it.' Then she answered: 'At Wünschenschul there is someone, he is called Nicolas, he's clever.' Then the aforesaid Nicolas, on her suggestion, came to him. He taught him several things and baptised him.⁴¹

After recanting and being released in January 1532, Erbe was arrested again in 1533 with a woman called Margarethe Koch and eighteen others. The Saxon and Hessian authorities batted his case back and forth between one another for many years, disagreeing about how best to punish him. He was not a leader, and was no great thinker, or even a baptizer, but he was well known to other Anabaptists. Erbe and Koch were held in prison for a considerable time, and Erbe refused to recant during his incarceration, which was to last sixteen years. He was supported by friends and associates, such as Hans Scheffer and Han Koler, both arrested in 1537 because they had tried to get into the prison at night to converse with Erbe.⁴² Those who carried back news of this recalcitrant Anabaptist ensured that his case became so notorious that the authorities were forced to respond. They decided Erbe had become too infamous in his former prison, and in 1540 he was transferred to the Wartburg, the fortress situated on a high precipice overlooking Eisenach where Luther had sojourned after the Diet of Worms. Erbe died here in 1548.⁴³ People had obviously talked about his sorry situation, and shared recollections of his experience drew people together. This was an oral process. There is, as far as we know, no printed account of his experiences. But Erbe did leave one written record of his fate, scratching his name into the masonry of the south tower of the Wartburg where he was held.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 'Es were eyn fraw, gnant Katharina, welche vngeuerlich fur eynem jare zu Franckenhausena auch des jrthumb halben gerechtfertigt worden, zu jme auff dem wege zwuschen Bercka komen vnd Mit ime Mancherlei geret, vnder andern der widdertauff gedacht. Darauff er gesagt, wann einer fur handen were vnd des grundt hette, mochte ichs gerne horen. Als hette sie geantwort: zu Windischensoula ist einer, er Niclas genant, ist geschickt. Do were derselb vff jr anregen zu jme komen, hette jnen Mancherlei vnderweist vnd jnen getaufft; Wappler, *Stellung*, 138–9; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, fo. 3.

⁴² Wappler, *Stellung*, 198; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, fo. 27.

⁴³ Wappler, *Stellung*, 157–61, 163–7, 178, 189, 191–5, 198, 201–8, 210–21; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, fo. 13, 28, 33r–36v, 43r–44r, 54r–60r; No. 1001, fo. 10r–16v, 25r–26r, 28r, 29r–30v; No. 1006; No. 1007, 2r–3r, 11, 15, 16r–17v, 19r–25v.

⁴⁴ This was discovered in 1925 during renovations. Another Anabaptist who was held in prison for nearly 300 days, Hans Schleier, even gave his name to the tower in

Erbe's experiences were shaped by stories that spread by word of mouth as Anabaptists travelled and talked. This talk allowed memories of people and encounters to be kept alive, and the authorities could not easily control this manner of dissemination.⁴⁵ People discussed the tantalizing tales of itinerant preachers, who voiced new ideas and then could disappear without any definite guarantee of return. For example, Marx Mayer stressed that his first encounter with Hut was not direct; rather he heard through an acquaintance that there was a man who had come to punish evil and set the world to rights.⁴⁶ Rumours are not necessarily false or irrational but obey logic which gives them power, and they reveal how social knowledge is constructed, on shared conviction and faith rather than tangible proof.⁴⁷

Susan Phillips's study of the problem of gossip in late medieval English parishes and the way that the authorities attempted to control it, suggests that gossip was more substantial than simple idle chatter, and had the capacity to reorganize social relationships. It was even ingrained in pastoral relations between priest and layman, since confession itself encouraged narrative remembrance but was susceptible to subversion. 'Jangling in church', the casual conversations exchanged between individuals before and after (perhaps during) prayer, was a powerful tool and dangerous threat. Indeed gossip had its own demon, Titivillus, who recorded people's whispering in churches. He first appeared in Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones Vulgares* and was used as a trope in sermons, art, and books all over Europe.⁴⁸ His image suggests that gossip was deeply ingrained in the late medieval and early modern imagination as a viable if perilous method of communication.

This type of chatter gained new impetus with the spread of the Reformation. Matheson's deconstruction of the Reformation as a

the Leuchtenburg where he was held, the Schleierturm; see Ulrike Kaiser, *Das Amt Leuchtenburg 1479–1705: Ein regionales Zentrum wettinischer Landesherrschaft* (Cologne, 2012), 92–4.

⁴⁵ Creasman argues that the authorities in Augsburg were concerned with seditious talk as much as printed works; Allyson F. Creasman, *Censorship and Civic Order in Reformation Germany, 1517–1648: Printed Poison & Evil Talk* (Farnham, 2012). On oral transmission see also Scribner, 'Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas', in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), 49–70.

⁴⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 322; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 203.

⁴⁷ Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rumeurs: Le plus vieux média du monde* (Paris, 1987), 303–5.

⁴⁸ Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park, PA, 2007), 1–13, 21, 207–8; Scribner, 'Heterodoxy, Literacy, and Print in the Early German Reformation', in Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (eds), *Heresy and*

linguistic and literary phenomenon notes that symbolic dialogues were an important form of expression which helped create a new reality by idealizing clashes between ordinary people and novel ideas.⁴⁹ Utz Rychsner's work of 1524, entitled *A Pretty Little Conversation Book*, described a fictional priest and a weaver who stopped to talk about the Gospel on the road to Augsburg; the weaver challenged the priest's view that the disrespect shown to the Pope was shameful.⁵⁰ In the opening lines the weaver declared that it was better to travel with someone because you could chat with them—he used the more colloquial 'schwätzen' not 'reden', which suggested common prattling rather than learned discussion.

Rychsner's elevation of 'schwätzen' to a transformative experience was not unique. The meaningful encounter that happened on travels was an established trope of Reformation literature, as theologians, intellectuals, tradesmen, weavers, and even peasants all discussed the latest issues of the day. Even Thuringia's own pilgrimage, Grimmenthal, was immortalized for all the wrong reasons in one of these dialogue works.⁵¹ These literary forms of travelling, gossip-fuelled confrontations, relied on certain tropes, as Hans-Christoph Rublack indicates in his study of the way ordinary people's encounters with the Reformation were represented in pamphlets. A work by Konrad Distelmaier, a layman from Franconia, told how a strawcutter and a woodcutter met on their way to their daily work in the town of Bayreuth. They debated the meaning of the story in John's gospel when St Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest Caiaphas. In Distelmaier's tale we find all the central elements of the way in which people's encounters with religious change were represented in print: a chance meeting, the sermon which the woodcutter had heard on the subject, the name of Luther as a way of justifying views.⁵² Maybe most important of all was the role of the ordinary man in discovering the true faith.

Literacy, 1000–1530 (Cambridge, 1994), 259–64. For Titivillus see Margaret Jennings, 'The Literary Career of the Recording Demon', *Studies in Theology* 74.5 (1977), 1–95.

⁴⁹ Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (2nd edn, New York, 2004), 81–110.

⁵⁰ Utz Rychsner, *Ain hüpsch Gespräch biechlin, von ainem Pfaffen vnd ainem Weber, die zúsamme kommen seind auff der straß was sy für red, frag, vnd antwort, gegen ainander gebraucht haben des Euangeliums vnd anderer sachen halben* (Augsburg, 1524).

⁵¹ *Eyn gesprech zwyschen yver Personen wye sie eyn getzengk haben, von der Wallfahrt ym Grimmenthal, was fur vnradt odder büberey, dar aus entstanden sey* (Erfurt, 1523). See also Jürgen Kampe, 'Problem "Reformationsdialog": Untersuchungen zu einer Gattung im reformatorischen Medienwettbewerb' (Tübingen, 1997), 97–209. On this pilgrimage see *Die Wallfahrt zu Grimmenthal: Urkunden, Rechnungen, Mirakelbuch*, ed. Johannes Mötsch (Cologne, 2004).

⁵² Hans-Christoph Rublack, . . . *hat die Nonne den Pfarrer geküsst? Aus dem Alltag der Reformationszeit* (Gütersloh, 1991) esp. 43–8. On the importance of the rhetoric of dialogue in the Reformation see also Kampe, *Reformationsdialog*.

The simple 'einfeltig' peasant became fashionable in the early 1520s; he was perhaps particularly suited to hearing new ideas expressed in direct form since he would not tie himself up in knots over intellectual debates. Karlstadt, among others, expressed admiration for the strong, honest labour of the poor working man (in place of veneration for the artificial poverty and begging of monks).⁵³ The most ubiquitous symbol of this reformation of the common man was the figure of Karsthans, the labouring, uneducated peasant with his hoe or flail in hand whose very simplicity enabled him to see through the sophistry of Catholic polemic.⁵⁴ In a famous pamphlet from 1521, the first to represent this archetypal peasant as the protagonist, Karsthans discussed religious matters with his son (a university student), the god Mercury, the Catholic theologian Thomas Murner, and Luther himself (see Fig. 3.1). Murner's ludicrous nature was immediately underlined by the confusion that arose between Karsthans and his son as to whether they were in the presence of a man or a cat, as Murner made a strange whining mew. In contrast Karsthans praised Luther because 'you write the godly truth in our language in German, so that we simple laity also might read it'.⁵⁵

Anabaptism was suffused with this rhetoric. As Anabaptists like Fritz Erbe recounted their stories, tales about a simple visit for the purpose of selling goods or visiting a professional acquaintance took on a different character when it just so happened that they also encountered people who wished to discuss matters of faith. Heinz Kestner, for example, who was questioned at the end of 1527, was travelling home from Buttelstedt, just north of Erfurt, to Schwerstedt after delivering onions when he met three people travelling on foot in Orlishausen. They accompanied him the six kilometres to nearby Sömmerda and engaged him in discussion. When they were about to part company, the unnamed travellers asked if they might stay with Kestner in Schwerstedt. Fourteen days later the men returned and, they told him 'they were sent forth by God, and the world would not stand for more than eleven months'. Kestner was careful to avoid saying at any stage in the initial meetings that he realized these

⁵³ Andreas Karlstadt, *Von abtuhung der Bylder, Vnd das keyn Betdler vnther den Christen seyn sollen* (Wittenberg, 1522), D3r-E4v.

⁵⁴ The figure of Karsthans was not invented by the Reformation but originated in the Alsace and Swabian regions as an insulting term for peasants. It was used by the Catholic Thomas Murner but was reappropriated by the Reformation as a positive term; Barbara Könnker, *Die deutsche Literatur der Reformationszeit: Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (Munich, 1975), 100–9; *Karsthans*, ed. Thomas Neukirchen (Heidelberg, 2011), 286–96. See also Nina Jørgensen, *Bauer, Narr, und Pfaff: Prototypische Figuren und ihre Funktion in der Reformationsliteratur* (Leiden, 1988), esp. 42–4 for Karsthans.

⁵⁵ 'Schriben in vnser sprach zu dütsch die gotlich warheit, vff dz wir einfeltigen leyen ouch mogen lessen'; *Karsthans* (Strasbourg, 1521), B3v.



Fig. 3.1. Title page from *Karsthans* (Strasbourg, 1521).

© SLUB Dresden/Digitale Sammlungen, Hist.eccl.E.376, 26.

men were Anabaptists. He presented the meeting as a chance encounter.⁵⁶ Anabaptist stories of conversion, like Kestner's and Erbe's, were often constructed in similar ways to the pamphlet models suggesting that, even if individuals were not using these literary models directly, people remembered such encounters with a common structural pattern as they explained their decisions in trials.

MODELS FROM THE BIBLE

Consciously or unconsciously individuals in the early modern period employed biblical schemata as a way of remembering events, and Luther encouraged people to use the narratives of the Bible as a way of interpreting real life.⁵⁷ The Swiss reformer Johann Kessler, recounting his meeting with Luther in the Black Bear Inn at Jena on the road to Wittenberg in 1522, modelled his story on the disciples meeting with Christ at Emmaus (Luke 14:13–17). The two disciples made their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, talking about the events that had occurred, and while they were engaged in discussion, Jesus approached them and walked with them. When evening fell, the two disciples invited the stranger in and over the breaking of bread recognized him as Christ. In a similar manner, as the Swiss student Kessler and his friend Wolfgang Spengler made their way to Wittenberg, they halted at Jena and struck up a conversation with a man at a table. He asked them where they were from and engaged them in discussion about new developments in the reform movement. Impressed by his knowledge of notable theologians and his Latin, the friends failed to recognize that this figure, with his red hood, plain doublet and hose, and a sword at his side, was of course Luther himself in disguise, just as Christ's disciples had been incapable of identifying their Saviour raised from the dead.⁵⁸ By the time Kessler published his account, the Black Bear Inn had already earned itself a place in the legendary topography of the Reformation, for it was here that Luther and Karlstadt had met in August 1524 as Karlstadt defended himself against the charge that he was one of the 'rebellious, murderous spirits'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ 'Das sie aber solden habe gesaget, das sie von Got außgesandt und die welt solt nit mehr dan 11 monat stehen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 254–55; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 27r.

⁵⁷ Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2012), 31–4.

⁵⁸ Emil Egli and Rudolph Schoch (eds) *Johannes Kesslers Sabbata mit kleineren Schriften und Briefen* (St Gallen, 1902), 76–8; Burke, 'History as Social Memory', 50–1.

⁵⁹ Martin Reinhart, *Wessich Doctor Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt mit Doctor Martino Luther beredet zu Jena, und wie sie wider einander zu schreiben sich entschlossen haben. Item*

Kessler was not the only one to use this tale. The story of Christ's encounter with the two followers after his resurrection was a popular theme in art and literature of the early modern period. Though obscured in shadow and hidden from his companions, Christ is immediately recognizable to the viewer in Rembrandt's version, painted in 1628. In 1537 Urbanus Rhegius wrote a commentary of the passage in Luke in the form of an imagined dialogue between himself and his wife.⁶⁰ While the bulk of this very lengthy work was designed to highlight all the instances where the Old Testament contained prophecies of Christ, foreshadowing the New Testament, the initial exchanges between Urbanus and Anna revealed how affecting this piece of scripture might be. The husband asks his wife why she is so sad, and she replies that today is the day that the two men unknowingly met Christ on the road and she feared her faith might be as weak as theirs. Urbanus comforted her: the task of the true believer was to recognize Christ, which prompted Urbanus's drawn-out Christological exposition of the Old Testament.

The language of the chance encounter, invitations of hospitality and sharing of food, and the direct simplicity of the emphasis on talking exemplified in this passage resonated with many of the Anabaptist stories. Hans Ludwig described how he had unintentionally gone with Kemmerer to meet an Anabaptist preacher in Eisleben and they gave money for wine as they sat and conversed with a man known only as 'the baptiser'. 'Such disputation and talking lasted for a while; afterwards the baptiser asked, among other things, whether they wanted to be part of the Christian brotherhood.' Ludwig and Kemmerer of course both replied in the affirmative.⁶¹

Repeating narratives about meetings using biblical schemata made the remembrance more meaningful. Preachers could appear to be revealed as Christ-like (or indeed Luther-like). Leaders' reputations were not only built on the ideals they stood for or the ideas they preached, but the tales told about them. The group of Anabaptists arrested in the abbacy of Fulda in 1532 talked about their leader, 'the Prophet', who seemed to have gained

die Handlung Doctor Martini Luthers mit dem Rath und Gemeine der Stadt Orlamünd, am Tag Bartholomäi daselbst geschehen (Leipzig, 1524); *WA Schriften*, 15: 333–41. See also Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (Oxford, 2011), 3.

⁶⁰ Urbanus Rhegius, *Dialogus von der schönen predigt, die Christus Luc. 24 von Jerusalem bis gen Emaus den zweien jüngern am Ostertag, aus Mose und allen Propheten gethan hat* (Wittenberg, 1537).

⁶¹ 'Solche disputation und rede habe eine zeitlang gewehret; dornach habe der teuffer unter andern gesagt, ab sie wolten in Christus bruderschaft mit sein. Haben sei beide gesprochen ja'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 262; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 83r.

such an epithet through his ability to work miracles and communicate with God directly. Just like stories of meetings and conversations that were modelled on scriptural narratives, tales about 'the Prophet' were told so that they conformed to biblical parables. 'The Prophet' was supposed to have healed an old woman from leprosy, turned water into wine, and raised people from the dead, and witnesses bore testimony to the bizarre way he seemed to have communicated with God. He would place a container of water on his head and 'something in there wriggled or moved, as if there was a big fish in it'. Then someone in the group would be moved to cry out that God had sent them a prophet. As soon as he removed the container from his head, the water stopped moving and the person would cease shouting; when the water was replaced the drama would start all over again.⁶² The way people were able to tell each other the stories about what they remembered, constructing 'the Prophet' as some sort of Christ figure, made him seem ever more mysterious, but also provided a template in which people could insert their own remembrances.

Biblical tropes became part of the fabric of Anabaptist identity. In December 1535 Philip Melanchthon was put in charge of the interrogation of the group of Anabaptists being held in Jena: Hans Peisker, Heinz Kraut, Jobst Möller, and Lorenz Petsch. They transposed their experience into a scriptural narrative. When their interrogators claimed to be discussing matters in a friendly, Christian way, the Anabaptists responded, 'Yes, well . . . you want to wash your hands of the matter like Pilate'.⁶³ Casting themselves as actors in a Christ-like persecution drama, their imagery accurately reflected the power dynamic which characterized the nature of interrogation, but also allowed them to give meaning to their own situation, one that might even have apocalyptic significance.

TALES OF THE APOCALYPSE

Eschatological expectations abounded in early modern Europe, and Anabaptists were no exception.⁶⁴ Hans Edlamer stressed the thrilling nature of encounters with anonymous preachers who espoused apocalyptic theology:

He said that the preachers told him that the Day of Judgement would soon come; this was revealed and announced to him through God's

⁶² Wappler, *Thüringen*, 340, 343. See also ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 60v, 66.

⁶³ 'Ei ja . . . du willst die hände waschen wie Pilatus'; CRiii: 998.

⁶⁴ Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine, and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2001).

spirit . . . the preachers told him they should consider their teachers well, and then, if they returned, they would only then discover what their alliance can do.⁶⁵

At this time, people's memories of events were particularly urgent, since they wanted to be sure that they were following the true Gospel and were part of the elect. Encounters were not only remembered in word and thought but translated into literary record. Hut apparently kept a book on his travels, which listed all the people he had baptized.⁶⁶ His followers linked this written register with powerful imagery that had apocalyptic connotations, in a clear parallel to the Book of Life in Revelation. The wife of Hans Weber, who was interrogated in 1528, described how Jörg von Passau, an associate of Hut's, had come to their home and preached. He told them to kneel, said they were absolved of their sins, and he then removed their name from the book of the dead and wrote it in the book of the living.⁶⁷ Actions were inscribed as a textual memory which had particular force, distinguishing between who was saved and who was not. Places, numbers, and people all took on extra significance as followers tried to recall what the predictions for the end of the world would entail. Even the noises that rang in their ears could have eschatological resonance. Klara Fuchs, the wife of Georg Fuchs, warned her husband and their friend Andreas Schneider that whenever the great bell sounded in Erfurt in the evening they should take note, proclaiming to them 'God help us, what will happen now the bell sounds'.⁶⁸ Memory and history became oriented towards predicting the future, as places and times were interwoven in dramatic fantasies.

Mühlhausen took on a special significance for the followers of Hut and other Anabaptists. Hut chose the town as a rallying point when the impending apocalypse arrived. Thomas Spiegel described how 'they should flee to the two Mühlhausens, the one in Thuringia, the other in the Swiss lands; they should stay in these same Mühlhausens until the

⁶⁵ 'Item er sagt die prediger sagen der jungst tag werde bald komen, sey offenbar vnd kunth gethan, jne dein geist durch gott. Item die prediger haben jnen gesagt sie sollen jre lere wol bedencken . . . darnach, so sie wider komen sollen, sie erst erfahren was jre verpunftnus vermoge'; ThStAM, GHA IV, no. 78, fo. 12r.

⁶⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 234.

⁶⁷ QGTii: 116.

⁶⁸ 'Eadem hat bekant, als man der grosse glocke zu Erffurdt auff den abendt geleut hat sie zu jrn Man vnd Andresen den Schneider gesagt hilff got was wil das werden, das nun die glocke leuth'; SAE, 1-1/XVI-I, Acta des Magistrats zu Erfurt (no folios).

Turks entered the country'.⁶⁹ Mühlhausen was one of the most important and iconic towns of Thuringia. It sits in fertile land on the banks of the River Unstrut. Surrounded by an imposing city wall, which had been built in the thirteenth century, the city's panorama is dominated by gothic churches, the largest of which, the *Marienkirche*, sits atop a hill, second only to Erfurt cathedral in size in Thuringia. Its striking town hall, and its narrow, cobbled streets, are still lined with impressive timber-framed houses, hinting at the wealth of its past.

The year 1525 marked a watershed year in Mühlhausen's history. The town had been the emblematic heart of Müntzer's activities in the Peasants' War, where he had formed the Eternal Alliance with Pfeiffer to fight under the rainbow banner, a symbol of the divine covenant.⁷⁰ Capitulation in March 1525 not only saw the further decline of Mühlhausen's political autonomy; it also fixed the town in the memorial landscape of central Germany. Veit Weischenfelder said that when he met the Anabaptist preacher Hans Hut, he did not know Hut's second name but he did remember that he was with Müntzer at Mühlhausen. It was not surprising perhaps that Veit Weischenfelder remembered this fact. His brother, Martin, had been banished from Mühlhausen for his part in the Peasants' War.⁷¹ Mühlhausen was a link with a recent past, and the way it was used by Hut made it a verbal and geographical token of the intangible connection with other, unknown Anabaptists. Past and present were elided as places like Mühlhausen which were historically significant were also allotted a place in an eschatological plan.⁷²

A sense of the importance of place had also driven Römer's plans. He did not elaborate on exactly why he chose Erfurt as the site for the resurrected Jerusalem, although its importance as an intellectual and economic centre in Thuringia made it a natural choice. During the Peasants' War, armies had entered Erfurt but the authorities had managed, just, to retain control. Perhaps Römer felt that the city's lukewarm stance had been a betrayal of the peasant movement, which made it a viable target for retribution in an eschatological fantasy. While the immediate scriptural source for Römer's apocalyptic theology seems to have been Daniel, it

⁶⁹ 'sollen sie in den beden Mulenhausen, das ein in Thuringen, das ander in Schweintzer [land] gelegen, fliehen; in denselbigen Mulhausen sollen sie sich enthalten, biß der Turke inß lande kome'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 231.

⁷⁰ Goertz, *Müntzer*, 159–71, 186.

⁷¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 242–3.

⁷² For the relationship between the past and apocalyptic future see Peter Sherlock, 'The Reformation of Memory in Early Modern Europe', in Radstone and Schwarz (eds), *Memory*, 33. On the importance of place to memory see Boettcher, 'A Community of Memory?', 123–4; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011).

was also reminiscent of Revelation, which describes the building of the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of the world (Rev. 21).

All over Germany in the early modern period, various places were designated as heavenly Jerusalems—the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster was not the only one.⁷³ Müntzer saw Prague as his Jerusalem when he travelled there in 1521 after being forced to leave Zwickau.⁷⁴ In November of that year he wrote a call to action, named the Prague Manifesto, to remind the Czechs to defend God's word and of the role they should play in the apocalypse. He did not explicitly mention the restored or heavenly Jerusalem, but he coaxed the Bohemians with the reminder that 'the new church will begin here, this people will be a mirror for the whole world'. For good measure, he warned them: 'If you refuse, God will let you be struck down by the Turks in the coming year.'⁷⁵ Melchior Hofmann, the Anabaptist preacher and leader active in north Germany and the Netherlands, was more explicit. He said that the New Jerusalem would be in Strasbourg; a theocracy would be set up until 1533, when Christ would return. His ideas were the basis for many of the revolutionary ideas in Münster itself—just the location of Jerusalem was changed.⁷⁶ When Römer mentioned Erfurt and Jerusalem in the same breath, when Hut declared Mühlhausen was an apocalyptic refuge, they were not parroting Müntzer's ideology. Signposting places in this manner, as arks for the end of days, was not the preserve of any individual preacher but part of a much wider rhetoric about eschatological prediction that served as a trigger for memory.

In an apocalyptic timescale numbers were also important, since Revelation was littered with portentous figures. When Jan of Leiden instituted his rule in Münster, he reorganized the layout and social structure of the city to reflect biblical signs. Münster was separated into twelve districts, and in addition to the ten gates of the city, the entry and exit points of the river were labelled as gates so that the town had the requisite twelve, just like the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation. Streets and gates were even renamed to reflect the material of heavenly Jerusalem, Gold Street leading to the Gold Gate.⁷⁷ This use of symbolic numbers was also

⁷³ Claus Bernet, '*Gebaute Apokalypse*': *Die Utopie des himmlischen Jerusalem in der frühen Neuzeit* (Mainz, 2007).

⁷⁴ Thomas Müntzer, *Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh, 1988), 352.

⁷⁵ Müntzer, *Complete Works*, 371.

⁷⁶ Thomas A. Brady, *Protestant Politics: Jacob Sturm (1489–1553) and the German Reformation* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1995), 105–7.

⁷⁷ Bernet, "*Gebaute Apokalypse*", 102–9; Klötzer, 'The Melchiorites and Münster', 232–7.

apparent in central German Anabaptism. Fuchs's account in 1528 said there would be four fires lit in Erfurt, so he may have been thinking of the four gospels. Römer claimed that he would light seven fires in the city, calling to mind the seven seals, the seven candlesticks, or any other of the uses of the number seven in Revelation. Dionysius Mansfeld referred explicitly to Revelation 7 when he said that there were twelve races, and out of each, 12,000 would be saved. He and his friends did not need to worry, however, as they were already in the number of the elect.⁷⁸ Even the authorities slipped into this eschatological patter. When Erfurt council warned that there were Anabaptists in four corners of the world, it called to mind the four angels in Revelation who stood at the four points of the earth.⁷⁹

Events were never going to replicate precisely the pattern in Revelation, and the whirl of signs and numbers had explosive potential as they allowed individuals to create their own narrative. People had varying memories of what they were told about the sequence of apocalyptic events. The group of Anabaptists arrested in Grossenbach in December 1529 received warnings about the end of the world from Georg von Staffelstein, Nikolas Schreiber, and Melchior Rinck, although not everyone could remember all the details. Doll Frank knew that there would be seven plagues, although he could only recollect four: blood, water, fire, and stone.⁸⁰ In contrast, Veit Pickert, one of Römer's followers, recalled the detail that 'then an earthquake would come over the whole world' (the seventh plague).⁸¹ People often created their own visions of the impending judgement, filling in gaps when they had not been given all the detail, and this added vivid potency to the ideas. Römer's follower Kestner said that 'in a short time a sharp wind would blow and many people would die'.⁸² While collectively people shared a sense of fear that the end of the world was

⁷⁸ 'Es soltin aus den zwelf geschlechten aus jedem geschlecht zwelf tausend selig werden . . . umb das sacrament dorften sie sich nicht kummern, dan sie weren bereit in der zal der auserwelten'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 260–1; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 80v.

⁷⁹ 'das solche widderteufen und neue verbundtnis in vier orten der werlt sol erregt werden'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 265; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 35r.

⁸⁰ 'ungeverlich umb des neuen jarstag got die welt straffen werd mit sieben plagen durch wasser, blut, feuer und stain, der ander drei wiss er nicht'; *TAH*, 23. See also Ellen Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts?: Religious Dissidence and the Reformation in the Landgraviate of Hesse', DPhil dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 2008, 34.

⁸¹ 'das die welt nit lenger dan eilf monat stehen, also dan wurde ein erpidem uber die ganze welt kommen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 289; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 94v.

⁸² 'es wurde nach in kurzer zeit ein scharf wind wehen und noch mancher undergehen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 255–6; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 27v.

near, their personal interpretations of this impending horror gave them ownership of these ideas.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of an individualized, fantastical interpretation, which gives us an insight into how such visions were constructed, came from the Augsburg Anabaptist, Augustin Bader.⁸³ Bader had been associated with Anabaptists in Augsburg, including Hut, but after the brutal repressions in the city in 1528, he seems to have become increasingly unstable. Convinced that the apocalypse was near, Bader gathered associates, renting a mill at Lautern near Blaubeuren. He named his infant son as the Messiah and sovereign ruler of the kingdom of God that would soon be upon them. Fine robes and golden apparel, which were intended to symbolize the power of Bader's future realm, were made. In his confession given on 22 January 1530, Bader asserted:

And as a sign, signification, and fulfilment of this matter, as now mentioned, he had a crown, sceptre, chain, dagger, a sword, and clothes made . . . and he put the sceptre in the hand of one of his other children, who is about five years old, and he laid the crown and sword on his table, and he wore the clothes, the dagger, and chain in the presence of all his other companions, to prove the future power of his young child, who is half a year old.⁸⁴

Bader's views may have seemed to have been little more than wild, imaginative ramblings, but Anselm Schubert's recent biography has reintegrated him into his contemporary cultural context and shown how his time in Strasbourg and his connection to the Jewish community in Worms exposed him to a whole range of cabbalist interpretations. Bader said that a priest named Oswald Leber, whom he had met in Strasbourg, had helped him understand the apocalypse; Oswald had been instructed from the Hebrew texts and told by a Jew that the end of the world was approaching. The Jewish man was on the way to the real Jerusalem and invited Oswald to join him, telling him the house and street where he could be found.⁸⁵ Bader absorbed ideas from these contacts and reworked

⁸³ Anselm Schubert, *Täuferium und Kabbalah: Augustin Bader und die Grenzen der Radikalen Reformation* (Gütersloh, 2008).

⁸⁴ 'Und zw anzaigung, bedeutung und erfüllung der ding, wie itzt gemelt, so hab er ain cron, ain zepter, ketten, dolchen, ain schwert und claiden lassen machen . . . und hab einem anderm seinem kind, das bei funf jaren alt sei, den zepter in sein hand geben und die cron und schwert auf sein disch gelegt, und hab er die claiden und den dolchen und ketten angehabt in beisein der andern aller seiner mitgesellen, damit zwbezeugen den zukunfftigen gewalt seins jungen kinds, das ains halben jars alt sei'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 315; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 990, fo. 2.

⁸⁵ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 317–18; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 990, fo. 4v. For details on Oswald Leber and Bader's relationship to the cabbalist tradition and other cultural contexts see Schubert, *Täuferium und Kabbalah*, 70–103, 257–84, 309.

them into a dramatically staged scenario where he tried to give physical expression to his fantastical understandings.

REMEMBERING DREAMS

Bader said that signs had been shown to him in revelations and prophecies sent by God. Such precognition in this period was often connected with states of mental disassociation, such as dreams and trances.⁸⁶ Dreams remained an important part of Reformation culture, although Luther was often sceptical about them. Melanchthon was less dismissive but saw the need to distinguish between truly godly dreams and those that were inspired by the Devil.⁸⁷ However, for many religious groups, especially marginal ones, dreams could be an important source of authority. Jakob Storger said when he was interrogated on 12 October 1537 in Mühlhausen:

He also thinks highly of dreams, which lead to the Gospel. He said, Müntzer's teaching was right and he followed him, as he grasped the inner word so well, and the proof of that is that he wielded the outer sword with the inner word.⁸⁸

Dreams at night were experienced by individuals, but dreams of the prophetic kind were also meant to be remembered as public *Weissagung*, true statements of a heavenly message. To be part of a historical record, dreams had to be remembered and narrated, and as they were retold they became not only personal accounts but also cultural constructs. In the words of

⁸⁶ Christa Tuczay, 'Trance Prophets and Diviners in the Middle Ages', in Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (eds), *Demons, Spirits, Witches*, i: *Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest, 2005), 216.

⁸⁷ Siegfried Bräuer, "... einige aber sind Natürliche, andere Göttliche, wieder andere Teuflische ..." Melanchthon und die Träume', in Siegfried Bräuer, *Spottgedichte, Träumer, und Polemik in den frühen Jahren der Reformation*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz and Eike Wolgast (Leipzig, 2000), 223–54; Goertz, 'Träume, Offenbarungen, und Visionen in der Reformation', in Rainer Postel and Franklin Kopitzsch (eds), *Reformation und Revolution: Beiträge zum politischen Wandel und den sozialen Kräften am Beginn der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1989), 171–92. See also on the history of dreams and prophecy: Peter Burke, 'L'histoire sociale des rêves', *Annales* 28 (1973), 329–42; Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley, CA, 1995); Janine Rivière, "'Visions of the Night': The Reform of Popular Dream Beliefs in Early Modern England", *Parergon* 20 (2003), 109–38.

⁸⁸ 'Er helt auch vil von treume, die sich zum evangelio ziehen. Sagt, Munzerß lere sei recht gewest und hengt im an, so vil das innerliche wort ergreift, und bewerets damit, das er das eusserliche schwert mit dem innerlichen wort gefurt habe'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 429; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 111.

Pick and Roper, a dream 'is a stunning compression of thought and fantasy, dreads and desires, materials distantly past and immediately present, put back together in illusory narrative coherence, itself worked over in the secondary revisions when it is retold'.⁸⁹ Dreams, therefore, are not remembrance in an obvious, uncomplicated sense, but they contain an element of memory which could become particularly important when related to prophecy and apocalypticism.

For Anabaptists in central Germany, dreams did not seem to produce charismatic visionary leadership but they might be part of a creative memory which bound brothers and sisters together in faith by linking them to a wider narrative of divine prophecy. This was especially true when dreams of others were retold, vividly demonstrated by Jörg von Passau, baptized by Hut, in a letter to his fellow Anabaptists written in 1528. He said God had given them a revelation through one of their brothers in prison.

Then he was condemned to death, when a revelation came to him, that he was to escape from prison. Then all his restraints were loosened. And he stood up and went out through seven doors, which were shut but which all opened before him.⁹⁰

This vision contained symbolic references to this man's mission to go out and spread the word. Like Albrecht Dürer's famous dream of 1525 when a great flood swept away the land, it also invoked apocalyptic imagery.⁹¹ Once more the number seven played an important role. The story had the feel of a biblical vision, and the dream with its mythical, anagogic formation was a particularly appropriate form for this kind of remembrance: remembrance which also pointed to the future. Konrad Friedrich said that Römer told him that if he let himself be baptized, God would reveal to him all that was hidden and 'dreams of this would come to him, whose contents he should study, if he should act and behave according to them, then everything he needed would be

⁸⁹ Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper (eds), *Dreams and History: The Interpretation of Dreams from Ancient Greece to Modern Psychoanalysis* (London, 2003), 9.

⁹⁰ 'Lieben bruder und schwester im Herrn, ich thu euch kunt, das uns Got, almechtig, hat geoffentwart durch einen bruder, den Got erweckt hat durch seinen heiligen geist in der gefencknus . . . do hat man im verurteilt zum tod, da ist im ein offenwarung komen, er sol ausgen aus der gefencknis. Da sein im alle pand los worden, und ist ufgestanden und ist ausgangen durch sieben thur, die verschlossen sein gewesen, die sein alle vor im ufgangen; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 307; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 27–8.

⁹¹ Jeffrey Chipps Smith, 'Dürer's Losses and the Dilemmas of Being', in Lynne Tatlock (ed.), *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives* (Leiden, 2010), 89–90.

given to him'.⁹² Unfortunately we do not know whether Friedrich ever interpreted his dreams, but we can imagine him trying to remember his sleeping thoughts and what Römer had said, endeavouring to fit his dreams into a framework of divine revelation.

* * *

As Anabaptist identity developed, much of the context was provided by the Peasants' War with its apocalyptic hopes and forceful figures, yet Anabaptism was not just a continuation of its social and political ethics. The peasant uprisings were only part of the milieu and were symptomatic of the wider backdrop in which Anabaptism evolved. Anabaptists selected elements of the linguistic and conceptual framework of the early rhetoric of the Reformation, and these concepts, selectively applied, were interwoven with a sense of the importance of particular times, locations in central Germany, such as Mühlhausen, and figures such as Müntzer, as well as individual experiences like day-to-day travel and personal conversations. The impact of the Peasants' War in Thuringia is a story of the power of memories ordered around certain people and places, as well as particular words and ideas.

In a movement which relied on talking and oral transmission, memory was always important. The mobility of central German Anabaptists facilitated the sharing of information. An exodus of Hans Hut's followers from the Saxon enclave of Königsberg to Frankenhausen meant that the story of his activities and death travelled with them. Hans Muller, tried in Frankenhausen in January 1530, provided his own potted history of the Anabaptist movement which others in his group must have heard, even if they had not known Hut. 'The brotherhood started soon after the Peasants' War, and their leader was killed at Augsburg; his name was Hans Hut, and he was previously a school master in Bibra'.⁹³ In this way something like Halbwachs's concept of social memory was constructed. Personal, recollected experiences could be knitted into a grander narrative which functioned on a more distant, intangible level, supporting a dissonant identity, at odds with the dominant values of sixteenth-century German society. In how they chose to remember and what they chose to forget, Anabaptists forged their own character from the rhetoric and events of the early Reformation.

⁹² 'Deßgleichen wurden im treume zufallen, darauß er studiren, darnach er sich dan richten und halten soll, wurde im alles, was im von nothen gegeben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 286; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 90.

⁹³ 'bruderschaft habe sich balde nach dem bawerkriege angefangen, und irer vorsteiner sei zu Augsburg getödet, habe Hans Hut gehissen und sei zuvor ein schulmeister gewesen zu Bibra'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 313; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 67v.

4

Believing in Baptism

As 1533 came to a close, Valentin Schade from Unterbreitzbach was expecting a new addition to his family: his wife was pregnant, with twins as it turned out, though the Schades probably could not have known this. But on the Sunday after New Year's Day in 1534 his wife fell ill and complications arose. The unfortunate woman gave birth to one child on Tuesday morning which, although weak, lived, and on Wednesday morning the other infant was stillborn. The health of the mother and the surviving baby deteriorated, and both died on Friday, leaving Schade a childless widower. This was a sad if common enough story in early modern Germany. What was unusual about this particular instance was Valentin Schade's response, which caught the disapproving attention of Martin von der Tann, the *Amtmann* in Vacha. In most instances, a child as sick as the remaining twin would be urgently baptized in case it died prematurely, but Schade expressly forbade baptism for his ailing infant, although the midwife, who was Schade's aunt, wanted to perform the rite. Rumours circulated that the child had been comparatively healthy but that Schade might even have mortally injured the infant so that it would not have to be baptized. Witnesses claimed that when they saw the baby, it was weak but not at death's door. Schade himself maintained that the child had inherited some fatal illness from its mother. Even if he had not killed the infant, he nevertheless showed a remarkable resignation to the tragedies of his wife's pregnancy; he felt he had done the right thing by his family, and although his spouse too died of her illness, he was content that she had departed this world in the true faith.¹

Such a seemingly callous response ran counter to profound concerns in early modern society about the salvation of children and was abhorrent to Catholic and Lutheran theology alike. Refusing to baptize one's

¹ *TAH*, 77–8. See also Marlies Mattern, *Leben im Abseits: Frauen und Männer im Täuferium (1525–1550): Eine Studie zur Alltagsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 138–9.

children was, according to the Catholic Johann Fabri, equivalent to sacrificing them to the Devil.² In contrast, Schade believed that an incorrect baptism was more damaging than letting his child die; possibly, if the allegations were true, he might even have believed that murdering the unbaptized infant was preferable to letting it receive the rite. What could have provoked such insouciance in a father and husband? Schade was a confessed Anabaptist. He had been arrested the previous summer and appeared before the chancellery in Kassel.³ His extreme solution to the problem of infant baptism suggests that Anabaptism radically overturned the customary worries surrounding childbirth, when usually every effort was made to ensure that children were baptized, saved from the Devil, and admitted into the Christian community before it was too late.

Existing accounts of Anabaptism have tended to look at the theological 'grown-up' message of baptism.⁴ Anabaptists themselves had other priorities. Baptism was an inescapable part of birthing rituals; assaults on its efficacy were thus naturally bundled up in a wider discussion about children and childbearing, and before committing to believer's baptism, people first had to entertain the possibility that infant baptism was useless and perhaps even actively damaging. When the Anabaptist preacher Jakob Storger was executed by drowning in the river Unstrut on 8 November 1537, he and his companions called out to the onlookers:

Repent, repent, you great obstinate horde, abstain from the dog's bath, the swine's bath and disgusting, filthy bath of child baptism; turn, convert yourselves to our small flock, for this is the right path of belief. Do not follow and accept the simoniacs, for they seduce you.⁵

Rather than reasoning with his audience that adults should be baptized because they could understand faith, Storger ranted that they should reject infant baptism because it was detrimental to the child, dismissing the rite with vulgar language. Calling the rite a 'dog's bath' implied

² Gary K. Waite, *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe, 1525–1600* (Toronto, ON, 2007), 39.

³ *TAH*, 77.

⁴ See for example Rollin S. Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale, PA, 1966).

⁵ 'Thut buesse, thut buesse, ir verstocketn leute der großen menge, stehet abe von dem hundebade, sawbade und sodelbade der kinder taufe, kert und wendt euch zu uns wenigen haufen, dan ditz ist der rechte weg des glaubens. Folget und nehmet nit an die taubenkremer, dan sie vorfuren euch'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 446; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 155r.

that baptizing children was akin to baptizing beasts, since animals, like infants, were in no position to understand and speak. Reformation polemic was littered with allusions to animals and animalistic behaviour, with beasts such as pigs, dogs, cats, and wolves used to represent the corruption and ignorance of the Roman Church.⁶ Furthermore, baptism, in Storger's eyes, did not purify infants but might well harm children and would make them filthy.

It was one thing for a theologian to reject infant baptism because it had no scriptural basis, but quite another for expectant parents to dismiss the whole apparatus of baptism as a magical ritual. Storger's attack was not based on exegesis but reflected a thornier problem about sacramental procedure: was bad practice worse than no rite at all? Melchior Rinck thought so. In his view, the Devil was not necessarily present within a child at birth but could be introduced by wrongful infant baptism. During his interview with Balthasar Raidt, the preacher in Hersfeld, in 1528, Rinck was called to account for disagreeing with both Lutheran and Catholic baptism and for proclaiming that all children who received the sacrament were offered up to the Devil.⁷

By participating in a debate which was fundamental to Lutheran theology about sign and signified, sacrament and testament, Anabaptists came to the conclusion that the sign of infant baptism did not match up to the process it was supposed to effect. As they disputed the efficacy of the consecrated water or the potency of the words of baptismal exorcism, they arrived at novel conclusions about human nature and the character of sin. Most Anabaptists never denied that baptism in some way made up for human failings, but they refused to believe that baptism was indispensable for cleansing children of original sin. Anabaptists argued that sin only had an impact at the age when individuals could understand what it meant to do something wrong. Anabaptism reconfigured not only the theological but also the social and emotional significance of infant baptism, and the alternative view of children it offered may have made it an attractive prospect to some parents in early modern Germany.

⁶ Joachim Vadian's *Das Wolffgesang: Eyn ander hertz, ein ander kleid* (Basel, 1521) attacked Catholic opponents characterized as different animals; see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2005), 166; Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), 74–7.

⁷ *TAH*, 4; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 295.

CULTURAL MEANINGS OF BAPTISM

The baptismal ritual in early modern Europe was something of a contradiction: although it was performed on children, it was essentially designed for adults as, until the fourth century, baptizands were normally grown men and women. Children were brought to the threshold of the church where the priest put questions to the infant, most crucially 'What is your name?' These queries were answered for them by godparents. Next there followed a series of lengthy exorcisms to expel the Devil, before the child was brought to the font and the sacrament performed. The infant was asked whether it was ready to live under God's rule and commit to the true faith (responses once more provided by the attendant godparent), and when the baptismal washing had been carried out, the child was given a white robe and candle as a symbol of purity.⁸ Mothers were normally absent from the baptism itself, but the ritual had gradually become part of the series of interrelated practices that accompanied pregnancy and childbearing designed to protect both mother and child.

Before it was cleansed, named, and made part of the community, the child was perceived to be a target for seduction by the Devil, for it occupied a liminal state between acceptance and rejection, between alienation and socialization. Concern for and even fear of children who were in this 'No Man's Land' manifested themselves in beliefs about evil spirits that might attack them; in the Alsace region the *Doggele* or *Letzekäppel* with its back to front bonnet was believed to sit on children and suffocate them, and in Sarrebourg the *Erdmännchen* sucked children's blood at night time.⁹ Celebrating a child's arrival with baptism distinguished the boy or girl as an individual, valued member of the Christian community. Assigning children a name also helped to order grief and memory in the case of premature death. Kaufmann Linz from Trier gave his sixth-born child the same name and godparents of his fifth child who had died eight months earlier, thereby incorporating the deceased infant within the collective memory of the family.¹⁰

⁸ For the late medieval rite see Michael J. Halvorson, 'Theology, Ritual, and Confessionalization: The Making and Meaning of Lutheran Baptism in Reformation Germany, 1520–1618', DPhil dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 2001, 27–39; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (1997; 2nd edn, London, 2007), 43–9; Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1992), 1–32.

⁹ Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Rosemary Morris (Cambridge, 1991), 194; Karen E. Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva: The Shaping of a Community, 1536–1564* (Aldershot, 2005), 34.

¹⁰ Eva Labouvie, *Andere Umstände: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Geburt* (Cologne, 1998), 176.

With infant mortality high, young children hovered on the boundary between life and death, and while midwives might be life-savers, they could all too easily become undertakers.¹¹ The Limbo of Catholic theology reflected this uncertainty, and even in Virgil's pre-Christian imagining of the Underworld in the *Aeneid*, a special place was reserved for 'the weeping spirits of babies, whom on the first threshold, since they did not share in sweet life and had been torn from the breast, the black day carried away and plunged in bitter death'.¹² In Christian theology this boundary between life and death was invested with even more importance since it was baptism that made the difference between salvation and damnation.

When the baptism ritual was performed, therefore, it tried to satisfy a wide variety of needs by combining elements of purification, exorcism, acceptance into the Christian community and into society.¹³ It was traditionally a form of church 'magic', which coincided with popular magical ideas, although it was always open to undesirable manipulation if not executed properly.¹⁴ This was most vividly evident in the roles of sacramentals, like blessed water and salt. These para-liturgical sacred objects, often used for apotropaic purposes, were essential to baptismal exorcisms.¹⁵ The late medieval Catholic ritual was obsessed with the idea of expelling the Devil, a practice where institutional religion converged with popular thaumaturgic practice, for once purified, the infant was granted access to the Christian community not only in this life but also the next and was free from the influence of maleficent shadows.¹⁶ So urgent was this requirement and so precarious was the status of the newborn, that midwives were permitted to perform emergency baptisms if the child was sickly and likely to die, and in

¹¹ Gélis, *Les enfants des limbes: Mort-nés et parents dans l'Europe chrétienne* (Paris, 2006); Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 158–9; Labouvie, *Beistand in Kindsnöten: Hebammen und weibliche Kultur auf dem Land (1550–1910)* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 10.

¹² 'infantumque animae flentes, in limine primo/ quos dulcis vitae exsortis et ab ubere raptos/ abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo'; Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI* (Loeb edn, London, 1965), Book VI, lines 426–9.

¹³ For a discussion of the importance of baptism in communities and its controversies see Halvorson, 'Theology, Ritual, and Confessionalization', 1–11; Spierling, *Infant Baptism*, 4–10.

¹⁴ Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 233–4; Waite, *Devil's Minions*, 23–5; Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 43–50.

¹⁵ Scribner, 'Cosmic Order and Daily Life: Sacred and Secular in Pre-Industrial Germany', in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), 5–7.

¹⁶ Old, *Baptismal Rite*, 10. Old argues that exorcisms dominated baptismal rites on the eve of the Reformation. On exorcism see Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927–42), ii: 1101–5.

extreme cases dead babies might be 'revived' so that they could be blessed.¹⁷ The most famous birthing manual from late medieval Germany, Eucharius Rösslin's *The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives*, criticized any midwife who let infants die without baptism; responsibility for their eternal damnation lay at the negligent woman's door.¹⁸

One way of understanding baptism is to see it as a rite of passage: a practical expression of a psychological journey by individual and community. Arnold van Gennep's way of conceptualizing the role of ritual in the life cycle of human existence has been particularly influential. As we pass through life's different stages and cross from one social group to another, rites with broadly similar characteristics across cultures facilitate this passage.¹⁹ Victor Turner expanded on Gennep's notion of the liminal stage of transition in ritual, arguing that the 'characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming'.²⁰ There are advantages to such an approach. Anthropological analyses of baptism have exposed how ritual intersects with deep-seated and very human concerns about the meaning of life and death and the boundaries of communal existence, and can help explain the relationship between performance of ritual and the psychologies of individuals and communities.

Yet recent scholars have suggested that anthropological models have their limits, for they are artificial and reductionist. Most notably, Philipp Buc has drawn attention to the fact that there is a disjuncture between the reality of the practice of medieval rites and the term 'ritual' as developed by twentieth-century social scientists. Because information about medieval rituals comes from texts that themselves seek to establish truths and interpret the world, the author and reality behind the text is inaccessible;

¹⁷ Silvano Cavazza, 'Double Death: Resurrection and Baptism in a Seventeenth-Century Rite', in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (eds), *History From Crime*, trans. Corrada Biazzo Curry, Margaret A. Gallucci, and Mary M. Gallucci (Baltimore, MD, 1994), 1–31; Gélis, *Les enfants des limbes*, 26–9; Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 172–84; Gary K. Waite, 'Between the Devil and the Inquisitor: Anabaptists, Diabolical Conspiracies, and Magical Beliefs in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands', in Werner O. Packull and Geoffrey L. Dipple (eds), *Radical Reformation Studies: Essays Presented to James M. Stayer* (Aldershot, 1999), 120–40.

¹⁸ 'Wenn nun solches kind verdirbt/ Vnd on den heiligen tauff erstirbt/ Die hebamm schuldig ist daran/ On gots gesicht muß ewig ston/ Thut ir den hymel selbs beschliessen'. This appeared in many editions; the text is taken from the 1515 edition. Eucharius Rösslin, *Der Swangern frauen vnd hebammen rosgarten* (Hagenau, 1515), A4v. See also Halvorson, 'Theology, Ritual, and Confessionalization', 208–10.

¹⁹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London, 2004).

²⁰ Turner first published his work in French in 1907. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York, 1995), 94. See also Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (1997; 2nd edn, Cambridge, 2005), 21–33.

the best the historian can hope to achieve is an anthropological analysis of medieval *textual* practices. This alerts us to a wider problem. There is, Buc contends, no enduring and universal concept of 'ritual' as an analytical tool, for the idea itself is the culmination of years of gestation, ultimately just a product of modern theoretical thinking, which when applied to medieval Europe provides a seductively easy but ultimately deceptive nexus between the past and the present.²¹ Will Coster and David Cressy, who have both examined changing religious rituals in Reformation England, criticize anthropology for making sweeping statements about the ways in which human beings order the rhythms of life; such generalizations do not help us to explore baptism's specific historical characteristics and obscure the ambiguity of ritual meaning. We must instead, they suggest, examine the localized social and theological context of baptism.²²

The great strength of an anthropological approach is the emphasis it places on practice and its connection to mentalities; its great weakness is the overarching, static view of the mental worlds that lie behind that practice. However, instead of relying on an anthropological model which contends that rites pacified or soothed fears and points of fracture in society as van Gennep does, we will focus on identifying the issues of conflict to which the baptismal ritual gave expression and what happened to those concerns when the rite was altered. Baptism attempted to balance anxieties about the boundaries between life and death, damned and saved, but this equilibrium was always precarious, and as ritual and spiritual life was transformed in the confessional struggles of the sixteenth century, rites that had once seemed adequate could no longer contain these emotional conflicts.

BAPTISM IN THE REFORMATION

As early as November 1519 Luther expressed his opinion on the problem of baptism. In a printed sermon he reconfigured the meaning of the rite in terms of man's relationship with God as a perpetual sinner.²³ Luther emphasized that baptism was essential, as men are all born in sin, although no one emerged from baptism perfected; rather baptism had relevance

²¹ Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, 1992); Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

²² David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), 98; Will Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2002), 45–9.

²³ *Ein Sermon von dem heyligen hochwirdigen Sacrament der Tauffe* (1519); LW 35: 25–43; WA *Schriften*, 2: 727–37.

until the moment of death. After being baptized, people struggle to live a Christian life until the time when God would make them anew on the Day of Judgement. Luther envisaged this act as a literal rebirth, when God reformed mankind as he might a pot.²⁴ Partly on this basis Luther defended infant baptism against accusations that children could not understand: he argued that the faith of the receiver should not be the basis for baptism since it was dependent on the grace of God.²⁵

Luther wanted to strip away external paraphernalia from the sacrament, as he worried that people had become too preoccupied with the performative aspect of the rite and failed to see its true inner meaning.²⁶ He provided two translations of the baptismal liturgy in 1523 and 1526 which began to transform what he regarded as the magical elements by omitting some of the exorcisms and adornments. Yet Luther's versions still owed much to the traditional service. The 1523 ordinance retained the sacramental objects used for exorcisms in the Catholic ritual. The priest 'shall now take the child, put salt into his mouth, and say: "N., receive the salt of wisdom. May it aid thee to eternal life. Amen. Peace be with thee."²⁷ The 1526 version was more radical, and this was at least partly due to Luther's desire to respond to criticisms from reformers like Zwingli, Müntzer, and Karlstadt. More exorcisms were removed, as were two traditional prayers, the exsufflation, the anointing with the oil, and the use of candles.²⁸

However, exorcism still retained an important place in the liturgy, and the sacrament opened with the following imprecation: 'Depart thou unclean spirit and give room to the Holy Spirit', after the priest had blown three times under the child's eyes.²⁹ In Lutheran territories baptismal ordinances generally followed the service outlined by the Wittenberg reformer, and exorcisms were still employed, although in this limited form, in the second half of the sixteenth century.³⁰ In her study of the way in which ritual life was transformed in the German Reformation, Susan C. Karant-Nunn points out that Lutheran areas were distinctive in this respect; elsewhere reformed baptismal rites were stripped back more heavily, with exorcisms being a notable removal.³¹ Reforms also restricted

²⁴ LW 35: 32; WA *Schriften*, 2: 729.

²⁵ Jaroslav J. Pelikan, 'Luther's Defense of Infant Baptism', in Carl S. Meyer (ed.), *Luther for an Ecumenical Age* (St Louis, MO, 1967), 200–18.

²⁶ On Luther's ideas on baptism see Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 50–3.

²⁷ LW 53: 97; WA *Schriften*, 12: 44. See also *Wie man recht und verständlich einen Menschen zum Christenglauben taufen soll* (1523): 'Der teuffer nympt saltz in dye finger und stost es in des Kindes mundt und spricht: Nym hin das saltz der weyszheit du, dem got gnedigk ist'; WA *Schriften*, 12: 52.

²⁸ Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 51–3; Sehling i: 21–3.

²⁹ LW 53: 96; WA *Schriften*, 19: 539.

³⁰ Sehling i: 18. ³¹ Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 53–61.

the festivities which accompanied the ritual. Certain times of days were specified for baptisms and limitations were placed on the food and wine that could be drunk at the subsequent celebrations.³² Even Catholic areas witnessed change. A mandate produced in 1538 in the county of Henneberg for example, which remained Catholic until the 1540s but was not unsympathetic to Lutheran reforms, complained that people were spending over their income at weddings and baptisms, so no more than eight women could be present at the baptism.³³

The process of reform in the Saxon lands was enlivened by the more vituperative attacks on infant baptism in central Germany in particular, by groups such as the Zwickau Prophets—Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel, and Marcus (Thomae) Stübner—who came to Wittenberg from Zwickau over the Christmas of 1521.³⁴ The Prophets challenged the rationale behind paedobaptism, justifying their views, as Melancthon warned Elector Frederick in December, by claiming they were ‘apostolic and prophetic men’ to whom God had revealed his message.³⁵ Stübner proclaimed that Mark 16:16 (Whoever believes and is baptized is saved) demonstrated that ‘children who are baptized before the age of reason have no baptism.’³⁶ In December 1521 former associates of the Zwickau Prophets, including a weaver named Kaspar Teucher, his wife, and an Austrian journeyman weaver called Hans von der Freystadt, were arrested; all advocated adult baptism, since they believed that not even godparents could help children to acquire the necessary faith.³⁷

³² Andrea Reichart, ‘Wochenbett und Kindertaufe: Die Privatisierung des Alltags in den Satzungen der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt Essen’, in Bea Lundt (ed.), *Vergessene Frauen an der Ruhr: Von Herrscherinnen und Hörigen, Hausfrauen und Hexen 800–1800* (Cologne, 1992), 131–73. See also Peter M. Kitson, ‘Religious Change and the Timing of Baptism in England, 1538–1750’, *Historical Journal* 52 (2009), 269–94.

³³ ‘jnen mehr dan ihr vermogen auflegen’, ThStAM, GHA III, No.19, fo. 1r.

³⁴ The Bender school vigorously rejected these claims. See Harold S. Bender, ‘The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Müntzer, and the Anabaptists’, *MQR* 27.1 (1958), 3–16. See Stayer’s work on the importance of Saxon radicalism for the baptism debate: Stayer ‘Sächsischer Radikalismus und Schweizer Täuferum: Die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten’, in Günter Vogler (ed.), *Wegscheiden der Reformation: Alternatives Denken vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1994), 151–78.

³⁵ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition, 1500–1547: The Reformation as an Agent of Change* (Columbus, OH, 1987), 106–9. ‘Audiui eos: mira sunt, quae de sese predicant, missos se clara voce Dei ad docendum esse, esse sibi cum Deo familiaria colloquia, videre future, breuiter, viros esse propheticos et aspotolicos; Nikolas Müller (ed.), *Die Wittenberger Bewegung 1521 und 1522: Die Vorgänge in und um Wittenberg während Luthers Wartburgaufenthalt: Briefe, Akten u. dgl. und Personalien*, (Leipzig, 1911), 129. See also the questioning of Nicolas Storch and Hans Lew; QGTii: 4–9.

³⁶ ‘die kinder, dy man ytz tauff, ee sy vernunfft haben, sey kein Tauff’; *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, 161. See also Calvin Augustine Pater, *Karlstadt as the Father of the Baptist Movements: The Emergence of Lay Protestantism* (1984; 2nd edn, Lewiston, NY, 1993), 107.

³⁷ Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition*, 112–13.

Karlstadt and Müntzer also contributed to the range of views on offer in central Germany. Müntzer's views on baptism are somewhat confusing, since he objected to the manner in which infant baptism was practised but did not seem to advocate adult baptism. In the reform programme that he inaugurated in Allstedt it was clear that he still intended to baptize infants, but the godparents had to recognize the true meaning of the act and ensure the child's future conduct.³⁸ Karlstadt's musings on baptism, which were scattered across his work, developed gradually. First he questioned the efficacy of the external rite and the ability of children to participate meaningfully in the ritual, and, like Luther, criticized the accoutrements used at baptism. He argued that it was better to leave 'water and salt, palms and herbs, garlic and horse-radish unblest' and do away with them, considering the evil uses to which they were put.³⁹ As time went on, he increasingly stressed the importance of spiritual baptisms in the salvific blood of Christ. After Karlstadt had been expelled from Wittenberg, he was invited to become the preacher in Orlamünde, where he had the chance to translate theory into practice. He halted infant baptism in the town. Even his own wife Anna would not succumb to pressure to have her child baptized while Karlstadt himself was away.⁴⁰ Possibly the only work to contain his complete and mature baptismal theology is an anonymous tract, entitled *Dialogue on the Baptism of Children* (1527), attributed to Karlstadt by Alejandro Zorzin.⁴¹ The author argued that baptism must be accompanied by proper faith and anyone who baptized 'under-age' children was trying to measure Christ's ability to see into men. True baptism was that of spirit, not external water.

Preachers in the reformed Saxon lands waged a sustained assault on the corruptions that had crept into the practice of baptism, but the ensuing changes created uncertainty rather than consensus among the laity. One

³⁸ 'Wann bei vns ein kindt getaufft wirt, so vormanet man die gefattern bey yren selen selickheit, das sie sollen drauff achtung haben, was man bey der tauffe handelt, auff das sie es hernach dem kinde so es erwechset mugen vorhalten'; Thomas Müntzer, *Ordnung vnd berechnung des Teutschen ampts zu Alstadt* (Eilenburg, 1524), B1r.

³⁹ 'Ich sag angesehen die böse übung, so in saltz und wasser gehalten, das vil besser vnd zu der seligkeit nützer were, das man wasser und saltz, palmen und kreüter, knoblauch vnd meretich vngeweiht ließ, vndd gar auß der kirchenn thet'; Andreas Karlstadt, *Von geweychtem Wasser vnd Saltz Wider den vnuerdienten Gardian Franciscus Seyler* (Strasbourg, 1520), A3r.

⁴⁰ The child was later baptized and Luther himself was present; WA *Briefe* 4, No. 984: Martin Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf, 9 March or shortly before 1526, 35–6. It seems that Luther may also have been godfather to Karlstadt's older child. See Pater, *Karlstadt*, 106, 238.

⁴¹ Alejandro Zorzin, 'Karlstadt's "Dialogus von Tauff der Kinder" in einem anonymen Wormser Druck aus dem Jahr 1527', *ARG* 79 (1988), 27–58.

group of Anabaptists apprehended in 1539 in a town called Sagan (now Żagań), a Wettin enclave far east in modern-day Poland, were not clear what baptism meant.⁴² Simon Schneider said he did not know whether he was unbaptized or baptized but was certain what he had been told: baptism instituted by Christ was the best form of the rite, which left ambiguous whether by this he meant 'adult baptism'.⁴³

The changes of the Reformation deeply unsettled the nexus of ideas associated with the rite of baptism and raised important queries in the minds of the laity about the actual meaning of the ritual and its function within a salvific framework, especially since lay people did not always hear a complete or coherent message. Adam Angersbach, a follower of Melchior Rinck, disagreed with those who followed the Pope's teaching which placed so much faith in godparents, but he also criticized the rather unsatisfactory halfway house that Lutheranism seemed to occupy. 'If they knew that children did not have their own belief, they shouldn't baptise anymore'.⁴⁴ Mere confusion might be the upshot of such diversity. Barbara Adam, who was arrested as an Anabaptist in 1533 said, like Schneider, that 'she did not know whether she was a heathen or a Christian and simply did not know which was right or wrong out of child baptism and re-baptism'.⁴⁵

Much of this bewilderment was caused by the unique nature of Lutheran sacramental theology. In the popular imagination, as well as in pre- and post-Reformation thought, baptism was accorded tremendous salvific power. A woman suspected of Anabaptism known only as 'die Klenkhartin' was questioned in Frankenhausen in 1530 and stated 'she had been baptised in her childhood and hoped this would make her blessed'.⁴⁶ Baptism, in the polarized parameters in which Klenkhartin saw it, was perceived as a once and for all act. However, Lutheran baptism was not supposed to transform man's sinful nature completely, and the lines between good and evil were blurred.⁴⁷

⁴² SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 30r–33v.

⁴³ 'Sÿmon Schneider vom Loß, sagt, er wisse nicht ap er getauft ader vngetauft sei, aber wie mans mit ihm furgenommen habe, die tauffe die Christus hat ausgesagt heldet er vor die beste'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 31r.

⁴⁴ 'woe sie wosten, das kinder nit eigen glauben hettem, sie wolten nummer keins taufen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 328.

⁴⁵ 'sie wuste nicht, ob sie ein heyde oder Christ getaufft were vnd wust gar von keiner kynder oder widdertawff, welchs recht oder unrecht were'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 170; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, fo. 8v.

⁴⁶ 'sie sei in der kintheit getauft worden, verhoffe in der selig zuwerden'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 312; SHStAD, GA10024, 10328/1, 67r.

⁴⁷ 'Therefore those people err greatly who think that through baptism they have become wholly pure'; LW 35: 36; WA *Schriften*, 2: 732.

Baptism started to heal a wound but it stayed with the baptizand until death.⁴⁸

In Luther's eyes, an unbaptized child was 'possessed by the devil and is a child of sin and wrath', and thus the rite retained some of its power to absolve children from the stain of Adam and Eve's errors, a process prefigured in the Old Testament with the story of Noah and the flood when sinful people had drowned in the same way that sin was drowned in baptism.⁴⁹ Adding a prayer which compared the familiar image of the Great Flood with baptism to the 1523 liturgy only strengthened the association with the cleansing of sins.⁵⁰ For Luther, baptism was not an unthinking, unreflective absolution effected by mere water, but neither could the sacrament occur without the act of washing. In the *Large Catechism* he criticized those who claimed baptism was nothing more than dipping into a bird bath. The act of purification in water 'tears us from the jaws of the Devil, makes us God's own, dampens and removes sin, so that day by day the new man gets stronger'.⁵¹ The promise of God's word was made known or visible through the sign of sacraments like baptism, which was 'a spiritual death of sin and resurrection in God's grace'. For Luther the connection between testament and sacrament was self-evident; for others the link between the reformed ritual and the start of the salvific process was less clear. As changes occurred, people might not always be certain that baptism secured their salvation. Klenkhardt hoped the rite performed in her infancy would rescue her, but doubt was implied in her words. What if a new solution was offered?

EXORCISM AND INFANT BAPTISM

In 1545 Daniel Kestel, who hailed from Bergstadt Platten in the Erzgebirge, was questioned about his views on baptism. He told how he

⁴⁸ 'This significance of baptism—the dying or drowning of sin—is not fulfilled completely in this life'; LW 35: 30; WA *Schriften*, 2: 727, 729; 'After baptism original sin is like a wound which has begun to heal. It is really a wound, yet it is becoming better. . . . So original sin remains in the baptized until their death'; LW 54: 20; WA *Tischreden*, 1: No. 138: 60.

⁴⁹ LW 53: 101; WA *Schriften*, 12: 47. See also Luther's *Large Catechism* of 1529, WA *Schriften*, 30.i: 212–21. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), 192–6.

⁵⁰ LW 53: 97–9; WA *Schriften*, 12: 43; Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 51; Sehling i: 18.

⁵¹ 'so uns den Teuffel aus dem hals reisset, Gott zu eigen macht, die sund dempfft und weg nympt, darnach teglich den newen menschen stercket'; *Large Catechism* (1529); WA *Schriften*, 30.i: 221.

had gone to Peter Anger's inn to fetch beer for his wife during her lying-in period. One man invited him to take a seat, and he enjoyed a drink with the present company and sang a few hymns with them, including that most Lutheran of songs, 'Ein feste Burg'. Conversation turned to baptism. Kestel claimed he had heard it preached that children were pure creations of God and were not possessed by the Devil, so the words of the baptismal exorcism, 'Depart, you impure spirit', were completely redundant.⁵² Baptismal exorcisms dramatically laid bare what was at stake in these arguments over performance and sacramental significance. Performing an exorcism on an infant made a definitive statement that human nature was deeply tainted with original sin. Exorcisms were often physically violent events where the Devil had to be forcibly and visibly ejected by frightening movements, the smell of garlic and horse-radish, the sound and sensation of exsufflation, the sight of candles, and the taste of salt.⁵³ Luther retained exorcisms, but he also removed many of the visibly purifying elements of the baptismal ritual so that it lost the powerful experiential dimension it had possessed in Catholic liturgy. If the child still needed to be cleansed, but the external aids of the exorcism were eliminated, how could one be sure that the Devil was really gone?

An instruction to pastors by the visitors in electoral Saxony in 1528 betrays some of the tension surrounding the process of baptism. In line with Lutheran practice it instructed that 'one should attribute nothing to the chrisma or the chrism', but then went on to assert that 'the true chrism itself is the Holy Spirit', suggesting that parishioners needed assurance that something could expel the Devil.⁵⁴ Andreas Osiander in Nuremberg kept some of the exorcisms Luther had removed, while in Strasbourg reformers realized that the Latin prayers and exorcisms lost much of their mystery when translated into German.⁵⁵ Even Anabaptists could not let go of all traditional apparatus of the ritual. Salt was used at the baptism of the *Mordbrenner* Thomas Stoer; he said 'he was baptized with water, finally a cross was drawn on his forehead with water and salt'.⁵⁶ In his study of exorcism in the later sixteenth century, Philipp Stenzig points to the tension in Lutheran theology,

⁵² Paul Wappler, *Inquisition und Ketzerprozesse in Zwickau zur Reformationszeit: Dargestellt im Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung der Ansichten Luthers und Melanchthons über Glaubens—und Gewissensfreiheit* (Leipzig, 1908), 209.

⁵³ Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächthold-Stäubli, *Aberglaubens*, ii: 1107–8.

⁵⁴ 'Von dem chrisma oder kressem sol man sich nicht zanken. Denn der rechte chresem, selbs, ist der heilig geist'; Sehling i: 158.

⁵⁵ Old, *Baptismal Rite*, 42–5, 48.

⁵⁶ 'mit wasser getaufft, entlichen an seyne stiern, mit wasser vnd Saltzs eyn creutz gestrichen'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fol. 74r.

which maintained the possibility of adult possession but dismissed the traditional means to counter it.⁵⁷ With the enforcement of changes in baptism too, the sequence of *Zeichenfolgen* (to use Eva Labouvie's words) was severed, so that the apotropaic power of baptism was brought into question.⁵⁸ Changing the ritual by stripping back exorcisms led individuals to ask broader questions about whether baptism really did help deliver children from evil.

In 1544 the Lutheran theologian and superintendent of Eisenach, Justus Menius, complained to Landgrave Philip of Hesse about the pastor in the village of Niederdorla, Sebastian Thiel. Thiel did not perform baptism in accordance with official requirements, and even permitted adult baptism.⁵⁹ Menius's attention was caught by Thiel's views on exorcism in baptism, which was an essential weapon in the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Devil. According to Menius, children were bereft of the Holy Spirit. The efficacious baptismal rite which ordered the evil spirit to depart had to be performed as soon as possible so that children could be freed from the Devil's power.⁶⁰ But Thiel eliminated the exorcisms, salt, and oil when he baptized. He did not see the point, for original sin did not condemn children to damnation, nor were they subject to the power of the Devil at this young age.⁶¹

For Menius, this matter was a grave concern, 'because it is not only to do with external ceremonies but also principally about the main outlined articles of Christian faith'.⁶² Luther, in the explanatory notes at the end of his 1523 German translation of the baptism ritual, admitted that the externals of the ritual were not important but that he had kept them for weak people to make sure they were not suspicious of a new

⁵⁷ Philipp Stenzig, *Die Schule des Teufels: Der Exorzismus in den Glaubenskämpfen der Reformationszeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 123.

⁵⁸ Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 233.

⁵⁹ Wappler, *Stellung*, 227–30; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 2r–5r.

⁶⁰ 'Das aber diese Ceremonia des Exorcismi der hailigen schrifft gar nicht entgegen, sondern gantz gemes vnd bei der tauff woll zu gebrauchen sei, ist clar aus dem grunder, das gewis vnd vnwidrsprechlich war ist, das alle die, so ausser dein gnaden Raich vnsers ieben hern Jesu Christi sint, dieselbigen auch den hailigen gaist nicht haben, sondern alle sampt gewislich jns teuffels Raich vnder der Bosen gaister gewalt gefangen sint. So ist die tauff darumb von hern Christo eingesatzt.'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 228; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 3r.

⁶¹ 'Als das die jungen kinder, ehr dan sie dem gnaden Reich vnsers lieben hern Jesu Christi eingelebt, des Teuffells gewalt nicht vnderworfen. Zu dem auch, das die Erbsunde, so er an den kindern bekennet, ein gar vnschedliche vnd vnuerdampliche unde sei'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 227; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 2r.

⁶² 'weil es nicht allein vmb eusserlich Ceremonien, sondern zugleich auch vnd furnemlich vmb die angezaigten haubtartickel der Christlichen lar zuthun ist'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 228; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 2v–3r.

baptism ritual.⁶³ However, the problem for Menius (and, indeed, for Luther) was clear: to uphold the theological point that inner baptism freed children from the power of the Devil, Menius had to emphasize external baptismal exorcisms. He defended the possible criticism that baptisms had historically been performed without exorcisms by countering that he was not arguing about the words of exorcism and whether it was necessary to use them at baptism, as he was aware baptisms had happened without them.⁶⁴ Tying himself up in knots, he conceded that exorcism was not contained in the Holy Scriptures, but it was not contrary to them either 'but completely complementary and well used with baptism'.⁶⁵

Exorcism's symbolic function became integral to Menius's theology since baptism drew the boundaries between good and evil, and was a reminder of the omnipresent threat of the Devil. Menius continued to defend this position in later disputes. After a debate with the assistant of St Margaret's Church in Gotha, Georg Merula, in 1549, he published a work entitled *On Exorcism* (1551). Menius lamented that opponents of exorcism in infant baptism did not understand what was at stake. They claimed that children had original sin at birth, 'yet they had no actual or real sin of their own since they, because of their natural immaturity, can do neither good nor evil'.⁶⁶ Exorcism was in theory only the outward symbol of the process enabled by baptism, but it became essential as a visible sign of the theology underpinning the sacrament.

When it came to exorcisms Lutheran theology seemed to raise more problems than it solved about original sin and the nature of children. What sin was actually effaced by baptism? Were exorcisms necessary or not, and what form should they take? If children were not baptized, did their souls go to Limbo, or even Hell, when they died? Were the children on whom no exorcism was performed possessed by the Devil?

⁶³ LW 53: 103; WA *Schriften*, 12: 47.

⁶⁴ 'ich umb die bloße wort des Exorcismi an ihnen selbst nicht straitte, als ob man dieselbigen von noth wegen bei der tauffe gebrauchen muste vnd man an solche wort gar nicht tauffen konte, dan ich von gots gnaden woll weis, das ehr solche wort des Exorcismi woll mag getaufft werden'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 229; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 4r.

⁶⁵ 'sondern gantz gemes vnd bei der tauff woll zu gebrauchen sei'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 228; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 3r.

⁶⁶ 'so hetten sie doch keine eigene thetliche noch wirkliche sunde, weil sie, jrer natürlichen vnvermuglichkeit halb, weder gutes noch boses thun kondten etc.'; Justus Menius, *Vom Exorcismo. Das der, nicht als ein zeuberischer gewel zuuerdamme, sondern in der gewöhnlichen Action bey der Tauffe, mit Gott vnd gutem gewissen wol gehalten werden möge* (Erfurt, 1551), B3r. See also Bodo Nischan, 'The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation', *SCJ* 18 (1987), 33–4.

If exorcisms were not needed urgently, as Anabaptists suggested, why perform the act on suckling infants at all; why not wait until children could speak for themselves? The fragile coherence of baptism was broken. For Jörg Schnabel, an Anabaptist arrested in Allsdorf in 1533, baptism was mere sorcery since the preacher tried to conjure the Devil out of the child.⁶⁷ Instead, Anabaptists developed their own theories about original sin and children to explain why traditional infant baptism was invalid.

INFANT DEATH, BAPTISM, AND SALVATION: ANABAPTIST RESPONSES

Hans Quinger, who was interrogated in Eisenach in October 1531, was troubled over what to do with his children. He said:

He had not been otherwise baptised, but he did not know for what his own baptism was serviceable, and even less whether his children's baptism was useful for the salvation of their souls.⁶⁸

Quinger's wife, Gela, had been re-baptized and had left him for an Anabaptist community elsewhere.⁶⁹ Knowing that his wife believed in this new adult baptism, he had to determine on his own what to do with the child she left behind. As late as 1544 at least one of Quinger's children, born when his wife was away from him, remained unbaptized.⁷⁰ Like Klenkhartin, Quinger had a specific and polarized understanding of the salvific value of baptism, and if he was not wholly persuaded by Anabaptism, neither was he completely convinced that his child needed to be baptized. Yet Quinger had not even wanted to baptize his child as an insurance policy, while he took the time to decide whether there was anything valid in Anabaptist teaching. Perhaps like other Anabaptists he believed that an erroneous baptism was actually damaging. Intensely personal and emotional experiences like Quinger's emerge from the trials as people tried to comprehend the intricacies of soteriological theology.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *TAH*, 75.

⁶⁸ 'sey nicht ander weit getaufft, aber er wisse nicht, wurzu jme seyn eigne tauffe dienstlich, vilweniger, ob seinen kindleyn jre tauffe zu jrer selen seligkeit furtreglich'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 138; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, fo. 4r.

⁶⁹ Wappler, *Stellung*, 140; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, fo. 6v.

⁷⁰ Wappler, *Stellung*, 221; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, fo. 21.

⁷¹ See also Katherine Hill, 'Blut, Taufe, und Identität: Beobachtungen zur Entwicklung des Täuferturns in Thüringen, c. 1520–1550', *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 67 (2010), 51–68.

As Cressy notes, these concerns about the efficacy of baptism ‘came sharply into focus with the immediate, personal, and practical crisis of an infant dying’ without receiving the sacrament.⁷² Would such children be saved or damned to the fires of Hell? Pragmatically infant mortality also raised the question of where the physical body might be buried, since children who died without baptism would normally be denied burial in consecrated ground to symbolize their eternal exclusion from the Christian community.⁷³ Anna and Joseph Masson from Foulcrey in north-eastern France took their dead child to St Bernhard’s shrine in the abbey church of Hamseil. The infant was apparently revived, and yet the parents were unsure, since they did not know what to expect from a ‘baptism miracle’ and saw no signs of life. Ultimately they were not satisfied that the baptism had been effective and buried their infant between a field and a forest, between civilization and wilderness.⁷⁴

Catholic theology had tried to assuage the fears of parents not only by making provision for and even encouraging emergency baptisms, but also stressing that the fire of Limbo was pure, painless fire. Reformers scorned this compromise. Luther definitively rejected the existence of Limbo. He wrote despairingly of the whole Catholic geography of the afterlife which constructed a separate circle for unbaptized infants and a separate level for the church fathers and great classical thinkers who predated Christ, not in Hell but beyond the bounds of Heaven’s grace. Luther dismissed these as ‘nothing but dreams and human inventions’.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Karlstadt in the *405 Conclusions* (1518) said that we must swallow the bitter pill of scripture, even when it gives us unwelcome conclusions, and accept that children who die unbaptized are damned.⁷⁶

Despite such seeming pessimism, Lutheranism stressed in images and word that the baptismal blessing of children was essential to eternal salvation. Lutheran Saxon iconography was filled with images of children being sanctified which buttressed the Lutheran theology of baptism. A series of scenes of ‘The Blessing of the Children’ painted by Cranach in the 1530s seems to have been a direct response to Anabaptist ideas⁷⁷

⁷² Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 114.

⁷³ See for example Will Coster, “‘Tokens of Innocence’: Infant Baptism: Death and Burial in Early Modern England”, in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), 266–87.

⁷⁴ Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 184.

⁷⁵ LW 8: 316; WA *Schriften*, 44: 812.

⁷⁶ Karlstadt, *D. Andree Carolstatini doctoris et archidiaconi Wittenburgensis CCCLXX et apologeticae Conclusiones pro sacris literis et Vuittenburgenita editae ut et lectoribus profuturæ sint* (Wittenberg, 1518), D1v–D2r, Conclusions 274–6. Karlstadt similarly denied that the fire of the afterlife was painless; see Pater, *Karlstadt*, 94–5.

⁷⁷ Hans Georg Thümmel, “‘du rühmst immer deinen Monch zu Wittenberg’: Lucas Cranach—Maler der Reformation”, in *Luther und seine Freunde: Wittenberger*



Fig. 4.1. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Christ Blessing the Children*.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

(Fig. 4.1). The font of the *Stadtkirche* in Pirna, installed in 1561, showed intimate scenes of children hugging, kissing, and playing, some naked and some in baptismal clothes. It was a powerful symbol of the innocence of (baptized) children.⁷⁸ Such children would be saved even if the worst happened. The epitaph made for Hans Guenther Podewitz, in the church of St Lawrence in Erfurt, showed the three dead Podewitz sons being presented to Christ and blessed. Inscribed at the bottom were words from Mark 10:14 'Suffer the little children'.⁷⁹ Contemporaries would have known that the passage continued, 'Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein'.

Sonntagsvorlesungen Evangelische Predigerseminar (Wittenberg, 1998), 48. See also Harold Marx and Eckhard Kluth (eds), *Glaube und Macht: Sachsen in Europa der Reformationszeit: 2. Sächsische Landesausstellung: Eine Ausstellung des Freistaates Sachsen, ausgerichtet durch die Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Katalog* (Torgau, 2004), 134.

⁷⁸ Bettina Vaupel, '“Das Merkwürdigste war uns der Taufstein”: Ein Kuriosum aus der Renaissance'; <http://www.monumente-online.de/05/06/streiflicht/05_pirna.php> accessed 13 November 2013.

⁷⁹ Charles L. Kuhn, 'The Mairhauser Epitaph: An Example of Late Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Iconography', *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976), 542–6.

However, Lutheranism seemed to offer little practical comfort in tragic situations of infant death. Regulations over what happened with sick infants and emergency baptisms were confusing. Emergency baptisms were generally permitted, but regulations were tightened.⁸⁰ The Kassel church ordinance of 1539 said that there should be appointed times for baptisms, and the parents had to approach the pastor beforehand. In cases where the child was so weak

that they could not wait for the appointed hour for baptism, so that they did not die without holy baptism . . . they should be baptised in houses or churches, after the necessity and opportunity for each child has been weighed up. Yet no one should be permitted to allow his children to receive the holy baptism from anyone but the appointed servants of our church and according to the regulations of the same.⁸¹

Increasing stringency reflected the authorities' anxiety that emergency baptism was ill-advised as it was difficult to control. Birth was not always a moment of female solidarity, for midwives and the community of matrons could put pressure on pregnant women for confessional and political reasons, and midwives might come under suspicion for colluding with non-conformist parents.⁸² Some areas attempted to professionalize the career of midwives to ensure that they were, indeed, carrying out baptisms properly and were not abusing their positions.⁸³ Situations might also arise where the midwife (like that in Schade's case) would not be allowed to perform the baptism even if they wanted to.

⁸⁰ The 1527 ordinance in Hesse suggested that midwives might baptize children; see Sehling viii: 51.

⁸¹ 'Wo aber die kinder blöd und schwach weren, daß man besorgen müßt, sie künnten der verordneten stunde zu taufen nit erwarten, damit sie dann nit on die heiligen tauf stürben, weil der Herr die kinder der kirchen einmal geschenkt hat, soll man die in die heusern oder kirchen taufen, nachdem die notturft und gelegenheit mit jedem kind sein würt. Doch soll niemants gepüren, den heiligen tauf von andern dann von den geordneten dienern unserer kirchen und nach ordnung derselbigen seinen kindern zu entpfahen'; Sehling viii: 119.

⁸² One woman, Anneli von Wattwil, was coerced by her birthing assistants to renounce her Anabaptist faith; see Marion Kobelt-Groch, 'Mouldered away in the Tower with the Fruit of the Womb? On the Treatment of Pregnant Anabaptist Women under Criminal Law', trans. Dennis L. Slabaugh, in Sylvia Brown (ed.), *Women, Gender and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2007), 236–7.

⁸³ In 1569 the authorities in Groningen issued a decree ordering all midwives to be inspected before they could practise their profession; Waite, *Devil's Minions*, 67. See also Alison Rowlands, 'Monstrous Deception: Midwifery, Fraud, and Gender in Early Modern Rothenburg', in Ulinka Rublack (ed.), *Gender in Early Modern German History* (Cambridge, 2002), 71–101.

Emergency baptisms often seemed to be more trouble than they were worth. When the Lutheran Duke Henry came to power in Albertine Saxony in 1539, his first church ordinance stated that a pastor should impress upon his parishioners 'that they should not hurry lightly to emergency baptism'.⁸⁴ If this was necessary, and in case parents wished to verify the baptism had been performed adequately, a process was established for checking the first baptism and for carrying out another baptism if it was needed.⁸⁵ Such 'conditional baptisms', a form of insurance policy for parents, were contentious. Philipp of Hesse decreed that in cases of doubt, a child could be baptized with the words 'If you are not baptised, I baptise you in the name of the father etc'.⁸⁶ The Hessian ordinance stressed this should not be thought of as a re-baptism but only one, properly performed baptism. Luther dismissed 'conditional baptisms', and most Lutheran areas had stopped the practice by 1540. Anyone who did perform such baptisms might be branded an Anabaptist.⁸⁷ Even emergency baptisms were forbidden in some cases. In 1542 the consistory in Wittenberg, in line with Luther's own views, said that when only a limb or foot might be visible the child could not have an emergency baptism, and their parents could only pray for them.⁸⁸

Anabaptism fed Lutheran anxieties about the danger of re-baptism. In 1595 a report by the pastor in Meiningen on the second baptism of a child already baptized by the midwife discussed the problems of this practice. If the child lived it could be plagued by the concern that:

⁸⁴ 'das sie nicht leichtlich zu der nottauf eilen sollen'; Sehling i: 267.

⁸⁵ Sehling i: 267–8.

⁸⁶ 'Si vero propter ignorantiam baptismi dubitatur, an recte fuerint baptizati, tum sub conditione baptizentur sic: Si tu non es baptizatus, ego te baptizo in nomine patris etc'; Sehling i: 51.

⁸⁷ Merry E. Wiesner, 'The Midwives of South Germany and the Public/Private Dichotomy', in Mary Harland, *The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe* (London, 1993), 85. See Luther's comments in the Table Talk: 'Zum Andern. "Soll man denn die Kinder, so jäch getauft sind, wieder täufen?" "Nein," sagt er'; WA *Tischreden*, 1: No, 1030: 521.

⁸⁸ 'Wo es auch in kindes nöten fürfele, das die kindlein nicht gar geboren, sondern allein mit einem hendlein, oder füßlein, zum gesicht kommen, sollen dieselben kindlein nicht getauft werden, bis sie gar zur welt bracht, es sollen aber die jenigen, so darumb und neben sind, für solch kindlein ein gemein gebet zu gott thun'; Sehling i: 202. Luther expressed similar views in the Table Talk: 'Wenn es sich zuträgt mit einem Weibe, daß das Kind nicht gänzlich von ihr kommen kann, sondern ein Arm oder ander Glied herfür kömmt, so soll man dasselbige Glied nicht täufen in Meinung, als ob dadurch das ganze Kindlin getauft sei. Viel weniger soll man ein Kind, so noch in Mutterleibe steckt und noch nicht von ihr kommen ist noch mag, täufen, also daß man wollte Wasser gießen über der Mutter Bauch &c'; WA *Tischreden*, 6: No. 6758: 167.

therefore, they might doubt whether one baptism cancelled the other baptism, so that no baptism remained for them, or rather would not know whether the first or the second baptism was the true baptism, as Doctor Luther says in one place, the Anabaptists with their twofold baptism, ensure that both come to nought, and they would have no baptism at all.⁸⁹

Pressure for the right baptism to take place was, therefore, considerable, since an unnecessary baptism could be damaging. When all efforts to baptize the child failed and it died without receiving the sacrament, a place in sanctified ground was not guaranteed: in some places a complete burial was performed, in others pastors refused to bury unbaptized children, or conducted a burial ceremony, but in solemn silence, without prayers and singing.⁹⁰

Lutheran theology, seemingly aware of the uncompromising and confusing solutions it offered parents, moved towards a position that emphasized that prayer was sufficient for the child's redemption. Luther sought to comfort parents who suffered miscarriages and stillbirths; they should not be castigated for 'it was not due to their carelessness or neglect that the birth of the child went off badly'.⁹¹ If the mother was a committed Christian and truly desired baptism, Christ would surely hear her prayers. Historians have suggested that this was a consoling alternative for parents and pregnant women in particular.⁹² But it may not have been so reassuring for women used to the old rituals. How was a mother to know her prayers were sufficiently heartfelt?⁹³ Parents were anxious to do the right thing, and Anabaptist ideas on sin and salvation might prove more attractive, especially for mothers and fathers who had to confront the trauma of a sick or dying child.

Arguments between Lutherans and Anabaptists often focused on whether original sin damned children and what happened to unbaptized infants. Anabaptists tried in Mühlhausen in 1537 were asked: 'where

⁸⁹ 'das sie darob zweifeln mogen, ob auch wol eine tauffe die andere tauffe auffgehoben, das inen keine tauffe blieben, ader doch je nicht wusten ob die erste oder andere tauffe die rechte tauffe ware, wie D. Luther an einem orte sagt, die widertauffer machen mitt jren zweifachen tauffen, das bede zu nichts werden, vnd sie gar keine tauffe hetten'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 384, fo. 1v.

⁹⁰ Eckhard Struckmeier, 'Vom Glauben der Kinder im Mutter-Leibe': *Eine historisch-anthropologische Untersuchung frühneuzeitlicher lutherischer Seelsorge und Frömmigkeit im Zusammenhang mit der Geburt* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 169–75.

⁹¹ *Ein Trost den Weibern, welchen es ungerade gegangen ist mit Kindergebären* (1542); LW 43: 247; WA *Schriften*, 53: 205.

⁹² Struckmeier, 'Vom Glaube der Kinder', 122–6.

⁹³ Coster suggests that the erosion of the option of emergency baptisms led people to extend the period in which the child was considered innocent; Coster, 'Infant Baptism', 286.

innocent children went then, who died before baptism?⁹⁴ Anabaptists came to the conclusion that these children would not be condemned and they would not go to Hell. Christoph von der Eichen from Niederdorla, interrogated in 1564, stated explicitly that although children could not believe, nevertheless Christ had promised Heaven to them. If they died in their youth, they would be saved as a result of this promise, even without baptism.⁹⁵ The appeal of this salvific anthropology is clear. Anabaptist parents, like Quinger's wife, who left children behind and did not baptize them, might seem callous, but their theology convinced them that baptism was simply irrelevant to their children's salvation.⁹⁶ Jakob Storger, who had railed against infant baptism on the way to his death, had four children, three of whom had been baptized 'wrongly', that is when they were young, but his fourth child, only twelve weeks old, had not been baptized at all.⁹⁷ Having been through the process of baptism three times before, he was now certain that he did not have to baptize the youngest child, such was the depth of his Anabaptist convictions. Even when individuals did not reject infant baptism entirely, Anabaptist theology could influence how they reacted to emotional conflicts when the child died or was gravely ill. Fritz Strigel, one of the Dreamers (a group discovered in Uttenreuth in 1531 who relied on visions from God) said if he had a child then he would have it baptized according to God's commandment, although he would not say what this commandment was. However, if the child died, it would die on God's word, and he would not question it, suggesting that he would not attempt to revive the child nor be overly concerned about its fate.⁹⁸ The death of the child may not have been any less distressing for Anabaptists, but they may have been less anxious about the fate of its soul.

Anabaptist thinking on original sin implied that children did not need to be saved from demonic influences by baptism, water, spiritual, or otherwise. For an age when people supposedly 'thought with demons', there is a striking lack of mention of diabolic activity in

⁹⁴ 'wue dan die unschuldige kindlein, so vor der taufe sterben, hinkommen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 437; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 133v.

⁹⁵ 'Darumb, so werden die kinderlein, wen sie in ihrer jugent sterben, auch ohne die tauf selig aus solcher zusag'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 497; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 252r.

⁹⁶ See for example the group of Anabaptists in Zella St Blasii; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 304–5; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1025, fo. 3r–4v.

⁹⁷ 'er habe vier kinder, dre seint unrecht getauft, und das vierde ist zwölf wochen alt, ungetauft'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 429; SAM Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 112v.

⁹⁸ QGTii: 255; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 476–80.

Anabaptist accounts of baptism.⁹⁹ The Devil was not absent altogether from Anabaptism, but where he appeared, he did so in a very different guise from that in Lutheran or Catholic theology. Thomas Spiegel said that he was instructed by Georg Volck from Haina and Eukarius Binder from Coburg on the nature of good and evil. He concluded that: 'God created all creatures for the purpose of good, and children are pure, they have no Devil within them, baptism is not necessary for them'.¹⁰⁰ Spiegel came to a novel conclusion about sin and human nature, so that child baptism, with or without exorcism, was redundant in his eyes; the Devil held no sway over small infants. Heinz Ot, part of Melchior Rinck's circle, stated that 'any person who comes to awareness has two spirits: one good, the other evil. The good one drives him to good, the evil one to evil'.¹⁰¹ The evil spirit could not be exorcized since it remained in existence along with the good. Both presented themselves as choices of a way of life to the individual. Anabaptism retained something of the pessimism of Lutheran theology in that man was never free of sin; life was a struggle with the ever-present danger of evil. Where they diverged from Luther was how they related this to the nature of children. Even if not every Anabaptist agreed that children were 'pure', they did concur that children did not have damning sin and they were not possessed by the Devil. In Anabaptist theology, children could not be damned before they were aware and could reason.

REASON AND THE FAITH OF CHILDREN

Summing up his thoughts in 1534, the Anabaptist Georg Knoblauch stated: 'infant baptism is nothing, for little children are pure, they don't need baptism, and they cannot believe'.¹⁰² Children could not express their faith and confess their love of God, nor could they choose between good and evil at a young age. Since the baptismal ritual

⁹⁹ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997). See also H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven, CT, 2005), 24.

¹⁰⁰ 'alle creatur habe Got erschaffen, fur gut angesehen und sinde die kinder rein, kein teufel bei ine habend, sei in der taufe nit not'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 230; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 360–7.

¹⁰¹ 'ein jeder mensche, der zum erkenntnis kome, habe zween geist: ein gut, den andere boeß. Der gut reiz zu guden, der boeß zum boeßen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 331.

¹⁰² 'die kindertauf sei nichts, dan die kindlein sein rain, dorfen der tauf nicht und konnen nicht glawben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 356; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 207r.

demanded so many responses from the baptizand, this was something of a problem, not just for Anabaptists. Catholicism had addressed this obstacle explicitly with the concept of *fides aliena*, which argued that the faith of godparents and the Christian community was a sufficient replacement for the faith which children themselves could not articulate at baptism. Reformers, Anabaptists included, rejected this solution. For Anabaptists the answer was clear: baptism and baptismal faith was unnecessary for infants, since these children were not at an age when they could sin of their own will. In an organized dispute with the pastor Balthasar Raidt in August 1528, Rinck stated:

Children, before the age of reason and before they can consent to sin, are neither justified nor unjustified, neither blessed nor unblessed. But they bring with them from birth good and evil seed.¹⁰³

The wife of Christoph von der Eichen echoed these views. She said that children could not sin before 'they came to their understanding'.¹⁰⁴ The concept of *Vernunft* (reason) or *Verstand* (understanding), drawn from the vocabulary of a shared debate, was indispensable to Anabaptists who repeatedly stated that without faith and reason individuals could not sin.

Vernunft had many connotations. In legal contexts it denoted a level of criminal responsibility, and young children, the aged, and those who were drunk or mentally ill were lumped together as *unvernunft* (without reason).¹⁰⁵ *Vernunft* was also used by early modern scholars to contrast human reasoning with divine revelation. The most famous mystical tract of the late medieval period, the *Theologia Deutsch*, argued that in order to become perfect and unite with the divine, one had to let go of 'sense and sensibility and everything the senses can comprehend, all reason, works of reason, and everything that reason may comprehend and conceive'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ 'seien die kinder vor der vernunft, und, ehir sie in die sunder verwilligen, weder recht noch ungerecht, weder selig noch unselig, sonder bringen von der gepurt an mit sich guten und bosen samen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 295; *TAH*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ 'die kinder haben keine sunde, ehe sie zu ihrem verstand komen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 499; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 253r. See also Ludwig Spon: 'es gesche dan wie ohr anhang zu Hersfelde der taufe gebrauchte, die lassen ire kinder bis zu irer vernonft ligen'; *TAH*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Claudia Jarzebowski, 'Loss and Emotion in Funeral Works on Children in Seventeenth-Century Germany', in Lynne Tatlock (ed.), *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives* (Leiden, 2010), 193.

¹⁰⁶ 'synn vnd synlichkeyt vnd alles was synne begreiffen mugen, vnd vernufft, vernufftliche wurckung, vnd alles dass vernufft begreiffen vnd bekennen mag'; Martin Luther, trans., *Eyn deutsch Theologia das ist Eyn edles Buchleyn, von rechtem vorstand, was Adam und Christus sey, und wie Adam yn uns sterben, und Christus ersteen sall* (Wittenberg, 1518). The *Theologia Deutsch* was probably written some time in the late fourteenth century by a member of the Teutonic Order in Frankfurt. Luther

Vernunft was also already being used in Reformation literature to frame the debate about man's relationship to sin and heavenly law. In a pamphlet from 1525 by Hans Sachs illustrated by Hans Flötner which personified usury as a Jew, the figure of *Vernunft* was shown advising the common ass, leading him to resistance against the evils of temporal lordship, somewhat ill-advisedly, since rebellion might be contrary to heavenly law.¹⁰⁷ Different understandings of the meaning and importance of *Vernunft* propelled debates about baptism.

Anabaptists justified their views on baptism by citing Mark 16:16, 'Whoever believes and is baptised is saved', and here too they stood on common ground with other reformers. In 1525 Luther gave a sermon which referred to the very same passage. He posed the question: what happened to children who did not have *Vernunft* and could not believe for themselves?¹⁰⁸ Luther rejected *fides aliena* but argued that children's faith was aided into being at the time of baptism by the faith of the godparents and other bystanders and, furthermore, contested that one could have belief without reason. Yet Luther could not relinquish the idea of reason completely and claimed that children had hidden *Vernunft*, which was not likely to be deceived unlike the open *Vernunft* of adults.¹⁰⁹

But Luther's theology did not really advocate using reason, although he employed the vocabulary; his understanding of baptism was based on an idea of infant faith which bypassed the problem of infant understanding and the problematic passage in Mark 16. His 'reasoning' child did not need to speak or comprehend for this was not synonymous with true faith, even for adults. In a sermon from 1522 he declared that it was not enough to hear or read about Christ's resurrection, or even understand it; rather it had to be ingrained in one's heart.¹¹⁰ Luther wrote of faith:

provided his own translation of this great mystical text. See *Theologia deutsch-theologia Germanica: The Book of the Perfect Life*, trans., introduction, and notes by David Blamires (Walnut Creek, CA, 2003), 2–27.

¹⁰⁷ Margit Kern, 'Justitia divina und iustitia humana im Zeitalter der Reformation', in Frank Büttner and Gabriele Wimböck (eds), *Das Bild als Autorität: Die normierende Kraft des Bildes* (Münster, 2004), 60–3. See also Martin Arnold, *Handwerker als theologische Schriftsteller: Studien zu Flugschriften der frühen Reformation* (Göttingen, 1990), 105.

¹⁰⁸ 'Nu ist die frage, wo die iunge kinder bleyben, so sie doch noch kein vernunft haben und fur sich selbs nicht mugen gleuben, weyl geschrieben stehet Ro. 10: "Der glaube kompt durchs horen. Das horen aber kompt durchs predigen Gottis wortt." Nu horen noch verstehen yhe die iungen kinder Gottes wort nicht, so mugen sie auch keynen eygen glauben haben'; *Festenpostillen: Das Euangelion auff den dritten Sonntag nach Epiphanie. Matthei viij* (1525); *WA Schriften*, 17.ii: 79.

¹⁰⁹ *WA Schriften*, 17.ii: 87.

¹¹⁰ 'Man muß es jns hertz hinein schlagen und nicht allein mit den leiblichen oren hoeren oder mit dem mund reden'; *Adventspostille: Ein ander Sermon auff den Ostertage über das Euangelion Marci xvi* (1522); *WA Schriften*, 10.ii.II: 220. See also Rublack, 'Grapho-relics: Lutheranism and the Materialization of the Word', *PP* 206, Supplement 5 (2010), 150.

who believes and wishes that and depends upon it, he has it and is sure, that it is, how he believes. For the word will make this same faith so powerful in his heart, that he overcomes death, the devil, sin and all misfortune . . . ¹¹¹

Faith went beyond the mere recognition of sin, which was all that reason and senses could comprehend.¹¹² Reason and faith were not inextricably linked for Luther, and this reconfirmed his fundamental belief that grace was given by God and that man should not be overly reliant on his own faculties to bring about his salvation.

Anabaptists disagreed. For them *Vernunft* was an essential tool to unite man with the divine since the litmus test of true belief, which was brought about by understanding, was the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Baptism was not essential because, on the practical level, faith came from listening and children could not listen. Anabaptists discarded the faith of 'good works' and merits of Catholicism—baptism alone could not bestow grace—but Anabaptists also rejected the Lutheran view that faith and listening were not necessarily related. Rinck was insistent on this point: he said that children do not hear preaching on repentance, and it would be useless to preach to them since they do not yet know good or evil.¹¹³ A pragmatic sense of small children's limited capabilities underpinned Anabaptist theology. For them, faith implied that one could do everything associated with faith: receive the sacrament, make confession, or know the difference between virtue and sin. One Anabaptist arrested in Vacha in 1531 argued that if children could undergo baptism, one might as well administer the sacrament of the altar to them.¹¹⁴ Infants were, according to Hans Werner, 'halfway

¹¹¹ 'wer solchs glaubt und erwünscht und daran hengt, der hab es unnd sey sicher, das es also sey, wie ers glaubt, Dann den selbigen wirt diß wort also mechtig im hertzen, das er überwindt tod, teüfel, sünd und alles unglück'; *Adventspostille: Ein ander Sermon auff den Ostertage über das Euangelion Marci xvi* (1522); WA *Schriften*, 10.ii.II: WA *Schriften*, 10.i.II: 221.

¹¹² Enpfinden aber geedt nichtt weytter, dann was man mit vernunft und synnen begreyffen kan, als was man hoeret, sihet und empfindet oder mit den eüsserlichen synnen erkennet. Derhalben empfinden ist wider den glauben, glaub wider das empfinden'; *Adventspostille: Ein ander Sermon auff den Ostertage über das Euangelion Marci xvi* (1522); WA *Schriften*, 10.i.II: 222.

¹¹³ die kinder horen nicht predigen buess und vergebung der sunde, so darf man inen auch buess nicht predigen, den sie sind vom guten nicht abgewichen, dieweil sie weder gutes noch boses wissen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 296; *TAH*, 5.

¹¹⁴ 'so den kinder das sacrament der tauf von noten und darzu bracht werden soll, warumb man sie dan auch nit in der kindheit das sacrament des altars geben tue etc'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 329.

Christians' ('midling Christi') who had to be brought up to understand the meaning of sin.¹¹⁵ Baptism was meaningless for children because they had no awareness of what the experience meant. Hans Nadler, a key member of Hans Hut's circle in Franconia, who was questioned in January 1529 in Erlangen, argued not only that other people could not believe for children but that no one could even give them an account of baptism which would be a sufficient substitute for remembering it themselves.

Someone told him he had been baptised, his parents told him, and he said, 'I was there, but I had no knowledge of it, for I was a child and had no understanding. Then I also knew of no faith.'¹¹⁶

In contrast, Luther emphatically stated that trusting the witnesses to one's birth and baptism was not only sufficient but part of the process by which baptism was confirmed as a true work of God.¹¹⁷ In a clear disavowal of Luther's ideas, these Anabaptists emphasized that carefully listening and reasoning was a fundamental part of faith and baptism. This was beyond infants.

Fault lines became apparent when debates turned to the question of godparents. Godparents had been essential to the baptismal ritual because they professed faith for children, including renouncing the Devil on their behalf. Godparents seemed to be an archaic hangover from a time when baptisms were performed on adults, but Luther rationalized their presence by stating they had a prophetic role in declaring that people would ultimately emerge from baptism free from sin.¹¹⁸ Even Karlstadt had clung to the idea of *fides aliena* in his early works and stated that the vow of godparents was sufficient for the child. In his more mature work, as he stressed the role of spiritual baptisms and stopped baptizing infants, he moved away from this position. As Karlstadt argued, the covering faith of godparents needed for baptism would not be sufficient for a cat, so why would

¹¹⁵ 'kein kind sei kein christ, sonder ein midling Christi'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 331.

¹¹⁶ 'Man hab im gesagt, er sei getauft, sein eltern habens im gesagt, und ich sei darpei gebest, aber ich hab kein wissen darumb, dan ich bin ein kind gebest und hab auch kein verstand gehabt. So hab ich auch von keinem glauben gewist'; *QGT*ii: 135; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 428–33.

¹¹⁷ LW 40: 236; WA *Schriften*, 26: 150–1.

¹¹⁸ 'It is as if the sponsors, when they lift the child up out of baptism, were to say, "Lo, your sins are now drowned, and we receive you in God's name into an eternal life of innocence". For in this way will the angels at the Last Day raise up all Christians—all the devout baptized—and will there fulfil what baptism and the sponsors signify'; LW 35: 31; WA *Schriften*, 2: 728–9.

it be so for a child?¹¹⁹ Anabaptists developed such ideas into a much more direct rejection of infant baptism and the faith of children, godparents included. Even when individuals did not fully dismiss infant baptism, knowledge of Anabaptist theology led them to emphasize variant views on the value of godparents. Greta Warner, a follower of Melchior Rinck in the town of Vacha, admitted the validity of child baptism but was adamant it should happen without godparents since they could not believe for the children and were therefore redundant.¹²⁰ Greta had also clearly adopted many of the Anabaptist views on human nature: original sin did not damage anyone and children knew nothing of sin. Whether she really did value infant baptism or sought to appease her interrogators remains obscure.

Anabaptists' very different conclusions about birth, pregnancy, and childbearing must have distinguished them from many of their contemporaries. Exorcisms, emergency baptisms, godparents, and everything that had previously seemed essential for children's welfare were now perceived as redundant by Anabaptists. Yet despite Anabaptism's appeal, the deep sentimental pull of infant baptism did sometimes prove too strong. Johannes Schmied from Uttenreuth, who was questioned in April 1531, said he had once rejected infant baptism but now recognized that it was right. A vision had made him see the error of his ways. In the middle of a church he glimpsed a baptismal font, as the voice of God told him that from here gushed living waters. The Lord then revealed to him where he should get his child baptized and how he should choose the sponsor.¹²¹ The font, in which generations of people may have been baptized, was a physical symbol of the importance of baptism to the community as well as to an individual's salvation, and pre-Reformation fonts were not automatically dismantled in Lutheran churches. St Katherine's church in Annaberg-Bucholz had a font dating back to the late medieval period which had been embellished with Mark 16:16, 'Whoever believes and is baptised, is saved', in Lutheran German.¹²²

¹¹⁹ For views on godparents see Zorzin 'Karlstadts "Dialogus von Tauff der Kinder"', 43–6. Pater suggests that Karlstadt did not reject the oath of godparents, although he may not have believed that the adults could believe for the infants; Pater, *Karlstadt*, 112.

¹²⁰ 'Hat gesagt, sie woll zuletzt zulassen, das kinder tauffen recht sei, doch das es an einen paten zugehe, dan nimantzs konne vor die kinder glauben'; *TAH*, 47.

¹²¹ 'Gott habe ihm ein Gesicht erscheinen lassen, da habe er einen Taufstein mitten in einer Kirche stehen sehen und die Stimme Gottes habe geredet, das sei der Stein, daraus das lebendige Wasser fließe; auch habe ihm die Stimme befohlen, wo er sein neugeborenes Kind taufen lassen solle, nämlich zu Neunkirchen, auch wen er zum Gevatter gewinnen solle, auch was der Gevatter ihm einbinden solle'; *QGT*ii: 221; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 504.

¹²² Marx and Kluth (eds), *Glaube und Macht*, 265–6. On the importance of baptismal fonts in Lutheran churches see Margit Thöfner, 'Framing the Sacred: Lutheran Church

Godparenthood and baptismal sponsorship were also social bonds that could prove too strong to break. For Anstad Kemmerer it was neither the trial process nor the arguments of his interrogators which convinced him that Anabaptism was wrong but a prophetic dream. He imagined that his brother's wife was going to give birth to a son and that he should rush to tell his brother the prophecy. His brother-in-law would also arrive in the morning from Halle, and then Anstad would take his horse and ride to Halle to ask about a sponsor.¹²³ Even in their recantations and their rejections of Anabaptism, people reveal that they were making personal, carefully considered decisions about baptism. Deep concerns about doing the right thing by your children could lead people to reject these radical alternatives but they could also make them consider the attractive option that Anabaptism offered.

An Anabaptist arrested in Sagan in 1539, 'die Gutterin', said she believed that Christ had made no provision for one-, two-, or three-year-olds to be baptized and went so far as to say that 'the first baptism was a bath promised by the Antichrist', not a claim to be lightly dismissed.¹²⁴ If people, like Gutterin, found Luther's stance on child baptism ambivalent or unconvincing, then their desire to find a different sign of salvation could drive them to entertain the possibility of adult baptism. Anabaptist baptismal theology developed gradually into a declaration that only understanding adults could receive the rite, but the arguments about the value of adult baptism originated in debates about children and over the pros and cons of infant baptism. Though they owed a debt of gratitude to Karlstadt and other reformers Anabaptists also forged their own path. Anabaptists stressed that small children had the potential to do good and evil when young, and sin was not damning; their emphasis on reason and coming of age did not mean necessarily that people were choosing adult baptism but that the precepts of baptism as described in the Bible—whoever believes and is baptized is saved—could not be applied to children.

ADULT BAPTISM AND SALVATION

In the Thuringian *Hauptstaatsarchiv* in Weimar there is a document purporting to be an early Anabaptist baptismal ritual dating from about

Furnishings in the Holy Roman Empire', in Andrew Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2012), 110–18.

¹²³ 'Des abends ist ime der nacht ein traum vorkommen, das seines brooders weip einen sohn geben wurde und das er aufstehen solte, dasselbig bruder zu weissagen. Es wurde auch sein schwager morgen von Halle kommen und ime diese weissagung auch thun; uff dieselbigem pferde solte er, Anstad, nach Halle reiten, ime zu diesem kinde gefattern zubitten'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 261.

¹²⁴ 'die erste tauf sei ein badt das der Endchrist ausgesagt har'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 32r.

1528. This followed the formula, although in much shortened form, of the Lutheran sacrament in the questions it asked of the baptizand: 'What are you called? Do you reject the Devil and all his works?' and so forth, not inconsistent with the sorts of questions that seem to have been asked of Anabaptist followers by their leaders.¹²⁵ There was no mention of physically expelling the Devil, nor did externals such as salt appear. It did not, however, seem to imply a deep knowledge of God or faith—the questions were as standard and as formulaic as any other baptismal ritual, suggesting that the Anabaptists here had not yet developed a coherent understanding of the faith that was required of an adult being baptized. The form relied heavily on precedent, and a previously unnoticed marginal note indicates that certain sections of the liturgy were even supposed to be spoken around a font.¹²⁶ Exorcisms may have been eliminated, yet the use of water suggests that Anabaptists still believed baptism could save, even when performed on adults, although they did not believe it was a rite that was suitable for children. Adult baptism was not just a mature confession of faith or an initiation rite, enacted after people fully understood and accepted the movement. Like infant baptism, it had rich social and emotional meanings, and it was often seen as a route to salvation.

Valentin Romeissen, who was interrogated in Grossenbach in December 1529, painted an evocative picture of the end of the world. He had been told that a dreadful punishment was coming soon to the earth, and anyone who clung to the old beliefs would be eternally damned; so terrible was the threat, and it 'aroused in him such fear and terror, that he worried daily about such ruination'.¹²⁷ Romeissen's horror was related to his concerns about baptism. He mentioned the much quoted passage from Mark 16:16, whoever believes and is baptized is saved, although it seems this group had taken to heart the second half of the verses, 'whoever does not believe and is then baptised, will be eternally lost'.¹²⁸ It is telling that Romeissen chose to stress the words that suggested a baptism which was performed without proper faith could actually be harmful to one's spiritual state. Romeissen was so terrified about the fate of his soul that he joined the movement. Even when people undertook baptism as an adult, it

¹²⁵ 'Wie haistu? Widersagstu dem teufel und allen seinen werken?'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 305; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 987, fo. 1. For examples of questions asked at baptism see the trial of Volkmar Fischer on 12 January 1535. He explained that prior to his baptism by Römer, he and his companion were told to reject evil: 'sie sollten allem ubel und bößen widerstehen und den geboten Gottes anhangen.' Römer then drew the sign of the cross on their foreheads and baptized them in the name of the Trinity. Wappler, *Thüringen*, 368; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 140v.

¹²⁶ The Latin could also refer to a spring or water source.

¹²⁷ 'habe im die sachen so grausam angezeigt und in in ein solch forcht und erschrecken bracht, das er sich deglich solcher verderbung besorgt'; *TAH*, 24.

¹²⁸ 'wer nit glaubt und dernach gedauft, der werd ewiglich verloren'; *TAH*, 25.

remained an emotional experience with potentially alarming consequences for one's status in the afterlife. Anstad Kemmerer had confessed to Hans Römer, who had instructed him, that 'he had been baptised and he hoped the baptism was sufficient for the salvation of his soul'.¹²⁹ Römer's preaching had at first astounded him, although he claimed that he was aware that the preacher might be deceiving him; yet Römer's words moved him to his heart since, as he put it, 'if time was short and he should fall from grace, that would not be good'. Perhaps the baptism of this strange brotherhood might define him as one of the elect.¹³⁰ Anxiety for the state of his soul played an important part in his decision to accept the new baptism.

Like infant baptism, the adult rite was a sign of a salvific process. For Balthasar Hubmaier, the Swiss Anabaptist, water baptism was confirmation of true faith that had already been realized; for Hut it was a sign of the wish and confession of the baptizand to enter the community of the saved as the Last Days approached, and it was a promise of purifying suffering to come. Hut and Hubmaier, like many other theologians, turned to 1 John 5:7–8 to explain the complex process signified by water baptism and expanded upon the three separate but interconnected baptisms by blood or suffering, water, and spirit. Both Hut and Hubmaier asserted that spirit, blood, and water all bore witness on earth, although they formulated their understandings differently.¹³¹ These complex stages, related to narratives of suffering, martyrdom, and the apocalypse, were understood in varied ways and initiated a set of queries in people's minds about what it meant to be saved and how individuals knew redemption had been assured. In a letter from 1528, Jörg von Passau, who was baptized by Hut, wrote that on the Day of Judgement the angels might not know who was saved and who was damned. The faithful should cry to God to ask Him to imprint the seal upon their foreheads so that the angels would recognize it. Jörg stressed this was not an external seal. However, the way adult baptism was practised was demonstratively linked to a dialogue about identifying who was saved.¹³²

¹²⁹ 'er sei getauft und hoffe, die taufe sei ime zu seiner sehlen seligkeit gnugsam'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 259; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 79r.

¹³⁰ 'und wiewol diese wort ime eine grosse vorwunderung gebracht, hab er dennoch bei sich bedacht, es mochte betriegerei sein und doch su herzen gezogen: solte die zit so kurz sein, und er solte der gnade entfliehen, were nicht gut; und dieweil inen Nisius dorzu hat helfen berede, hat er gesagt, er wolle diese taufe auch entpfahen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 259; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 79v.

¹³¹ Gottfried Seeß, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben, und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Göttingen, 2002), 445.

¹³² 'O lieben brueder, schreiet zw Gott mit mir, auf das er uns des pfunds des geists woll geben in unser herzen und das sigel Gottes an unser stirnen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 306; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 27r.

Limited evidence exists of the actual practice of adult baptism, probably because the rite often happened quickly and in secret; usually only vague snippets extracted under interrogation remain. The trials of Anabaptists arrested in the Harz region in 1535 provide some of the most detailed accounts of adult baptisms. First the person being baptized came to the baptizer and said as he kneeled, 'dear brother, I wish to set up a union of good conscience with God and ask for baptism'.¹³³ Next the baptizer asked if those being baptized believed that Christ was the only and eternal son of God and if they would submit themselves entirely to one God and be obedient, and whether they would even die for this assertion.¹³⁴ Having received a positive response, the baptizer then repeated the words of John the Baptist, dipped his finger into the water three times, and drew a cross on the forehead as he said 'I baptise you in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Ghost'. Psalms were sung and praise given to God.

It was common for a sign to be traced with water across the forehead, rather than the individual being dipped in water. This distinction was important because Anabaptists perceived the water to be acting differently. Water saved people but not by physically, or even symbolically, washing away sins; it provided a seal of faith. Changing practice in this way perturbed the Lutheran authorities who complained that some pastors performed child baptisms by merely putting a drop of water on the arm or head.¹³⁵ Using just a small drop of liquid as Anabaptists did, suggested that instead of cleansing, the water merely demonstrated that one was saved. A baptism ritual which marked people out as redeemed soothed concerns like Kemmerer's about sanctification. Jakob Storger stated that the following words should be used in baptism.

I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I take you away from all earthly things and commend you to the creator. I take you away from all unrighteousness and give you to the son of righteousness; I take you away from all the anger of God and commend you to the mercy of God, and pour three drops of water on your head.¹³⁶

¹³³ 'lyber bruder, ich begere einen buntt einess gutthen gwissens mitth godtt auffzu-richten und bitthe um dy tauffe'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 502.

¹³⁴ 'und wiltu dich yhme allein undergeben gentzlich als einem godtth, einem hern ghorsen sein? . . . ess dazu keme, dastu um seinethwillen sterben wollesth?'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 502.

¹³⁵ 'Und der misbrauch, da etliche die kinder nicht ins wasser tauchen, noch sie damit begiessen, sondern streichen in allein ein tröpflein auf den leib, oder an die stirn, sol keins wegs gehalten werden'; Shelling i: 203.

¹³⁶ 'Ich teufe dich im namen des vaters, des son und des heiligen geistes. Ich nehme dich ab von allen irdischen dingen und bephel dich dem schepfer. Ich nehme dich ab von aller ungerechtigkeit und gebe dich dem son der gerechtigkeit. Ich nehme dich ab von

Separation from the world was implied by this baptism, which marked transition from unrighteousness to righteousness and designated a physical place in the community of believers. Baptism meant something different for Anabaptists than it did for Lutherans, but sign and sacrament were still intertwined in a narrative of salvation.

BAPTISM BY BLOOD

Once Anabaptists had removed baptism from the familiar rhythms of childbearing, it became possible to practise the ritual in a variety of other ways. Ambrosius Spittelmeier, a convert of Hans Hut who was active in his native Linz in Austria and then in Augsburg and Nuremberg, was arrested in autumn 1527 in Erlangen. Spittelmeier was questioned in detail about his views on baptism. He stated that 'whoever does not want to be with Christ in water, spirit, and blood, then must be baptised in the fiery pool'; washing in the blood of Christ and the martyrs of the church was an important and often repeated theme for Spittelmeier.¹³⁷ The relationship between blood and baptism was a powerful, well-established one in the early modern period, built on the passages from John 5. Catholic thought had never strictly delineated water baptism as the only option, and there were, at least in theory, alternatives to water baptism in cases of emergency. Johannes Gerson suggested parents should pray to God to baptize their children with a baptism of fire or with the Holy Ghost if they could not arrange a baptism by water, for if the child then died, not all hope was lost; and Aquinas recognized spirit-baptism through repentance and blood-baptism through martyrdom.¹³⁸ Luther himself was heard to say that the ancient teachers ordained three sorts of baptism: baptism by water for catechumens, baptism by spirit for those who believed but could not receive a water baptism, and 'the third sort were baptised in blood and martyrdom', for the blood of Christ purified and washed away our sins.¹³⁹

allem zorn Gottes und bephel dich unter die barmherzikeit Gottes, und geuß im drei tropfen wassers aufn kopf; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 429–8.

¹³⁷ 'Wer nit also getauft mit Christo im geist, waßer und pluet will werden, der mues dort im feurigen teicht getauft'; *QGT*ii: 53.

¹³⁸ Pater, *Karlstadt*, 92; Struckmeier, 'Vom Glauben der Kinder', 126. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, iii, Q. 66 (Textum Taurini, Rome, 1954; online version) <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth4066.html>> accessed 2 February 2013.

¹³⁹ "Die alten Lehrer haben dreierlei Taufe gesetzt; eine des Wassers, die ander des Geistes, und die dritte des Bluts. Diese dreierlei Weise zu täufen hat die Kirch behalten", sprach Doctor Martinus Luther. "Die Catechumeni, so man zur Taufe bringt, werden im Wasser getauft. Die andern, so solch Wasserbad nicht haben bekommen können, gläuben aber doch, werden durch und im heiligen Geist selig, wie Cornelius in Geschichten der

Karlstadt too came to the conclusion that 'bathing in the blood of Christ' was sufficient for salvation.¹⁴⁰

Arguments linking sanctification and suffering were of course well-rehearsed in late medieval and early modern thought; one need only look at the cult of saints and the depiction of Christ as the man of sorrows, which picked out in gory detail his wounds, torments, and gushing blood.¹⁴¹ In late medieval Thuringia saints and pilgrimages flourished, and a quarter of the miracles recorded in the miracle book at one pilgrimage site in Elende are tales of imprisonment.¹⁴² Favoured 'pilgrimage tokens' depicted St Leonard, protector of prisoners, listening to the prayer of a chained captive.¹⁴³ Consequently pain, incarceration, and suffering had complex salvific meanings.¹⁴⁴ Baptism by blood drew on these cultural associations. Earlier radical groups had also related baptism and blood. So-called crypto-flagellants emerged in Thuringia and the southern Harz region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who dismissed traditional sacraments in favour of mortification of the flesh, as they believed this had the power to purge them of sin.¹⁴⁵ They suggested that blood had the power to baptize:

because after the flagellant movement no one can be saved and exist as a Christian, unless they have been baptised in their own blood, driven out from the body with a whip.¹⁴⁶

Aposteln für der Taufe oder ehe er getauft ward. Die dritten werden im Blut und Marter getauft"; WA *Tischreden*, 3: No 3744: 586.

¹⁴⁰ Pater, *Karlstadt*, 98–9.

¹⁴¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Europe and Beyond* (Philadelphia, PA, 2007), 1–20.

¹⁴² Gabriela Signori (ed.), *Das Wunderbuch Unserer Lieben Frau im thüringischen Elende (1419–1517)* (Cologne, 2006), 23.

¹⁴³ Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (London, 1975), 174.

¹⁴⁴ Bynum, 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages', in Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (1991; repr. New York, 2002), 79–117; Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*, trans. Pamela Selwyn (New York, 2004), 87–123; Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago, IL, 2001), 8–9, 64–7.

¹⁴⁵ Arrests were made from 1367–69, and again in 1446 in Nordhausen, in 1414 in Sangerhausen, in 1420 in Mühlhausen, at Stolberg in 1454, at Quedlinburg in 1461, and in 1481 at Schloss Hoym in the diocese of Halberstadt; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 34–6; Siegfried Hoyer, 'Die thüringische Kyrptoflagellantenbewegung im 15. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte* 2 (1967), 148–73.

¹⁴⁶ 'quod post transitum crucifratrum nemo potuit salvari et existere christianus, nisi in proprio sanguine cum flagello de corpore suo excusso baptizaretur'; Hoyer, 'Kryptoflagellantenbewegung', 173.

Baptism by blood or by fire for Gerson or Luther was seen as an emergency, alternative measure in case a water baptism could not take place; for the crypto-flagellants it was the only option, since they rejected any other sacrament. Anabaptists integrated baptism by blood more completely into a vision of what the rite meant, extending it beyond mere mortification of the flesh. In *On the Mystery of Baptism* Hut explained his view of baptism by blood or suffering.

The waters which rush into the soul are tribulation, sadness, fear, trembling, and worry. So baptism is suffering. So Christ was also constricted by his baptism before it was perfected in his death. True baptism is nothing but a conflict with sin through one's whole life.¹⁴⁷

So the 'suffering' was the struggle of the soul experienced by someone when they accepted responsibility for sin. Such anguish allowed the believer to be reborn by true inner baptism, purged by these metaphorical waters from lust and sin.¹⁴⁸ This process of inner suffering was analogous but not always identical to martyrdom. At times Hut seemed to draw a more overt connection between Christ's sacrificial martyrdom and baptism by blood, which was the true baptism that Christ indicated to his disciples: 'May you be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised etc. That is the baptism, which gives testament throughout the whole world, when there is such a gushing of blood.'¹⁴⁹ Hut was not simply suggesting that dying for one's faith was a baptism by blood because it mirrored Christ's experience but that partaking in suffering linked believers with Christ's bodily sacrifice.

Hut was the most vocal exponent in central Germany of the concept of a baptism of blood. Those who had heard him preach adopted his ideas, although their views of baptism by blood or suffering were less developed and more varied than Hut's. Alongside theological concepts, people referred to their own experiences, as well as broader culture

¹⁴⁷ Michael Baylor (ed.), *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge, 1991), 168; QGTiii: 12–28. The texts of Hut's works are problematic because they do not exist in editions which represent Hut's teaching reliably. *Von dem geheimnis der tauf* was never published and the printed version that exists in QGTiii is taken from a later Hutterite codex. The text for *Ein christlicher underricht* was changed when it was published by Landsperger in 1527 and the version in QGTii is taken again from a later Hutterite source; Johann Loserth, Robert Friedmann, and Werner O. Packull, 'Hut, Hans (d. 1527)', *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online* (1987; online) <<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/H88.html>> accessed 4 April 2011.

¹⁴⁸ QGTiii: 34–5.

¹⁴⁹ 'Das dritt sei das plut, das sei der rechte tauf, den Christus seinen jungern anzeigt, mögt ir getauft werden mit der tauf, darmit ich getauft werde etc. Das sei die tauf, die zeugnis gebe uber die ganzen welt, wa ains solhen plut vergossen werde'; QGTii: 43.

assumptions about the meaning of imprisonment, suffering, and tribulation. Anabaptists were subjected to interrogation and torture, sometimes they were executed, and such experiences could help to confirm for Anabaptists that 'baptism by blood' was a sign of one's saved status, transforming fear and pain into feelings of elation and joy. When Greta Knoblauch was executed, even her children apparently displayed none of the usual grief that would be expected at her death. The youngsters 'were not concerned at all for their mother, but they thanked God the Lord that she had remained resolute for the sake of truth and followed her Lord'.¹⁵⁰

The immediate impetus for the relation of baptism to suffering, therefore, came from the very real experience of being pursued by the authorities. The process of torture was built around sacred narratives of divine judgement and divine intervention, but within the hostile context of the trial, the authorities' use of pain to extract information was appropriated by the culprits for a different meaning.¹⁵¹ Two brothers, Veit and Martin Weischenfelder, questioned about their involvement with Hans Hut, were warned:

if they would not speak, however, then the executioner was already on his way, he would deal with them as he had with those at Staffelstein, as a result of which the ruination of their limbs might follow after this, and even less mercy in punishment might be shown.¹⁵²

However, if they told the truth, then pity might be extended to them. By placing pain within the context of providence and salvation, the authorities created a dialogue where the accused could conceive of themselves of as being marked by divinely ordained suffering. Veit confessed under torture in his second interrogation that:

he was baptised in another way, his wife, and his brother, the butcher. [Hut] took water and poured it on their heads as they knelt. Hans, who baptised them, said he must also be baptised in fear, in need, and in suffering.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ 'die kynther kummerthen sich auch gar nichts umb die mutther, besondern szie bedanckthen gotthe dem hern, das szie also von wegen der warheit bestendich gebleiben unnd yhrem hern gefolgt'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 512.

¹⁵¹ Silverman, *Tortured Subjects*, 65; Richard van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Oxford, 1990), 16–18.

¹⁵² 'wo sie aber nit sagen wolten, so wer der meister schon aufm wege, der wurd mit inen handeln, wie mit den zu Staffelstein gescheen, daraus ine darnach verderbung irer glider volgen und dester minder gnade in der strafe erzeugt werden mocht'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 236.

¹⁵³ 'er sei anderst getauft, sein hausfraw, auch sein bruder, der metzler. [Hut] Het wasser genommen und ir jden kniend ufn kopf gossen. Er het auch Hans gesagt, der inen getauft, in angst, in not und in leiden must er auch getauft werden'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 240.

Martin went one step further and said he did not know of any baptism apart from the one he had received in his youth, but that baptism through suffering was valid and 'the fact that he currently lay in prison, was also a baptism'.¹⁵⁴ Proposing imprisonment as a form of baptism seemed to be an idea he added as he strove to make sense of the situation, seeing his incarceration as a baptism of blood and suffering which guaranteed that he had been redeemed.

Baptism by blood widened the context in which 'baptism' came to be understood, and it was connected to a spectrum of opinions about suffering, Christ's salvific act, and man's relationship with Christ. Ambrosius Spittelmeier claimed that when Hut was convincing him that the new baptism was correct, he related his views to the concept of the 'gospel of all creatures' and to purgatory. Hut explained how creatures all must suffer before they are useful to man, and Christ also suffered for the sake of mankind. By sharing in this suffering, men could approach God. A Christian went under the cross of Christ and let God purify him with spirit, water, and blood; this was the true purgatory.¹⁵⁵ An economy of salvation which stressed the importance of baptism by suffering had something in common with Luther's 'baptism until death', where the rite was part of a drawn out process of sanctification. But Anabaptist ideas on baptism by blood exemplify how for them the ritual had been freed from a physical, liturgical rite associated with birth and applied to new circumstances, becoming a spiritual experience which expressed the relationship between Christ's saving blood and man. Anabaptists did not have a monopoly on baptisms of blood. By the end of the sixteenth century Lutheran prayers for stillborn or half-born children were framed in terms of a baptism of blood.¹⁵⁶ Anabaptists, however, linked baptism by blood or suffering explicitly to tangible, physical experiences. Baptism was not entirely spiritualized, and the sign, whether this was adult water baptism or time spent languishing in prison, was still incorporated into a salvific process.

Anabaptist baptismal theology presented a worrying threat for Lutheranism, because it rejected so many of the assumptions that underpinned Lutheran views of human nature and faith, and challenged the rituals that buttressed the experience of childbearing. Penalties were imposed

¹⁵⁴ 'west von keiner andern tauf dan die, so er in seiner jugent empfangen, must aber sonst getauft werden durch trubsal, angst, not und widerwertigkeit und, das er itzo in verheft innen leg, wer auch ein tauf'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 237.

¹⁵⁵ QGTii: 35–6.

¹⁵⁶ Struckmeier, 'Vom Glauben der Kinder', 155–8.

for parents who did not have their children baptized, and an ordinance published in Kassel exhorted pastors to admonish people to recognize the true teaching of the sacrament of baptism and hold it in esteem.¹⁵⁷ The concerted campaign of refutation in words, action, and images against re-baptism is a reminder that the development of Anabaptist ideas in central Germany was always closely intertwined with the Lutheran Reformation. Luther's ideas challenged traditional assumptions about the rite of infant baptism but did not always provide a convincing alternative, for although baptism was still associated with absolution of sin, the practice of the sacrament was stripped back so that it appeared less effective. These changes stoked the fires of debate in Lutheran Germany, and the challenge presented by the problem of paedobaptism, not the appeal of adult baptism, drove forward Anabaptist baptismal theology. Anabaptists rejected the redundant ritual for infants, evolved distinct ideas on original sin, and remoulded the relationship between faith and reason; only then could they develop a theology of believers' baptism, which did not see the act as a mature confession of belief but as an urgent salvific experience which sealed the faith of the redeemed and linked them to Christ's sacrifice in blood.

¹⁵⁷ Sehling viii: 115–19.

5

Consuming Christ

When interrogated about the Eucharist in the summer of 1533, the Anabaptist preacher Alexander said that Christ could not be present in the sacrament because no one can be in two places at once. He stated that Christ ‘has gone up to heaven, sits at the right hand of God, the Almighty Father. Therefore, he cannot and may not be present in the bread or wine as a sign.’¹ Alexander was fairly typical of most Anabaptists: he dismissed the wondrous transformation of bread and wine that gave the Mass such power in Catholic theology, and rejected the notion that people consumed Christ’s body in the rite. Claiming that Christ could not simultaneously be in the bread and reside next to God in Heaven was hardly a new criticism, but was based on a well-worn interpretation of Acts 7:56. In the fifteenth century the Taborites, a splinter group from the reform movement initiated by Jan Hus in Bohemia, had made almost identical claims about Christ’s corporeal presence, and the theme was taken up by reformers of the sixteenth century. Johannes Oecolampadius, Andreas Karlstadt, and Ulrich Zwingli, among others, all rejected the assertion that Christ’s body was ubiquitous.² Anabaptists relied on many of the same arguments as these theologians, although ordinary, uneducated members of the movement tended to reduce complex doctrine to bald, direct statements. Asked about the Lord’s Supper, they would often claim that they could not believe that God would let himself be baked in an oven, or avow that the bread and wine were simple food because they did not look or taste like God.³ Rejecting

¹ ‘ist aufgefahren gegen himmel, sitzet zur rechten Gots, des almechtigen vaters, etc. Derhalben konnt und mocht er in brot ader wein zum seichen nicht dosein’; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 348; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 60r.

² Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (Oxford, 2011), 78–90. For possible implications of these ideas, see Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 42–3.

³ Peter Leinweber, arrested and tried in Berka in 1533, said one could not see or taste Christ in the sacrament: ‘dann Man khonne jhn ja weder sehen noch schmecken’; Hans Köhler and Hans Stefan, arrested in 1537 in Eisenach, said it was wrong to make a bread

the sacrament meant dismissing a symbolic universe related to the bread and wine. In late medieval Europe, theologians and lay people alike had talked about the Eucharist as a source of nourishment, using metaphors of consumption and hunger to describe the physical bond with Christ; by the time Alexander was interrogated, this was no longer universally the case.⁴ Why had eating become an unacceptable method of uniting with Christ? And what were the consequences of this conclusion? Such questions propelled the debate about the Eucharist in central German Anabaptism.

The Eucharist touched on some of the most profound issues in early modern religiosity, such as the nature of sacrifice, salvation, and the relationship between matter and spirit. This was because the rite made visible the miracle at the heart of the Christian faith: God's decision to take up residence in human flesh in order to save mankind from its sins. Sacramental theology was necessarily intertwined with discourses about the boundaries separating the human and the divine on the one hand, and the nature of body and corporeality on the other.⁵ These issues continued to frame the debate in which Anabaptists engaged. Attacks on the ritual during the Reformation provoked a series of questions: what did the sacramental bread and wine mean; how could they relate to the body and flesh of Christ; and how did Christians take part in His salvific sacrifice? Above all, reform forced people to reassess to what extent the outward act of eating could relate to an inner act of grace.⁶

The contours of the academic disputes between educated, published theologians over the Eucharist which irrevocably split the reform movement in the German lands have received considerable attention, although the reaction on the ground is less well understood.⁷ Luther

God: 'drumb thu man da vnrecht vnd widder die zehen gebot, das man da ein brottern god machen woll'; Philipps Busch, interrogated in Frankenhausen in January 1530, said it was only simple bread and wine ('allein schlecht brot und wein'); Wappler, *Stellung*, 169, 197; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 313; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, fo. 6r; No. 997, fo. 26r; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 68v.

⁴ On the importance of eating in late medieval spirituality see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA, 1987).

⁵ See for example Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry* 22.1 (1995), 15; Ruth Goldbourne, *The Flesh and the Feminine: Gender and Theology in the Writings of Caspar Schwenckfeld* (Milton Keynes, 2006), 54–6; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994; repr. 2003), 22–3; Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge, 2006), 6–9.

⁶ Brian Gerrish notes that much of this discussion was about outer signs and their inner meaning; Brian A. Gerrish, 'Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther's Controversy with the Swiss', *Journal of Religion* 68.3 (1988), 377–95.

⁷ A significant body of literature exists on the debates between reformers. See for example Thomas Kaufmann, *Die Abendmahlstheologie der Straßburger Reformatoren bis 1528* (Tübingen, 1992); Walter Köhler, *Zwingli und Luther: Ihre Streit über das Abendmahl*

objected bitterly to the literalist interpretations of those whom he derogatorily labelled 'Sacramentarians', including the Wittenberg reformer's one-time colleague Karlstadt, as well as Zwinglians and Anabaptists. In a sermon on the nature of Christ's body in 1526 he complained:

They also say that he sits at the right hand of God, but what it means that Christ ascends to heaven and sits there, they do not know. It is not the same as when you climb up a ladder into the house. It means rather that he is above all creatures and in all and beyond all creatures.⁸

Lutheran authorities criticized 'Anabaptists and others' for their inability to look beyond the sign and symbol of eating to the deeper mystery of the Eucharist and the gifts it offered.⁹ In contrast to all who denied the real presence, Luther vehemently maintained that the body and blood of Christ were corporeally at hand. At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, when Philipp of Hesse attempted to put an end to the divisions which split the magisterial reformation, the question of Eucharistic presence remained a sticking point.¹⁰ With customary theatrical flourish, on the second day of discussions Luther emphatically made his point by inscribing on the table in chalk the words 'This is my body', even covering them over reverentially with a velvet cloth. The scriptural graffiti reinforced his point that this phrase could only be interpreted transparently.

nach seinen politischen und religiösen Beziehungen, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1924); Reinhard Meßner, *Die Meßreform Martin Luthers und die Eucharistie der Altern Kirche* (Innsbruck, 1989); Bodo Nischan, 'The "Fractio Panis": A Reformed Communion Practice in Late Reformation Germany', *Church History* 53.1 (1984), 17–29; Wandel, *Eucharist*. Some recent studies have addressed the gap on the wider context and response to Eucharistic controversies, although lay responses remain elusive; see for example Joel Van Amberg, *A Real Presence: Religious and Social Dynamics of the Eucharistic Conflicts in Early Modern Augsburg 1520–1530* (Leiden, 2012); Burnett, 'The Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist', *PP* 211 (2011), 77–119; Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (New York, 1999).

⁸ *Sermon von dem Sakrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi, wider die Schwarmgeister* (1526); LW 36: 342; WA *Schriften*, 19: 491. See also Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 69–71.

⁹ The Wittenberg church ordinance of 1545 emphasized: 'bei den anabaptisten und andern, so die sacrament lästern und sagen, man reiche allein da brod und wein, und seien allein zeichen, damit die christen unter sich ihre einigkeit erzeigen, und seien nicht zeugniss göttlicher gaben gegen uns; vertilgen also die lehr vom glauben etc'; Sehling i: 214. Such disrespect for the sacrament was also evident in trials. In 1534 Klaus Scharf was asked what he thought of the sacrament and he said 'he thinks nothing of it, but only believes in the testament' ('heilt gar nichts darvone, sündern halde alleine von dem testament'); Wappler, *Thüringen*, 374; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 19v.

¹⁰ Martin A. Mullett, *Martin Luther* (Abingdon, 2004), 196; Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebell in einer Zeit des Umbruchs* (Munich, 2012), 404.

Surprisingly little has been said about how Anabaptists responded to these arguments. John D. Rempel is the only historian to have written at length about Anabaptist theology of the 'Lord's Supper', in a study of the work of Balthasar Hubmaier, Dirk Philipps, and Pilgram Marpeck. All repudiated the notion of Christ's corporeal presence in the Eucharist. For these men the rite was important as a way of commemorating Christ's suffering; communal meals celebrated Christ's Last Supper before his Crucifixion and bound true believers together in faith, united as the body of the true church.¹¹ Aside from this study, scholars have not examined in detail the Eucharistic theology of other Anabaptists.

Central and southern German Anabaptist theologians dismissed the intrinsic value of sacramental eating, expressing broadly similar views about the memorialistic character of the Lord's Supper. When Hans Denck was expelled from Nuremberg in 1525 after clashing with Andreas Osiander and made to confess his errors, he explained his Eucharistic theology: people sick in their souls should not be deluded into believing that bodily consumption could alleviate their ills; the essence of Christian life was true spiritual drinking and eating that came from discipline to the word of God.¹² Hut was more direct in his dismissal of traditional interpretations. When questioned in 1527, he stated that the body and blood of Christ could not be present in simple bread and wine. In a fairly unoriginal reading of the Gospels, especially Luke 22:20, building on arguments used not only by Karlstadt but also Erasmus, he pointed out that the disciples broke the bread and drank wine at the Last Supper before Christ spoke the words about the meaning of the chalice and the testament, and certainly before the Crucifixion. No miraculous transformation preceded the meal, so bread and wine merely symbolized Christ's suffering. The chalice signified the new testament made in Christ's spilled blood, and the Lord's Supper celebrated the vow among the faithful to stay with Christ and display brotherly love.¹³

¹¹ John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Waterloo, IA, 1993). In *Ein einfältiger Unterricht* (1526), one of his three works on the Lord's Supper, Hubmaier wrote that 'the breaking, sharing, and eating of the bread is not a breaking, sharing and eating of the body of Christ, who sits in Heaven in the court of god the Father, but all that is a reminder of his shattering and sharing in suffering'; QGTix: 293.

¹² Clarence Bauman (ed.), *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck: Interpretation and Translation of Key Texts* (Leiden, 1990), 65.

¹³ For Hut's views see QGTii: 43–4; Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben, und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Göttingen, 2002), 476–9, 520. Karlstadt had dismissed the Mass with similar arguments. Luke 22 was cited by some as proof for the Eucharist: Christ gave the testament and instructed his disciples to drink and eat. Foreshadowing Hut's ideas, Karlstadt pointed out that 'Christ gave all his disciples the chalice to drink, and only after did he say that is my blood which will be spilled for you'; Andreas Karlstadt, *Ob man mit heylicher schrift erweysen müge das Christus mit leyb, blut vnd sele im Sacrament*

Our knowledge of what ordinary Anabaptists made of these arguments is even sketchier. Most in central Germany seemed to reformulate ideas taken from Luther, Karlstadt, Zwingli, Hubmaier, and Denck, throwing them together in a seemingly haphazard fashion, but adding nothing new. They were sceptical about the real presence and might dismiss the sacrament as a mere reminder or memorial. Katharina Goldschmidt, questioned in Mühlhausen in December 1537, announced that 'she could not conceive of it [the sacrament of the altar], for when she takes the bread, she does it as a remembrance'.¹⁴ Many celebrated humble meals at which they did not use blessed bread or wine. Georg Köhler, tried in Sangerhausen in 1535, prioritized the act of communal eating as a re-enactment of the apostolic fellowship over any ritual, sacramental consumption; he said that when Christ broke the bread, he was merely indicating that his body was to be given for the forgiveness of sins. As simple celebrations of this fact, Köhler and other Anabaptists held 'the breaking of bread from one house to another as the apostles did'.¹⁵ Some scholars have argued that the stark statements made by uneducated followers need little explaining and studies therefore have tended to focus on what form 'Lord's Suppers' took.¹⁶ However, asserting that Anabaptists only ate commemorative meals does not explain how these groups came to reject the rite that most eloquently expressed the nexus between the divine and the human, nor does it elucidate how someone like Köhler believed Christ's sacrifice could save people from their sins, once he rejected the Eucharistic transformation.

sey (Basel, 1524), C2r–D2v. See also Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 60–1; Burnett (ed.), *Eucharistic Pamphlets*, 123–6.

¹⁴ 'konn es auch nicht begreifen, dan wan sie das brot nimmet, thut sie es zum gedechtnuß'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 452; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 165r. Hubmaier likewise had claimed that the Mass was only 'a remembrance of his [Christ's] suffering' ('ain wider gedechtnuß seines leydens') and an external reminder of man's inner state; *QG*Tix: 101. See also Rempel, *Lord's Supper*, 41–92.

¹⁵ 'und halthen das brotthbrechen van hausen zu hause, wy dy aposteln gthan'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 505.

¹⁶ Goertz has argued that simple Anabaptists had simple ideas on faith. As regards the Lord's Supper, they would often resort to eating plain meals; Hans-Jürgen Goertz, 'Die "gemeinen" Täufer: Einfache Brüder und selbstbewußte Schwestern', in Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen* (Göttingen, 2007). See also John S. Oyer, 'Anabaptism in Central Germany II: Faith and Life', *MQR* 35.1 (1961), 24–5. Marlies Mattern provides a description of the simple meals ordinary Anabaptists held, and C. Arnold Snyder includes a brief summary of Anabaptists' views on the Lord's Supper in his survey of Anabaptist theology; Marlies Mattern, *Leben im Abseits: Frauen und Männer im Täuferum (1525–1550): Eine Studie zur Alltagsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 224–8; C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON, 1995), 394–6.

As the Reformation diminished the ceremonial splendour of the Mass, as pastors offered communion in both kinds, and as reforming religious authorities tried to enforce regular participation in the rite, individuals had to reassess their relationship with Eucharistic food. Anabaptists articulated their thoughts about changing practice and were drawn into a debate about the implausibility of eating a baked Christ; in so doing, they reconfigured the symbolic framework which had underpinned the act of eating bread and drinking wine. But Anabaptists went beyond dismissing the bread and wine in iconoclastic fashion. Imitation Lord's Suppers were only one dimension of Anabaptist ideas, forming part of a complex set of concerns about the physical connection between Christ's sacrifice and salvation. When Katharina Goldschmidt, for example, was asked again in 1545 why she rejected the sacrament, she said that one should not look for Christ in earthly things and that Christ's body could not be received in bread.¹⁷ Men and women like Katharina expressed anxiety about the sacrament because the rite implied Christ could be handled and eaten by humans. As a consequence, Anabaptists in central Germany not only concluded that Christ could not be present in these ordinary foodstuffs, but broke the link between physical eating and Christ's redeeming death. While some held commemorative meals, there was no suggestion that these initiated a salvific process. Instead, Anabaptists developed a language of sacramental devotion which moved away from the metaphors of eating and focused intently on Christ's living and bleeding body in which all true believers shared.

The debates of the Lutheran Reformation fundamentally shaped Anabaptist ideas on the Eucharist in central Germany. Of specific importance was the Wittenberg reformer's unique explanation of the relationship between the bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ. The doctrine of real presence questioned the nature of sacramental bread and wine, but did not dismiss entirely their symbolic, miraculous qualities. Luther was not overly concerned about practice or the necessity of receiving communion in both kinds, but he did care about the nature of the symbolic framework that underpinned the rite. In contrast to the movement in other areas, therefore, central German Anabaptism developed against the background of a theology which still invested Eucharistic language with totemic power, and which seemed to prioritize the individual, mystical union with Christ's body over the codified communal performance of the rite.¹⁸ This moulded Anabaptist views.

¹⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 477; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8211/6, fo. 315r.

¹⁸ Burnett argues that this was the fundamental difference between the sacrament in Wittenberg and Zurich, reflecting late medieval controversies over the nature of communion; Burnett, 'Social History of Communion', 115–16.

Anabaptists in central Germany scorned Luther's interpretation, but they seemed to take from Luther a sense of the divine materiality of Christ's body, whose nature was beyond human reasoning although it united all believers. In this respect they differed from the more purely memorialistic theology of reformed communities.¹⁹ Anabaptists agreed with Calvin and Zwingli that Christ's body and blood were not present in bread and wine. However, they did not bind their understandings of Christ's sacrifice to the liturgical celebration of the Lord's Supper. Commemorative and memorialistic meals were not essential or even frequent in Anabaptist worship in central Germany as a form of mediation between the word and the believer. On occasion some groups tried to recreate the atmosphere of the Lord's Supper in detail. Anabaptists arrested in Sangerhausen in 1534 described a Lord's Supper they had held in Halberstadt in summer of that year at which eighteen people were present. Petronella said the proceedings started with one of their number called Peter washing their feet and kissing them, though it is not clear why he in particular had been chosen as Christ in this piece of role play. Then they ate bread and drank wine in a simple meal with no special ceremony but simply reminded one another 'that they would be obedient to Christ unto death'.²⁰ However, rituals of this kind were not indispensable, nor did the mimesis of the historical Last Supper establish the physical connection with Christ's sacrifice. Instead central German Anabaptist theology developed new Christo-centric forms of sacramental devotion which focused on an intensely immediate union with the body of Christ.

THE MASS IN MEDIEVAL GERMANY

By celebrating the Eucharist, medieval religious life transformed the natural, daily activity of eating into a wondrous act, which was overlaid at every level with images of the body. The flesh of the sacrificed Christ, eaten by the physical body of the believer, signified the unified corpus of the Church. These universal symbols, which mediated between the human and divine worlds, knitted together diverse interests in the community, although the actual practice varied almost infinitely from region to region, and also shifted according to the rhythms of the liturgical

¹⁹ Wandel, *Eucharist*, 103.

²⁰ 'sye haben keinen ssonderlichen nutz darvon und thuns darumb, dass sye darmyt Christo byss in den thodt gehorssam leysten wollen'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 523, 529.

year.²¹ Not everyone would consume the sacramental bread on a regular basis because Catholic ritual increasingly prioritized the elevation of the consecrated Host over consumption; and no one except the clergy drank the wine. Yet even when bread and wine were withheld, individuals, particularly women, experienced Eucharistic miracles in which they devoured Christ's flesh and tasted the sweet substance of His body.²² These symbolic forms of eating and drinking, however, were fraught with contention. What was the body and blood of Christ under the species of transformed food supposed to look and taste like, and how was anyone supposed to consume Christ?

In answer to these problems, the Catholic Church sought to prescribe what sort of bread and wine should be used for the Eucharist. Thomas Aquinas specified: 'Other than wheat bread and wine [from the grape] cannot be used for this Sacrament.'²³ Using red wine was logical, as it did at least look like blood, and the taste of pure, almost flavourless white bread did not offend sensibilities, with the added benefit that some theologians believed it most closely mirrored Christ's essence. Aquinas stated that if the wheat flour of the bread were not sufficiently pure, it could not constitute the body of Christ, while unleavened bread replicated the nature of Christ's flesh, incarnated without sexual union.²⁴ Rye bread and ale were deemed unsuitable, and Aquinas criticized those who performed the sacrament without the requisite materials: the Arrodinici who used bread and cheese as 'offerings of the fruits of the earth and of their flocks', and the Cataphrygae and the Praeputiati who mixed flour with 'the blood from an infant, which they draw out of its whole body from tiny puncture wounds' to make the bread.²⁵

²¹ See Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 48–69, 251; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991); Wandel, *Eucharist*, 14–45. John Bossy's influential article argued that throughout the late medieval and early modern period the Eucharist was a social institution which established unity, enacted through repeated rituals and symbolic gestures; John Bossy, 'The Mass as a Social Institution', *PP* 100.1 (1983), 29–61.

²² For the practice of elevation see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 54–63. On the relationship between female spirituality and Eucharistic miracles see Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 77–8, 117–19, 274–5.

²³ 'De alio autem pane quam tritici et alio vino non potest hoc confici sacramentum'; Thomas Aquinas, *De articulis Fidei et Ecclesiae sacramentis ad archiepiscopum Panormitanum*, ii (Textum Taurini, Rome, 1954; online version) <<http://www.corpusthomaticum.org/oss.html>> accessed 7 August 2009. See also Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 30.

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, iii, Q. 74, Art. 3–4 (Textum Taurini, Rome, 1954; online version) <<http://www.corpusthomaticum.org/sth4074.html>> accessed 2 February 2013.

²⁵ 'Secundus est error Artotrytarum qui offerunt in sacramento hoc panem et caseum, dicentes a primis hominibus oblationes de frugibus terrae et ovium celebratas fuisse . . . Tertius est error Cathaphrygarum et Praeputiatorum qui de infantis sanguine, quem de

Despite such recommendations, the nature of consumables tended to vary from place to place depending on what was available locally. Even if white, unleavened, wheat bread and red wine were used for the sacrament, both were still real food and drink, made by the same people who might see it consumed in church later. The question much debated by medieval thinkers over what would happen if a mouse ate a Eucharistic crumb may seem to be as obscure as matters relating to angels and pinheads, but it reflected a widespread unease about how the Host as actual bread could be eaten as the body of Christ.²⁶ As Hans Nadler, an Anabaptist interrogated in Erlangen in January 1529, bluntly put it, 'what goes into the mouth, it is written, must come out naturally again'.²⁷

In the popular imagination these transformed morsels of bread and drops of wine could be distinguished from ordinary food by their supernatural properties. Eucharistic wine was a particularly powerful remedy: it could stop a woman's periods and was used against epilepsy.²⁸ Sacramental bread was used for all sorts of magical purposes in what Po-chia Hsia has called 'parasacramental Eucharistic devotion'.²⁹ To the dismay of the church authorities, some people, rather than chewing the bread, would keep scraps in their mouths for later use as a remedy for sick children or animals, to protect themselves, or even harm others. The ground-up Host was made into a love potion, but also was supposedly incorporated into strange concoctions by witches that might involve bones and the blood of children.³⁰ All sorts of miraculous practices were

toto eius corpore minutis punctorum vulneribus extorquent, quasi Eucharistiam suam conficere perhibentur, immiscentes eum farinae, panemque inde facientes'; Aquinas, *De articulis Fidei*, ii; (Textum Taurini, Rome, 1954; online version) <<http://www.corpusthomaticum.org/oss.html>> accessed 7 August 2009. See also Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 30, 48.

²⁶ Peter de la Palu, a Dominican, asserted that a mouse who had eaten Eucharistic bread should be caught, burned, and washed down a *piscine*, while Bonaventura and Aquinas engaged in an extended debate about whether sacramental bread remained intact if eaten by a mouse; Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of its Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN, 1999), 220–2; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 68; Wandel, *Eucharist*, 36.

²⁷ 'was zum munde eingeht, stet geschriben, das get zu seinem natürlichen gang wider aus'; QGTii: 137. For similar attacks made by medieval heretics see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 320–1.

²⁸ Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927–42), i: 49–52.

²⁹ Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, CT, 1988), 10.

³⁰ See for example stolen Hosts used by witches in Normandy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; William Monter, 'Toads and Eucharists: The Male Witches of Normandy, 1564–1660', *French Historical Studies* 20 (1997), 590–2. There were also parallels between the imagery of consuming the Host and cannibalistic acts performed by witches; Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, CT, 2004), 73–4.

associated with items used in the Eucharist, not just the sacramental bread and wine. People believed that clothes worn to the service could become imbued with thaumaturgic properties, so that in Oldenburg in north-west Germany ill calves were treated with salt and water served in a shoe which had been worn recently at the sacrament.³¹ The altar cloth on which the bread and wine were placed was said to heal epileptics and the possessed; the corporal, the pure white cloth reserved for the Host, was said to be good for eye illnesses. As Bob Scribner observed, these objects seemingly had a variety of spiritual, psychic, and physical effects, which blurred the line between religion and magic.³²

The depth of feeling about the supernatural potency of such objects, as well as ambivalence about their capacity, was highlighted by stories of abuse and desecration of the rite by witches and Jews. As the original 'Christ-killers', Jews were inevitably associated with the desecration of the Host, as in the widely publicized case from the lower Bavarian town of Passau.³³ Tales of ritual murder of Christian children by Jews for their blood, most typically to be used in making matzos for Passover in some grotesque Eucharistic parody, also abounded in the medieval period.³⁴ Jews were accused of such a crime in early thirteenth-century Fulda.³⁵ Some scholars have argued that the blood libel and Host desecration tales were an attempt to dispel Christian doubt about Eucharistic theory or assuage guilt about eating Christ.³⁶ David Biale rejects this conclusion, suggesting that blood libel was a by-product of the popularity of late medieval Eucharistic devotion that stemmed from ordinary people's desire to make the sacrament real and visible.³⁷ Both interpretations agree that there was a profound concern about the use and abuse of wondrous sacramental objects.

³¹ Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli, *Aberglaubens*, i: 45–51.

³² Robert W. Scribner, 'Cosmic Order and Daily Life: Sacred and Secular in Pre-Industrial German Society', in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation German* (London, 1987), 10–11.

³³ Hsia, *Myth of Ritual Murder*, 50–6; Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 173–5.

³⁴ Hsia, *Myth of Ritual Murder*, 2. See Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Blood Libel Legend: A Case-Book in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Madison, WI, 1991) for the persistence of these tales throughout history.

³⁵ Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (1990; repr. Berkeley, CA, 1996), 263–81.

³⁶ Dundes, 'The Ritual Murder of Blood Libel Legend: A Study in Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion', in Dundes (ed.) *Blood Libel Legend*, 336–78, esp. 357.

³⁷ David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (2007; repr. Berkeley, CA, 2008), 112–13. See also Scribner, 'Cosmic Order and Daily Life', 12–13.

A whole symbolic world related to eating existed in late medieval Europe, which expressed fears, desires, and hopes about salvation through a rite which took people out of their everyday lives to partake in God. But what happened to this rich culture of bleeding hosts and Eucharistic visions, evoked by scholars like Miri Rubin and Caroline Walker Bynum, a universe suffused with images of corporeal unification with God through the bread and wine?³⁸ How do we understand the transition to the stark literalism of Alexander or Hans Nadler? Do we have to rely on Max Weber's famous assertion that the Reformation represented a step on the road to the 'disenchantment of the world'?³⁹ Not necessarily. The Reformation attacked but did not completely destroy the late medieval traditions of Eucharistic devotion. Anxieties about how the body of Christ should taste, about the wondrous powers of sacramental materials, and more fundamental queries about how to commune with Christ's body took on new urgency, as religious change shattered generally accepted, if contested, assumptions about the link between the bread and wine and Christ's flesh and blood. While the bread and wine lost their miraculous sheen, we should be sensitive to the manner in which this symbolic world was recreated in other ways.

REFORMING THE EUCHARIST

Next to baptism, the Eucharist was the only sacrament to survive in Lutheran theology, but like that ritual it was substantially altered. For Luther, the Roman ritual of the Mass exemplified the financial and moral abuses of the Catholic Church, and needed to be reformed. In *On the Babylonian Captivity* he complained:

What else is Satan trying to do to us through this misfortune of ours but to remove every trace of the [true] mass out of the church, though he is meanwhile at work filling every corner of the globe with [false] masses, that is, with abuses and mockeries of God's testament—burdening the world more and more heavily with most grievous sins of idolatry, to its deeper condemnation? For what more sinful idolatry can there be than to abuse

³⁸ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Europe and Beyond* (Philadelphia, PA, 2007); Bynum, *Holy Feast*; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*.

³⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (first English edn, London, 1930; 2001), 61. For a review of the debates surrounding this thesis see Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and the "Disenchantment of the World" Reassessed', *Historical Journal* 51.2 (2008), 497–528.

God's promises with perverse opinions and to neglect or extinguish faith in them?⁴⁰

Masses said for the dead, for fraternities, and for those who could not make it to church: Luther condemned all of these as corrupt, money-making schemes which had nothing to do with the real meaning of the sacrament. The root of many of these problems, he believed, was the misconception that the Eucharist was a literal sacrifice of Christ, a sacrifice which had been at the heart of medieval practice. In *Babylonian Captivity* Luther wrote that this 'wicked abuse' led people to believe that 'the mass is a good work and a sacrifice. And this abuse has brought an endless host of other abuses in its train'.⁴¹

Despite lamenting this misapprehension, Luther nevertheless affirmed that Christ was present in the Eucharist. A communicant should believe that the body and blood of Christ were truly present and that God forgave sinners via a process beyond human reason. This was the promise, the testament, which gave the sacrament meaning.⁴² Luther rejected scholastic arguments about the distinction between substance and accidents, which had been used to explain why the bread and wine still looked the same after the Eucharistic transformation, although they were substantially different. In contrast, he contested that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, while remaining bread and wine, a doctrine which has become known as the 'real presence'. He criticized the Catholic Church for following Thomist thought rather than Aristotle since transubstantiation was an improbable and less believable doctrine than real presence.⁴³ Christ was in the substance and the accidents. Using the analogy of red-hot iron which was suffused with fire in every part, Luther posed a characteristic rhetorical question to explain: 'Why is it not even more possible that the body of Christ be contained in every part of the substance of the bread?'⁴⁴

Luther's theological critiques also implied practical reforms. In *Babylonian Captivity*, his first bone of contention was the nonsensical way in which the clergy withheld the wine from the laity without the authority to do so.

⁴⁰ *De captivitate Babylonica* (1520); LW 36: 41–2; WA *Schriften*, 6: 516.

⁴¹ LW 36: 35; WA *Schriften*, 6: 512.

⁴² LW 36: 36; WA *Schriften*, 6: 513, 518. See also Thomas J. Davis, "'The Truth of the Divine Words': Luther's Sermons on the Eucharist, 1521–28, and the Structure of Eucharistic Meaning", *SCJ* 30.2 (1999), 323–42.

⁴³ LW 36: 29; WA *Schriften*, 6: 508.

⁴⁴ LW 36: 32; WA *Schriften*, 6: 510.

If the church cannot withhold the bread, or both kinds, neither can it withhold the wine. This cannot possibly be gainsaid; for the church's power must be the same over either kind as it is over both kinds, and if it has no power over both kinds, it has none over either kind. I am curious to hear what the flatterers of Rome will have to say to this.⁴⁵

Luther's attacks on the Mass derogated the power and special status of the clergy since they no longer executed a mysterious sacrifice, beyond the mental and physical grasp of the laity. Giving communion in both kinds to the laity seemed the logical next step. As Luther hid in the Wartburg, Karlstadt dressed in his ordinary robes rather than clerical vestments for the communion service in Wittenberg on Christmas Day 1521, spoke the words of institution in German, and offered communion in both kinds.⁴⁶ When Luther returned to the town in March 1522, he urged caution on his hastier colleague. In response Karlstadt insisted that receiving communion in both kinds was essential to the meaning of the sacrament, if it was to be more than mere worship of the bread, and become participation in the saving act of Christ's sacrifice.⁴⁷ No open split had appeared yet between Luther and Karlstadt, but their different views on practice revealed fault lines. Subsumed within a seemingly minor debate about how quickly communion in both kinds should be enforced, were the seeds of bigger problems: namely, to what extent the precepts of divine law or Christian freedom should prevail when it came to practice; and perhaps even more importantly the relationship between external procedure and internal meaning. As the dispute with Luther escalated, Karlstadt became increasingly critical of the Wittenbergers' reluctance to abolish popish practice. He argued, for example, that any elevation of the Host was tantamount to sacrifice; even calling the rite 'Messe' and not 'Abendmahl' was idolatrous.⁴⁸ In comparison, as late as 1542 Luther remained ambivalent about prescribing the form of ritual. In a letter to Prince George of Anhalt, he said it did not matter to him whether the Host was elevated or not; ceremonies were not articles of faith.⁴⁹

Such indifference helps explain why Luther did not immediately transform the liturgy for the Mass. He produced a revised Latin version

⁴⁵ LW 36: 22; WA *Schriften*, 6: 504.

⁴⁶ Scribner, 'The Reformation as a Social Movement', in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), 149; Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, trans. James L. Schaff, 3 vols (Philadelphia, PA and Minneapolis, MN, 1985–93), ii: *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–32*, 34.

⁴⁷ Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 32–5.

⁴⁸ Andreas Karlstadt, *Wider die alte vn[d] neue Papistische Messen* (Basel, 1524), A2v. See also Burnett (ed.), *Eucharistic Pamphlets*, 112.

⁴⁹ WA *Briefe* 10, No. 3762: Luther to Prince Georg of Anhalt, 26 June 1542, 85–7.

in 1523, while a German translation followed in 1525, printed the year after.⁵⁰ Like his baptismal liturgy, this became a blueprint for orders of service throughout Lutheran territories, and pastors were provided with guidelines on transmitting Luther's views on the Mass to their parishioners. Instructions given to the first visitors in Saxony in 1528 stressed three important points for assessing teaching on the sacrament of the altar: first, pastors should state that the true body and blood of Christ were present; second, parishioners should be encouraged to take communion in both kinds; third, the true meaning of the sacrament and its relationship to faith and scripture should be preached.⁵¹ Nevertheless, procedure still varied a great deal, not least because this was not Luther's most pressing concern, and Lutheran churches would often remain adorned with sacristies and shrines, echoes of a time when the sacrificial Mass and not preaching was the central element of worship.⁵²

As they responded to these changes and developed their own refutations of Catholic transubstantiation, Anabaptists might refuse to attend the Eucharist in church at all. Several of Storger's followers had not been to the sacrament for twelve years since the Peasants' War. What prompted this withdrawal?⁵³ The practical effects of any theology which diminished the importance of the actual consumption of transformed bread and wine might probably be non-attendance and absenteeism. But while some individuals made positive and conscious decisions based on theological principles to detach themselves from the church and its rituals, matters were rarely so clear cut. Doubt and anxiety were just as likely to make people reluctant to receive communion.

Hans Schleier from Riethnordhausen, just north of Erfurt, was imprisoned in 1535 and was reprimanded for his refusal to receive the sacrament.⁵⁴ Franciscus Mecheler, the pastor in the town, reported that he did not think Schleier had been more than once in ten years.⁵⁵ Part of Schleier's reason was 'he had placed his pastor and all pastors under ban since his pastor was a sinner', who could not properly confer the sacrament.⁵⁶ While

⁵⁰ Sehling i: 10–16.

⁵¹ Sehling i: 158–61.

⁵² Bridget Heal, 'Sacred Image and Sacred Space in Lutheran Germany', in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (eds), *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), 50–1.

⁵³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 433; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 122r.

⁵⁴ Reinhard Jordan, 'Die Wiedertäufer in Mühlhausen: Wappler, *Die Täuferbewegung in Thüringen von 1526–1584*, Jena 1913', *Mühlhäuser Geschichtsblätter* 15 (1914/15), 39.

⁵⁵ 'So gebe ich meynen bericht das Hans Schleyer nicht gegangen sey zu dem heyligen hoch wordigen Sacrament in zehen jaren dann eyn mal'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 11r.

⁵⁶ 'Er habe sein pffarer vnd alle pffarer jn ban gethan, die weil sein pffarer ein sunder sey'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 13r.

anti-clerical moral outrage had its part to play in leading Schleier to reject the rite, his ideas were a confused reaction to a range of opinions on the Eucharist. He was conscious of the Catholic legacy which he dismissed as 'idolatry', but also said 'he did not want to receive it [the Sacrament] according to their [Lutheran] articles', saying that there was not sufficient scriptural proof for frequent communion as it was now celebrated.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly dissatisfied, he had not quite worked out his own answer to the problem of the Eucharist. Schleier was well versed in scripture, but he did not turn to the model of the apostles to suggest a simple Lord's Supper, as we might expect; in fact Schleier said it was virtually impossible to work out what 'apostolic' models were, since the disciples had often been in danger and many things had happened which were not written down.⁵⁸ People could only rely upon Christ's words at the Last Supper, which proved that he 'gave the disciples external bread and wine, and fed them spiritually in their souls with his words, thereby with the word of the Lord he gave them his body and blood'.⁵⁹

Uncertainty about proper practice was exacerbated by the fact that the progress of reforms was not even or uniform. Heinrich Hutter, an Anabaptist who was arrested in 1538, said that 'he holds with the sacrament, but in the *Vogtei* lands he has received the sacrament in both forms, but not in this area because it was not the custom'.⁶⁰ As a result of these changes some men and women became confused about whether they were receiving the rite correctly. Apollonia Ibenstedt, an Anabaptist arrested in 1537, said she did not understand the sacrament of the altar and had not received it for two years but added, possibly in an attempt to placate her interrogators, that she would welcome some instruction.⁶¹ Anxieties about proper sacramental practice led individuals to worry that they might actually be damaging the condition

⁵⁷ 'Im Bastumb habe man das Sacrament zw Abgöttereÿ gemacht darumb bleÿbe er bey der Einsatzung Christi . . . Aber er wölle es nicht entpfahen, wie vnser Artickel lauten, stehe auch nicht, das es Recht seÿ'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 19v–20r.

⁵⁸ 'die lieben Junger seint manichmahl in grosser fahr gewesen . . . dan viel ist geschehen, das nicht alles geschrieben'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 20r–v.

⁵⁹ 'Das Christus seynen Jungern gegeben hat eusserlich brod vnd wein, vnd domit mit seinem wort gaystlich gespeÿset, in der seelen des hern wort gibt ihme hiemit sein Leyb vnd blut'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 19v.

⁶⁰ 'er halte vom sacrament, er habe aber in der Voigte das sacrament in beider gestalt entpfangen und nicht hier im gerichte, dieweils nicht gewonlich'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 381; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 139v. Scott Dixon likewise indicates contemporary awareness of the variety in performances of the Mass in rural parishes in Brandenburg; C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach 1528–1603* (Cambridge, 1996), 30.

⁶¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 435; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 126v.

of their soul if they received communion in the wrong form. Pastoral advice from some reformers, such as Karlstadt and Jakob Strauss, even encouraged the laity to stay away from the Eucharist if they could not receive it properly and to meditate on spiritual consumption instead, a line which many Anabaptists were happy to follow. Erhart Jahn claimed that when he had been in Kaspar Hase's house, the preacher had told him 'he should withhold himself from the sacrament, for it damaged blessedness'.⁶²

Did Anabaptists first reject the theology of the real presence and then refuse to come to the sacrament, instead establishing new forms of worship; or did they initially fret about proper performance, and as a result develop a new theology? Asking whether practice or theology came first is rather like the riddle of the chicken and the egg. As with baptism, new theological frameworks and shifting procedures worked together to make people question what they were eating and how the act was related to the economy of salvation.

THE PROBLEM WITH EATING CHRIST

Being absent from the sacrament required an explanation. When interrogated, Anabaptists were asked to articulate why they thought Eucharistic eating was redundant, possibly damaging. In the first instance, many claimed that it was idolatrous to believe that bread could be transformed into Christ's body. In Heinz Kraut's eyes the bread in the sacrament was not just sinful 'Gotteslästerung' (blasphemy), but 'Abgotterei' (idolatry).⁶³ When Christoph von der Eichen was questioned in September 1564 about the Lord's Supper, he responded: 'We also commit a great blasphemy there that we bake a bread God, just as the children of Israel made a calf moulded from gold.'⁶⁴ Denunciations of the Eucharist, which transformed everyday items into supernatural gifts, became entangled with a wider discourse about the inability of material objects to relate to the divine. Just as many reformers rejected the bread and wine because they were man-made, they also discarded of all sorts of other sanctified

⁶² 'er solte sich je vom sacrament halten, dann es brechte schaden zur seligkeit'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 388; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 174r.

⁶³ CRii: 1001.

⁶⁴ 'Thut auch darzu große gotslesterung, das wir einen brotern Gott backen, gleich wie die kinder von Israel ein guldnen geßßen kalb gemacht haben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 499; SHStAD, GA 10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 253r. See similar dismissals by Hubmaier *QGTix*: 302.

substances, including baptismal water and salt, candles, and images. Karlstadt dismissed idols for being mere firewood, while Hubmaier attacked the way the sacramental bread was regarded as a magical charm used to ward against floods, fire, and storms, or 'locked up in stone and iron'.⁶⁵

If Christ could not be present in bread and wine made by human hands, then he could not possibly be consumed at the rite. Kunna Genslerin, one of several Anabaptists questioned in Frankenhausen in January 1530, said 'the bread and wine are there with much other nonsense, and Christ is not there'.⁶⁶ Such views are not entirely surprising. Anabaptist theology always had an iconoclastic and anti-ritualistic edge. In November 1535 a group of Anabaptists from Kleineutersdorf were questioned, and they dismissed Mass and baptism in the same breath since they were 'nothing other than simple bread, wine, and water'.⁶⁷ The idea of Christ's presence in the bread and wine was so implausible to some that they laughed about it. Curt Meiße and Adam Kühne joked that there was real flesh and blood present at the altar, but this was not the body of Christ, only the hand of the priest.⁶⁸ Kristina Strobel also ridiculed the rite. When interrogated in 1537 about the sacrament, her mocking reply came, 'What, the "Sackmantel", I think nothing of it!'⁶⁹ No English translation conveys the meaning of her words. 'Sackmantel' was clearly a derogatory play on 'Sakrament' which implied that the ritual was some foolish trick, not even worth dignifying with a serious response. She was not the only one to reject the Eucharist with sneering disdain. Barbara Schmidt from the village of Needa was mocked for receiving the sacrament in Coburg by a woman known as 'old Fligerin', who said to her 'What did you eat, have you eaten the Devil?'⁷⁰

Such mocking was revealing: it betrayed profound scepticism about the rite and its miraculous power. Anabaptists were uneasy, since eating seemed a completely inappropriate, even laughable way of communing with Christ's body. Here too Anabaptists echoed other reformers who

⁶⁵ 'nit inn den Lufft hencken, drey tail darauß machen, in Wein ertrencken, nit Spacieren tragen wider gussen, Feür vnd vngewitter oder in Stain vnd Eysen ein versperren'; *QGTix*: 298; Edward J. Furcha (ed.) *The Essential Carlstadt* (Waterloo, IA, 1995), 111.

⁶⁶ 'das brot und wein do sein mit vilem ubrigen geschwetze, und Christus sei nit da'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 311; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 66v.

⁶⁷ 'nichts anders dan schlechts brot, wein und wasser'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 399; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 999, fo. 18v.

⁶⁸ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 320–2; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, 61v–62v.

⁶⁹ 'Was, vom Sackmantel helde ich nichts!'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 444; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 149r.

⁷⁰ 'was hastu fressen, hastu den Teuffel fressen?'; Berbig, 'Franken', 400.

disliked the idea of masticating Christ with human jaws.⁷¹ Zwingli found such an idea abhorrent, and Hubmaier conjured an image of Christ being 'touched, seized, broken, split up with hands, and eaten with teeth'.⁷²

Central German Anabaptists reflected this distaste for touching Christ. In 1537 when tried in Mühlhausen, Ottilia Goldschmidt said she had been taught that 'God should not live in things which are made by human hands'.⁷³ Klaus Steinmetz, also questioned in Mühlhausen in 1545, was not only concerned with how the bread was made and consumed, but how the human body digested it. Appalled at the idea, he quoted Mark 15:11: 'whatever goes into the mouth comes into the stomach and not into the heart.' For Steinmetz, the passage implied that the holy flesh could never be absorbed properly by the base action of eating since food went straight to the belly, and 'he does not believe that Christ lets himself be eaten and drunk'.⁷⁴ Mark 15 told the story of the Pharisees who criticized the disciples when they ate with unwashed hands. Christ responded that nothing which entered through people's mouths could defile them since it did not go to the heart; whatever came out of their mouths, however, could be damning since this proved inner sentiment. Karlstadt had used the same verses to demonstrate that the sign of sacrament by itself could not harm or save anyone, but Steinmetz provided his own, rather bizarre, bit of exegesis. He reversed the meaning to suggest that anything holy would be defiled by its passage through the body. It is not surprising that he rejected the sacrament, but the logic of such arguments was rather perplexing. If the bread and wine were not the body and blood of Christ, why was there such discomfort with eating or handling Christ?

When ordinary Anabaptists tried to express their concerns about the Mass, therefore, there was tension between the iconoclastic dismissals of bread and wine but the almost tacit admission that the sacrament should be a corporeal bond between Christ and the faithful. Lentz Rüdiger did not believe that Christ's body and blood were in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, 'for one may neither see nor grasp nor taste it'.⁷⁵ It seemed that as Rüdiger attempted to join the dots and explain how Christ's sacrifice had brought about salvation, he concluded that sacramental eating

⁷¹ Wandel, *Eucharist*, 72.

⁷² 'Jst nun das Brot der leib Christi, so muß Chritus mit henden angetast, angriffen, gebrochen, außgetailt vnd mit den zenen gessen werden'; *QGTix*: 294.

⁷³ 'Got solte nit wonen in dingen, das von menschenhenden gemacht ist'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 454; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 169v.

⁷⁴ 'was zum munde eingehe, kum in den bauche und nicht in das herz, glaube nicht, das sich Christus lasse essen und trinken'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 475; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8211/6, fo. 313r.

⁷⁵ 'Vrsach, das man [es] weder sehen noch greiffen noch schmecken moge'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 171; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, fo. 9r.

was not the way to bridge the gap between the material and the spiritual, between heaven and earth. He was not alone. Simon Schneider, who was interrogated in Sagan in 1539, said it was illogical to claim that the transformation occurred at the point during the Last Supper when Christ had talked to his disciples about the bread and wine and had pointed to his body, since after the meal Christ had been sacrificed on the cross. At first glance, Schneider seemed to be mirroring Hut and Karlstadt's interpretations of Luke 20, but his clinching statement was revealing. Schneider said 'if they had eaten Him bodily, then what would have been left to slaughter on the cross on the Friday'.⁷⁶ Likewise, Ottilia Goldschmidt believed that the human body of Christ could not have been consumed at the Last Supper since it would have been completely eaten up. She said, 'the bread, whenever they eat, then they thank God; but that the flesh is supposed to be there, that she does not believe, for the flesh and blood was hung on the cross'.⁷⁷

Individuals like Schneider, Goldschmidt, and Steinmetz all began to sever the link between eating and Christ's sacrifice. If their varied statements drawn from a variety of sources sometimes seem contradictory or confused, we should not be surprised. No easy solution existed to the problem that lay at the heart of Christian theology about the incarnation of the Lord in human form and His bond with those He had died to save. Yet a set of concerns did hold Anabaptist views together. Schneider, for example, did not deny the importance of the Crucifixion, nor did he explicitly talk about the presence of Christ in the sacrament, but he renounced eating as a way in which a believer could comprehend the sacrifice of the Saviour. As Anabaptists challenged the Mass by dismissing the act of consuming Christ as fundamentally inappropriate, they reconfigured the corporeal link between flesh and spirit, and the nature of Christ's bodily presence in the human world.

SPIRITUAL CONSUMPTION

Spiritual consumption was a possible solution to the distasteful physicality of eating Christ. Wolfgang Wüst, one of Hut's followers arrested in Baiersdorf in 1528, said he had been taught that the flesh and blood of

⁷⁶ 'darnach an dem gutten freittags am galgen des heiligen kreutzes geschlagen sei worden, wen sie inen leiplich gessen hetten, was hette man an dem freittag ans kreutze zuschlahen gehabt'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 31r.

⁷⁷ 'das brot, so oft sie das essen, so danken sie Gott, das aber das fleisch da sein solt, das gleube sie nit, dan das fleisch und blut ist ans creuz gehangen worden'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 454; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 169v.

Christ were not conjured from the bread. Rather people should understand Christ's words in a spiritual sense, for when they accepted the word of God in their hearts, they ate Christ spiritually.⁷⁸ Wüst's claim was hardly unique. Other theologians and preachers were already explaining that eating the sacrament was different from normal dining. Medieval theologians emphasized the benefits of spiritual consumption of the sacrament in place of actual eating because communion by the laity in the late medieval period was infrequent. Similarly the Bohemian reformer Jan Hus stressed that communicants must partake sacramentally but also spiritually in the body of Christ.⁷⁹ Hans Denck described the action of eating and drinking together as a powerful mystical experience, rather than an act of base consumption. He wrote:

To eat and drink, both together are useful. Eating comforts and strengthens, drinking ignites in love and completes that for which Christ came, that is the washing away of sins that happened in the pouring out of Christ's blood.⁸⁰

His vision of the Eucharistic union was so abstract that the idea of consumption had become widened almost beyond recognition. Some reformers went even further. Karlstadt's determined dualism of matter and spirit made him sever the link between corporeal consumption and spiritual eating, as did the Silesian radical Caspar Schwenckfeld. From 1526 onwards, Schwenckfeld and some of his followers withheld themselves from the sacrament, presumably choosing instead a purely mental form of the ritual.⁸¹ Debates about spiritual consumption nearly always came back to the passage from John 6:51–6, where Christ told the Jews he was the living bread come down from heaven and that 'whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life'.⁸² It is not hard to see why

⁷⁸ 'Wann sie das wort han und annemen und in ir herz schließen, wie Cristus gelet hab, so niessen sie den lieb Christi im gaist'; *QGT*ii: 84.

⁷⁹ Burnett, 'Social History of Communion', 80–5; Gerrish, 'Discerning the Body', 379; Hieremonk Patapios, 'Sub Utraque Specie: The Arguments of John Hus and Jacobek of Stribro in Defence of Giving Communion to the Laity under Both Kinds', *Journal of Theological Studies* 53.2 (2002), 507–8; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 63–4.

⁸⁰ 'Essen und trincken, beyde zusammen sind nutz. Essen tröster und sterckt, trincken erzindet in der lieb und vollendet das, darumb Christus kumen ist, das ist die abwaschung der sünd, das ist geschehen im blutvergiessen Christi'; *QGT*vi.II: 26.

⁸¹ Goldbourne, *Flesh and the Feminine*, 56–60; Wandel, *Eucharist*, 71.

⁸² Cornelius Hoen distinguished between types of spiritual bread in his 1525 work, *Most Christian Letter*; Cornelius Hoen, *EPISTOLA CHRISTIANA ADMODVM ab annis quatuor ad quondam* (Strasbourg, 1525); Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, 17; Bart Jan Spruyt, *Cornelius Henrici Hoen Honius and His*

this passage, which emphasized the spiritual flesh of Christ, should have attracted the attention of those who looked for a different meaning in the Eucharist.⁸³

Such arguments about spiritual eating influenced Anabaptists in central Germany, encouraging them to develop not only an increasingly sceptical attitude to the Eucharist, but alternative views on the nature of communion. Melchior Rinck used the passage from John to reject Luther's theology. When questioned in August 1528, he denied that he had asserted that anyone who received the sacrament received the Devil, but he did say that he hoped to prove that 'in this case Luther has taught incorrectly'. He continued:

Whoever says that Christ promised his natural and assumed body and blood in the bread and wine as food and drink of the soul is truly contradicting Christ in the sixth chapter of John and cannot justify his opinion with godly and unfalsified scripture.⁸⁴

Ordinary Anabaptists were not ignorant of these debates either. An Anabaptist, who was arrested in Beyernaumburg in 1543 and would not give his name, was asked to recite the Lord's Prayer. He did so but he did not ask for daily bread rather 'the spiritual bread from heaven'.⁸⁵ Hans Nadler's scriptural knowledge was more impressive. He said that it was written in John 6 that Christ was the living bread come from heaven, not bread baked in the oven.⁸⁶ He continued:

John says in chapter 6: that bread, which I give you, is spirit and life. So it is my understanding, we should hear the word of God from the Holy Gospel

Epistle on the Eucharist 1525: Medieval Heresy, Erasmusian Humanism, and Reform in the Early Sixteenth-Century Low Countries (Leiden, 2006); 94–5; Wandel, *Eucharist*, 72–3.

⁸³ Karlstadt, Zwingli, and Schwenckfeld all relied on John 6, and the Hussites had used the passage as justification for giving communion in both kinds but also for a combined sacramental and spiritual eating; Goldbourne, *Flesh and the Feminine*, 61–2; Patapios, 'Sub Utraque Specie', 520–1; Wandel, *Eucharist*, 72–3.

⁸⁴ 'Wilcher sagt, das Christus versprochen habe seinen naturlichen und angenommen leip vnd plut im brot und wein zur speise und trank der sele, ist richtig wider Christum Johannis [am] sexten und mag sein meinung mit gotlicher und ongefelschter schrift nit erhalten'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 299–300.

⁸⁵ 'das geistlich brot von himmel'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 470; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 121v.

⁸⁶ 'Nun stet geschriben Johannis am 6. ich bin das lebendig brot, das von himel ist rabgestigen, nit das brot, das im ofen ist gebacken . . . Weiter spricht Johannis am 6. im beschluß, das brot, das ich euch gib, ist geist und leben. Also ist mein verstand, wir sollen do heren das wort gottes aus dem heiligen evangelium und sollen darnach leben und ton. Der mensch lebt ewiglich, der darnach lebt und tut. Das ist den leib Cristi geistlich empfangen'; QGTii: 137–8; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 38r–51. For Hut's views on the Lord's Supper see Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 476–9.

and should live and act according to it. Man lives eternally, who lives and acts accordingly. That is the spiritual reception of the body of Christ.

It was not that Nadler could not understand the transformation that happened at the Mass and so simplified it. Rather he believed there was a qualitative difference between any bread that had been made by human hands and any bread/body of Christ. Yet this distinction did not resolve all the problems for Steinmetz, the Anabaptist who was so worried about digesting Christ. He rejected physical eating and embraced a more spiritual form of the sacrament. However, he remained anxious that he was still unworthy to receive the sacrament. Maybe even spiritual eating might defile Christ if it was not done properly.⁸⁷

Using John 6 to interpret the Eucharist put Anabaptists at odds with Luther. In his early works, Luther was emphatic that this passage of scripture did not refer to the sacrament. In *Babylonian Captivity* he pointed out that the sacrament had not been instituted when Christ spoke these words and argued that Christ was speaking of faith of the incarnated word. The Jews, Luther said, had misunderstood this as a carnal eating, and he criticized the 'Bohemians' for using the passage to justify communion in both kinds. Sacramental eating could not give life since unworthy people also ate the sacrament.⁸⁸ Luther later relented slightly and suggested that spiritual consumption before the Lord's Supper was necessary, but from a pastoral point of view spiritual consumption, which led people to avoid the sacrament, was frowned upon. When the authorities refuted Nadler's views, they repeated Luther's assertion that what was said in John 6 was nothing to do with the Lord's Supper, and if Nadler wanted to understand how flesh could be spiritual, he should refer to the works of Luther.⁸⁹

Anabaptists in central Germany developed a unique response to the idea of spiritual consumption as they separated spiritual communion from sacramental eating. Their views have to be understood in the wider context of religious changes that dismantled practices which would have traditionally given meaning to spiritual communion. In the later fifteenth century spiritual eating seems to have been an answer to the way in which the clergy restricted the Eucharist. Many women (and some men) who could not eat the bread or drink the

⁸⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 475; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8211/6, fo. 312v.

⁸⁸ LW 36: 19–20; WA *Schriften*, 6: 502.

⁸⁹ 'Was er hie vom 6. capitel Johannis sagt, wißt ir, das nichts vom abendmal gered ist . . . Item wie flaisch geistlich oder geist sei mug, find ir in confessione Martini'; QGTii: 146; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 428–33.

wine imagined themselves tasting the Eucharist, or devouring and being devoured by Christ. Furthermore, this had been buttressed by a range of experiences and miracles that proved the presence of Christ's Eucharistic body on earth, such as miraculous stories of bleeding hosts, most famously the three hosts that survived a fire in Wilsnack in 1383. Clerics were often sceptical about these miraculous manifestations of blood, but they fostered outpourings of popular devotional expression as pilgrimage sites.⁹⁰ Blood cults were expressions of the desire to share in the salvific blood of Christ, even if the laity were not permitted to drink from the chalice.⁹¹ Host elevation, blood miracles, images of the suffering Christ, perhaps even the stories of Host desecration, reassured people that when they consumed spiritually it was connected to a visible sacramental body. This logic had been destroyed by the Reformation. Spiritual communion still relied on a vivid sense of the corporeality of Christ, but it was no longer necessarily a way of making up for a missing Eucharistic meal, and indeed it might become divorced from the experience and metaphors of eating altogether.

Margarethe Grossin and her companion, a female miller from Uttenreuth, were questioned about the sacrament in 1528. They said that they could not believe that the body and blood were present in the bread and wine, declaring that they received the body of Christ in spirit and not in the bread, 'for through the spirit he came to flesh and blood in men'.⁹² Margarethe placed emphasis on the fleshy nature of Christ's body, albeit received in spiritual form, but this was not to express a sense of loss for Eucharistic eating. Spiritual consumption had the paradoxical effect in this case of increasing emphasis on the physicality of Christ's sacrifice, as spiritual communion became divorced from the imagery of now redundant bread and wine, and focused on the body and blood of Christ. When Christoph von der Eichen was arrested in Mühlhausen in 1545 he said: 'so the body and blood cannot be there, it is a likeness; for Christ gave many likenesses. When someone makes themselves suitable for it and receives it, then he receives in faith the body and blood of Christ.'⁹³

⁹⁰ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 25–45; Bynum, 'The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages', *Church History* 71.4 (2002), 691–9.

⁹¹ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 34–5.

⁹² 'dan durch den geist wer er zu fleisch und plut im menschen'; QGTii: 95.

⁹³ 'kan also der leib und bluet nicht do soen, es sei ein gleichnus; dann Christus hab vil gleichnus geben. Do sich einer darzue geschickt machte und es empfinde, so empfinde er im glauben den leib und bluet Christi'; Wappler *Thüringen*, 476; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8211/6, fo. 314v.

If Christ's likeness was everywhere and was not restricted to the bread and wine, there might be other, more appropriate ways of communing with His body and blood. Anabaptists set themselves apart from more spiritual and symbolic interpretations of the sacrament by suggesting that communion was connected to the physical relationship between the corporeality of Christ's body and the bodies of believers, an experience distinct from memorial meals which recreated the Last Supper. Anabaptists developed their own ritual expressions which focused entirely on the cleansing blood of Christ, suffering and martyrdom, and the very flesh of the believer.

COMMUNING WITH THE FLESH OF CHRIST

Kaspar Hase explained that the preacher at the Anabaptist meetings he hosted dismissed the sacrament of the Mass because it was a dead God.⁹⁴ Anabaptists contrasted the dead body of Christ in the sacrament, Christ who was sacrificed anew by the priest performing the Mass, with the living Christ made human. Erhard Pulrus stated quite explicitly that a body should have flesh and blood, which the bread did not. He concluded that 'the sacrament has no life, when one lays it down, there it lies'.⁹⁵ Anabaptists may have believed that Christ sat at God's right hand and was not present at the Eucharist, but they did not focus only on the resurrected body of the Saviour, 'the clarified body' as Luther called it, which was absented from the human world.⁹⁶ Anabaptists also talked about the body of Christ as a body of flesh. Hans Nadler, for example, stressed that He became a man of flesh and blood, while Ambrosius Spittelmeier said that Christ was at once a son of man and a son of God, who appeared as a true human presence with flesh and blood.⁹⁷ 'Flesh' was ambiguous; it could be both negative and positive.⁹⁸ Steinmetz reminded his interrogators that Christ himself says in John 6:63 'flesh is of no use but the spirit makes things living'.⁹⁹ But these verses also stated that the flesh and blood of Christ gave life. They had special qualities.

⁹⁴ 'eß were ein toter Gott'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 386; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 171r.

⁹⁵ 'das sacrament habe kein leben; wo man das hinlege, do lige es'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 312; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 62r.

⁹⁶ 'wie Christus auferstannden sey mit clarificiertem leib und sitze da und hab lust und freude'; *Ein ander Sermon auff den Ostertage über das Euangelion Marci.xvi* (1526); WA *Schriften*, 10.i.II: 220.

⁹⁷ QGTii: 51, 137.

⁹⁸ Goldbourne, *Flesh and the Feminine*, 79–87.

⁹⁹ 'fleisch sei nicht nutz, sunder der geist mach lebendig'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 475; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8211/6, fo. 312v.

Ordinary flesh was worthless for Steinmetz, as suggested by his rejection of the digestive process which the traditional Eucharist involved, but flesh inspired by and consumed by the spirit, like the flesh and blood created by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Immaculate Conception, was a different matter.

Anabaptists were not, however, worried about precise definitions of whether Christ's flesh was divine or human. Their priority was that this flesh should be vital and powerful. Christ had been killed for humanity's sins, but He also represented life and resurrection; Eucharistic bread could never reflect this living sacrifice. Wolfgang Wüst denied that there was biblical evidence for the Eucharist as it was currently celebrated. 'Now some might talk about how Christ spoke at the supper, when he held the supper with his disciples. He did not mean, however, the sacrament in the bread, but spoke of his body.'¹⁰⁰ The bread did not suffer, Wüst argued, so it could not be the essence of the sacrament, rather it was Christ's body that had endured pain. Such interpretations reconfigured the understanding of the meaning of sacrifice in the rite and its link with salvation. Reformers such as Karlstadt made it abundantly clear that the Eucharist was not a sacrifice which was repeated again and again. Central German Anabaptists concurred but they still believed it was important to share somehow in Christ's historical crucifixion as part of redemption. As the group called the *Blutsfreunde* claimed, when they discussed 'enjoyment of the sacrament' at the Lord's Supper, 'it points to the suffering and death of the Lord. We must become part of this and not the enjoyment of the sacrament etc.'¹⁰¹

Partaking in the sacrificial blood of Christ was essential to how Anabaptists thought about the sacrament. Yet Anabaptists never spoke about miraculous blood, but were concerned with the living fluid that ran through their veins which connected them to the saving blood of Christ, promised in the chalice at the Last Supper. Wolfgang Wüst's words revealed that for central German Anabaptists the blood-filled chalice was more than symbolic, although he did not advocate drinking wine as blood.

The chalice, which Christ gave to his disciples, signified his suffering, the blood in the chalice is the blood of Christ in the body of men; and when the

¹⁰⁰ 'Nun mocht etlicher sprechen, wie hat dan Christus geredt am abentmal, do er mit seinen jungern das abentmal gehalten hab. Er hab aber nit gemeint das sacrament im prot, hab gered von seinem leib'; *QGT*ii: 73.

¹⁰¹ 'auch im abentmal von der niessung des sacraments geredt, das es uf das leiden und sterben des Hern gemeint sei. Des müssen wir teilhaftig werden und nit der niessung des sacraments etc'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 493; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 109r.

person is a Christian, he has the blood of Christ, and when suffering comes in the body, that is the chalice in the blood.¹⁰²

Wüst seemed to attach a particular emotional and physical state to his idea of the sacrament; experiencing suffering linked Christians in a very physical manner to the blood of Christ. Not all Anabaptists in central Germany were martyred or tortured, but they linked physical torment to the saving sacrifice of Christ. Like the fifteenth-century Thuringian crypto-flagellants whose self-mortification connected them to the Crucifixion, the power of martyr stories in Anabaptist culture more broadly may have been that they gave people the sense of sharing in Christ's sacrifice.¹⁰³ Justus Menius described how Anabaptists, believing that they were in danger and the end was in sight, would celebrate a meal in some out of the way place.¹⁰⁴ Seen in the context of these ideas about suffering and sacrifice, the meal took on a different significance beyond imitating the apostles. The act was not a mere remembrance of the Last Supper or a bonding exercise, though it may have been all of these, but the fear and anxiety stimulated an almost tangible union with the body of Christ and his sacrifice. As with baptism, a new symbolic universe was being created, in which any sense of physical or emotional suffering could be seen as Eucharistic.

Such notions of sacrifice described the connection between the flesh and blood of Christ and believers, but suffering was not the only expression of this bond. Some Anabaptists developed even more physical demonstrations of the union with the body of Christ. Having rejected every other rite like baptism or the Lord's Supper, the *Blutsfreunde* asserted that there was only one sacrament, the *Christierung*, which was the sexual communion of brothers and sisters in faith. Sacramental sex was explicitly linked to Eucharist analogies by referring to the women as wine and men as bread. The *Blutsfreunde* drew on well-established traditions which linked sacramental worship to the marriage of the Lamb of God

¹⁰² 'und der kelch, den Christus sein jungern gegeben, bedeut sein leiden, das plut im kelch sei das plut Christi im leib der menschen; und, wann der mensch ein crist sei, hab er das plut Christi, und so das leiden in leib kom, sei der kelch im plut'; QGTii: 84.

¹⁰³ The third song of the Anabaptist hymnal, the *Ausbund*, was an historical catalogue of all the martyrs of the church. Repeatedly it talked about the blood and horror of Christian martyrdom. See for example, 'Auch Decius der groß Tyran// Mercklich fing zu verfolgen an, // Viel Christenbluts vergossen'; see *Ausbund: Das ist Etliche schone Christliche Lieder* (Germantown, 1785), 18–19. The Thuringian crypto-flagellants had a prayer which ended 'dorch got vorgyssen wyr unser blut, dass ist vor dy sunde gut'; see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Justus Menius, *Der widderteuffer Lere vnd geheimnis, Aus heiliger schriftt widerlegt. Justus Menius. Von der Widdertauffe an Zween Pfarher, Ein Brieff. D. Martinus Luther Unterricht widder die lere der Widderteuffer. Philip. Melancht.* (Wittenberg, 1534), L7r.

to his bride, the church, and believed that sexual, physical communion was a way of partaking in the mystical body of Christ.¹⁰⁵ One of the *Blutsfreunde*, Hans Kindervater, exclaimed: 'this is their sacrament, they think nothing of another; the sacrament of the altar is nothing but simple bread and wine.'¹⁰⁶

Kindervater's conclusions may have been radical, but he was typical of Anabaptists in central Germany in that he dismissed the sacrament of the altar as simple bread and wine; nor was the way he collapsed all salvific processes into one idea of sharing in Christ's sacrifice exceptional. This tendency was already apparent in the similarity between the descriptions of baptism by blood and spiritual communion as a way of sharing in Christ's death. The ideas of the *Blutsfreunde* are one end of a spectrum of opinions about communing with Christ. The fleshly union of men and women of true faith, as bread and wine united, was a potent demonstration of the enduring symbolic power of the living body of Christ in Anabaptist Eucharist thought, as Reinholdt's work indicates.¹⁰⁷ The *Blutsfreunde* thus provided a drastic solution to the problems in Eucharistic theology that confronted all central German Anabaptists: if eating could not express the physicality of Christ's sacrifice and the process of salvation, what could?

SACRIFICE AND SALVATION

More than any other religious experience, the Mass linked believers to the salvific promise of Christ's death. Reconfiguring Eucharistic worship, therefore, forced people to rethink the nature of Christ's human sacrifice and heavenly resurrection. Though few expressions of the bond between Christ and believers were as a dramatic as Eucharistic sex, the *Blutsfreunde* help illuminate alternative views on the nature of God and Christ stimulated by Eucharistic debates. Explicit statements on Christology and the Trinity are few and far between among central German Anabaptists. Most did not reject the Trinity outright. Alexander for example accepted it without question; Christoph von der Eichen believed in three separate people in the Godhead, although one of his followers, Margarethe Bartolfin, denied the Trinity; and the

¹⁰⁵ Katharina Reinholdt, "durch fleischliche vormyschunge geheilligett"—Sexuelle Devianz und spirituelle Ehen bei den "Blutsfreunden aus der Wiedertauff", in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, und Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferturns/ Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009), 295–313.

¹⁰⁶ 'es sei dieses ihr Sacrament, von einem andern hielten sie nichts; das Sacrament des Altars sei nichts denn schlecht Brod und Wein'; Hochhuth, II: 184.

¹⁰⁷ Reinholdt, 'Sexuelle Devianz', 308.

Anabaptists held in Leuchtenberg and questioned by Melancthon in 1535–6 did not really seem to understand the nature of the Trinity at all.¹⁰⁸ Since most Anabaptists were insistent that Christ's death was essential, it is hardly surprising that they emphasized the individual importance of the Son of God. Not relying on any priests or pastors for their form of sacramental worship, they believed they could establish a direct connection with the Saviour. Yet such overweening emphasis on Christ's sacrifice, combined with a sense that the faithful could unite completely with God, had the effect of eliding any meaningful distinctions between the parts of the Trinity.

Kaspar Mueller was an isolated, lonely figure from Torgau who was arrested in 1574. He did not discuss the Eucharist, and only three things were of importance to him: visions he received from God, the invalidity of infant baptism, and denial of the Trinity.¹⁰⁹ Mueller said it was pointless to talk about three separate people in the Trinity: where Christ is, so is the Father; whoever calls to God, calls to Christ. Mueller's view of the Trinity, however, did not stop him from emphasizing that Christ had come in fleshly form, destroyed the works of the Devil, and allowed humanity to be born again in God. Rejecting the Trinity for Mueller did not mean denying Christ; merely that God, Son, and Spirit were so intimately linked that to speak of any division was meaningless.¹¹⁰ The same was true for the anti-Trinitarian Margarethe Bartolfin. She said that God was one person with three names. Yet in answer to the very next question she emphasized the office of Christ and the importance of his death.¹¹¹ Anabaptists in other regions also had a tendency to merge the three members of the Trinity. Melchior Hoffman emphasized that Christ was entirely divine, not human, because he was completely free of sin. Therefore God and the Son were indistinguishable.¹¹² Central German Anabaptists were not as concerned about the distinction between humanity and divinity but unwavering emphasis on Christ's sacrifice had a similar effect, collapsing the Trinity into one.

¹⁰⁸ 'Wappler, *Thüringen*, 349, 496–7, 506; Jacobs, 'Harz'; CRii: 988; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 121r, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 251r, 260r.

¹⁰⁹ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 328r–344v.

¹¹⁰ 'das Falsch vnd Vnrecht sey, drey Vnterschiedliche personen jm den gothait setzen, dan die so also an ruffen nicht erhöret werden . . . das nicht drey personen sey, folge daraus das Paulus spricht, Gnad vnd fried vom Got dem vater vnd hern Jhesu Christi etc'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 333v, 336v, 337r.

¹¹¹ 'Christus sei komen umb der gerechtigkeit willen, das er uns gerecht mache, habe uns mit seinem leiden und sterben erlost'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 506; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 260v.

¹¹² Katharina Reinholdt, *Ein Leib in Christo werden: Ehe und Sexualität im Täuferturn der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2012), 45–6.

Denying the Trinity while simultaneously emphasizing Christ's salvific act allowed Mueller to conceive of a perfect union with God which overcame human sin. In a written report of his ideas, Mueller reminded his readers that in John we are told that 'whoever is born of God, does not sin'. For Mueller, men and women could conquer sin if some sort of bodily connection with God could be achieved, though he did not specify how this would happen.¹¹³ The *Blutsfreunde* were more direct. Sex established who had gained salvation through participating in Christ's flesh and body, and therefore it was not considered to be sinful. Quite the opposite. In 1551 a group of the *Blutsfreunde* was arrested in Mühlhausen, and alongside questions about their sexual relationships they were also asked whether they believed they were sinners, presumably in the hope that this would elicit a positive response and lead to recantation. The authorities were often disappointed. Wendel Schuchart claimed he had been freed from sin through Christ; Jorg Jacuff said he could only do wrong if God let him; and Schuchart's wife, Else, stated emphatically that she could not sin (even though she seemed to reject many of the other beliefs of the *Blutsfreunde*).¹¹⁴ Instead of being sinful, this ritualized sex, which gave corporeal expression to the connection between all members of the group in the body of Christ, demarcated the pure community of the *Blutsfreunde*.¹¹⁵ As Hans Kindervater stated, 'this is not sinful according to their belief, because it is written, that we are all one body in Christ'.¹¹⁶

At times the views of central German Anabaptists seem perplexing. They categorically denied Christ could be on earth and in heaven, but they insisted on a profound, bodily connection between Christ and the faithful. They stated Christ was an 'enfleshed' man who had died for humanity's sins, yet they might also deny the Trinity. How was such apparent cognitive dissonance possible? The key was in the *lack* of specificity about the nature of Christ and the absence of any clear distinction between flesh and spirit. Focusing on the flesh of Christ, imprecisely defined, allowed Anabaptists to dismiss the bread and wine as idolatrous, without meaning that they had to relinquish the physicality of Christ's sacrifice or the corporeal union between Christ and believers. This rather

¹¹³ 'Drum darumb ist Christus ins fleisch kommen, auff das er die werg des Teüffels in der menschen hertzen vnd glidmaßen zustöre, also das die menschen die auß gott geboren sind nicht sündig'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 332r.

¹¹⁴ 'nach empfangung aber des glaubens das jm christus mit seinem Leiden vnd sterben erlost habe, kunne er hinfurder nit mehr sundigen'; 'das er sundigen kunde wan jn got fallen lasse'; 'Gleube nicht das sie sundigen kunte'; SAM Sig.10/E6 No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, fo. 70r, 71r, 72v.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 6, this volume.

¹¹⁶ 'Dieses se nach ihrem Glauben nicht sündlich, derweil geschrieben stehe, daß wir alle ein Leib in Christs wären'; Hochhuth II: 184.

confusing approach helps us understand the Anabaptist salvific theology and its relation to the Eucharist. It is significant that most of the explicit statements about Christ's nature and sin came from Anabaptists arrested in later years. They were the legacy of Eucharistic debates which had moved away from discussions of the real presence and the practice of sacramental eating, but instead had turned to different ways of conceptualizing Christ and the Crucifixion. The *Blutsfreunde* may have been exceptional in their solution but the problem was not: how to imagine the relationship between man and God?

* * *

Mother and daughter, Katharina Goldschmidt and Veronica Goldschmidt, said that the Eucharist was a 'remembrance and sign of union'. Christ could not be in heaven and on earth, and we should look for him in heavenly not earthly things. This would seem inherently practical—bread was for eating and the body was on the cross.¹¹⁷ Anabaptists, like other reformers, were doubtful that bread and wine, which were bodily consumed, could represent the body of Christ, and as ordinary Anabaptists articulated their thoughts they relied on fragmented concepts taken from Luther, Zwingli, Karlstadt, and others. While Eucharistic debates continued to rage fiercely throughout the sixteenth century, many of the arguments were well-rehearsed by the later 1520s; central German Anabaptists came late to the party. Certain key passages had come to frame the debate about the Eucharist, just as Mark 16:16 did for the disputes about baptism. Claims that Christ was at the right hand of God and that he would not let himself be baked in an oven; passages from Luke 20 about the order of the words spoken at the Last Supper; and sections of John 6 regarding spiritual eating, cropped up time and again as catchy phrases with authoritative power which embedded themselves in Anabaptist identity.¹¹⁸ Collated in this manner, these statements did not form a coherent analysis but did focus Anabaptist arguments on certain issues: the problem with eating Christ, the spiritual, life-giving flesh of the Saviour, and the historical importance of the Crucifixion, rather than the real presence *per se*.

It is easy to assume that ordinary Anabaptists reduced these complex arguments about Christ's presence to bald statements, and the only way

¹¹⁷ 'ein gedechtnus und bundzeichen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 475–7; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8211/6, fo. 313r–315v.

¹¹⁸ Burnett has analysed the importance of such passages in Eucharistic debates; Burnett, 'Hermeneutics and Exegesis' in the Early Eucharistic Controversy', in Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (eds), *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars, and their Readers in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden, 2012), 85–106.

they could possibly conceive of the sacrament was as a form of commemorative eating. The reality was not so straightforward. In addition to and distinct from brothers and sisters in faith meeting to eat in remembrance of the Last Supper, Anabaptists in central Germany developed ways of thinking about the sacrament which focused on the body of Christ and his purifying blood. Greta Knoblauch trusted in the salvific power of the Crucifixion but did not believe she shared repeatedly in the blood sacrifice by taking communion. She said 'the spiritual enjoyment through faith without the sign is enough'.¹¹⁹ Indeed, she did not want to eat the bread (no mention was made of the wine), even in remembrance, suggesting it was not the recreation of the Lord's Supper which was important for her but participation in the sacrifice of Christ. Anabaptists emphasized the corporeal, salvific bond created by the Crucifixion over any form of eating, spiritual or otherwise. In some ways, Anabaptist theories were radical, since they divorced the Eucharist from eating; in other ways, they were deeply traditional since they relied overtly on ideas of the mystical body and sacrificial blood. They embraced the body as a way of understanding redemption, and it is here Anabaptists found meaning in the sacrament, as they sought to attain the salvation promised by Christ.

¹¹⁹ 'das geistlich genießen durch den glawben ane das zeichen genug sei'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 358; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 209v.

6

Brothers and Sisters

In November 1535 Hans Peisker from Kleineutersdorf was arrested with sixteen of his fellow Anabaptists. He bid farewell to his wife: she was excused from prison because she was pregnant and the couple had young children. Peisker 'spoke to his wife and called her "sister", he comforted and blessed her, told her to remain firm and constant in her faith', reassuring her with the rather meagre consolation that she would soon follow him. He exhorted her to instruct the other children in the faith while he was gone.¹ As she said goodbye, Peisker's wife in turn addressed her husband as brother. What were the authorities to make of this? Peisker, head of his household, referred to all its members as his 'brothers and sisters'. The court officials recorded the otherwise rather banal exchange in full, suggesting they were intrigued by the nature of these relationships, which appeared to combine the fraternal language of religious societies with the structures of married life.

Peisker's relationship with his sixteen-year-old daughter Margarethe, who likewise called her father 'brother', was even more worrying. She said she had only been convinced to join the Anabaptist movement because she was afraid of her father. Perhaps Martha was just using a defence strategy, but she seemed to have difficulties adjusting to her role as a sister-daughter, as she tried to reconcile the language of fraternal love with the reality of paternal discipline. To persuade her to confess to her error, the authorities brought in her mother to put pressure on her, a tactic which proved successful.² What had led Peisker to undermine his position as a husband and father by labelling his wife and daughter spiritual sisters? And how did he make familial reality fit with the theological ideal?

Sixteenth-century society constructed gender along hierarchical lines; marital relationships, which inherently prioritized the authority of the

¹ 'zu seinem weibe geredt und sie schwester geheissen, sie getrost und gesegnet, in irem glauben vest und bestendig zubleiben und ime balde nachzufolgen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 396; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 999, fo. 13v.

² Wappler, *Thüringen*, 399, 401–2; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 999, fo. 19v, 21r–23r.

patriarch, formed the basis of any community. Anabaptists were different. They relied on a rhetoric of brotherhood and sisterhood which was anti-hierarchical and envisaged relationships as a set of horizontal not vertical bonds between men and women. Patriarchy was an ideal but it did not represent the totality of interactions between men and women in early modern life. In reality, although they so often remain hidden from view, cross-hierarchical relationships must always have been part of people's everyday experiences in village life. Men and women might, for example, gather the harvest together, bake bread, or journey to pilgrimages. For Anabaptists, varied bonds between individuals of both sexes, and of different ages and kin groups, were essential to their survival, because they did not rely on traditional institutional structures of community. Both men and women played important roles in the movement in central Germany, with numbers of female followers equalling men. The relationships between them were diverse: sometimes husbands and wives joined the movement together; at other times it was one parent and a child; or it could be extended kinships or work relationships which brought people together as they took part in Anabaptist activities.

As Anabaptists redefined gender roles, therefore, they did not draw up their ideas on a clean slate but worked from their own lived experiences of labouring, eating, and journeying together. Pragmatic strategies for survival and cooperation offered a radical way of rethinking gender dynamics as Anabaptists turned the different kinds of relationships that made up their movement into a set of fraternal and sororal bonds. Spouses, parents, and children might call each other brother and sister as the Peiskers did; and even strangers, welcomed into the home, were labelled brothers. Elisabeth Horcher, a girl of only thirteen or fourteen years of age arrested in Sennfeld in 1528, said that the Anabaptists met as a group in Hans Edlamer's house, and 'the strange brothers came and preached to them'.³ She chose to describe the outsiders as brothers, suggesting that although these people were not personally known to her, they were still considered part of an imagined familial and fraternal community.

Using brotherhood and sisterhood to describe a range of personal interactions was not unique to Anabaptists. Socially constructed sibling relationships were found in a variety of theological, social, and economic contexts in late medieval and early modern Europe. Anabaptists simply took this further, using these relationships to remodel every aspect of their everyday lives. In an age when everything seemed up for grabs, Anabaptists cast aside much accepted wisdom about the roles of spouses

³ 'haben jnen frembde bruder die zw jnen komen gepredigt'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 9r.

and parents, and instead combined a fraternal ideal, at once familiar and strange, with ideas on marriage, sexuality, and parenthood.

GENDER DYNAMICS IN CENTRAL GERMAN ANABAPTISM

Encouraged by the Anabaptist rhetoric of spiritual fraternity, scholarship on gender in Anabaptism traditionally focused on whether the movement accorded women more freedom or equality than other religious groups. Following the contours of the broader scholarly debate about gender and the Reformation, much historiography of the 1960s and 1970s suggested that radical movements such as Anabaptism offered women a chance to act on a level playing field with men, at least spiritually, although some scholars such as Claus-Peter Clasen definitively rebutted such claims.⁴ As newer research modified the view that Protestantism created more opportunities for women, the 1980s and 1990s saw a handful of studies presenting a more nuanced and less resoundingly positive view of women's roles in Anabaptism.⁵

⁴ George Williams stated that 'Nowhere else in the Reformation era were women conceived as so nearly companions in the faith, mates in missionary enterprise, and mutual exhorters in readiness for martyrdom as among those for whom believers' baptism was theologically a gender-equalizing covenant'; George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (3rd rev. edn, Kirksville, MO, 1992), 762. Schäufele concludes that 'The woman in Anabaptism emerges as a fully emancipated person in religious matters and as the independent bearer of Christian convictions'; Wolfgang Schäufele, 'The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity', *MQR* 36.2 (1962), 108. See also Roland Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (Minneapolis, MN, 1971), 145–58. For the contrasting interpretation see: Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618* (Ithaca, NY, 1972), 207. See also Joyce L. Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism, 1525–1675* (New York, 1979).

⁵ C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth Century Reforming Pioneers* (Waterloo, IA, 1996); Nicole Grochowina, 'Zwischen Gleichheit in Martyrium und Unterordnung in der Ehe: Aktionsräume von Frauen in der Täuferischen Bewegung', in Anne Conrad (ed.), *'In Christo ist weder man noch weyb': Frauen in der Zeit der Reformation und der Katholischen Reform* (Münster, 1999), 95–113; Wes Harrison, 'The Role of Women in Anabaptist Thought and Practice: The Hutterite Experience of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *SCJ* 23.1 (1992), 49–69; L. Lucille Marr, 'Anabaptist Women of the North: Peers in the Faith, Subordinates in Marriage', *MQR* 61.4 (1987), 347–62; Keith L. Sprunger, 'God's Powerful Army of the Weak: Anabaptist Women of the Radical Reformation', in Richard L. Greaves (ed.), *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History* (Westport, CT, 1985), 45–74; Marion Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter Gottes: Frauen im Bauernkrieg und in den Täuferbewegungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993). A recent review of literature on Anabaptism and gender can be found in Sigrun Haude, 'Gender Roles and Perspectives among Anabaptist and Spiritualist Groups', in John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (eds), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden, 2007), 425–66.

Some, like Marlies Mattern, focused on the everyday realities of life for men and women in Anabaptist communities.⁶ Other scholars demonstrated that in certain circumstances women enjoyed greater freedom, including some stand-out examples of powerful and charismatic women who exerted considerable influence, but nonetheless concluded that patriarchal order generally remained firmly in place. Marion Kobelt-Groch's work in particular showed that moments of upheaval such as the Peasants' War disrupted patriarchal systems, even if this was only temporary and the gains quickly lost.⁷ A Weberian 'early-late' model of gender relations played a particularly important role in these debates about the scope and nature of women's roles. Radical religious movements, so these scholars suggested, offer chances for women in their early phases, as unstructured communities with fluid ideas about ideological authority present opportunities for female members of the group, often in the guise of prophets. But as radical outbursts settle into more institutionalized sects, patriarchal norms reassert themselves, and these avenues for autonomous action are closed off.⁸

However, praising or censuring Anabaptism for being 'better' or 'worse' for women is deeply unsatisfactory because it tends to judge the past by alien standards. Some scholars have moved beyond an evaluative approach to gender in Anabaptism. Lyndal Roper has contextualized the sexual radicalism of groups like the Dreamers in Uttenreuth within a shared, fractured debate about the meaning of marriage and the role of sex, fuelled by the reformers' rejection of the sanctity of celibacy. Katharina Reinholdt has meticulously deconstructed the way in which Anabaptists reinterpreted the sacrament of marriage and sexual intercourse as a way of expressing unity with Christ, in conversation with a medieval past and a reforming present.⁹ Päivi Räisänen-Schröder suggests that we need to think about gender in the Anabaptist movement not as an 'isolated or stable entity but rather part of a complex social and

⁶ Marlies Mattern, *Leben im Abseits: Frauen und Männer im Täuferum (1525–1550): Eine Studie zur Alltagsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998).

⁷ Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter*, 19–22, 164–7.

⁸ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, MA, 1922), 104–5. See for example Auke Jelsma, *Frontiers of the Reformation: Dissidence and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot, 1998), 40–51, esp. 51. For a discussion of the debate surrounding this thesis see Haude, 'Anabaptist Women—Radical Women?', in Max Reinhart (ed.), *Infinite Boundaries: Order, Disorder, and Reorder in Early Modern German Culture* (Kirkville, MO, 1998), 313–28.

⁹ Katharina Reinholdt, *Ein Leib in Christo Werden: Ehe und Sexualität im Täuferum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2012); Lyndal Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism in the German Reformation', in Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994; repr. 2003), 79–103.

cultural matrix', and understand that gender difference was negotiated in relation to dynamic ideological frameworks.¹⁰

Gender roles in central German Anabaptism certainly do not fit into neat early-late patterns. Anabaptism developed along surprising lines, dominated by men in its earlier, 'anarchic' phase, and attracting more female adherents as time passed. Hans Hut's followers, for example, were mostly male. When Thomas Spiegel was questioned early in 1527, he did not name a single woman among his list of twenty-three associates.¹¹ Women were not completely absent from Hut's group, although often we hear only, for example, of 'Martin and Endres with their wives'.¹² Several single and often elderly women also did associate themselves with Hut—Gher Zottlerin, Barbara Presslerin, Barbara's mother, Els Kohlhausin, and 'die alt Weisin'—and they played important roles. Gher Zottlerin hosted Hans Hut in Hollfeld, and Barbara Presslerin provided lodgings in Staffelstein.¹³ The reasons why many of the independent women were older widows are not entirely clear, although possibly they were not under as much pressure from male relations to conform to social norms; they may have been widows of the Peasants' War. We get veiled hints elsewhere of such connections to the events of 1524–5. Margarethe Koch was a widow, baptized in 1531 by Rinck, who was imprisoned for several years with Fritz Erbe. Like Erbe, she remained obdurate in her beliefs and looked back to the Peasants' War as a divinely ordained occurrence; possibly her first taste of radicalism had come in the years of peasant rebellion.¹⁴ Römer's followers were also predominantly male. Of the fifty or so names that appear in the records, only sixteen were women, though there may have been more among a large undifferentiated group mentioned in Alich.¹⁵ Nearly all the men who knew Römer were mentioned by name, but we know the full name of only one woman—Klara Fuchs.¹⁶

As the movement matured after the Peasants' War, however, numbers of women soon equalled or even outstripped men. On 17 January 1530 thirteen individuals were arrested in Frankenhausen, a mixed group of

¹⁰ Päivi Räisänen-Schröder, 'Between Martyrdom and Everyday Pragmatism: Gender, Family, and Anabaptism in Early Modern Germany', in Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo (eds), *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2013), 99–102.

¹¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 230–2.

¹² 'Mertein und Enders Grotzer sambt iren weibern'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 239.

¹³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 240, 243.

¹⁴ 'die negste Muntzerische aufruhr, dorjnnen Melchior Rinck, jr tawffer, auch gewesen, auß gottes willen gescheen vnd gotes werck gewesen sey'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 174; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, fo. 14r.

¹⁵ Wappler, *Stellung*, 131; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 998, fo. 1.

¹⁶ SAE, 1-1/XVI-I, Acta des Magistrats zu Erfurt (no folios).

seven women and six men, while one more woman, Hans Hane's wife in Esperstedt, had also been questioned earlier in the year.¹⁷ Sometimes female followers were the significant majority. In September 1528 the authorities caught up with Andres Kolbe, one of Volkmar von Hildburghausen's followers, in the area round Zella St Blasii. To their dismay, the rest of his group, which included ten women but only five men, had already fled. Five women were named only as wives who had followed their husbands into flight, but Cunz Eigeler's wife, Peter Konig's wife, her maid, a woman called 'die Focken', and her daughter seem to have acted independently.¹⁸ The judicial record will always tend to underestimate women's roles, and in these instances we have little detail about what drove Eigeler or Konig's wife to abscond. Sometimes we get more of the backstory. Petronella, a baker who was part of the large group of Anabaptists in Halberstadt, had left her partner in Frankenhausen because he was not an Anabaptist, but 'stayed in the darkness and loved that more than the light'. She was adamant that she would only return to him if he converted, instead choosing to associate with other Anabaptist women including Anna Reichard and Greta Knoblauch. Kobelt-Groch argues that cases such as Petronella's disprove Clasen's assertion that Anabaptism denied women meaningful roles.¹⁹ Klara Fuchs was a character of similar determination and appears to have been a driving force behind the networks in Erfurt. Baptized first, she remonstrated with her husband and other members of the group, issuing warnings and proclaiming her opinion, while her husband dithered over whether to receive the new baptism.²⁰

Even as Anabaptism became more entrenched in localities, it did not seem to conform to clear patterns of authority. After the death of the preacher Alexander, the sprawling network of Anabaptists that developed in north and west Thuringia saw men and women involved in fairly equal numbers. Jakob Storger and his wife gathered a group of twenty-eight individuals in Mühlhausen and further afield, over half of whom were female; women predominated in the close circle round Storger, and when he went to his death on 8 November 1537, eight of his female followers were executed alongside him.²¹ We could explain Storger's success, and his

¹⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 311–15; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 66r–69v.

¹⁸ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 304–5; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1025, 3r–4v.

¹⁹ 'bessondern ehr sey in der finsternusse geblyeben und habe dasselbighe mehr denn dass licht geliebet'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 315. Kobelt-Groch, 'Why Did Petronella Leave Her Husband? Reflections on Marital Avoidance among the Halberstadt Anabaptists', *MQR* 62.1 (1988), 26–41; Kobelt-Groch, *Aufässige Töchter*, 165.

²⁰ SAE, 1-1/XVII, Acta des Magistrats zu Erfurt (no folios).

²¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 448; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 154r–155r.

large female following, as a cult centred on the charisma of a male leader. Yet Storger would have been unable to survive without the domestic networks that sustained Anabaptism in Mühlhausen and its outskirts for he was a stranger to the region and relied on a web of existing contacts. Many of those with whom he was arrested did not owe their Anabaptist beliefs to him. Klaus Scharf had a longstanding association to Anabaptism, Otilia Frankin had already been arrested in Frankenhausen, where her husband had been executed, and Kristina Strobe I had previously been apprehended in Gerstungen.²²

The women who associated with Storger relied on friendships with other women as much as they looked up to Storger. Katharina Goldschmidt was arrested on two different occasions with two different daughters: in October 1537 with Otilia and again in June 1545 with Veronica. Possibly the sisters were encouraged by each other and their mother to defy their disapproving father and join Anabaptism. Otilia said that she had spent one night in the house of Barbara Meißrod, although her father had then forbidden her from doing so again. Nevertheless she sat up all night with Jakob Storger and listened to him read from the Bible, while Anabaptists such as Georg Köhler and Wolf Guldener were invited to stay in her mother's house.²³ Otilia was executed in 1538, after rejecting the chance to be pardoned at the point of death; a journeyman had said he would marry her if she would recant.²⁴ Her mother had been more fortunate since she had not been re-baptized, and her husband, Curt Goldschmidt, intervened on her behalf, vouching for her good behaviour.²⁵ Yet neither Otilia's fate nor Katharina's promises of good behaviour, not even Curt's authority, seemed to dissuade the mother and other daughter Veronica from continuing their association with the movement. The women's lasting connections and contacts to wider networks, especially with other women, were as important as male authority figures in giving cohesion to the movement.

Women played important roles in central Germany—positions in the domestic sphere allowing them, for example, to play host or support their children—but they did not derive positions of authority by

²² Scharf had first been questioned in October 1534, while Otilia had been part of the earlier circles of activity round Alexander; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 374–5, 427, 442; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 19r–20v, 108v–109r, 143v.

²³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 448–9; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 161r.

²⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 456; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 165r. This form of pardon was an established tradition; Richard van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Oxford, 1990) 151–2.

²⁵ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fol. 161r.

acting as prophets. In this respect their experiences were different from those of medieval mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, or women in contemporary radical movements in south-west and north Germany, or seventeenth-century England.²⁶ Women were not teachers and visionaries in central Germany, and even strong-minded, recalcitrant females like Klara did not run the groups in which they were involved. Katharina Valebs, arrested in Frankenhausen in 1530, persuaded Fritz Erbe to listen to Anabaptists ideas, and the wife of Matthes Reiden in Hesse converted people in Riedeselschen. In 1532 she came to Heinz Hanzel and Doll Cuntz, telling them they should repent and abstain from evil since the end of days was near.²⁷ Yet their activities seem rather prosaic compared to women like Ursula Jost and Barbara Rebstock in Strasbourg, whose prophetic charisma bestowed upon them a special status. Such high-profile figures are missing from Thuringia, Hesse, and Saxony. This did not mean that women in central Germany were subordinate to male authority figures, for if women in central German Anabaptism did not derive their status from positions of visionary leadership, neither did men.

Anabaptism in central Germany was never a charismatic movement, and no consistent emphasis was placed on revelation from the spirit or prophecy. Even when individuals did receive visions, they did not seem to be granted special status. Anna Reichard said that she had heard the word of God, but there is no suggestion that she was considered a prophet or apostle.²⁸ Kaspar Mueller, the Anabaptist from Torgau in the 1570s who relied on dreams from God, could not supply a single detail from these revelations when he was questioned, and his interrogators were far more interested in his denial of the Holy Trinity and his dismissal of infant baptism.²⁹ Very few individuals, male or female, were seen in the light of visionary leaders in central Germany. One man who was known as 'the prophet' led a group of Anabaptists in Fulda, but they seemed to derive comfort and solidarity from a series of group activities such as singing, making strange noises like animals, dancing as an old woman banged on

²⁶ Lois Yvonne Barrett, 'Wreath of Glory: Ursula's Prophetic Visions in the Context of the Reformation and Revolt in Southwestern Germany, 1524–1530', PhD dissertation, Union Institute, Cincinnati, OH, 1992; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, CA, 1992); Snyder and Hecht (eds), *Profiles of Anabaptist Women*, 273–87; Diane Watt, *Secretaries of Gods: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1997). See also essays in Sylvia Brown (ed.), *Women, Gender, and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2007).

²⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 321; Wappler, *Stellung*, 138–9; *TAH*, 53; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 62r; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N. No. 997, 4v.

²⁸ Jacobs, 'Harz', 530.

²⁹ 'Redt von allerley offenbarung, geschichten etc. weiss aber keines zumelden'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 336v.

a drum, recounting stories, and kissing one another, as much as they did from hero-worshipping their prophet.³⁰ Rather than being dominated by prophetic leaders, male or female, Anabaptism in central Germany had grown out of fluid, peripatetic groups that relied on kin and friendships.

Just as Anabaptists conceptualized space in terms of the node-like, interconnected communities without clear focal points, so men and women interacted in ways which did not prioritize centralized authority structures. This was true of all sorts of relationships, not just those between husbands and wives. Heinz Florer, arrested in February 1529 and interrogated in Cadolzburg, said his son was first to become involved with the Anabaptists. The boy persuaded his father, not the other way around. Florer, initially sceptical, had tried to dissuade his son, but the younger Florer retorted that 'there was absolutely nothing evil in it, what they were said to do, but everything good'.³¹

Even recognizing such dynamism, we still struggle to understand the subjective experience of gender within the Anabaptist movement on its own terms. In searching for a paradigm to replace anachronistic and teleological ideas about equality and female rights, gender historians have instead relied on the concept of agency, implicitly and explicitly, as a way of understanding when and how women might have opportunities to exert their influence or express their desires. Scholars accept that patriarchy still dominated social structures and that women might participate in and uphold its norms as much as they struggled against them. However, agency has been used to differentiate between the strategies open to men and women of varying ages, status, or position, without resorting to simplistic arguments about equality. In early modern society, gossip might be a way for women to threaten patriarchal structures, as well as gain dominance over other women; older married women and midwives were able to exert power over young, single women; and men's experiences of patriarchy also varied, depending on age and status, so young men's indulgence in violence and excess presented a challenge to patriarchal models of manhood.³²

³⁰ 'Wan di hat angefangen zu kloppern, so haben di andern alle tanzen, jüchzen und schreien müssen', 'Darnach sich man und weiber durch einander gekust'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 341, 343; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 60v–61r.

³¹ 'es war ganz und gar kein arges dorine, das sie tun solten, sonder alles guts'; QGTii: 155.

³² Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003); Patricia Crawford, 'The Construction and Experience of Maternity in Seventeenth-Century England', in Valerie Fildes (ed.), *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren* (London, 1990), 3–38; Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds), *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 1–16; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1998); Gowing, *Common Bodies*:

However, agency is as alien to early modern mentalities as the idea of equality. While it has the advantage of allowing us to imagine the means by which men and women subverted the expectations of social frameworks of authority, it does not permit a rich understanding of subjectivity. Drawn from sociological models which posit an opposition between structure (the prevailing norms and institutional frameworks within a society) and agency (the actions of creative individuals within those frameworks), agency creates an unnatural separation between power constructs and the subjective experience of being a man or woman in early modern Germany.³³ The actions of men and women are reduced to a series of moves in games of social power. Rather than using gender as an analytical category to understand historical subjectivity, agency bypasses it. After all, patriarchy itself was more than a set of structures and familial roles, but a corpus of ideas about gender, family, and authority profoundly ingrained in people's identities.

Worse, it is difficult to build change and causality into the concept of 'agency' because men and women seem to select strategies from a fairly static range of options. Yet Anabaptism did not simply present itself as an alternative to patriarchy. In a period of radical transformation like sixteenth-century Germany, novel questions were posed about what it meant to be a man or a woman as marriage, sex, parenthood, and kinship itself were debated. Deep-seated assumptions about fatherly obligations or female obedience to authority continued to mould men's and women's experiences, but Anabaptist men and women understood and shaped their world in very different ways from most contemporaries. They did so not by picking from a variety of strategies, nor simply by making different choices. Anabaptist solutions evolved from the same impulses and same context as Lutheran patriarchy, though their responses seem unimaginable in an age when fathers ruled. And yet Anabaptists were able to creatively reconstruct their experiences in ways which indicate a

Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England (New Haven, CT, 2003); Steve Hindle, 'The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender, and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England', *Continuity and Change* 9.3 (1994), 391–419; Susannah Lipscombe, 'Crossing Boundaries: Women's Gossip and Violence in Sixteenth-Century France', *French History* 25.4 (2011), 408–26; Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003); Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker (eds), *Gender and Change: Agency, Chronology, and Periodisation* (Oxford, 2009). Räsänen-Schröder also raises the question of 'agency' in relation to Anabaptism; see Räsänen-Schröder, 'Between Martyrdom and Everyday Pragmatism', 99.

³³ See for example Nick Crossley, *Towards Relational Sociology* (Abingdon, 2010), 124–43; David Rubenstein, *Culture, Structure, and Agency: Toward a Truly Multidimensional Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 2001).

deep shift in the psyche about what they dreamed and desired, and the manner in which they experienced emotions such as envy, anger, or love.

Valentin Krautheim from Riestedt, questioned in 1538, said he had been introduced to Anabaptism through his wife's sister, Gretha Krämer. She had visited him in his house two years before, telling him to cast off his previous evil life and accept re-baptism. She also suggested that Krautheim should leave her sister because she was always embroidering and 'that was the Devil's work'.³⁴ Krautheim did, though we feel that we do not get the whole story of why Gretha Krämer was so keen for her brother-in-law to desert his wife. Is there an untold tale of sisterly jealousy and trust? Krautheim returned to Riestedt in May 1538, and on learning that his wife was away at the yearly market in Hergisdorf, he made his way back home. As he reached the threshold of his house, he heard his sister's husband, Andres Matthes; the threshold was a liminal space marking his absence from the family home. Enraged at finding another man in his house, he threw a lead ball through the window. The authorities asked Krautheim if he had attempted to murder Matthes. In his defence the suspected Anabaptist claimed he was only incensed that Matthes had left his own wife and child. This was a startling instance of the pot calling the kettle black, though one suspects the real reason for his outburst was envy and resentment that his position might have been usurped.³⁵

Agency does not provide a useful way of interpreting these events. Krautheim's choices were clearly shaped by his own expectations of patriarchy, and yet also involved a highly creative reimagining of his own role as a father and husband. His decisions seem irrational and inconsistent, as he deserted his home yet used patriarchal values to castigate his brother-in-law. Similarly, instead of framing Gretha's role in terms of female agency within the domestic sphere, we can understand her actions as the result of an individual concatenation of circumstances: jealousy, theological conviction, affection for her brother-in-law. Men's and women's choices, like Gretha and Krautheim's, were always framed by people's expectations of gender in this patriarchal society, but Anabaptists were able to rethink their roles in different ways. As a set of novel ideas about association espoused by Anabaptist preachers coincided with an existing world of domestic rivalries and struggles, affections and passions, Anabaptism provided the opportunity for men and women to reframe

³⁴ 'hette gesagt, er sollte von seinem bösen leben ablassen und der widderteuffer glauben auch annehmen . . . Er muste auch von seinem weibe gehen sonst wurde ihn Got nicht erleuchten, dan sein weib stunde von dem ausnehen nicht abe, und das were teufelswerk'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 459; SHStAD, GA10024, 10328/1, fo. 197r.

³⁵ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 460–1; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 199v–200r.

their subjective experiences with a different language and to explain, justify, and rationalize their interactions in original ways. This fed a gender dynamic that clashed with the values of early modern society.

THE LANGUAGE OF GENDER

According to Martin Weischenfelder, a follower of Hans Hut, when Anabaptists greeted one another, they were supposed to say something like 'God greets you, brother in the Lord'.³⁶ Probably the first thing that comes to mind when we say 'brother' or 'sister' is the reality of sibling relationships, but for early modern people the resonances of brotherhood were much wider. They may have thought about the brotherly bonds between the apostles; monastic brothers and cloistered sisters participating in a fraternal ideal; or any number of corporative structures such as fraternities, guilds, urban leagues, craft societies, and charitable associations.³⁷ Bert Meister's research on the Saxon town of Altenburg, which had around 300 households in the late medieval period, gives us an insight into a fairly typical range of communal organizations on offer to inhabitants, which all gave tangible expression to the rhetoric of brotherly and sisterly affection. Seven different fraternities flourished. These were lay brotherhoods that were often devoted to particular saints and had specific duties to promote religious life. The fraternities catered to a wide spectrum, not only male, wealthy citizens. Women made up 62% of the membership of the *Fronleichnamsbruderschaft* attached to St Bartholomew's Church, and the *Elendenbruderschaft* was intended to make provision for and include poorer members of society. In addition, there were eight guilds in Altenburg at the end of the Middle Ages, serving the likes of butchers, bakers, and cloth makers, alongside three journeymen's societies.³⁸

³⁶ 'Got grus dich, bruder in Herrn'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 237; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXVIII, fo. 369r–377v.

³⁷ Hans-Jürgen Goertz, 'Brüderlichkeit – Provokation, Maxime, Utopie: Ansätze einer fraternitären Gesellschaft in der Reformation', in Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen* (Göttingen, 2007), 216–37; Bert Meister, *Sie sollen Bruderschaft halten: Religiöses Engagement in den genossenschaftlichen Vereinigungen (Bruderschaften, Zünfte, Gesellenvereinigungen) der Stadt Altenburg im Spätmittelalter* (Beucha, 2001); Ludwig Remling, *Bruderschaften in Franken Kirchen- und sozialgeschichtliche: Untersuchungen zum spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Bruderschaftswesen* (Würzburg, 1986); Remling, 'Sozialgeschichte Aspekte des spätmittelalterlichen Bruderschaftswesens in Franken', in Peter Johanek (ed.), *Einungen und Bruderschaften in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt* (Cologne, 1993), 149–69; Ronald F. E. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982).

³⁸ Meister, *Sie sollen Bruderschaft halten*, 13, 145, 165, 174–5. On guilds see also Gervase Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds, and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town', *PP* 154.1 (1997), 3–31.

Guilds too were often associated with particular saints, binding together professional interests with religious activities. Different trades and crafts carved out their own identities through these organizations, a notable example being guilds or *Knappschaften* which emerged in the Erzgebirge to represent the burgeoning mining industry.³⁹

The concept of brotherhood came under increasing scrutiny by Protestant reformers, who rejected the narrow and exclusive brotherhoods of monastic communities and of guild and lay associations.⁴⁰ In a sermon on the sacrament of the altar and brotherhoods from 1519, Luther argued that the activities and ordinances of fraternities were nothing to do with religion and complained:

What have the names of Our Lady, St. Anne, St. Sebastian, or other saints to do with your brotherhoods, in which you have nothing but gluttony, drunkenness, useless squandering of money, howling, yelling, chattering, dancing, and wasting of time? If a sow were made the patron saint of such a brotherhood she would not consent.⁴¹

For Luther, self-serving fraternities were intimately connected with abuses of the Mass, and he complained in *Babylonian Captivity* (1520) that 'participations, brotherhoods, intercessions, merits, anniversaries, memorial days, and the like wares are bought and sold, traded and bartered, in the church'.⁴² By criticizing self-interested, selfish fraternities and emphasizing the all-encompassing brotherhood of the priesthood of all believers, reformers actually widened the scope for the meaning of brotherhood and tied the religious and social potential of fraternal associations together more closely. Jakob Strauss compiled a list of the characteristics of good and bad brotherhoods.⁴³ True Christians, for example, had 'a heart burning with the light of faith', but false brotherhoods 'want to burn many great, fat, long wax candles in bright daylight, as if they wanted to light up and burn God and the saints in their heaven'. Polarization between benevolence and wickedness was extended to socio-economic contexts.

³⁹ Hermann Löscher, 'Die erzgebirgischen Knappschaften vor und nach der Reformation', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 92 (1956), 162–90.

⁴⁰ For reforming attitudes to brotherhoods see Goertz, 'Brüderlichkeit – Provokation, Maxime, Utopie', 20–24; Remling, *Bruderschaften in Franken*, 26–9.

⁴¹ *Eyn Sermon von dem Hochwirdigen Sacrament des Heyligen Waren Leychnams Christi Und von den Bruderschaften* (1519); LW 34: WA *Schriften*, 2: 754. See also Goertz, 'Brüderlichkeit – Provokation, Maxime, Utopie', 221.

⁴² *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520); LW 36: 35–6; WA *Schriften*, 6: 512.

⁴³ Jakob Strauss, *Vnderricht D. Jakob Straussens, wartzu die Bruderschaften nütz seyen, wie man sy bißher gehalte(n) hat, vn[d] nu fürohin halten sol* (Augsburg, 1522). See also Goertz, 'Brüderlichkeit – Provokation, Maxime, Utopie', 222.

A true Christian should clothe the naked, whereas false brothers dressed idols in gold; Christ wanted people to give anything they had left over to the poor, whereas the unscrupulous brothers abandoned the 'poor craftsmen' without anything.⁴⁴

Anabaptists appropriated the concept of a more inclusive, more socially responsible fraternity, regularly using a language of 'brother' and 'sister' to refer to one another. Georg Fuchs, one of Hans Römer's group, reported that when a man in Erfurt was baptized, they rejoiced: 'We are richer, we have yet another brother.' Jörg von Passau wrote to his fellow Anabaptists in 1528 unwaveringly referring to them as 'brothers and sisters in the Lord'.⁴⁵ This mode of expression has received little attention, regarded as a simple reflection of the spiritual equality apparently advocated by Anabaptism. It was most dramatically evident in Anabaptist martyrologies, where death seemed to give all victims parity and unity with Christ's suffering, regardless of age, status, and sex.⁴⁶ Anabaptist ideas were clearly developed in conversation with a medieval past and broader reforms, particularly the events of 1524–5; but in important ways the manner in which Anabaptists used 'brother' and 'sister' also set them apart from some of the rhetorical emphases of the early Reformation and the Peasants' War.

First, it was significant that the Anabaptists elected to use the language of fraternity, rather than the phrase, 'gemeiner Mann' (common man), another staple phrase of reformers as the new social and religious ethic was given expression.⁴⁷ This term was highly gendered, and its female opposite, 'gemeine Frau', which designated a whore in early modern parlance, was never used in a positive sense.⁴⁸ We might

⁴⁴ 'Die bruderschafft[n] wollen gemeinklich an den tagen irer Patronen vn[d] begangkussen ain überflüssigen praß halten, also, maniger armer handtwercker auff ain tag souil on wirt vn[d] verzert, er mocht ain gantze wochen weib vnd kind daruon vnderhalten . . . Christus wil haben von allen Christen ain liechtbrinnends hertz im glauben. Die bruderschafften wollen haben vil groß dick lang wachsin kertzen bey hellem liechtem tag zuprennen, als ob sy got vnd den hailigen iren hymel leichten vnd zinden wolten'; Strauss, *Bruderschafften*, A2v–A3r.

⁴⁵ 'Wir seindt reicher, wir haben noch einen bruder desto meher'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 272, 305–8; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 41v.

⁴⁶ See for example Jenifer Hiatt Umble, 'Women and Choice: An Examination of the *Martyrs' Mirror*', MA thesis, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, 1987; Jennifer H. Reed, 'Dutch Anabaptist Female Martyrs and their Response to the Reformation', MA thesis, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, 1991.

⁴⁷ Goertz, 'Karlstadt, Müntzer, und die Reformation des "gemeinen Mannes", 1521–1525', in Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation*, 54–96; Jay Goodale, 'Luther and the Common Man—the Common Man and Luther', in Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt (eds), *Luther Zwischen den Kulturen: Zeitgenossenschaft-Weltwirkung* (Göttingen, 2004), 66–88.

⁴⁸ Roper, '"The Common Man"', '"the Common Good"', '"Common Women": Gender and Meaning in the German Reformation Commune', *Social History* 12.1 (1987), 1–21.

assume that when Anabaptists talked about a community of goods, they would transfer this language to talk about gender. Certainly the authorities suspected as much and asked Anabaptists whether all goods, women included, were held in common. Georg Braun, questioned in Schweinfurt in February 1529, said 'it is not true that the wives and young women among them . . . are supposed to be common, for that was not godly, but devilish'.⁴⁹ Perhaps it was this suspicion that led several Anabaptists to move away from a language of common ownership. Marx Mayr, a follower of Hans Hut, said that some followers in Thuringia had expressed a desire for women to be treated as shared possessions, but he added that several others in the group disagreed.⁵⁰ In central Germany, Anabaptism generally eschewed any consistent, recognizable idea of communal ownership, and the phrase 'gemeiner Mann' was almost never used. One inhabitant in Salza said Römer taught that prophetic books should be translated into German and 'proclaimed to the common man', but this was rare.⁵¹

Second, Anabaptists reified brotherly and sisterly relationships in a way other reformers did not. 'Brotherhood' had allowed Luther and others to direct anti-clerical sentiment and express spiritual solidarity, but it was not meant literally. For the peasants, who formed defensive fraternal leagues, brotherhood was a metaphor for the gulf between the faithful and the godless; this was a masculine, apocalyptic vision of community, based on political action and violence in which sisters rarely featured, despite some of the dramatic exceptions described by Kobelt-Groch.⁵² For Anabaptists, not only brotherhood but sisterhood too were more than metaphors. Their communities included men and women, brothers and sisters.

In medieval Europe monastic brothers and spiritual sisters were united in their love for Christ but were physically separated in convents, and they gave up worldly relationships when they vowed to be siblings serving God, but Anabaptists used these fraternal kinships to structure

⁴⁹ 'es sei nit warheit, das die weiber und junkfrawen unter inen . . . gemein sein sollen, dan es wer nit gotlich, sunder teufelisch'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 309; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 36v.

⁵⁰ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 323; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 204r.

⁵¹ 'die alten prophetischen bucher vorteuttschen und dem gemeinen mann vorkundigen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 253; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 72v. Goertz argues that 'brotherhood' might be considered a special form of the community of goods. However, although the two concepts might be linked, they were different. Goertz, 'Einleitung', in Goertz (ed.), *Alles gehört allen: Das Experiment Gütergemeinschaft vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute* (Munich, 1984), 11.

⁵² Kobelt-Groch, *Aufsässige Töchter*, 34–63.

their everyday lives, employing the terms 'brother' and 'sister' in conjunction with existing relationships. Kemmerer referred quite happily to the 'brother' Anabaptists he met, and in the same breath, he talked about his actual brother Georg.⁵³ The language of brotherhood and sisterhood was a product of the diverse, dispersed communities of central German Anabaptism, in many ways a practical response to the problem of expressing connections between scattered groups, since fraternity was an umbrella term which was capacious enough to allow them to accommodate a very broad range of relationships between men, women, and children. It created communities which were founded on definitively anti-hierarchical ideas about the meaning of association, and which undermined familial and marital structures in ways in which Lutherans found hard to comprehend or excuse.

SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

Applying fraternal language to marital and sexual relationships was something Lutherans could not stomach. Marriage was at the heart of the Lutheran community.⁵⁴ Despite stripping wedlock of its sacramental value, Luther emphatically asserted that the state of marriage was desired by God, rejected chastity as a good work, and affirmed the importance of sex within marriage, with the hope of course that children would be the result. In *A Sermon on the Married Estate* (1522), he stated: 'after God had made man and woman he blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply" [Gen. 1:28]. From this passage we may be assured that man and woman should and must come together in order to multiply.'⁵⁵ Religious and social order rested on the foundations of a disciplined household, maintained by men as patriarchs and women as wives and mothers.⁵⁶ Luther argued that questions about engagement, marital order, and divorce were primarily the concern of the secular authorities, not the church, since marriage was an 'outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking'.⁵⁷ Yet in reality marriage remained bound

⁵³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 258–61; SHStAD, GA 1004, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 79r–80r.

⁵⁴ See for example Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge, 1995); Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1983).

⁵⁵ *Vom Ehelichen Leben* (1522); LW 45: 18; WA *Schriften*, 10.ii, 276.

⁵⁶ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Fragrant Wedding Roses": Lutheran Wedding Sermons and Gender Definition in Early Modern Germany, *German History* 17.1 (1999), 25–40.

⁵⁷ LW 45: 25.

up with debates about salvation and the purity of the community, and Luther spent much of his time answering queries about marital affairs.⁵⁸

Little surprise then that Anabaptists also had a variety of views on marriage and what it should mean. Katharina Reinholdt's work has detailed the bewildering range of opinions that Anabaptists expressed and the variety of arrangements they had to accommodate these views. As she shows, what united these heterogeneous opinions was the insistence on the importance of spiritual marriage as an expression of the union between Christ and believers. This ran counter to the Lutheran claim that marriage was a secular concern.⁵⁹ Anabaptists in central Germany followed the suit of groups in Strasbourg and Switzerland, and combined the concept of spiritual marriage with fraternal language, although not everyone used these ideas in the same way. Some rejected carnal, earthly marriage in a manner which we might expect from a group for whom traditional rites and rituals seemed to hold little meaning. Bernardt Brussel, questioned in Oberdorla in 1564, disparagingly stated:

there are two types of marriage, spiritual and worldly. He calls the spiritual the union of Christ and His bride, the Church, which is proper. The worldly he calls the coming together of man and wife, which is fleshly and evil, and is also not God's commandment and does not please God.⁶⁰

Others echoed Brussel's views; they dismissed worldly unions or called marriage 'whoredom', stating that any carnal relations between man and wife were evil.⁶¹

In contrast, Brussel's fellow Anabaptists, Hans Stefan and his wife, said that 'they considered marriage to be right, if people lived in agreement within it; if, however, people were not as one, then it is not from God'.⁶² It is not surprising that the married couple chose to place more value on

⁵⁸ Thomas A. Fudge, 'Incest and Lust in Luther's Marriage: Theology and Morality in Reformation Polemics', *SCJ* 34.2 (2003), 319–45.

⁵⁹ Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*. See also Kobelt-Groch, 'Why Did Petronella Leave Her Husband?', 29; Mattern, *Leben im Abseits*, 104–22.

⁶⁰ 'Macht zweierlei ehestand, den geistlichen und den weltlichen. Den geistlichen heist er die verbundnis Christi und seiner braut, der kirchen, der sei recht. Den weltlichen heist er die zusammenverfugung mannes und weibes, der sei fleischlich und böß, sei auch nicht Gottes ordnung und gefälle Gott nicht'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 501; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 254r.

⁶¹ Anna Kremin from Lüdersdorf, questioned in Beyernaumburg in the summer of 1543, said marriage is 'ein hurnleben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 472; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 123v.

⁶² 'Den ehestand halten sie recht, wen man darin eintrechtig lebt; wen man aber uneins ist, so sei er nicht von Gott', Wappler, *Thüringen*, 503; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 255v.

their relationship than Brussel who was a single man, but although the Stefans did not explicitly articulate the idea of spiritual marriage, their views and Brussel's were not so different. The most obvious measure for avoiding 'earthly' marriage and achieving a spiritual one might be to keep it in the Anabaptist, fraternal family. A union of believers, like that of the Stefans, could unite the pair in the body of Christ and rise above fleshly, evil marriage which was so distasteful to Brussel. Marriage in this sense was a gift from God. Kunne Genselerin said that her partner, Balthasar Keller, was her 'one husband, who was given to her by God, the Almighty, and not by any human'.⁶³

For some, anything other than marriage within the community of the faithful was abhorrent. Jakob Storger said that there was 'no married state in the whole world, which is not of their faith, but simply whoring and fornication'.⁶⁴ Storger had a family himself, and cases like his indicate that Anabaptists did not dismiss sex and marriage out of hand as carnal acts; rather they were remoulding what was permissible and what was taboo when it came to marital and sexual relations.⁶⁵ For Strohans, one of the *Blutsfreunde*, adultery took on a different meaning. He claimed that 'if someone committed this act [had sex] with worldly women, who were not holy and not of his belief, then it was adultery'.⁶⁶ Adultery was, therefore, not the betrayal of an earthly sacrament; rather it was committed by any man or woman who had sexual relations with someone without true faith and so was unfaithful to the body of Christ. Predicated on an idea that infidelity was disloyalty to God rather than to an individual, this definition echoed existing Catholic regulation stating that breaking a monastic vow to God was adulterous.

But what happened if married partners did not concur? According to Martin Weischenfelder, a follower of Hans Hut, if a man's wife refused to be baptized, he had three options. He could instruct her himself, get other brothers in the movement to persuade her, or he might leave her and join his fellow believers.⁶⁷ Krautheim's case or the problem of the Goldschmidt family were worrying reminders of what could go wrong when spouses disagreed, with the possibility

⁶³ 'Sagt, sie habe ein man, der sei ir von Gote, dem almechtigen, gegeben und von keinem menschen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 311; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 66v.

⁶⁴ 'es sei kein elicher stand in der ganzen welt nit, die ires glaubens nit sein, sunder eitel hurn und buben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 425; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 105r.

⁶⁵ Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism', 84–6.

⁶⁶ 'So er sich aber solcher werke mit einer andern weltfrauen, welche nit heilig und seines glaubens were, gebrauchet, so were es ein ebruch'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 481; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, 62v.

⁶⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 239.

that confessional divisions between husband and wife could lead to more permanent emotional divides.⁶⁸ Anabaptists did not have a single response to this problem, however. Reinholdt has shown that Anabaptists might opt for a range of solutions. Sometimes these were drastic, as in the case of Klaus Frey who horrified the authorities in Strasbourg when he surfaced in the city, after deserting his wife and eight children for another woman. Frey was executed for adultery but defended his new marriage with his 'marriage sister' ('eeswester') as a different type of union, spiritualized because it was contained within endogamous bonds which drew Anabaptists together.⁶⁹ Yet there were compromises and accommodations, as well as abandonment and renunciation of marriage.

Melchior Rinck's marital situation proved particularly problematic. He had married Anna Okharshausen before the Peasants' War, but she did not become an Anabaptist and was unwilling to follow him in his itinerant lifestyle. With the pair effectively separated, Anna and her father desperately sought a divorce, but Rinck would not agree. In an angry and emotional letter, he condemned Anna's father for selling her into fornication; but he also refused to grant her a legal separation since no man could separate what Christ had joined and divorce was just one step towards adultery.⁷⁰ His solution differed yet again from Brussel or the Stefans. Perhaps it was telling that Rinck had been a cleric. He had taken up a pastorate in Oberhausen in the early 1520s, and his marriage to Anna was a badge of his commitment to the reformed cause, though his views on the duties of the married estate might seem rather confused. His abhorrence of divorce was even shared by Luther on occasion, who advised bigamous unions instead of separation or adultery in certain cases, though this was by no means his default position.⁷¹

Rinck was not the only cleric to wrestle with his conscience as he confronted the demands of married life. As Beth Plummer has so deftly argued, rights and wrongs of clerical marriage shaped the

⁶⁸ On mixed marriages see Bertrand Forclaz, 'Le foyer de la discorde? Les mariages mixtes à Utrecht au XVIIe siècle', *Annales* 63 (2008), 1099–123; Dagmar Friest, 'One Body, Two Confessions: Mixed Marriages in Germany', in Ulrika Rublack (ed.), *Gender in Early Modern German History* (Cambridge, 2002), 275–304.

⁶⁹ Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism', 87; Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*, 71–4.

⁷⁰ 'wie er seyn kindt nicht verhelicher sonder hab es wellen verkauffen'; 'Es spricht ja Christus: was Gotzusamen gefuget hab, soll der mensch nicht scheiden'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 149–52, at 150–1; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 996, fo. 7r–10r.

⁷¹ Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, "'The Much Married Michael Kramer': Evangelical Clergy and Bigamy in Ernestine Saxony, 1522–1542', in Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer and Robin Barnes (eds), *Ideas and Cultural Margins in Early Modern Germany: Essays in Honor of H. C. Erik Midelfort* (Farnham, 2009), 99–116.

broader debate about marriage and sexual propriety, especially as the reformers themselves began to marry. Men who had only spent their lives thinking of women as mothers, sisters, servants, or spiritual siblings, now had to form new ideas about their relationship to the other sex. While other clerics began to take partners, Luther himself was at first hesitant. He considered a celibate union, what he termed a 'Josephehe', as an act of support for his fellow reformers, and when he finally married Katharina von Bora in 1525, the union was denounced as incestuous since they were spiritual brother and sister.⁷² Dissolving the vows of chastity that had bound cloistered communities and career clerics instigated arguments that bled into a bigger dispute about acceptable sexual unions, as well as stimulating new interpretations about the precise nature of the relationships between brothers and sisters in faith.⁷³

The terms of this debate were constantly shifting. Early in his career, Luther had challenged Catholic regulations regarding forbidden incestuous relationships in the wider family. Basing his ideas on Leviticus, Luther argued that marriages between certain degrees of family were forbidden, but that the new prohibitions between godparents and their godchildren and siblings were invented by the Devil. In particular Luther zoned in on these spiritual kinships created by baptism rituals. If the sacrament of baptism brought any hindrance to marriage, it would follow that no Christian man could marry a Christian woman since all baptized men and women are spiritual brothers and sisters.⁷⁴ Other reformers also questioned these restrictions. In 1523 Matthias Zell, the Strasbourg reformer, claimed

as there is nothing in the scriptures regarding godparenthood, therefore, there should also be no ban against them marrying as a mortal sin . . . so would you also ban any Christian from taking another, when baptism

⁷² Fudge, 'Incest and Lust'; Plummer, *From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife: Clerical Marriage and the Process of Reform in the Early German Reformation* (Farnham, 2012).

⁷³ Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism', 79–80.

⁷⁴ 'In addition they have also concocted new degrees of relationship, namely, the godparents, godchildren, and their children and brothers or sisters. It was really the devil who taught them that, for if the sacrament of baptism is supposed to create an impediment then no Christian man could take a Christian wife, since all baptized women are in a spiritual sense the sisters of all baptized men. They have in common the sacrament, the Spirit, faith, and spiritual gifts and blessings, by reason of which they are more closely related in Spirit than through the outward act of sponsorship'; *Welche Personen verboten sind zu ehelichen* (1522); LW 45: 8; WA *Schriften*, 10.ii: 266. On the idea of incest within spiritual kinships see Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. A.A. Brill (London, 1938), 27; Sidney W. Mintz and Eric R. Wolf, 'An Analysis of Ritual Co-Parenthood (Compadrazgo)', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 6.4 (1950), 341–68.

makes them even closer brother and sister than godparenthood which, however, is not essential like baptism.⁷⁵

Later in his career Luther backtracked. The views expressed in the early 1520s can probably be explained by the fact that he was working out what to do about clerical marriage and monastic vows, as well as dismantling the authority assumed by the Roman Church over the regulation of marriage and sexuality. By 1530, however, Luther was arguing that relationships to the fifth degree were forbidden. A sense of how rigid these restrictions remained is indicated by an ordinance issued in Albertine Saxony in 1555 that forbade a woman from marrying, for example, her nephew's daughter's husband.⁷⁶ Luther could not maintain the radical stance he took in 1522, but the fact that he wrote this 'work in progress' at all highlights two essential points. First, that reordering marriage and sexuality in the Reformation was not a linear process; and second, that along the way, it was not only marriage and adult sexual relationships at stake but the way in which ideas about familial ties, broadly understood, structured people's lives.

With their ideas on spiritual marriage and their rejection of institutions like infant baptism and godparenthood, it is not surprising that Anabaptists questioned a set of wider relationships. Hans Peisker not only referred to his wife and daughter as 'sisters', but also said 'they wanted to hear nothing of their friendships and blood relations; they say, they have no friendships on earth, they do not desire their help or advice, even less their intervention'. It turned out that one of the guards was Hans Peisker's godfather but Peisker was brutally dismissive and retorted, 'he knows nothing at all of his "godfatherhood", he was the Devil's godfather etc'.⁷⁷ Peisker went beyond calling his immediate family spiritual siblings, and in one contemptuous swoop he discarded a whole network of traditional kinships that bound individuals together. He questioned categories like 'Freund', 'Blutsfreunde' and 'Gevatter', ambiguous, highly contentious labels which described wider family networks that were not

⁷⁵ 'da von der gefatterschaft in der geschriff nichts ist, darumb solt auch kein verbot geschehen bey todtsünden sich darinn zu vermählen . . . also möchtestu auch verbieten, das gar kein christ den andern neme, wann der tauff ye näher brüder und schwester macht weder gevatterschaft, die doch nit von nöten ist als der tauff; QGTvii: 6.

⁷⁶ Sehling i: 335–9.

⁷⁷ 'Item sie wollen von iren freuntschaften und blutsfreunden nichts hoeren, sagen, sie haben auf erden keine freundschaft, begeren nicht irer hulf nach rat, weniger irer vorbitt, und sunderlich ist der wechter einer des mullers Hansen Poißkers gefatter, der inen im gefenkhus gefatter geheißē, dem er geantwortet, er wuste von seiner gefatterschaft gar nichts, er were des teufels gefatter etc.'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 399; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 999, fo. 18v.

necessarily consanguineous and which had been brought into question by Reformation debates about marital unions, kinship, and sexuality.⁷⁸ The Reformation dissolved oaths which removed monastic siblings from the world, questioned the nature of godparenthood, and reordered marriage, and Anabaptists shared many of these concerns. Yet by retaining the rhetoric of brotherly and sisterly kinship above all other ties, Anabaptists also broke taboos in ways that shocked other reformers. Married partners, like Peisker and his wife, referred to one another and their children as spiritual siblings, and the *Blutsfreunde* saw one another as brothers and sisters, combining fraternal categories with spiritual marriage and sacramental sex.⁷⁹ Anabaptists were not generally accused of incest, yet they elided fraternal rhetoric with traditional familial and marital relationships, using language that simply did not make sense to Lutherans and which threatened their vision of domestic order.

SEX AND SALVATION

Sexual radicalism in Anabaptist communities made headlines. When reports flooded out of Westphalia in 1535 that the Anabaptists had taken control of the town of Münster and enforced polygamy, the authorities' worst fears concerning the dangerous effects of Anabaptism were confirmed. Here, surely, was proof that such heresy led to immorality and destroyed normal sexual relationships. Quite apart from events in Münster, central German Anabaptism offered its own brand of sexual radicalism, although these examples were by no means typical of all Anabaptists in the region: Hans Krug and his associates raped women who would not be converted, and the *Blutsfreunde* rejected all sacraments

⁷⁸ In the medieval period, 'Gevatterschaft' had been used to designate 'co-parenthood' and sponsor relationships that were created by baptism, and also the fictive kinships created between natural parents and godparents. In early modern polemic 'Gevatter' began to be used to talk about spiritual and theoretical kinship in general rather than just baptismal relationships, and then in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was used for any kind of close relationships, or cousins. 'Freundschaft' was also unclear: it could refer to friend or kin relationships since it was used to designate elective friendships as well as non-elective kinships, from the old meaning of 'Freund' as relative; Mintz and Wolf, 'Analysis of Ritual Co-Parenthood', 341; *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 vols (Leipzig, 1854–1960); iv: Sp. 167–9; vi: Sp. 460–5 [online] <<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/>> accessed 20 December 2012; Harrington, *Marriage and Society* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 273–4; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012).

⁷⁹ Reinholdt, "durch fleischliche vormyschunge geheilligett"—Sexuelle Devianz und spirituelle Ehen bei den "Blutsfreunden aus der Wiedertauff", in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferniums/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009), 295–313.

in favour of sacramental sex, the *Christierung*. Further south in Bavaria, the Dreamers of Uttenreuth, discovered in 1531, claimed to be inspired by the spirit which told them when and with whom they should have sexual relations.⁸⁰

Contemporaries believed such deviancy proved that heresy encouraged libertinism, and this view has also found its way into scholarship on radical groups. However, recent historical analysis has undermined the idea that apparently unusual sexual practices were driven by lust and desire. The rigid rules which surrounded these radical acts have led some scholars to argue that sexual deviancy was in fact a form of asceticism, and that the apparent sexual radicalism of the *Blutsfreunde* and the Dreamers, even the polygamy of Münster, can be traced back to traditional Christian disgust at sex.⁸¹ One of the Uttenreuth Dreamers, Jakob Mulner, said that if the divine voice told him to let his wife go to another man, he would do so, against his own wishes, because it would be the right thing to do, while Margarethe Strigel claimed that she had carnal relations with Michael Peuerlein on two occasions, when the spirit had so demanded it, although she would have preferred to sleep with her own husband.⁸² On the evidence of such confessions, Anselm Schubert has suggested that the Dreamers had a vision of holiness that functioned in spite of sexuality, in the sense that they tried to create a sexual experience that was free from lust.⁸³ The Thuringian *Blutsfreunde* seemed to agree. Blasius Tutz stated that when they came together for the *Christierung*, the rite could be performed with wives young and old, presumably to stress that choices were not made on the basis of physical attraction.⁸⁴ However, attempting to control lust through regulated sex was not the only way Anabaptists reconciled sexuality with spirituality.

⁸⁰ For the *Blutsfreunde* see Reinholdt, 'Sexuelle Devianz und spirituelle Ehe'; Hochhuth ii: 182–96; Gustav Schmidt, *Justus Menius, der Reformator Thüringens nach archivalischen und andern gleichzeitigen Quellen*, 2 vols (Gotha, 1867), ii: 127–38; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 189–206. The trials of many of the Dreamers are printed in *QGTii*: 219ff. On the Uttenreuth Dreamers see Anselm Schubert, 'Der Traum vom Tag des Herrn: Die "Träumer von Uttenreuth" und das apokalyptische Täuferturn', *ARG* 98 (2006), 106–36; Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*, 68–71; Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism', 82–6. For Hans Krug see *ThStAM*, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 80r–81r.

⁸¹ Matthias Hennig, 'Askese und Ausschweifung: Zum Verständnis der Vielweiberei im Täuferturn zu Münster', *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 40 (1983), 25–45; James M. Stayer, 'Vielweiberei als "innerweltliche Askese": Neue Eheauffassungen in der Reformationszeit', *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 37 (1980), 24–41; Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*, 104–8.

⁸² *QGTii*: 257.

⁸³ Schubert, 'Der Traum vom Tag', 125–6.

⁸⁴ 'vnd beides jung vnd alt vnder den weibs personen Cristirten, vnd were ihr eine als die ander'; *SAM*, Sig.10/E6 No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 41r.

As Reinholdt's work has demonstrated and as is evident from the Eucharistic theologies expressed in central Germany, Anabaptists felt certain that the body could link believers to Christ. The *Blutsfreunde* believed that a corporeal bond united the faithful so that sex between fellow believers was not whoring; rather sexual communion was a way of partaking in the one body of Christ, a divine union of flesh. Jörg Jakob, interrogated over the autumn and spring of 1551–2, declared: 'Christ and Paul teach everywhere of one body, into which we must all come, and so if another man knew his wife, then that bound their marriage all the closer.'⁸⁵ Making sexual relations an inalienable element of the sacramental ritual was not so strange, since pre-Reformation marriages could be concluded with a promise and consummation, confirmed only later in church. Sex sealed the union.⁸⁶

Nor was conceptualizing all Christians as part of a spiritual body, with Christ as the head, unique to Anabaptists. Writing about marriage, Luther himself had quoted the same passage used by the *Blutsfreunde* from Paul (Ephesians 5:32) which linked sexual relations between a man and a woman, the body of Christ, and the corpus of the Christian community. Some Anabaptists just seemed to take this more literally. The *Blutsfreunde* argued that among true Christians everything could be used freely (wives, children, and goods) by a perfect and pure believer.⁸⁷ Such musings struck chords with the theology of the community of goods, though the *Blutsfreunde* saw the society of sinless Christians linked in a much more physical sense by their shared participation in the flesh of Christ. Jörg Schuchart went so far as to say that all men should be considered just one man, and all women as a single woman, united in the one body of the Saviour.⁸⁸ In an overtly physical sense, sex between these individuals delineated the bodily substance of the community in Christ.

Even the views of Hans Krug, a follower of the arsonist Hans von Fulda, became comprehensible seen from this perspective. When he was questioned in 1532, he confessed to the violent crimes committed against men and women. He and a companion had robbed and killed a sixteen-year-old boy, a woman, and a man; with another colleague, he had set

⁸⁵ 'dan Christus und Paulus lehren uberall von einem leib, darein wir alle komen müssen, und so nun ein ander sein weib erkenne, binde es die ehe viel fester'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 493; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 109.

⁸⁶ Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism', 83.

⁸⁷ 'under rechten christen alles, es sei weib, kinde oder gut zugebrauchen einem jeden volkomen reinen christen frei stehe und sei'. Wappler, *Thüringen*, 481; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 997, 62v.

⁸⁸ 'Das alle manner ein Man sein solle vnd alle weiber ein Weib'; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 80r.

fire to a village; he had raped and killed a woman who would not accept the new baptism. Krug said that when any of the Fulda arsonists met a young girl or woman, they would say 'I desire your flesh'.⁸⁹ While Krug's assumption that he was entitled to use women sexually seems abhorrent, his sexual violence was part of the ritual activity that bound his group together. The acts he and his companions committed against women appeared to be a way of marking the boundaries of the group, just as arson attacks on prized property or the destruction of a man's house who would not provide Krug with accommodation were intended to be acts of revenge on outsiders.⁹⁰ By taking possession of the flesh of women who were not receptive to Anabaptist ideas, Krug may have believed some kind of victory of conversion was achieved. These women were not simply used as common possessions; rather the act of defiling their bodies was a way of drawing the lines of inclusion and exclusion, perhaps even partaking of the body of Christ, though Krug never articulated this idea.

Such ideas were linked to late medieval theologies of the mystical body. But there was a difference. Neither the *Blutsfreunde* nor Krug gendered the bodily union with Christ overtly. Brussel was quite unusual in his use of familiar allusions to the bride and bridegroom, and even when Anabaptists did use this analogy it was sufficiently vague to allow men and women to imagine themselves in the wifely role.⁹¹ Nor did Anabaptists follow the late medieval tradition that linked Christ's body and sacrifice with female corporeality, based on the idea that both bodies possessed nourishing and nurturing power.⁹² Fifteenth-century images feminized Christ's body: blood spurted from Christ's wounds into chalices and mouths, like a lactating mother. This drew a direct comparison between a mother's milk and Christ's blood, a trend which was continued in the sixteenth century in the works of spiritualists like Schwenckfeld. Ruth Goldbourne has argued that emphasis on the nourishing body of Christ made Schwenckfeld's theology more attractive to women and can explain why he gathered so many female followers.⁹³ Yet this model will not help us explain central German Anabaptist theology where such overtly gendered images of Christ's body were absent.

⁸⁹ 'ich gelust deins flaisch'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No, 78, fo. 81r.

⁹⁰ 'Item er hat auch ein frawen, die sich nit tauffen hat wollen lassen, er vnd sein geselle hans von folda genottzutiget, vnd der nach vetott. Item er hat auch ein man vetott, der hat jnen nit wollen herberegen'; ThStAM, GHA IV, No, 78, fo. 80v.

⁹¹ Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*, 30.

⁹² Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages', in Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (1991; repr. New York, 2002), 79–117.

⁹³ Ruth Goldbourne, *The Flesh and the Feminine: Gender and Theology in the Writings of Caspar Schwenckfeld* (Milton Keynes, 2006), 95–6.

By referring to the *Christierung* as if it were a form of Eucharistic bread and wine, the *Blutsfreunde* did not see sexual intercourse as part of worldly marital relations or as a way of procreating, but related it to sacrifice and death. Sex and bodily gestures could express a variety of sentiments, some of which seem alien to modern values. We would tend to see kissing, for example, as a way of negotiating gendered transactions, sometimes but not always sexually charged, and expressing relationships between partners and friends. Craig Koslofsky's work, however, reminds us that a different sort of kiss, the kiss of peace, could play other roles in late medieval and early modern Europe.

When the Saxon visitors did their rounds in 1528, they found many practices and objects which no longer had a place in Lutheran worship, including pax-boards. These boards of wood decorated with the image of the *Agnus Dei* had been passed between the laity and clergy during Mass at the essential moment between consecration and communion, and then kissed 'to evoke the divine gift of peace . . . a public kind of kiss, at once more transcendently spiritual and more crudely material than the kiss in the modern West'.⁹⁴ The kiss, which united believers in Christ, could even be substituted for the Eucharist. It had no place in Lutheran worship, where the gesture was private and optional, but it did for Anabaptists. A 1568 code of conduct in Strasbourg said brothers and sisters would kiss to mark inclusion and exclusion, and in martyr stories the final act of farewell as the faithful were united with Christ was often the kiss of peace.⁹⁵ As Koslofsky suggests, physical gestures such as kissing or even having sex could express spiritual truth. For Anabaptists like Krug or Strohmans, sexual communion was more than a modified form of asceticism which controlled lustful desires between men and women. It expressed a corporeal vision of spirituality linking believers with Christ's sacrificed body, which was inextricably connected to the broader ritual universe of central German Anabaptism.

Even motherhood was subsumed within this ideal. The same rhetoric that was used to justify sex between brothers and sisters was applied to childbearing. The former pastor of Niederdorla, Sebastian Thiel, criticized the *Blutsfreunde* for their literalism when it came to children. According to him they used the passage from Matthew 7 (a good

⁹⁴ Craig Koslofsky, 'The Kiss of Peace in the German Reformation', in Karen Harvey (ed.), *The Kiss in History* (Manchester, 2005), 18–35, at 18.

⁹⁵ Koslofsky, 'Kiss of Peace', 28. See for example the martyrdom of Ursula and Maria van Beckum in Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus Their Saviour, from the time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1660*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, PA, 1951), 467.

tree brings forth good fruit) to talk about birth: the pure flesh of true Christians could conceive pure children. Kindervater confirmed this, saying that 'if a child was born to him, then it would already be pure, good, and well created through Christ, and therefore they don't think anything of infant baptism'.⁹⁶ Thiel refuted his position, arguing that 'the corporeal birth does not make Christians and that neither blood nor flesh brings with it faith, love, and blessedness, for flesh bears flesh, John 3'.⁹⁷ Anabaptists disagreed. In one of his letters to his fellow Anabaptists in central Germany, Jörg von Passau discussed what should happen to the children of Kilian Volkaimer, who had been left behind by their father.

I ask you out of Christian brotherly love and faith, as my children are abandoned, you will help and advise that they are brought up in the Lord and that they will be to his praise and credit, although they are not mine according to the flesh but according to the spirit since we are all bound together according to the gospel in the union of love to one body, which is the body of Christ.⁹⁸

Children who were not of an age to be baptized had an ambiguous status in Anabaptist groups as 'midling Christi', not old enough to be full reasoning members of the community. Yet although they could not make statements of belief, they might still be part of the body of Christ. Some Anabaptists, therefore, went beyond merely referring to one another as brothers and sister, but combined the traditional language of marriage, family, and sex with a religious language of the body, communion, and kinship. Sex expressed the boundaries of faith, not by controlling sexual relations within a rigid, ascetic framework, but by uniting men, women, and children through a sexual experience which became a performative religious rite designed to express the bodily connection between true believers.

⁹⁶ 'wan ihnen ein kind geporen werde, das sei also albereit rein, gut und wolgeschaffen durch Christum, und derhalben halten sie auch von der taufe gar nictes'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 485; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1014, fo. 6.

⁹⁷ 'daß die leibliche Geburt nicht Christen macht und daß Blut noch Fleisch weder Glauben, Liebe und Seligkeit mit sich bringt, denn ein Fleisch gebäret Fleisch Joh. 3'; Hochhuth II: 185.

⁹⁸ 'bit euch von cristlicher bruderlicher lieb und trewe, wie meine kindlein verlassen sein, woller helfen und raten, das sie im Hern auferzogen werden zw seinem lob und preiß, wiewol sihe seind nit mein noch [dem] fleisch, sondern noch dem geist, dieweil wir seind verpünden noch dem ewangelio im pünd der lieb zw einem leib, welcher leib ist Cristüs'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 306; BStAN, Rep. 111b, Ansbacher Religions-Akten, Tom. XXXIX, fo. 27v.

GENDER ORDER AND THE
THREAT OF ANABAPTISM

Calling someone 'brother' or 'sister' might seem to be an innocuous enough profession of fraternal or indeed sororal affection, but to the Lutheran reformer Justus Menius it represented a menace to social order. When people received the new baptism, they were initiated into a distinct community of brothers and sisters, which (as seemed to be the case with Peisker's family) cut across the normal bonds of society.

Then they no longer have a natural father or mother, brother or sister, wife or children, but are simply spiritual brothers and sisters amongst one another. Then no-one says, 'I am in my house', but in 'ours'; not 'I lie in my bed', but 'ours'; not 'I cover myself with my cloak', but 'ours'.⁹⁹

By opting out of conventional relationships and being brothers and sisters to one another, Menius believed that Anabaptists ripped apart the fabric which held communities together and eroded familial distinctions between husbands and wives, parents and children. Undoubtedly he fretted over sexual deviants such as the *Blutsfreunde*, publishing a work about them in 1551 in which he made direct comparisons with the outrageous events in Münster.¹⁰⁰ Yet it was not illicit sex per se that bothered Menius but rather the menace that the fraternal kinships of Anabaptism posed to familial hierarchies and godly ordinances in the home. In the work on the *Blutsfreunde*, Menius used every word he could to emphasize the order of the Lutheran household—'Oeconomia', 'Hauszucht' and 'Hausregiment'—in contrast to Anabaptist disorder.¹⁰¹

Lutherans like Menius were baffled and worried by the choices these Anabaptists made when it came to their families. When Gela Quinger left her home for an Anabaptist community, the authorities were concerned about parental responsibility and wanted to ensure that Hans Quinger, the deserted husband, would look after the couple's children. Twelve years

⁹⁹ 'Da haben sie nimmer leiblich widder vater noch mutter, bruder noch schwester, weib noch kinder, sondern sind eitel geistliche brüder und schwestern unter einander. Da spricht keiner: Ich bin meinem sondern in unsern haus; ich lige in meinem, sondern in unsern betten; ich deck mich mit meinem, sondern mit unserm rock'; Justus Menius, *Der widderteuffer Lere vnd geheimnis, Aus heiliger schriftt widderlegt. Justus Menius. Von der Widdertauffe an Zween Pfarher, Ein Brieff. D. Martinus Luther Vnterricht widder die lere der Widderteuffer. Philip. Melancht* (Wittenberg, 1534), C8v.

¹⁰⁰ Justus Menius, *Von den Blutfreunden aus der Wiedertauff* (Erfurt, 1551).

¹⁰¹ 'hat der Teuffel, alle Gottliche ordnung jnn der Oeconomia, das ist, im Hausregiment oder Hauszucht, durch diese Rotten auch wollen zustoren'; Menius, *Von den Blutfreunden*, B1v.

later Justus Menius and the *Schösser* in Gerstungen and Hausbreitenbach, Wolf Blümlein, tried to arrange the baptism of the boy who had been born to his wife when she was away travelling as an Anabaptist. Quinger himself no longer had anything to do with Anabaptism, and as a reformed character, they trusted he would baptize the child. Described as a poor man, the authorities gave him half a gulden to help with the cost of the baptismal clothing, perhaps as a tactic to guarantee that the baptism would actually be carried out.¹⁰²

Authorities were all too aware of the long-term disruption to families that Anabaptism might cause and were keen to counter it. Melchior Toter, interrogated in Mühlhausen in 1554, did not know why he and his fellow prisoners were called Anabaptists; all he knew was that his father had instructed him and that his parents had not been to church for years.¹⁰³ Even more worrying was the situation in Zella, when fifteen men and women fled in 1528. Georg Bader and his wife abandoned two boys and two girls, one of whom was completely blind, and supplied nothing at all for their care. Many other parents from this group did likewise, and family members or local households were left to look after these children. Hans Mhor cared for the Bader's blind infant.¹⁰⁴ We cannot know precisely what prompted this response: whether these parents were driven to desperation by their desire to escape the authorities; or truly believed the children would be adequately protected by family and friends with the meagre provisions provided. For the authorities, their actions placed a considerable burden on the community.

Combatting the threat from Anabaptism was, however, easier said than done. Working out what went wrong when marriages or families fell apart or spouses quarrelled involved identifying the partner who had misbehaved: a man might abuse his position as protector and patriarch and so destabilize the normal bonds of marriage, or women were sexually unruly and acted as *unartige Weiber*, 'naughty wives'.¹⁰⁵ Iconographic tropes of feminine rebellion depicted them revolting against and usurping male authority, using the instruments of their household activity such as the distaff to beat their husbands into submission.¹⁰⁶ The implements used for

¹⁰² Wappler, *Stellung*, 221; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 991, fo. 21.

¹⁰³ 'Sagt sie heissen sie widerteuffer aber Weiss es nit wie ers nemen sol, sein vather habe jn das gelert, vnd sein vather vnd mutter sein jn etzlichen jaren jn keiner kirchen gewesen'; SAM Sig.10/E6 No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer 1519–1589, fo. 113r.

¹⁰⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 304; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1025, fol. 3v.

¹⁰⁵ Claudia Ulbrich, 'Unartige Weiber: Präsenz und Renitenz von Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Deutschland', in Richard van Dülmen (ed.), *Arbeit, Frömmigkeit, und Eigensinn: Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 13–17.

¹⁰⁶ Keith Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation* (Chicago, IL, 1989), 101–26.

making and mending clothes occur repeatedly in images of female unruliness, so perhaps there was more than a hint of irony when Valentine Krautheim said he had left his wife because she would not stop embroidering.¹⁰⁷ Israhel van Meckenem's engraving of a wife who beats her husband with a distaff while battling for his trousers, or Cranach's sketch of women punishing clerics with farming implements, reflect the wider visual tradition which associated female insubordination with rebellion against male authority and with sexual looseness. The women in such pictures often had their breasts uncovered and their hair down, emphatic signs of their sexual availability.¹⁰⁸

Men and women were, therefore, normally accused of different crimes. Infanticide, prostitution, witchcraft, slander, and adultery were typically misdemeanours committed by women, while men were more likely to be apprehended for violent and political crimes, and more male suspects than female appeared before the courts.¹⁰⁹ But Anabaptism presented a problem. Heresy tended to be one of the few crimes where men and women were arrested for the same offence at the same time, and in the case of central German Anabaptism in fairly equal numbers. Tension over how to deal with Anabaptism was manifest in the way officials wrote about it. An instruction from the Elector John of Saxony to the council in Gotha stated that his subjects should be obliged to 'stay with their wives, children, and to feed the household', suggesting that men would be more likely to desert their home for heresy.¹¹⁰ Yet the case of Gela Quinger or Petronella indicated that women might just as likely abandon their homes. Officials were all too aware that women could be as deeply implicated as men. The authorities in Mühlhausen, for example, commented that Christoph von der Eichen's wife was as bad as him, a damning assessment considering Christoph was on his sixth arrest.¹¹¹ Women could also engage in violent rebellion. In 1532 in the village of Spahl a group of Anabaptists barricaded themselves in a house and attempted to repel the forces in the abbacy of Fulda. The abbot of Fulda wrote to count William

¹⁰⁷ For the imagery of spinning in female rebellion see Ulbrich, 'Unartige Weiber', 17–19.

¹⁰⁸ For the van Meckenem engraving see Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives*, 104–6; for the Cranach image see Ulbrich, 'Unartige Weiber', 21–3.

¹⁰⁹ For the treatment of women in criminal proceedings see Ulinka Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 1999). On gender and crime see also Susan Broomhall, 'Poverty, Gender, and Incarceration in Sixteenth-Century Paris', *French History* 18.1 (2004), 1–24; Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Berbig, 'Königsberg', 340.

¹¹¹ 'neben seinem weib (die so argk ist als er)'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8199/7, fol. 17r.

of Henneberg in shock and disgust about the behaviour of the thirteen women in the group who were 'almost even more devilish than the men when it came to weapons'.¹¹²

Anabaptists were difficult to define and difficult to punish. When both partners had sinned the punishment was more straightforward. Barbara Schätzlin was executed with her husband since he too was suspected of Anabaptism. However, the extraordinary instances of Anabaptist women, such as Margarethe Hellwart in Beutelsbach, who were allowed to return to their homes as long as they were chained up and could do no further mischief, betrays the inadequacy of punishments which relied on gender discipline. Women like Margarethe were delivered to the authority of husbands whose role it was to discipline the weaker sex, and this reinforced a patriarchal mode of punishment, but their crime and conviction was a constant reminder of the breakdown of patriarchal order in the first place, while the fact these women were physically restrained did not suggest a vote of confidence in the ability of their husbands to keep them in check.¹¹³ As happened with Curt Goldschmidt, who vouched for his wife in 1537 but was unable to control her, the authorities may have released women into the hands of husbands knowing it might not provide a satisfactory solution.

Such situations were problematic for the authorities as they could not be contained within a normative view of marriage and marital disunity. In 1551 the town council of Erfurt stated emphatically that the *Blutsfreunde* sect with its devilish principles had ripped apart the sacrament of marriage and encouraged men to leave their wives for other women, while their wives associated with other men.¹¹⁴ Illicit and deviant sexual affairs usually carried with them the menace of quarrel and enmity born of jealousy, rejection, and anger; the ripple effect of these affairs ought to be highly visible. Yet in reality the *Blutsfreunde* had gone unnoticed for several years, suggesting that existing relationships might coexist alongside sacramental sex.¹¹⁵ Brotherhood and sisterhood was a way of designating membership in Anabaptist communities but these expansive terms subsumed traditional marital roles and disagreements within religious, ritual

¹¹² 'unter diesen sein auch bei dreizehen weibsilden gewest, di solten sich fast deuffschere dan di menner zu der wehr gestelt haben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 338; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 59r.

¹¹³ Kobelt-Groch, 'Frauen in Ketten: "Von widertaufferischen weibern wie gegen seligen zu handeln"', *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 47/48 (1990/91), 53–4. For the treatment of pregnant Anabaptist women see also Kobelt-Groch, 'Mouldered away in the Tower with the Fruit of the Womb? On the Treatment of Pregnant Anabaptist Women under Criminal Law', trans. Dennis L. Slabaugh, in Brown (ed.), *Women, Gender, and Radical Religion*, 219–41.

¹¹⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 487.

¹¹⁵ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 192.

experiences. Contrary to expectations, Anabaptist views did not always tear apart marriages, nor did men and women fit into easy categories of unruly wives or weak husbands.¹¹⁶ As Roper points out, even Klaus Frey attempted to defend his adultery with an appeal to the norms of patriarchal order; his first wife had refused to follow him to Strasbourg, and so she was at fault, not him.¹¹⁷ Theologians and magistrates struggled to categorize the roles Anabaptist men and women played, for these groups conceptualized their communities in fundamentally different ways from the patriarchal model which Lutheranism valued.

* * *

The impact of Anabaptism on communities was sometimes dramatic as with the *Blutsfreunde*, and sometimes more subtle, as with Peisker and his daughter. Yet for the men and women concerned, Anabaptism in central Germany created a radically different experience of family and communal life from the patriarchal ideal. It is not helpful to suggest that Anabaptists set out to provide equality for women, but it is nonetheless true that the equalizing rhetoric of sisterhood and brotherhood recast the roles which men and women had to play. Every Anabaptist could partake in this fraternal language, even those who had not been baptized, or those who might not attend sacraments like the Lord's Supper, and it drew Anabaptists together, men and women, in scattered areas, from different kinship groups, and of different ages. Gender (unlike in patriarchal systems) was not used as a category of hierarchical difference but an expression of union and similarity. Growing out of the patterns of association that allowed Anabaptism to flourish, brotherhood and sisterhood stimulated new attitudes to gender as theological abstractions about Christian fellowship were applied to the realities of everyday life. By constructing collective structures which grouped them all as spiritual siblings, these Anabaptists, who were prepared to leave partners or children, or break social taboos about sex, put everything on the line. They constructed a ritual universe which deployed, language, emotions, and the body in a way which was radically different from the world of Lutheran patriarchy.

¹¹⁶ Reinholdt, 'Sexuelle Devianz und spirituelle Ehe', 312.

¹¹⁷ Roper, 'Sexual Utopianism', 87.

The Curious Case of Hans Thon

On 15 September 1564, the pastor of St Catherine's Church in Eschwege, the deacon in Salza, and four Lutheran superintendents responsible for Eisenach, Mühlhausen, Allendorf, and Salza, a block of territories in eastern Thuringia bordering Hesse, questioned a group of Anabaptists in Oberdorla who had been arrested a few days earlier. Proceedings seemed to unfold in a fairly undramatic fashion, as the interrogators ran through a list of queries on topics such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and marriage, until they got round to questioning a shepherd by the name of Hans Thon from the village of Niederdorla. All the suspects confessed non-conformist views, but so obstinate and objectionable was this particular prisoner, that 'for fear of God and horror of upsetting those listening', the interrogators halted their examination.¹ The officials were not just worried about themselves; in a remarkable and otherwise unprecedented move in Anabaptist cases in the region the decision had been made to hold a public trial.² Clearly the superintendents were concerned that everyone present was at risk. What could have evoked such a reaction in these experienced Lutheran clergymen? Who was this man who inspired such revulsion and alarm?

The details on Thon's life are sparse. He lived in Niederdorla, but no precise information was given about when or where he was born. His parents were residents of Lauterbach near Mihla, a village about 20km south-west of Niederdorla.³ Clearly he had spent some of his childhood in his parents' village since as late as 1583 he was able to recall the name of his godfather from Lauterbach, Hans Butsen.⁴ He also had a brother who lived in Niederdorla, known only as Master Lorentz. Perhaps the title suggested that Lorentz was more respectable than his brother, or perhaps the

¹ 'aus gottesfurcht und schrecken umb ergernis willen der zuhörer'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 505; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256v.

² SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8199/7, fo. 18r.

³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 503; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256r.

⁴ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 313v.

opposite was true, since 'Master' was the standard designation for an executioner, the most dishonourable of professions.⁵ Aside from this handful of family members, Thon seemed to have no more significant others in his life; he was not married since he rejected the union as an earthly institution, adding for good measure that 'he did not approve of fornication'.⁶ By profession he was a shepherd with no fixed abode, his occupation probably requiring him to travel about with his flock. It is difficult to determine how Thon was viewed by his contemporaries. Shepherds might be ostracized since the nature of their profession appeared shameful to some, isolating them from society and resembling the work done by skinners and knackers.⁷ However, herdsman might also possess charismatic power in local communities as a consequence of their seeming independence and the magical healing associated with the profession.⁸

We also know little about when and where Thon first encountered Anabaptist ideas, but on 6 July 1562 the pastor in Niederdorla, Jost Pflaum, wrote to the superintendent of Langensalza, Franciscus Strauss, and the *Amtmann* in Langensalza, Erich von Berlepsch, to inform them that he was perturbed by the Anabaptists in his territories. He named nearly a dozen individuals, Thon included.⁹ Christoph von der Eichen headed up the group and had been a thorn in the side of the authorities for nearly thirty years. After Pflaum's complaint the matter was passed on to Strauss and his fellow superintendent in Mühlhausen, Hieronymus Tilesius; the pair followed up with a letter on 10 December to Elector August of Saxony, informing him of the situation and urging action.¹⁰ Elector August wrote to the *Amtmann* and *Schösser* in Langensalza on the following day to say that the Anabaptists should not be tolerated, and Christoph von der Eichen should be arrested and questioned.¹¹ Even so, it was not until September 1564 that Christoph and his followers were finally brought in for examination. From the first Thon must have made an unfavourable impression since he was described at the bottom of the

⁵ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 212r. On executioners see Kathy Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honour and Ritual Pollution* (Cambridge, 1999), 69–93; Joel F. Harrington, *The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century* (London, 2013).

⁶ 'Die unzucht lob er nicht'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 521; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 300v.

⁷ Stuart, *Defiled Trades*, 94–7; Rudolf Wissell, *Des alten Handwerks Recht und Gewohnheit*, 3 vols (Berlin, 1929), i: 81–7.

⁸ Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Obertsdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H.C. Erik Midelfort (Charlottesville, VA, 1998), 4–8, 82–4.

⁹ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 211–13.

¹⁰ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 225–6.

¹¹ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 223–4.

index of names as 'a true organ of the Devil'.¹² At this point we are not given any further indication as to what had inspired such a damning assessment. It soon became clear, however, that Thon's view of faith and God was somewhat at odds with that of his interrogators.

From 12–15 September 1564 nine of the prisoners were questioned on a range of important topics. The answers of the other interrogated Anabaptists were listed under topic headings in Latin, 'De coniugio', 'De baptismo', etc. However, Thon, who was described as a 'vagabond', suggesting the authorities were suspicious of his peripatetic occupation, was different. His confession was transcribed without subject titles as a stream of ideas about the nature of God and creation, hinting at the unusual nature of his views.¹³ It was this initial round of questioning that so horrified his interrogators, and an appeal was made to the consistory in Leipzig, who advised at the beginning of November that the Anabaptists should be executed by fire if they remained obstinate.¹⁴

So on 28 November 1564, Strauss and Christian Grau, the superintendent of Allendorf, launched another attempt to elicit a recantation from Thon and four other prisoners, although this time proceedings were not a matter for public consumption.¹⁵ From the word go, the shepherd was described as 'obstinate in his error'; he would not be instructed because he did not accept that the Bible was the word of God.¹⁶ However, another reprieve from the fires of execution was granted temporarily. All the prisoners were given a period for further consideration until 17 January 1565, but on 19 December Thon escaped.¹⁷ The authorities in Treffurt passed judgement on Thon in his absence, along with another absconded prisoner, Margarethe Bartolfin, so that the authorities would know how to act 'if they were to sneak back into the *Vogtei*'. They were barred from the region, on pain of arrest or worse.¹⁸ No attempt seems to have been made to follow up their flight, however, and there was no urgency to execute the other Anabaptists who remained in prison. Thon's case was not to be finally resolved until twenty years later in 1583 when the authorities

¹² 'ein recht organum diaboli'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 495; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 249r.

¹³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 495–506; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 251–257r.

¹⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 509–10; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 265–266r.

¹⁵ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 510–13; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 268–270r.

¹⁶ 'Beharret auch ganz halsstarrig in seinem irtumb, hat keine weisung noch underricht annemen wollen, ob er sich wol des heuchelischer weise demütiglich erpöten, den er will nicht bekennen noch annemen, das die bibil und heilige schrift Gottes wort sei'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 511; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 268v.

¹⁷ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 214.

¹⁸ 'ob sie sich widderumb in die vogtei einschleichen wurden'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 277v.

caught up with the errant shepherd; perhaps his occupational peregrinations explain why it was not easy to detain him. This time there was no daring breakout. Obstinate to the end, Thon was executed on 5 January 1584.¹⁹

Bearing in mind Thon's shocking views, it is surprising that this decision was not made earlier. Thon was thoroughly pessimistic and dismissed the validity of much accepted wisdom of the Christian faith, Lutheran or Catholic. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were useless; Thon disapproved of marriage and secular authority; when asked in his interrogation in November 1583 whether he considered the Bible to be God's word, he said, 'He cannot answer that; God is the word himself, God is spirit and faith';²⁰ and most controversially of all, he based his ideas on a radically different understanding of the nature of the world. Thon talked of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit 'as if they were only one person'.²¹ He believed there was no distinction between the parts of the Trinity and denied that Jesus was the Son of God who had come down to earth to suffer and die for humanity. As the court officials put it, 'in short he denies the person and whole office of Christ'.²² In fact, Thon rejected everything on earth since the Devil created it and it was therefore sinful. Only those things which were invisible, eternal, and heavenly had been fashioned by God, who was, in Thon's eyes, complete and indivisible. God in the form of the incarnated Christ could not have come down to earth to die and absolve mankind of its sins, and he would not accept Genesis as evidence that God had created the earth. Thon's interrogators were patently frustrated that nothing could dissuade him from his anti-Trinitarian and dualistic views on God and the Devil.²³

It is hard to see where this peculiar character fits into the narrative of Anabaptist history, aside from exemplifying the dying throes of a movement which no longer possessed any definitive ideology and presented no real institutional threat to the Lutheran church in Thuringia and Saxony. His case would seem to confirm a view that Anabaptism in central Germany lacked leaders with lucid theology, failed to form stable communities, and consequently degenerated into occasional pockets of

¹⁹ Reinhard Jordan (ed.), *Chronik der Stadt Mühlhausen*, 5 vols (Mühlhausen, 1900–13; repr. Bad Langensalza, 2001), ii: 168.

²⁰ 'Er konne drauf nit antworten; Got ist das wort selber, Got sei geist und glauben'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 519; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 298v.

²¹ 'als wen sie nur einige person weren'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 504; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256r.

²² 'in summa negat personam et totum officium Christi'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 504; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256r.

²³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 495, 503–5, 511–12; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 249r. 256r–v, 269r.

activity, with people expressing strange, incoherent views.²⁴ Yet Thon's case, which has received only the briefest of mentions in the secondary literature, is more than a coda to an insignificant branch of Anabaptism.²⁵ It tells us how, and in what form, Anabaptism survived; how the authorities responded; and what it meant to be an Anabaptist as the sixteenth century progressed. Thon was an example of the longevity afforded by the networks which had sustained a seemingly scattered, disorganized movement. It was no coincidence that Thon was picked up near Mühlhausen, the town that had seen more Anabaptist activity than anywhere else in central Germany, and where patterns of non-conformist behaviour were well established. Thon was a product of these clusters of association which had continued to exist despite periodic waves of arrest and executions.

Anabaptism in central Germany never succeeded in creating an alternative church to Lutheranism or Catholicism. It did not establish independent communities such as the Hutterites; it did not stimulate the tolerated, separate churches of the Dutch Republic Mennonites, who also contributed significantly to the intellectual, cultural, and economic life of the Netherlands; nor give rise to the types of quietist communities which Michael Driedger has studied in Lutheran Hamburg.²⁶ Yet as the sixteenth century progressed, Anabaptists in central Germany did not retreat into isolated, persecuted groups until they died out, as the uniformity and the discipline of the Lutheran church triumphed. They continued to be an integral presence in local communities and engaged with the theological and emotional concerns prominent in the Lutheran church.

Part of the reason why the authorities did not deal with Thon more decisively is that as much as he was the product of the legacy of radicalism in central Germany, he was also embedded in his local environment. For his interrogators he was a worrying sign of what went wrong when pastoral care and instruction had failed, not simply a dangerous rebel to

²⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 206–20.

²⁵ Gary K. Waite, *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe, 1525–1600* (Toronto, ON, 2007), 155–6. There are inaccuracies in Waite's account, most obviously the assertion that Thon was held in prison continuously for twenty years.

²⁶ Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Aldershot, 2001); Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore, MD, 1995); Piet Visser, 'Mennonites and Doopsgezinden in the Netherlands', in John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (eds), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden, 2006), 299–345; Samme Zijlstra, 'Anabaptism and Tolerance: Possibilities and Limitations', in Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (eds), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2002), 112–31.

be executed. In this sense Anabaptists in central Germany became part of the confessional background, so that while the threat of Anabaptism ultimately faded from the judicial record, the types of concern evoked by non-conformists like Thon still animated debates within communities of Lutheran territories. The strange shepherd from Niederdorla was a reminder of what Anabaptism became in central Germany, and what its legacy might be in the continuing confessional struggles of the sixteenth century.

MÜHLHAUSEN AND THE SURVIVAL OF ANABAPTISM

At the very heart of Germany, on the edge of the Hainichwald and near the fertile valley of the Unstrut, lie the villages of Niederdorla, Oberdorla, and Langula. To the east is the Opfermoor, a site of ancient sacrifice littered with the bones of animals and humans, while to the north is the imperial town of Mühlhausen (see Fig. 7.1). Much of the surrounding countryside here was under the control of the town but jurisdiction in this triangle of villages, which formed a semi-independent unit belonging to the *Ganerbenschaft* of Treffurt, was split between the Wettins and the Landgraves of Hesse, although Mühlhausen council also had vested interests. While the economic and social connections between Mühlhausen and the villages were close, Niederdorla, Oberdorla, and Langula had more independence and freedom than the nineteen villages (such as Dachrieden and Ammern) which were official possessions of the town.²⁷

Perhaps, therefore, we should not be surprised that Anabaptism was still flourishing here in the second half of the sixteenth century, benefitting from the independence which these communities offered and exploiting the web of connections that thrived in Mühlhausen and its environs. When Thon and his associates were discovered, they were only the latest in a long line of non-conformist disturbances. As early as 1528 a citizen of Mühlhausen made an appeal to Duke George of Saxony, mentioning two men baptized in Niederdorla by Hans Römer when he was planning his daring attack on Erfurt for New Year's Day 1528.²⁸

²⁷ Christoph Volkmar, *Reform statt Reformation: Die Kirchenpolitik Herzog Georgs von Sachsen, 1488–1525* (Tübingen, 2008), 512; Sven Tode, *Stadt im Bauernkrieg 1525: Strukturanalytische Untersuchungen zur Stadt im Raum anhand der Beispiele Erfurt, Mühlhausen/Thür., Langensalza und Thamsbrück* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 148.

²⁸ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo.64r.



Fig. 7.1. Copper engraving of Mühlhausen by Merian.

Reproduced in the first volume of Reinhard Jordan (ed.), *Chronik der Stadt Mühlhausen in Thüringen*. © The British Library Board, 10256.dd.7 title page.

In March 1532 the *Hauptmann* in Mühlhausen, Seifert von Bulzingsleben, wrote to Duke George of Saxony to tell him the worrying news that the preacher in Niederdorla, Sebastian Thiel, had unabashedly criticized the sacrament of the altar, declaiming it as a vanity and a public deception, and had questioned the real presence with what von Bulzingsleben called 'unchristian and devilish teaching'.²⁹ The pastor in Oberdorla seems to have been no more reliable, since his preaching was so inconsistent that the infamous Christoph von der Eichen cited it as the reason why he stayed away from church.³⁰ The very individuals who were supposed to uphold orthodoxy, the local clergymen, gave their superiors little to be happy about. Whether through incompetence or rank insubordination, they seemed to encourage dissidence, not combat it. Simultaneously the authorities also had to worry about unlicensed preachers in the region. The seemingly ubiquitous Alexander preached to the inhabitants of Oberdorla and Niederdorla in April 1533, resulting in the arrest and interrogation of several individuals, including Christoph von der Eichen, who hosted meetings in the region.³¹

The authorities did not progressively establish greater control. Rather, the situation in Mühlhausen and its rural environs seemed to deteriorate: in 1537 the group of Anabaptists with Jakob Storger at their head was arrested in Mühlhausen; Christoph von der Eichen turned up again in 1545, apprehended with five others; and in 1551, when a man called Strohans was detained, evidence of the activities of the *Blutsfreunde* came to light, initiating a wave of arrests and interrogations that dragged on until 1556. Officials and councillors in Mühlhausen apparently reported with a certain amount of glee that the prominent member of the *Blutsfreunde*, Klaus Ludwig, had been active without being detected in the region for which Justus Menius was responsible and whose reforming campaigns in Mühlhausen were resented in some quarters.³²

Whether as a result of poor preaching or the continued attraction of Anabaptism, the reality in the Mühlhausen area was that it was often difficult to persuade or force people to renounce their association with non-conformism. By the time of his arrest in 1564, Christoph von der

²⁹ 'ein jtel nichts, Sunder ein vffetnlicher betrugk sey, mit ganzem Ernst geheißen dem heiligen Sacrament gar keine ehrerbithunge zuthunde, vnd das do warer goth, blueth vnd fleisch sein solde, zugleuben hefftigk verboten vnd mit vhielen andern vncristlichen, teuffelischen leren sich vornehmen lassen'; Wappler, *Stellung*, 235; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 71r.

³⁰ Wappler, *Stellung*, 184; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1021, fo. 6v.

³¹ Wappler, *Stellung*, 184–5, and Wappler, *Thüringen*, 350; *TAH*, 55; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1021, fo. 6r–v; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10327/9, fo. 121r.

³² Reinhard Jordan, 'Die Wiedertäufer in Mühlhausen: Wappler, *Die Täuferbewegung in Thüringen von 1526–1584*, Jena 1913', *Mühlhäuser Geschichtsblätter* 15 (1914/15), 46.

Eichen had already been questioned and released three times, but was freed in early 1565 only to be recaptured in a matter of months. Yet even now he was granted a reprieve. After swearing an oath that he would leave the area, he was discharged.³³ He did not, however, keep to his word and held gatherings at his home, causing disruption around Mühlhausen and Langensalza for several years.³⁴ Franciscus Strauss continued to complain about von der Eichen, and in revenge the Anabaptist wrote an open letter posted on the outside of the town hall in Langensalza on 5 June 1571, intended to defame the Lutheran clergyman.³⁵ His plan was only thwarted when Hans Steinfurdt, a councillor, happened upon the letter on his way to church, tore it down, and went to the *Stadtdiener* to tell him to arrest von der Eichen.³⁶ Accordingly on 12 June 1571 the *Amtschösser* and council in Langensalza wrote to Elector August to inform him of the latest developments. Once more von der Eichen was arrested, and the authorities pointed out, referring to the arrest in 1564, that he had already been 'most seriously and thoroughly instructed by three different examinations of the deputed and arraigned lord Superintendents in Salza, Eisenach, Allendorf, and Mühlhausen'.³⁷ Protracted discussions ensued, and in July 1571 Strauss revealed his frustration when he lamented 'God give us his grace, that we once let go such an enthusiast and deceiver'.³⁸ Yet by September 1572 missives were once more being exchanged about von der Eichen's release.³⁹

This fraught background of persistent and recurrent Anabaptist activity, of which Lutheran theologians were all too aware, explains how someone like Thon came into contact with Anabaptism and managed to survive, despite the hostility to those who were labelled Anabaptists. Generations of Anabaptists existed in villages like Niederdorla and Langula; they felt they belonged and were not easy to root out. Anabaptists had always been

³³ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fol. 240, 275r–276v.

³⁴ 'Er hat aber Christoff von der Aychen solchs jhm wenigsten nit gehalten, sunder fur vnd fur seinen vnderschlaß zu Niderdorla ihn seiner behausung gehabt, do die bruder zusammen kommen'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fol. 239r.

³⁵ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 227; Loc. 8199/7, fo. 7r–8v.

³⁶ 'Es ist aber Hans Steinfurdt ein Raths Person, vngeuerlich als ehr zur Kirchen gehen wollen, Voruber gangen den Brieff gesehen, abgerisen vnd den Stadtdiener so ihm eben begegnet, dem Christoff von der Eiche nachzufolgen vnd gefengcklichen einzuziehen welchs auch geschehen beuelich gethan'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fol. 227r.

³⁷ 'durch drei vnderschiedliche Examina der darzu depututen vnd vorordneten hern Superintendenten Salza, Eisenach, Allendorff vnd Mulhausen, zum ernlichsten vnd vleißigsten vnderichtet'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8199/7, fo. 5r.

³⁸ 'Gott verlyhe sein gnade, das wir einmal solcher schwirmer und verfurer Loß werden'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fol. 286v.

³⁹ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8199/7, fo. 23–5.

part of their local communities, but the longer they persisted, the more deeply ingrained these genealogies and relationships became. On the night of 15 August 1551, the *Blutsfreunde* initiated a daring letter-writing campaign to release one of their number, Jorg Schuchart, with copies of the missive found in villages across north-western Thuringia, on doors and on city gates; Christoph von der Eichen survived a series of arrests and continued to find supporters.⁴⁰ Such endeavours were only possible with associates willing to aid and protect these Anabaptists. In the absence of records, it is impossible to know how Christoph was treated by his fellow villagers, if he was shunned or ostracized, but his continued success in nurturing Anabaptism and the confidence he displayed in publicly vilifying a high-ranking clergyman suggest otherwise. Likewise Thon, for all his strange views, was not without friends. Hans Schroter and Curt Schliffer brought him food and drink in prison, told him to remain steadfast, and the Saxon consistory, writing on 10 December 1583 to the superintendent in Langensalza, complained that Thon had been encouraged in his beliefs by associates. Furthermore, someone had helped him escape from prison in 1564.⁴¹ Thon's survival was no accident, not a freak stroke of luck. Seen in context, it was unsurprising even, when his associates included a round of usual suspects like Christoph.

THON'S BELIEFS

Supported and encouraged by other Anabaptists, Thon had developed his own obstinate ideas on faith. In a Manichean strain, he argued that God was the good master, the creator of all that was pure, good, holy, eternal, 'invisible and intangible', whereas the Devil was the evil master who created all that was 'earthly and external, visible and transient'.⁴² This included everything from fish to the moon, from corn to children. Thon's ideas appear radical even for Anabaptists, and Gary Waite has suggested they 'strike the reader as more akin to the deeply unorthodox musings of Carlo Ginzburg's Miller of the Fruili, Domenico Scandella (Mennochio), or of late medieval Catharism'.⁴³ While there is something

⁴⁰ SAM Sig.10/E6 No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer 1519–1589, fo. 19r–38v; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No, 997, fo. 61r–97v; Wappler, 196–7.

⁴¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 214, 521; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 294r, 300v.

⁴² 'Der gute meister habe geschaffen alles, was da unsichpar und unbegreiflich, ewig und unvergenglich ist, der ander aber, was da irdisch und eußerlich, sichparlich und vorgenglich ist'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 504; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256r.

⁴³ Waite, *Devil's Minions*, 155; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD, 1980).

of the Menocchio about Thon, his world view was much less imaginative and fanciful than that of the miller or of an individual like Behringer's shaman of Oberstdorf.⁴⁴ Such comparisons do not provide an explanation for how and in what context he came to believe what he did.

In 1583 Thon was asked whether God's word was preached in churches. He not only dismissed preaching but said he had not been into a church for twenty years.⁴⁵ Clearly Thon's experience of faith was, like many Anabaptists and radicals, not primarily based on daily encounters with the Bible in a formal setting. Without any constant contact with the institutional church and only his fellow Anabaptists and his own thoughts to rely on, spending time alone with the animals for which he cared for company, it is understandable that his ideas were slightly unusual. It is doubtful whether Thon read himself, but despite his dismissal of scripture and the written word, textual encounters still framed his world view, intersecting in various ways with oral and aural contexts.

Thon's ideas were certainly not the result of glorious isolation. He did not experience the same energetic preaching and teaching as those who became Anabaptists in the 1520s and 1530s since that first generation of leaders were executed or otherwise dead, but there were individuals like von der Eichen whose memories stretched back to the early years of the movement. Thon's absence from church coincides neatly with his period of known association with Christoph, and he had certainly listened to Anabaptist preaching, mentioning that he had attended a gathering in a wood and heard teaching on the subject of whether Christ had suffered for our sins. Perhaps Christoph was also present for he too confirmed that he had been at gatherings in a wood in Fulda.⁴⁶ After the arrests in 1565 der Eichen continued to hold gatherings, and on the evidence of the letter he posted in 1571, his scriptural knowledge was impressive. The document was littered with biblical references: Deuteronomy 28 as he warned of those who did not obey God; Matthew 10 as he described how true disciples would be persecuted; and as he cautioned against false prophets, he turned to Matthew 24.⁴⁷

Thon, who had been baptized, also drew on his encounters with the institutional church, and he had manifestly not forgotten all biblical learning, even by 1583. So while he denied that the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed had any value, he could still recite parts, although

⁴⁴ Behringer, *Shaman of Obertsdorf*, 12–25.

⁴⁵ 'Er gehe in keine kirchen; in 20 jaren sei er in keine kirche gangen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 519; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 298v.

⁴⁶ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 496, 519; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 251r, 299r.

⁴⁷ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 8199/7, fo. 9–12r.

with many 'changed and uncertain words', and at several key points in his interrogation in November 1583 Thon came back to biblical passages that he had heard and which continued to trouble him.⁴⁸ Therefore, to understand what issues were agitating Thon, we find ourselves trying to piece together what he heard preached perhaps many years ago and what he now made of it in the light of the time he had spent with Anabaptists. He shared Mennochio's independent and personal struggle to understand divine action in this world, but Thon's Manichean views grew out of an emotional engagement with concerns that lay at the heart of Lutheran theology about free will, evil, and the meaning of sin. In particular, one issue seemed to crowd his thoughts: in the face of a Lutheran Reformation which above all stressed the degeneracy of mankind and humanity's inability to save itself, what could be the possible solution? What comfort, if any, could Thon find when he thought about his own salvation?

He seemed to derive little solace from the idea that Christ was God's true son and had suffered for mankind. Thon wondered: if he was supposed to be released from sin by Christ, how was it that he still struggled against the impulses of his own flesh? Of course, his Lutheran interrogators would argue that this was man's natural condition and that while men and women would always struggle in vain to control their fleshly lusts, in the final reckoning Christ's grace could save sinners. Thon quoted Romans 7:23.⁴⁹ This passage spoke of a subject that was dear to Lutheran theologians: the law. Paul explained that individuals tried to obey the law of God, but another law applied to bodily existence, meaning that whenever someone attempted to do good, they realized that their natural inclinations consigned them to the law of sin. Thon had chosen to focus on a passage from Romans which dealt so intimately with the central debates in Lutheran faith about righteousness and the route to salvation. In *On the Freedom of a Christian*, Luther himself had turned to Romans 7:22–3 when discussing the conflict between the inner spiritual life and life on this earth.⁵⁰ Thon knew the solution which Lutheran theologians proposed, for he also quoted Romans 8:1–2.⁵¹ Here Paul explained that for those who followed Christ, there was

⁴⁸ 'mit viel verenderten und verkehrlichen Worten'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 512; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 286v.

⁴⁹ 'Jesus beklage sich seiner sünde, und so er solte durch in erloset worden sein, wie es den kome, das er immerdar mit seinem fleisch und blute zu kempfen habe? Er ist berichtet worden ex dicto Pauli: Ego invenio aliam legem etc'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 519; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 299v. Wappler wrongly cites the reference as Romans 7:21.

⁵⁰ *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (1520); LW 31: 359; WA *Schriften*, 7: 30.

⁵¹ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 519–20; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 299v.

nothing to fear, since he freed mankind from the law of sin and death. Flesh was sinful and needed to be conquered, and this had been made possible by Christ's sacrifice

Lutheran theology had raised the psychological problem of the relationship between sin and salvation, but in Thon's eyes it had not adequately solved it. Personally, he did not feel that Christ had freed *him* from sin and death in this way. When asked what sin was, he said, 'anger and hate etc.'⁵² These were very human emotions, sins of the weak flesh, which no one could help feeling, but Thon did not see any way round the dilemma that such sentiments harmed his salvation. A long time ago, when he had still been going to church, he had attended a sermon in Mühlhausen; the preacher quoted the passage from Ephesians 5:5 which stated that those who were not pure had no inheritance in the kingdom of God. Thon specified that 'no whore-monger, adulterer, no avaricious man can come into the kingdom of God etc.'⁵³ This was the sticking point. For Thon it did not seem possible to overcome the boundary between the realm of fleshly sin and the kingdom of heavenly salvation; consequently all measures, such as the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, profited nothing.

Thon's dualistic views on God and the Devil were predicated on his dissatisfaction with the way Lutheran theology explained man's ability to conquer his sinful nature. On the one hand he believed that man was corrupt and impure, and on the other that whatever belonged to the kingdom of God was perfect and free from sin. As a result, he could not accept that humanity was God's creation, nor was he certain how the split between the spirit and flesh could be reconciled. As Thon said in his 1564 interrogation, his birth could not have been an act of God 'since he is sinful and evil and was conceived and born in sin, but he says he is from the other master, the Devil'.⁵⁴ The Manichean strain of Thon's views seems to have been a direct consequence of his inability to resolve the problem of overcoming human propensity to do evil. Thon expressed his desperate situation with simple resignation: 'Whatever God creates, is pure. I am impure; therefore, I am not God's creation.'⁵⁵

⁵² 'Was ist sünde? Zorn und has etc.'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 520; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 300r.

⁵³ 'kein hurer, kein ehbrecher, kein geiziger ins reich Gottes komen etc.'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 521; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 301r.

⁵⁴ 'derselbige nicht von Gott sei, dieweil er sundhaftig und böß und in sunden empfangen und geboren sei, sondern sagt, er sei von dem andern meister, dem teufel'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 504; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256v.

⁵⁵ 'Was Gott schafft, ist rein. Ich bin unrein; ergo so bin ich nit Gottes geschepf'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 520; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 300r.

Thon's insistence that all that was eternal and intangible was created by God, and all that was transient and external was created by the Devil is reminiscent of the language of mystical texts such as the *Theologia Deutsch* or the work of Johannes Tauler. Mysticism drew a sharp contrast between the inner and outer, the spiritual and the corporeal, for 'the imperfect is tangible, comprehensible, and expressible; the perfect is for all creatures, elusive, incomprehensible, and inexpressible'.⁵⁶ However, there was a crucial distinction between mysticism and Thon's world view. Mysticism despised the fleshly and temporal realms, but it still saw them as an essential part of the spiritual journey.⁵⁷ The *Theologia Deutsch* emphasized that it was necessary to become aware of the futility of the imperfect world, while Thomas Müntzer, heavily influenced by mystical ideas, stressed that individuals must pass through 'Kreaturenfurcht' (literally 'creature terror'). Realization of the suffering caused by attachment to creaturely things gave mankind a new understanding.⁵⁸ But in Thon's view there was no sense of evolution and development, in fact no real sense of how one might ever make this transition from imperfection to perfection.

Consequently he also denied that God had been made human in Christ and that His suffering had saved mankind. Thon would not accept that a fleshly being could be a creation of God sent for the divine purpose of atoning for sin. Having rejected the redemptive power of the Crucifixion, Thon seemed at a loss to explain how sin might ever be overcome. His view of the world was strikingly bleak; he did not even embrace martyrdom, presumably since he denied he could commune with Christ's sacrifice through his own suffering. Yet, however much Thon condemned man as a creation of the Devil, denied Christ's power, and rejected the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, when he was asked if there was an eternal life and a Hell, he still said he 'hopes to become blessed'.⁵⁹ God in his final mercy might

⁵⁶ 'Die geteiltenn sind begreiffenlich, bekentlich vnd sprechenlich, Das volkumen ist allen creaturen vnbegreifflich, vn bekentlich vnd vnsprechlich ynn dem als creatur'; Martin Luther, trans., *Eyn deutsch Theologia das ist Eyn edles Buchleyn, von rechtem vorstand, was Adam und Christus sey, und wie Adam yn uns sterben, und Christus ersten sall* (Wittenberg, 1518), B1r.

⁵⁷ Tauler stressed that there were three stages in a mystical life: purgative, illuminative, and unitive. Vanquishing attachment to worldly things was thus an essential stage of progression; *Theologia deutsch-Theologia Germanica: The Book of the Perfect Life*, trans., intro., and notes by David Blamires (Walnut Creek, CA, 2003), 16.

⁵⁸ Hans-Jürgen Goertz, 'Apokalyptik in Thüringen: Thomas Müntzer-Bauernkrieg-Täufer', in Günter Vogler (ed.), *Bauernkrieg zwischen Harz und Thüringer Wald* (Stuttgart, 2008), 332.

⁵⁹ 'Hoffe selig zu werden', Wappler, *Thüringen*, 521; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 301r.

decide to sanctify him since this was the only way he could ascend to heaven, although he was completely unable to understand how this might happen.

Thon was radical but he was not exceptional, for he was not the only one who responded in a personal way to the intractable problem of sin and evil. A recurring theme in the confessions of the group of Anabaptists arrested in 1564 was a tension between the inner and outer. Christoffel von Bern rejected the preaching of the 'external word' and said that preachers simply led man away from God to 'external creatures', although he did not see the world in the same stark hues as Thon.⁶⁰

Others also echoed his views on human sinfulness and worried about how to fulfil God's law. One of Thon's associates, Margarethe Bartolfin, who too denied the Trinity, said she nevertheless believed in the salvific act of Christ's sacrifice and stated that 'no one can obey the law without God's help'.⁶¹ Likewise Christoph von der Eichen said that justification came through a perfect fulfilment of God's law, which could only be done with God's help.⁶² The difference was that Thon clearly felt that it was virtually impossible to obey this law perfectly. Even beyond his immediate circle, Thon shared the same concerns as other non-conformists in central Germany. Like the *Blutsfreunde*, he became involved in discussions about the nature of flesh and spirit, but, unlike them, he did not believe there was a way in which bodily actions could be part of the process of spiritual salvation.

Even Thon's utter despair at human and worldly sin can be contextualized. In 1543 a man and two women were arrested and interrogated in Beyernaumburg.⁶³ After refusing to even say what he was called since God, his father, had no title, the Anabaptist with no name scorned anything temporal as a creation of the Devil, just as Thon condemned everything upon the earth as diabolic and unredeemable, since it originated with Satan.⁶⁴ This Clint Eastwood of the Anabaptist world was more vulgar—he violently rejected baptism by saying 'you should not shit on me in faith with the filth'—but he used similar language to Thon, with his

⁶⁰ 'verwirft aber genzlich das predigampt und eußerliche wort . . . sie [preachers] furen die menschen von Gott ab auf die eußerlichen creaturen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 499; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 253r.

⁶¹ 'niemandes das gesetz halten konde one Gottes hilf'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 506–7; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 260v.

⁶² 'er will gerecht und selig werden durch eine volkomliche erfüllunge des gesetzes'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 496; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 251r.

⁶³ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 469–73; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 120r–124r.

⁶⁴ 'er hab keinem namen, den Got, sein vater, hab auch kein namen . . . Got hab des fleisch nicht geschaffen, sonder der teuffl und auch di welt; die sei auch des teuffels'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 470–1; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 121r, 122v.

direct and often visceral dismissals of the quotidian facts of life.⁶⁵ Both Thon and the unnamed Anabaptist chose to talk about birth and child-bearing as examples of the fleshly creations of the Devil. As the authorities listed all the things that Thon rejected as earthly, visible, and devilish, the emotional emphasis fell at the end of their list: 'even the child in the mother's body with body and soul.'⁶⁶ When the anonymous Anabaptist was asked where he came from, he replied: 'he rejects the whoredom of his mother.'⁶⁷ Even less radical Anabaptists like Christoph von der Eichen said that children were naturally born with sin.⁶⁸

This language echoed Lutheran pastors who stressed human degeneracy and emphasized that children were born in sin. The pastor in Rietnorthausen, in dispute with Hans Schleier in 1535, said that he encouraged his parishioners 'at prayer that they would entreat God for the sake of the poor child which is conceived and born in sin (as the prophet says in the psalm, "in my mother's body I was conceived in sin, from my mother's body I was born in sin").'⁶⁹ Thon was not so exceptional in his assertion that children were born under the power of evil, but he saw no way that infants, or indeed grown adults, could be redeemed from this sin.

Thon's views also seem to have struck chords with perhaps the most important Lutheran theological debate of the later sixteenth century, the debate over original sin between Matthius Flacius Illyricus and Viktorin Strigel, which was part of the wider ongoing argument between the Gnesio-Lutherans and the Philippists.⁷⁰ Growing out of arguments at the Weimar Colloquium in 1560, Flacius contested that at the Fall, man had undergone a substantial transformation and that an essential part of human nature had changed. Original sin was thus a substantial property

⁶⁵ 'mir solten im glauben nit mit dem dreck bescheissen'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 470; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 122r.

⁶⁶ 'auch das kind in mutterleib mit leib und seel'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 504; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256v.

⁶⁷ 'er nohr sich von der hurerei seiner mutter'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 470; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 121r.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 5, this volume.

⁶⁹ 'vormanet zum gebet das sie got wolten bitten fur das arme kyndleyn das in sunden empfangen vnd geboren ist (Wie der prophet saget in ps. in mutter leyber bin ich empfangen in sunden von mutter leybe bin ich in sunden geboren)'; ThHStAW, EGA Reg. N, No. 1017, fo. 11v.

⁷⁰ Robert J. Christman, 'Heretics in Luther's Homeland: The Controversy over Original Sin in Late Sixteenth-Century Mansfeld', DPhil thesis, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, 2004; Christman, *Doctrinal Controversy and Lay Religiosity in Late Reformation Germany: The Case of Mansfeld* (Brill, 2011). See also Irene Dingel, 'The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies Leading to the Formula of Concord (1548–1580)', in Robert Kolb (ed.), *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture 1550–1675* (Leiden, 2008), 53–4.

of human nature, and free will could not overcome it. Strigel argued that original sin was an accidental property of man's nature and that there was an element of free will in man's acceptance of God's grace.

In the ensuing years the divisions between the two sides became ever more apparent. Luther's home territory of Mansfeld was torn apart by the debate, with Cyriacus Spangenberg, the deacon in Tal Mansfeld and court preacher of Mansfeld, siding with Flacius, and the pastorate in Eisleben taking the opposing view.⁷¹ Those who subscribed to the Flacian viewpoint were condemned as Manicheans, so when the magistrate in Treffurt, David Fischer, branded Thon a Manichean, it was not a casual insult.⁷² We have no reason to suppose that Thon had any specific link with the Flacian controversy or that the debate had penetrated to the laity in the Mühlhausen area. Nevertheless, Thon's views certainly resonated with the message espoused by Spangenberg and other Flacian pastors, and the questions he was asked during his interrogations were inextricably linked to the terms of the debate. Thon's interrogators asked him about the nature of sin, but complained that he was unable to explain 'the true cause and origin of sin', and that (perhaps unsurprisingly) he could not say anything about 'the difference between man's nature and substance, and the sin and contamination attached to them'.⁷³ Even though there was no proven causal link between Thon and the Flacian controversy, we should not be surprised that Thon, like Christoph, Margarethe, and the Anabaptist with no name, and like Lutherans who argued between themselves, circled round these debates about human nature and sin, about justification and salvation.

THE RESPONSE OF THE AUTHORITIES

While there was common agreement that Thon's views were unacceptable, the procedure for dealing with his case was anything but straightforward. It involved protracted negotiations, attempts to force Thon to recant, referrals to the consistory in Leipzig, and the participation of high-ranking clergymen. Even when Thon was arrested for the second

⁷¹ Christman, 'Heretics in Luther's Homeland'; 101–246, 490–93.

⁷² Wappler, *Thüringen*, 516; SHStAD, GA10024. Loc. 10328/1, fo. 287r.

⁷³ 'Er hat sich auch nicht wollen berichten laßen von dem rechten ursprung und ursachen der sunden, viel weniger aber von dem unterschied des menschen natur und wesens und demselbigen anhangende sund und befleckung'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 504; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 256v.

time, there was no rush to make an example of him by execution. The authorities certainly knew who he was. In 1583 the *Amtmann* in Treffurt, David Fischer, wrote to the superintendent in Langensalza, by now Marcus Breitschneider, the former deacon who had interrogated the radical shepherd in 1564, about Thon and his history.⁷⁴ As in the 1560s, the authorities sent word to the consistory in Leipzig to give judgement on how Thon should be treated, who decided he should be questioned and instructed, then given ten days to think. So again Thon was interrogated, once more he would not recant, and finally he was executed. Absence of a quick death sentence did not mean that the threat of Anabaptism was considered negligible. Many man-hours and much effort was expended in attempting to persuade Thon and his associates that their views were erroneous. In 1564 four superintendents used their expertise to question the Anabaptists; Christoph's case was batted back and forth for nine years; and for Thon's second trial in 1583 no less than fourteen people were present.⁷⁵ Yet with all the interest, why did the authorities not deal with him more decisively?

A range of strategies had always been used to combat Anabaptism in central Germany. Immediate and outright execution was rarely favoured despite our impression of the threat of Anabaptism or its martyred status. Exile, forgiveness, branding, recantation, even extended imprisonment in the case of Fritz Erbe, were all tried and tested.⁷⁶ The response in 1564, for example, was tailored to individual cases. The consistory in Leipzig concluded that David and Facius Martwengk and Apollonia Stol should not be punished severely, for their error was only the result of poor instruction; Thon and the others were more worrying and should be threatened with execution.⁷⁷ In 1583 the interrogating clergy chose to make the association between Thon and the Flacian controversy, and this tendency to elide the threat of Anabaptism with a broader set of pastoral concerns indicates that they saw Thon as something rather more than an isolated Anabaptist but a problem bound up with Lutheranism's internal struggle to establish what it even meant by orthodoxy.⁷⁸ For the authorities in Mühlhausen

⁷⁴ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 516–7; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 287.

⁷⁵ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 518; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 298r.

⁷⁶ Stefan Ehrenpries and Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Darmstadt, 2002), 52–62; Horst W. Schraepfer, *Die Rechtliche Behandlung der Täufer in der Deutschen Schweiz, Südwestdeutschland, und Hessen, 1525–1618* (Tübingen, 1957).

⁷⁷ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 236.

⁷⁸ On the definition of orthodoxy see Thomas Kaufmann, 'Nahe Fremde—Aspekte der Wahrnehmung der "Schwärmer" im frühneuzeitlichen Lutherthum', in Kaspar von Greyerz, Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen, Thomas Kaufmann, and Hartmut Lehmann (eds), *Interkonfessionalität-Transkonfessionalität-binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität* (Göttingen, 2003), 179–241.

and beyond, Thon was still an urgent concern, but equally his problematic case required a more nuanced solution than execution as the first resort. To respond in this way was to admit failure, to agree that such strains of non-conformity could only be cut out not cured, and as the authorities were all too aware, surgical removal was not even an option when Anabaptists were deeply integrated into the local community.

The nature of the Anabaptist threat slowly transformed. As the century progressed it became increasingly clear that Anabaptists could not simply be classified as rebellious outsiders.⁷⁹ Consequently, the questions put to them began to change in the 1540s and beyond. Inquiries about when, where, and with whom, became more or less redundant in cases such as von der Eichen's and Thon's. The interrogation was much more closely focused on what their faith meant and how they thought about it. So in 1564 von der Eichen and his associates were asked what they thought of confession, the secular authorities, baptism, and the sacrament, in a canon of questions which tried to reveal what Anabaptist faith meant and possibly where the Lutheran church had gone wrong in instruction.

In 1583 the opening salvo of questions put to Thon said nothing of baptism, re-baptism, or even specific articles of faith. They were, 'Are you a Christian?', 'Do you know what a Christian is?', and 'Are you such a child of God?'⁸⁰ Thon's interrogators fretted over a generalized crisis of faith and were not so interested in specific questions about performance of rituals like adult baptism, which had been seen as the signs of secretive, rebellious groups. Instead they investigated the world view that lay behind these acts, and the emotional, psychological issues which related to faith. Such cases signified their failure to educate and preach to the laity, and trials became a dissection of how and why this threat to the Lutheran community arose, not identification of an armed rebellion.⁸¹

⁷⁹ A similar situation is alluded to in Württemberg, where, as Karant-Nunn notes, the authorities complained that even with threats, people could not be persuaded to betray Anabaptists; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, 'Popular Culture as Religious Dissent in the Post-Reformation Era', in Hans-Jürgen Goertz and James M. Stayer (eds), *Radikalität und Dissent im 16. Jahrhundert/Radicalism and Dissent in the Sixteenth Century* (Berlin, 2002). See also Päivi Räisänen, 'Obrigkeit, Täufer, und ländliche Gesellschaft: Auf der Suche nach den "gemeinen" Täufern und Täuferinnen in Württemberg im späten 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert', in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täufertums/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009), 209–10.

⁸⁰ 'Seid ihr ein Christ . . . ob er wisse, was ein christ ist . . . Seit ihr ein solch kind Gottes?'; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 518; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 298.

⁸¹ Päivi Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf: Visitationsverfahren, Täuferbekämpfung, und lokale Handlungsmuster in frühneuzeitlichen Württemberg* (Constance, KY, 2011). Räisänen also points to the importance of the pastoral threat of Anabaptism in the later sixteenth century.

When Menius wrote about the *Blutsfreunde* in 1551, he continued to denounce the Anabaptists as false prophets in stereotypical terms, but he also expressed desperation about the ongoing inability of the Lutherans to ensure stability and unity, to the detriment of the whole church. Menius probably had Mühlhausen in mind when he railed against places that had not purely followed the gospel.⁸²

In Thon and von der Eichen's cases much was made of the associations between the Anabaptists and the Jews. In their letter to Elector August on 10 December 1562 the superintendents Strauss and Tilesius reported that the two seductive sects and godless rebels, the blasphemous Jews and the Anabaptists, who were both of the Devil, had insinuated their way into the local community and were being tolerated in the *Vogtei* of Dorla. They asserted that both groups dishonoured and dismissed Christians, the Christian religion, and its sacraments, particularly the Eucharist.⁸³ Just as Anabaptists might reject the sacrament of the altar for being natural food, a Jew had addressed a peasant as he came out of church one Sunday and asked whether he had eaten his bread God.⁸⁴

Equally as worrying, such groups were supported and protected in these localities, being allowed so much freedom that they were buying entailed estates.⁸⁵ Strauss reported to the *Amtmann* in Salza the following August that the Jews had held their feast of the tabernacle in Oberdorla, and although they had been chased out by the Treffurt officials, the Juncker in the neighbouring village of Oppershausen had sheltered them and allowed them to complete the celebration.⁸⁶ Toleration of Anabaptists and Jewish feasts seemed to be part of a combined problem where prominent local villagers and even officials permitted and encouraged these groups to become ever more integrated into the community. In defiance of official regulations and in an act of seemingly shameless

⁸² Justus Menius, *Von den Blutfreunden aus der Widertauff* (Erfurt, 1551), A2v; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 201.

⁸³ 'das bemelte beide verfuerrische Secten vnd gottlose Rotten, die Juden vnd Widerteuffer der Theuffel vnder die Christen darumb einrotet, das dadurch vnser warhafftige Christliche Religion, Sacramenta vnd Christen Standt geunehret vnd verleinert'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 226r.

⁸⁴ 'dann das factum beweist, das ein gutter einfeltiger Bawers Knecht jnn der Vogtej auss der Kirchen ann ein Sontag gangen, den ein Jude angesprochen: Ob er in der kirchen gewesen vnd seinen Brotern gott gefressen habe, Wie dann gewisslich war ist, das sy dergleichen vntzehliche gotteslesterung vnder einander Teglich treyben, vnsern lieben Christen sein wort vnd Sacramenta, zum greulichsten schenden vnd schmeihen'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 226r.

⁸⁵ 'vnd jnen von ettlichen soviel gestattet worden, das sie erbgutter kauffen vnd jnen gemein Recht muss vom den Vnderthann vorgonnet werden'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 225v.

⁸⁶ SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 214r.

profiteering, a payment of two gulden granted Anabaptists and Jews entry into Niederdorla. Christoph von der Eichen may have been driven out of Mühlhausen, but, like the Jews in Oppershausen, he was tolerated elsewhere.⁸⁷

Jews and Anabaptists were both potential outsiders on the inside, close enemies (in Kaufmann's words) who put the rest of the community in danger.⁸⁸ Franciscus Strauss believed that they misled and poisoned people 'whose souls have been dearly bought with Christ's blood'.⁸⁹ Gary Waite has suggested that the trials of Anabaptists and witches had structural and ideological similarities, and that the anti-Trinitarian aspects of questions in seventeenth-century witch trials in Thuringia could have derived from fears about individuals like Thon.⁹⁰ However, there was no overt diabolization of Thon in the style of a witchcraft trial. The immediate connection between Anabaptism and hostility to the Jews is more telling because it reveals the way in which the authorities were thinking about the Anabaptist threat: an opponent sent by the Devil possibly, but also eliding this menace with concerns about insidious peril in the community, which chipped away at the authority and conformity of the Lutheran church. Indeed, while Thon was called an organ of the Devil and the authorities talked about 'devilish' beliefs, they never accused him of being with the Devil or engaging in secret Devil worship, or indulged in the fantasies of terror that witchcraft seemed to inspire.

So what did it mean to be an Anabaptist, to be the close enemy? 'Wiedertäufer' was only ever a label applied to these individuals, and as the work of Räisänen has illustrated, understanding how and why the accusation of Anabaptism was used is essential to analysing the nature of the Anabaptist threat; it can certainly help explain why, as the danger mutated, it disappeared from criminal records. Basing her analysis on

⁸⁷ 'dann welcher zween gulden gibt, dan nehmen die auff ehr sey Jude oder Widerteuffer redlich oder unredlich, wie sie dan auch den genannten widertaufferischen verführer Christoff von der Aichen der auss den Mulhausischen gebiet, vnd andern orten seiner widertaufferischer Secten halben verjagt worden vnd zweyer gulden willen zw niderdorla auff vnd eingenehmen habe'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 225v.

⁸⁸ Kaufmann, 'Nahe Fremde'. Robert Scribner has also analysed the processes by which 'outsiders' in a community were defined; Robert W. Scribner, 'Wie wird man Außenseiter? Ein- und Ausgrenzung im frühneuzeitlichen Deutschland', in Norbert Fischer and Marion Kobelt-Groch (eds), *Aussenseiter zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Hans-Jürgen Goertz zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leiden, 1997), 21–46.

⁸⁹ 'viel durch Christi blutt thewer erkauffte Schlen verwirret vnd vergiffet werden'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 226r. On the threat of the Jews in Protestant thought see Thomas Kaufmann, 'Die theologische Bewertung des Judentums im Protestantismus des späteren 16. Jahrhunderts (1530–1600)', *ARG* 91 (2001), 191–237.

⁹⁰ Waite, *Devil's Minions*, 155–6.

the visitation records of Württemberg, Räisänen argues that the term 'Anabaptist' and its use often tells us more about the Lutheran elites than the reality of belief, since it was a category along with Schwenckfelder or Epicurean which identified a mode of unacceptable behaviour and was deployed in the struggle for the definition of orthodoxy and community. Visitations records also reveal a picture of surprising tolerance, accommodation, and compromise. And so the term 'Anabaptist' was, she argues, also part of a dynamic discourse used by various actors as they defined the limits of tolerance and the meaning of community, reminding us that the culture of Lutheranism was not monolithic, disciplining, and controlling.⁹¹

However, as well as appreciating the discourse strategies that lay behind the term, we also need to consider the subjective experiences of the individuals involved. The trials of the 1560s to 1580s should be seen in context in central Germany, where Anabaptists had always been part of communities and where the Lutheran pastorate was well acquainted with the personal stories of the individuals they encountered. In the case of men like Thon or von der Eichen, the accusation of Anabaptism was not unexpected nor merely a discursive label, certainly not by the time of the second, third, or fourth arrest.

Without knowing what occasioned Thon's arrest in 1583, we cannot draw firm conclusions about what particular transgression led him to be apprehended; matters are clearer in von der Eichen's case, but the accusations can have come as no great surprise to the suspects or the authorities. The open trial in 1564 would also have made these men and women instantly recognizable to many of their contemporaries. Undoubtedly debates rumbled on about the meaning of community, but within these, individuals who had long been recognized as non-conformist carved out their identity not only through the experience of a series of trials, recantations, and relapses, and through their rejection of Lutheran (and Catholic) theology, but also through positive actions which established their place in the locality.

One example elucidates what was at stake: disputes that continued after death about burial. The location of a grave made a clear statement about that person's status within the community. Unbaptized infants, criminals, or disreputable professionals such as executioners, might all be interred in unsanctified ground, disassociating them from the community in this world and symbolizing their possible damnation in the

⁹¹ Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf*, esp. 12–13, 323–34.

next.⁹² In 1587, a woman from Mühlhausen named Ottilia Kirchhofin was executed as an Anabaptist and buried just beyond the *Wagenstetdter* gate in the north-east of the town, outside the city walls; not only was her grave nowhere near a churchyard, but she was consigned to the knacker's yard, a final act of shame and dishonour.⁹³ In death at least the authorities tried to draw the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and used this as a threat against criminals and heretics.⁹⁴ But pastors did not always call the shots, and the clergymen sent to a locality might be outsiders to the community as much as any heretic or Jew.⁹⁵ When Pflaum made his complaint in 1562, he stated that he had denied the Anabaptists a Christian burial in the church graveyard, but they had defied his instructions on at least two occasions.⁹⁶ What was worse in Pflaum's eyes, this had only been possible because the Anabaptists had been aided by the mayor and a local official.

So when the Anabaptist Curt Martwengk died, his sons Facius and David buried him with the help of two associates, Thomas Kirchner and Thilo Hartung. Clearly this action was not without support from the community, since many people followed the procession to the burial, in an unequivocal statement of support for these individuals as members of their community, if not necessarily for their beliefs.⁹⁷ Such an action was surprising. David and Facius seemed to have little knowledge of or care for Lutheran instruction. When they were questioned, apparently David could do nothing but start to invoke God's aid, reciting a prayer about creation and the Our Father, although he was not able to get all the way through.⁹⁸ Yet although they associated with Anabaptists, they also wanted to bury their father in consecrated ground, and their ties to their local community were sufficiently strong to allow them to do so.⁹⁹

⁹² Craig Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany* (Basingstoke, 2000), 40–1. Koslofsky also notes the increasing reliance on extramural cemetery burials in the sixteenth century.

⁹³ Jordan, *Chronik der Stadt Mühlhausen*, 175.

⁹⁴ Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf*, 14.

⁹⁵ Jay Goodale, 'Pfarrer als Außenseiter: Landpfarrer und religiöses Leben in Sachsen zur Reformationszeit', *Historische Anthropologie* 7 (1999), 191–211; Scribner, 'Außenseiter', 32–4.

⁹⁶ Burials in this fashion were expressly forbidden in visitation ordinances. Articles from Meissen in 1533 specified that when a person died they should be buried openly and at daytime, with the permission of and in the presence of the pastor or chaplain; Sehling i: 189.

⁹⁷ 'Thomas Kirchner vnd thilo hartung haben das grab gemacht vnd ist wie ich bin bericht viel volcks nachgefolgen zum begrebniß'; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 212r.

⁹⁸ Wappler, *Thüringen*, 503; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 255v.

⁹⁹ Not all Anabaptists wanted burials in this fashion; for alternatives see Marion Kobelt-Groch, 'Täufer ohne Begräbnis? Bausteine zu einer Geschichte

This group of Anabaptists did not separate themselves, but nor were they compromising in an effort to go unnoticed. They struggled to be both Anabaptists *and* members of the community, sometimes overtly and obviously, defined by burial. Accounts of the way Anabaptists survived and coexisted have been dominated by strategies of compromise and dissimulation, such as evading discussion of contentious topics, or absenting themselves from difficult social and political occasions.¹⁰⁰ Anabaptism is thus defined negatively by the way that someone like Thon absented himself from the church or by the non-committal answers given in trials. However, we also need to think about the positive strategies these men and women used, the networks they relied on, and the actions they took. People who were labelled followers of the Anabaptist movement in and around Mühlhausen had lived in the area most of their lives, had heard church preaching; some even wanted to bury their relatives in consecrated ground, and they talked to one another about their beliefs. The *Blutsfreunde* waged active campaigns for the release of Schuchart, von der Eichen posted his views publicly, and Thon certainly did not want or did not have the sense to avoid difficult questions. As well as compromises such as recanting and absenteeism from church, these men and women expressed their identity in bolder ways, not shying away from confrontation but yet eschewing active martyrdom and isolation. In central Germany, Anabaptists walked a tightrope, striking an ambivalent, precarious balance as outsiders on the inside.

räuberisch-mennonitischer Sepulkralkultur', in Schubert et al. (eds), *Grenzen des Täufern*, 314–25.

¹⁰⁰ Driedger, *Obedient Heretics*; Thomas Furner, 'Lay Casuistry and the Survival of Later Anabaptists in Bern', *MQR* 75.4 (2001), 429–70; John S. Oyer, 'Nicodemites among Württemberg Anabaptists', *MQR* 71.4 (1997), 487–514; John S. Oyer, 'Responses of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists to Persecution: How the Anabaptists Ran an Underground Church', in John S. Oyer, *They Harry the Good People Out of the Land: Essays on the Persecution and Flourishing of Anabaptists and Mennonites*, ed. John D. Roth (Goshen, 2000), 35–47.

8

Conclusion

In the lands where he had been raised and educated, the Grafschaft Mansfeld and Thuringia, Luther felt keenly the threat of Anabaptists, enthusiasts, and all those he considered to be radical prophets. In 1532, answering the *Amtmann* at the Wartburg, Eberhard von der Tann, who saw many Anabaptists come and go in his time, Luther wrote: 'If you ask them about their call, who has commanded them to come hither stealthily and to preach secretly, they will be unable to answer or to produce their authorization.' This was proof enough for Luther that they were sent by the Devil, 'For the Holy Spirit does not come with stealth. He descends in full view from heaven. The serpents glide unnoticed. The doves fly'.¹ Luther moved away from his earlier faith in a priesthood of all believers and criticized the Anabaptists for their lack of any properly instituted priestly order. Such creeping preachers were evidence for Luther of the need to re-establish an ordered pastorate, and his typically vitriolic and emotional response reveals the profound impact these individuals had on Lutheranism. Perhaps after studying Anabaptism more closely in this region we can understand why Luther and his contemporaries were so concerned.

In central Germany, with scattered groups and no great leaders, it might appear that Anabaptism did not mount a coherent theological challenge to the Lutheran church. Some historians have suggested the Lutheran authorities saw Anabaptists primarily as rebels, a socio-political threat which stirred associations with the Peasants' War and later Münster, or explained the hostility as part of a generic intolerance of 'the other'.² Tom Scott argues that the

¹ *Ein Brief D. Martin Luthers von den Schleichern und Winkelpredigern* (1532); LW 40: 383–4; WA *Schriften*, 30.III: 518.

² Sigrun Haude, *In the Shadow of 'Savage Wolves': Anabaptist Münster and the German Reformation during the 1530s* (Boston, MA, 2000). Haude writes 'Age-old fears of the outsider and the criminal mingled with the dread of sedition and savage anarchy', 146. See also Michele Zelinsky Hanson, *Religious Identity in an Early Reformation Community: Augsburg, 1517 to 1555* (Leiden, 2009), 103; Eugène Honée, 'Die Ketzerverbrennung: Eine Sünde gegen den Heiligen Geist? Die Lutherische Kirchen und ihre Abrechnung mit der Täuferbewegung des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts', *Concilium* 24 (1988), 490–6; Päivi Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf: Visitationsverfahren, Täuferbekämpfung, und lokale Handlungsmuster in frühneuzeitlichen Württemberg* (Constance, KY, 2011), 13.

response to the Anabaptists marks the point at which heresy 'began to take its place in the history of social deviancy'.³ Such explanations do not really get to the root of the problem. When Melanchthon questioned the Anabaptists in Jena in 1535, he asked them briefly about Münster but quickly moved on to the nature of their piety:

why do they remove themselves not only from the Papists, Lutherans, Zwinglians etc., as one calls them, but also from the whole of Christianity and the old Church, as far back as one can read or find, and start their own sect?⁴

Melanchthon's hyperbolic attack aside, Lutherans were evidently concerned about Anabaptist theology. He was quite clear in ensuing exchanges about the precise points to which he wanted answers, such as the Trinity, the forgiveness of sins, and baptism, the main articles of Lutheran faith. For him, Anabaptism was a genuine theological and pastoral problem. It was part of the dynamic which shaped the religious landscape of central Germany. In 1569 Landgrave William of Hesse called on Matthias Flacius Illyricus and Johannes Pistorius in Nidda, among others, to advise on the question of whether the authorities should forcibly baptize the children of Anabaptists.⁵ The careers and the ideas of these Lutheran clergymen were fundamentally shaped by the issues that Anabaptism forced them to confront. By drawing on the experiences of the ordinary men and women who engaged with concerns that so troubled Melanchthon, Flacius, and others, this study has revealed how Anabaptist identity developed as result of a dialogue with Lutheranism.

In an attempt to recover a sense of what Anabaptism and radicalism meant, scholarship often seems to make a choice between two options: stating that Anabaptism shared a theological basis with the reformers until the Protestants betrayed the cause or at least until paths

Gary K. Waite, *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe* (Toronto, ON, 2007), 197: 'In the sixteenth century, a scapegoating attitude, feeding off major tragedies, escalated anxiety over the plotting of secretive organizations that could not be rooted out by normal means and led to judicial changes that reduced the rights of suspects and allowed the application of horrific forms of torture upon suspects.' See also Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2003), 87–117.

³ Tom Scott, 'The Problem of Heresy in the German Reformation', in Scott, *The Early Reformation in Germany: Between Secular Impact and Radical Vision* (Farnham, 2013), 195.

⁴ 'warum sie also nicht allein von der Papistischen, Lutherischen, Zwinglischen etc. wie man sie nennet, sondern auch von der ganzen Christenheit und der alten Kirchen, so weit man zurucke lessen oder finden kann, absondern, und eine eigne Sect anfahren?'; CRii: 998.

⁵ *TAH*, 352.

diverged;⁶ or that the movement had fundamentally different doctrinal roots from the reformers which relied on currents present within popular piety or medieval theology.⁷ It becomes clear, therefore, why Anabaptist historiography, which has tried so hard to define Anabaptism in relation to other confessions and to pinpoint its origins, has struggled to find a place for central German Anabaptism with its incoherent theologies and dispersed communities. Leafing through the sources for Thuringia and Saxony, a reader's immediate impression might be confusion about the theology that formed the core of Anabaptism. No clear set of ideas emerges, and the names of numerous leaders and preachers jump out from the pages, appearing in a dizzying number of towns and villages. Anabaptists expressed a range of different views on every issue. On baptism there was perhaps the most agreement, but even so opinions varied. Some like Georg Köhler said:

that these same children are completely pure and are not sullied with original sin or other sin, for God poured a pure spirit into them, just as beautiful as the sun from heaven.⁸

Others, like Thon, condemned everything tangible that was born of flesh, even children in their mother's bellies. In the absence of leaders and role models, the picture of Anabaptism's development in central Germany is messy. While at certain points it is evident that Anabaptists were influenced by mysticism, Müntzer, the legacy of Catholic ideas, or Lutheran views, in general it is impossible to locate clear theological origins for the ideas of these Anabaptists.

Some historians, therefore, have defined Anabaptism negatively, as a rejection of the Lutheran movement and its failure to address certain moral and spiritual issues, rather than a positive attempt to find a solution

⁶ Günter Vogler, 'Konsens-Konflikt-Dissens: Das Exempel Thomas Müntzer: Ein Diskussionsbeitrag', in Hans-Jürgen Goertz and James M. Stayer (eds), *Radikalität und Dissent im 16. Jahrhundert/Radicalism and Dissent in the Sixteenth Century* (Berlin, 2002), 61–74; Stayer, 'The Passing of the Radical Moment in the Radical Reformation', *MQR* 71.1 (1997), 147–52. Goertz has recently suggested a more nuanced view of the radical phase of the Reformation, arguing against radicalism as a typology; Goertz, 'Die Radikalität reformatorischer Bewegungen: Plädoyer für ein kulturgeschichtliches Konzept', in Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen* (Göttingen, 2007), 11–22.

⁷ See for example Kenneth R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottsdale, PA, 1974); Ellen Yutzy Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts?: Religious Dissidence and the Reformation in the Landgraviate of Hesse', DPhil dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 2008, 352.

⁸ 'das dysselbygen kyndelin gar reyn und mit keyner erb- ader andern ssunde befleck-erth sinth, danne god habe yhnen einen reynen geysth eingegossen, auch so schon alss dy sonne von himmell'; Jacobs, 'Harz', 500.

to the religious and theological challenges that were presented to people.⁹ A careful reading of the Thuringian sources suggests, however, there is another way of understanding the development of the movement. We should not reduce the emotions, hopes, fears, and theological musings of ordinary people in early modern Thuringia to social and moral dissatisfaction, for men and women brought their own personal and emotional contexts to bear on theological issues. An argument which rests on the idea of negatively defined Anabaptism also has the effect of downplaying or sidelining the radical impulses of the Anabaptist movement since, in that model, Anabaptist faith seems to be based on a generic pre-Reformation emphasis on good works, simple piety, and communal discipline, and a soteriological approach which responded to the moral failings of the Protestant reformers.¹⁰

Such an approach risks seeing groups like the *Blutsfreunde* and *Mordbrenner* as aberrations from this model. It seems more fruitful to understand how groups like Anabaptist arsonists or the *Blutsfreunde* could develop as a result of the same impulses felt by less obviously radical Anabaptists, and while recognizing their extremity, see them as a point on a continuum. Our 'thick description' of Thuringian Anabaptism has allowed us to see how Anabaptists, with ostensibly very different ideas, were actually using a shared rhetoric. This rhetoric also connected them to their local religious environment. Everyone, whether Lutherans, Anabaptists, or ambivalent Anabaptists, could ask questions such as: how is the Christian community connected in faith? how should children be baptized? what do the bread and wine mean?

Anabaptists appealed to scripture, quoted their leaders, and had individual visions, but they repeatedly returned to issues which referred back to Lutheran theology. The quotation of John 6 and Mark 16:16 in the context of discussions on the Eucharist and baptism are obvious examples of this dialogue but they are not isolated. In general terms Luther's doctrine of *sola fide* focused on a personal understanding of God and how this might be expressed through the sacraments that were retained in the Lutheran church. Lutheran theology, in some senses, seemed to present a half-way house, especially when it came to the sacraments, and left unanswered particular questions about the

⁹ Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts', 352–4; Räisänen, 'Obrigkeit, Täufer, und ländliche Gesellschaft: Auf der Suche nach den "gemeinen" Täufern und Täuferinnen in Württemberg im späten 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert', in Anselm Schubert, Astrid von Schlachta, and Michael Driedger (eds), *Grenzen des Täuferturns/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen* (Gütersloh, 2009), 213.

¹⁰ Glebe, 'Anabaptists in their Hearts', 355.

relationship of the physical and the divine. For a reformer like Zwingli, water, bread, and wine were signifiers that symbolized nothing physical, but for Luther the external symbol was an integral part of his understanding of the internal process; although he rejected the wondrous exorcisms and transformations of the Catholic Church, the inner and outer were still connected.

In response to this debate, ordinary people might come to their own, seemingly simplified versions of theology, but they never did so in uncomplicated ways. Many individuals adopted an apparently literalistic attitude to the sacraments: Anabaptists saw bread and wine at the sacrament of the altar as nothing more than ordinary food and drink, and baptismal water did not actually wash away sins. Literalism did not always equate to simplicity, however, and although Anabaptists often rejected conventional understandings of marriage, the real presence, and infant baptism, their faith was not formed only of unadorned moral piety and brotherly association. Anabaptists still relied on a complex language of symbolism relating to sacramental life.

We mentioned at the start of this study the issues that seemed to be important to Anabaptists in central Germany: brotherhood, baptism, the sacrament of the altar, and sex and gender. These clusters of ideas were not isolated from one another. Concepts of body, blood, flesh, and spirit were all linked together by Anabaptists in a new symbolic language as they tried to express their communal identity, and determine how the members of this community could access Christ. Anabaptists thought differently about the emblematic meaning of water, bread, wine, blood, and flesh, intertwining all such sacramental expressions into forms of piety which focused above all on the symbolism of Christ's body. The fictive and intangible connections built up between members meant Anabaptists could conceive of themselves as brothers in faith, who were linked by the shared sacrifice of Christ's body. Ambrosius Spittelman said he sometimes used an extended greeting, which expressed this corporeal but also spiritual union:

If you are a Christian brother, so that I can recognise you, then tell me if Christ has come into your flesh, or when you received Christ? If he is a Christian, incorporated in the body of Christ and a member with him, then he answers me: 'When his godly will has been announced to me and he has willed me therein.'¹¹

¹¹ 'pistu ein cristlicher bruder, dopei ich dich erkennen kan, so sag mir, wen ist Cristus dir ins fleisch komen, oder wan hastu Cristum entpfangen? Ist er ein cristlicher bruder, eingeleibt in dem leib Cristi und ein glidmas mit im, so antwurt er mir, do mir sein gotlicher will verkundiget ist worden, und mich dorein verwilliget hab'; *QGT*ii:27.

This sense of a brotherhood in Christ's body did not necessarily mean people had to shut themselves off from the world or reject all other religious and social contexts, nor did it demand consistent or frequent participation in a set of ritual activities. But Anabaptists did form new emotional communities when they considered issues like baptism and marriage, in the sense that leaving a child unbaptized, sleeping with other people's wives, and not going to the sacrament might be seen as acceptable. Decisions were not just made on the basis of a rejection of Lutheran morality or discipline. Anabaptists opted for these practices in the belief that such forms of piety could help them to access Christ.

Anabaptism constructed a symbolic, ritual universe which was in many ways very alien to the values of sixteenth-century society, and yet which evolved from the same problems and anxieties that plagued contemporaries. How do we understand this dissonant identity? Is radicalism useful as a conceptual framework? How do we talk about the divergent paths that Anabaptists chose, understanding the difference, without resorting to confessional judgements? Scholars such as Goertz have argued for radicalism as a concept, rather than a restrictive typology, which encompasses the cultural world of symbols and actions created when ordinary people responded to religious change, allowing us to recapture a particular moment in time whose advances may have been rapidly lost.¹² Yet the confessional legacy of Anabaptist historiography has still left us with a problem: it remains difficult for scholarship to address the impact of theology as a serious motivating factor, for it seems that by accepting the importance of theological concepts we are forced into a study of genealogies and difference, of branches of Anabaptism. Anabaptist history has come far in recent years, broadening its horizons both conceptually and geographically, but excellent accounts of the social networks which sustained the movement or the cultural practices which engendered identity in Anabaptist communities still sit uneasily with the idea that Anabaptism created radically different theological impulses.

I would propose a different solution. We should not shy away from the difference or extreme solutions which Anabaptists in central Germany might propose, but we can still contain such concepts within a narrative of Anabaptist identity which does not relegate individuals to the position of separatist radicals. By exploring the emotional impact that theological issues evoked during the Reformation, we can reconstruct the subjective experience of being an Anabaptist in central Germany and explain the sometimes radical and sometimes confusing or inconsistent decisions

¹² Goertz, 'Radikalität reformatorischer Bewegungen'.

that Anabaptists made as they debated concepts which affected their lives in personal ways. The evolution of the Anabaptist movement was the result of a dialogue with the questions raised by Lutheran theology, in which ordinary men and women as well as theologians participated. Central German Anabaptism was not a minor sideline of the Anabaptist movement or a radical adjunct to the mainstream Reformation, but part of the dynamic which altered how people related to their social, psychological, and emotional worlds; as such it holds an important place in understanding the subtleties of dissidence and orthodoxy in Reformation and post-Reformation Germany.

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