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## CHAPTER FIVE

### Anabaptism in Central Germany

Kat Hill

#### Introduction

When he was arrested in Eisenach in October 1531, Hans Quinger explained his views on baptism. He himself had not been baptized ‘otherwise’ as an adult, but equally he was not persuaded that infant baptism was a good idea. He could not say for certain whether the baptisms performed on his own children would save their souls. Hans’ ambivalence was undoubtedly prompted by the decision of his wife Gela to depart for an Anabaptist community, leaving him with their seven-week-old child. Hans thought baptism could bring salvation but was uncertain which form of baptism was correct and at what time this should happen.<sup>1</sup> He may not have been entirely persuaded by the views of Anabaptist preachers but nor was he convinced by Lutheran theologies or the Catholic faith with which he had grown up. Quinger’s confused response is typical of statements amongst the records for central German Anabaptism. This lack of clarity and an accompanying paucity of sources has meant central German Anabaptism has not formed a key part of narratives about early modern

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Wappler, *Die Stellung Kursachsens und des Landgrafen Philipp von Hessen zur Täuferbewegung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1910), 30, 37, 41, 99, 138, 140, 138; ThHStAW EGA Reg. N, No. 997, fo. 4r, 6v; Kat Hill, *Baptism, Brotherhood, and Belief in Reformation Germany: Anabaptism and Lutheranism, 1525–1585* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 113, 194–95; Ellen Yutzy Glebe, “Anabaptists in their Hearts?: Religious Dissidence and the Reformation in the Landgraviate of Hesse,” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2004), 148, 152–53, 194–95.

Anabaptism;<sup>2</sup> but the movement here has an important role to play in accounts of the Anabaptist movement and Reformation more generally. It allows us particular insights into the decisions made by individuals in response to religious change in the Lutheran heartlands.

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<sup>2</sup> The major printed sources for central German Anabaptism are Paul Wappler's volumes: *Die Täuferbewegung in Thüringen von 1526-1584* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1913); *Die Stellung des Kursachsens; Inquisition und Ketzerprozesse in Zwickau zur Reformationszeit: Dargestellt im Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung der Ansichten Luthers und Melanchthons über Glaubens-und Gewissensfreiheit* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius, 1908); *Thomas Müntzer in Zwickau und die 'Zwickauer Propheten'* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1966). There late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications with source collections: Georg Berbig, "Die Wiedertäufer in Ortslande zu Franken, im Zusammenhang mit dem Bauernkrieg," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kirchenrecht* 22 (1912): 378–403; Berbig, "Die Wiedertäufer in Amt Königsberg in Franken in den Jahren 1527/1528," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kirchenrecht* 13 (1903): 291–352; Georg, "Die erste kursächsische Visitation in Ortsland Franken," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 3 (1906): 336–402; 4 (1907): 370–408; 5 (1908): 398–435; 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; Eduard Jacobs, "Die Wiedertäufer am Harz," *Die Zeitschrift des Harz-Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 32 (1899): 423–536; Walter Köhler, Walter Sohm, Theodor Sippell and Günther Franz, eds., *Urkundliche Quellen zur hessischen Reformationsgeschichte*, 4 vols (Marburg: Elwert, 1915–55), iv: *Wiedertauferakten 1527–1626* (hereafter *TAH*). The major archival collections relating to central German Anabaptism, listed in the sources are located

Whilst central German Anabaptism had connections with the south-German/Austrian branch of the movement, one of the three strains identified by the famous polygenesis model, it does not fit into traditional accounts of Anabaptist origins.<sup>3</sup> It lacked famous leaders, seemed to have little coherence, and had an unclear legacy unlike the Swiss or Dutch communities. In the political patchwork of Saxony and against the backdrop of Lutheran reforms, Anabaptism spread without well-known preachers and in disparate patterns to form scattered communities, but it had surprising tenacity.<sup>4</sup> Whilst the resulting religious beliefs are not always easy to uncover, they reveal how Anabaptist ideas evolved amongst ordinary men and women in an era of confessional transformation.

### **Preachers and Communities**

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in the Bayerisches Staatsarchiv Nuremberg; Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg; Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden; Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar; Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Meiningen; Stadtarchiv Erfurt; Stadtarchiv Mühlhausen.

<sup>3</sup> James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, Klaus Deppermann, “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptists Origins,” *MQR* 49.2 (1975): 83–121. See also James M. Stayer, “Saxon Radicalism and Swiss Anabaptism: The Return of the Repressed,” *MQR* 67.1 (1993): 5–30.

<sup>4</sup> The major older works on Anabaptism in this region are Wappler’s volumes and Gerhard Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung nach dem Grossenbauernkrieg* (Berlin: Rütten und Loening, 1958). On patterns of Anabaptism in central Germany and the political and religious background see Hill, *Baptism*, 33–68; John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 41–74; Yutzy Glebe, “Anabaptists in their Hearts,” 57–106.

The early energy of central German Anabaptism sprang not just from the consequences of Luther's challenge to Catholicism but also the radical preaching of figures such as Thomas Müntzer and the bitter embers of the Peasants' War.<sup>5</sup> Hans Hut, born in Haina, a village on the Thuringian-Bavarian border, is the most well-known amongst the early preachers in central Germany. The erstwhile bookseller and former sexton started to preach in Franconia and Thuringia in the summer of 1526, but he had long been entangled with reforming ideas. As early as 1524 he refused to have his child baptised, and his profession in the book trade had brought him into contact with Müntzer's radical, apocalyptic theology. His associations with the firebrand preacher led him to Frankenhausen in 1525 where he witnessed the slaughter of the peasants.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 69–97; Stayer, "Saxon Radicalism." Stayer refuted Bender's arguments which denied any connections between true Swiss Anabaptism and the radical Wittenberg movement of 1521–22. Harold S. Bender, "Die Zwickauer Propheten, Thomas Müntzer und die Täufer," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 7 (1952): 262–78 (264–65). See also Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and the Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Stayer, "Anabaptists and Future Anabaptists in the Peasants' War," *MQR* 68.2 (1988), 99–139; Gottfried Seebaß, "Bauernkrieg und Täuferium in Franken," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 85 (1974): 284–300; Zschäbitz, *Zur mitteldeutschen Wiedertäuferbewegung*.

<sup>6</sup> Gottfried Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben, und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Göttingen: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002). See also his article on Hut in Hans-Jürgen. Goertz and Walter Klaassen, ed., *Profiles of Radical Reformers* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982), 54–61.

After this shattering defeat, Hut disappears from view until the spring of 1526 when he was baptised by Hans Denck in Augsburg. After this he began a mission of evangelism across southern and central Germany as well as Austria.<sup>7</sup> Preaching about the imminent return of the Christ, although without advocating revolution, Hut returned to his hometown of Haina and gathered many followers in Franconia and Thuringia over the summer of 1526. Towards the end of November or the beginning of December, he travelled further south to Erlangen and Bamberg. From there he travelled to Nuremberg, Uttenreuth, and then to Nikolsburg and Austria; but he never made his way back to Franconia and Thuringia. After arriving in Augsburg again in August 1527, he was subsequently arrested and died in prison.<sup>8</sup> Although Hut's time in central Germany was brief, he left behind many who were attracted to Anabaptist ideas, men such as Georg Kolerlin, Kilian Volkmaier and Eukarius Binder who concentrated much of their activity in an enclave in Königsberg. This came to light in January 1527 when the magistrate heard concerning rumours and made a series of arrests in February, uncovering Anabaptist networks in the region.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, pp. 34–35; Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, pp. 204–51; Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 88–99; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 25–37. On the early Anabaptist movement in Franconia and Thuringia see Günther Bauer, *Anfänge täuferischer Gemeindebildungen in Franken*, (Nuremberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1966); Berbig, “Königsberg”; Berbig, “Franken.”

<sup>8</sup> Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 252–315, 526; Hill, *Baptism*, 58; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 310–11.

<sup>9</sup> Berbig, “Königsberg”; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 49.

Though the most well-known, Hut was not the only preacher active in central Germany in the later 1520s. Others came and went, their transient efforts producing widely dispersed pockets of activity: Hans Römer in Erfurt and its environs, and preachers such as Volkmar von Hildburghausen, Michael von Uettingen, Georg von Staffelstein, and Bernhardus, who gathered followers in Frankenhausen and Fulda.<sup>10</sup> In western Thuringia and Hesse, Melchior Rinck was the most influential preacher and a key figure in a community whose spiritual center was Sorga, a village on the western border of Hesse close to Hersfeld. From here, Anabaptists undertook missionary activity into Amt Hausbreitenbach and electoral Saxony.<sup>11</sup> Rinck himself came from a peasant background but attended the university of Leipzig and was influenced both by Hans Denck and the reformed pastor Joahannes Bader. Several confrontations with the authorities resulted in a final spell in prison in 1531 and, despite attempts to convert him to Lutheranism, Rinck resisted and probably died in his cell.<sup>12</sup> A series of trials in Berka and Sorga in 1533 revealed the extent of Anabaptist activity in this region.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 50; Hill, *Baptism*, 35; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 72–94.

<sup>11</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 54–56; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 51–52; Wappler, *Stellung*, 145–57; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 294–303, 326–36; Yutzy Glebe, “Anabaptists in Their Hearts,” 154–56.

<sup>12</sup> On Rinck see Erich Geldbach, “Toward a More Ample Biography of the Hessian Anabaptist Leader Melchior Rinck,” *MQR* 48 (1974): 371–84; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 52–64. See also Gerhard J. Neumann, “A Newly Discovered Manuscript of Melchior Rinck,” *MQR* 35 (1961), 197–21, with two works by Rinck: the *Widderlegung* (Refutation) and *Vermanung* (Admonition) and *TAH* for documents relating to Rinck.

<sup>13</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 65; Wappler, *Stellung*, 180–84; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 88–89.

As Rinck, Volkmar, and Staffelstein disappeared from the scene, their influence was still felt but circles emerged around new preachers and leaders. In western Thuringia and Hesse, men such as Georg Stein and Hans Bott continued to evangelize, and these communities' connections extended beyond central Germany to Hutterites in Moravia.<sup>14</sup> In the early 1530s, a man named Alexander, a former associate of Georg von Staffelstein and Volkmar von Hildburghausen, gathered followers in northern and west Thuringia; we never learn his second name.<sup>15</sup> An unnamed 'prophet' preached in the abbacy of Fulda whose activities came to light in 1532. In their interrogations, those arrested told tales of his miraculous doings and their deeds in response: singing, kissing, making noises like animals, dancing to a drum, and recounting stories.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the 1530s and beyond, Anabaptism persisted in the Harz territories and western and northern Thuringia in particular, sometimes in a disquieting form.<sup>17</sup> The Uttenreuth Dreamers, active from the early 1530s, believed that the spirit told them when and with whom to have sex. Anselm Schubert argues that this was seen as a way of achieving purity, and the appeal to dreamed, divine inspiration is comparable with later medieval

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<sup>14</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 66–67; Yutzy Glebe, "Anabaptists in Their Hearts," 121–22.

<sup>15</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 35, 57–58, 66–67; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 92–100.

<sup>16</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 67; Wappler, *Thüringen*, 81–85

<sup>17</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 67–68; James M. Stayer, "Swiss-South German Anabaptism, 1526–1540," in John Roth and James M. Stayer, eds., *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700* (Leiden, 2007), 83–117 (105–66). Wappler, *Thüringen*, 106–89.



Traumbücher or dream books which allowed readers to interpret all manner of dreams.<sup>18</sup> In the mid-1530s a group of murderous, arsonist Anabaptists appeared in northern Thuringia, led by Melchior Stoer,<sup>19</sup> whilst the Blutsfreunde (Blood Friends) emerged in the 1540s and 1550s. They professed that Christ freed believers from sin with his sacrifice, and they

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<sup>18</sup> Claus-Peter Clasen, “Medieval Heresies in the Reformation,” *Church History* 32.4 (1963): 392–414; Anselm Schubert, “Der Traum vom Tag des Herrn: Die ‘Träumer von Uttenreuth’ und das apokalyptische Täuferum,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 97 (2006), 106–36; Katharina Reinholdt, *Ein Leib in Christo Werden: Ehe und Sexualität im Täuferum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 68–71; Lyndal Roper, “Sexual Utopianism in the German Reformation,” in Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2003), 82–6.

<sup>19</sup> SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 105–112; ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78., fo. 73–9r. See also Wappler, *Thüringen*, 155–66; Wappler, *Stellung*, 63–4.

expressed their bond with each other and the Saviour through one sacrament called the Christierung - the sexual communion of brothers and sisters in faith.<sup>20</sup>

Ripples of activity in the latter half of the sixteenth century reveal much about the nature of Anabaptism in central Germany – its ability to persist despite pressure for confessional conformity and the legacies of long-lasting ties to Anabaptism. Certain locations, such as Mühlhausen, seemed to hold particular importance for Anabaptists. In 1564 fourteen individuals, many of whom had prior associations to Anabaptism, were interrogated in the town, amongst them Christoph von der Eichen who was apprehended again in 1571 and the shepherd Hans Thon, arrested once more in 1583.<sup>21</sup> Murmurs of non-conformist

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<sup>20</sup> 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: 182–88; Wappler, Thüringen, 480–94. Menius was also wrote a tract condemning the group: Justus Menius, Von dem Blutsfreunden aus der Wiedertauff (Erfurt, 1551). For accounts of the Blutsfreunde see Reinholdt, Ehe und Sexualität im Täufertum, 77–80; 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 Täufertums/Boundaries of Anabaptism: Neue Forschungen (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 295–313; Wappler, Thüringen, 189–206; Gustav Schmidt, Justus Menius, der Reformator Thüringens nach archivalischen und andern gleichzeitigen Quellen, 2 vols (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1867), ii, pp. 127–38; Wappler, Thüringen, 189–206.

<sup>21</sup> On Thon’s case see Hill, Baptism, 199–222.

activity persisted into the seventeenth century.<sup>22</sup> In 1605, Esajas Stiefel, a merchant from Langensalza, who believed he was perfected and free of sin, was questioned by the superintendent Melchior Tilesius<sup>23</sup> Generally labelled an ‘Enthusiast,’ he shared the same concerns as Anabaptists like Thon although he also belonged to the world of Jakob Böhme and spiritualist and pietistic Lutheran non-conformity of the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup>

Central German communities have often been disregarded in overviews of Anabaptism since the movement was neither as coherent nor as theologically sophisticated as in the Swiss territories or the Netherlands. But although Anabaptists were not always present in large numbers, they spread throughout villages and hamlets in central Germany, in a sweep across Franconia and back across the Harz Mountains. Recent scholarship has emphasized the way in which the lines which divided Anabaptists from other Protestants were never

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<sup>22</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 494–516, 206–20, 516–22; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 217r–26v, 227r–243r, 249r–78r, 287r–327r; Loc. 08199/07.

<sup>23</sup> Ulman Weiß, *Die Lebenswelten Des Esajas Stiefel oder Vom Umgang Mit Dissidenten* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 219, 227.

clear-cut.<sup>25</sup> Instead scholars must consider a spectrum of beliefs, often muddy and unclear but which originated from the concerns of ordinary people over religious change. This is particularly evident in central Germany where dispersed communities of individuals existed who only had limited contact with preachers. As Ellen Yutzy Glebe's indicates, John Oyer's frustration with central German Anabaptism was the difficulty of tracing clear ideological links.<sup>26</sup> It is a frustration shared by others but it misses the point of the rich narratives offered to us by central German sources and the insight they give us into lived experiences.

## Baptism

With the exception of a few works by Hut and Rinck and the disputes in which the latter was embroiled, we must rely on trial records and interrogation responses to piece together the ideas of central German Anabaptism. Perhaps for this reason, accounts of Anabaptist theology in this area have focused mostly on Rinck.<sup>27</sup> However, his views cannot account for

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Die 'gemeinen' Täufer: Einfache Brüder und selbstbewußte Schwestern," in Goertz, *Radikalität der Reformation: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 363–76; Hill, *Baptism*; Päivi Räisänen, *Ketzer im Dorf: Visitationsverfahren, Täuferbekämpfung, und lokale Handlungsmuster in frühneuzeitlichen Württemberg* (Konstanz: UVK, 2011); Anselm Schubert, *Täufertum und Kabbalah: Augustin Bader und die Grenzen der Radikalen Reformation* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008); Schubert, et al., eds, *Grenzen des Täufertums*; Yutzy Glebe, "Anabaptists in their Hearts."

<sup>26</sup> Ellen Yutzy Glebe, "The Use of Problematic Case Studies to Examine (Hessian) Anabaptism," in Schubert, et al., eds., *Grenzen des Täufertums*, 65–81, (68).

<sup>27</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 75-113.

the full range of ideas espoused by Anabaptists in central Germany. Indeed, perhaps one of the most interesting features of central German Anabaptism is the perspective it reveals of the diverse ways in which ordinary people interpreted views preached by Hut, Rinck, and others, and reworked them in light of Lutheran reforms and Catholic pasts.

Baptism was, unsurprisingly, a defining feature of Anabaptist ideas in central Germany, and Lutheran debates about baptism focused attention on the rite in distinctive ways amongst these Anabaptist communities.<sup>28</sup> Theological arguments proposed by preachers focused on the notion of adult baptism as a voluntary entry into the community of believers, a seal of God's faith, and a commitment to a particular vision of Christian ethics.<sup>29</sup> Hut's ideas on baptism were intimately related to his notion of the "Gospel of All Creatures" and his apocalyptic theology, stressing the necessity of preaching the Word of God before any form of baptism was performed. The much-quoted biblical passage, "Whoever believes and is baptized is saved" (Mark 16: 16), underpinned his thought. Once someone had understood the Word of God, he could make a covenant before his fellow believers, but even then, the true essence of baptism only came through "conflict with sin throughout one's whole life." Water baptism was nothing more than "a symbol, a preparation, and a pattern of the true baptism in Christ."<sup>30</sup> Baptism was a tripartite process – spirit, water, and blood – and Hut emphasized that the coming of Christ was imminent. To then be sealed in justification in the

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<sup>28</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 98–135; Hill, "Blut, Taufe, und Identität: Beobachtungen zur Entwicklung des Täufern in Thüringen, c. 1520–1550," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 67 (2010), 51–68.

<sup>29</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, pp. 78–85; Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 476–79.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism," in Michael G. Baylor, ed., *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 168.

union of true believers through a true baptism of suffering was even more crucial.<sup>31</sup> Rinck did not have the same apocalyptic fervor as Hut but he shared the conviction that baptism represented the seal of a spiritual journey in which man came to the belief that God forgave his sins. It had a dual meaning – death with Christ the Saviour and the marital bond to Christ the bridegroom.<sup>32</sup> As for Hut, baptism meant entry into a community of believers committed to Christ's love.

Visionary eschatology was even more acute in Hans Römer's theology. Preaching prior to a planned takeover of Erfurt on New Year's Day 1528, he emphasized the revelatory act of baptism as a preparation for the end of days.<sup>33</sup> Infant baptism had no part in this programme for religious renewal, and disdain for the rite continued to be echoed by many ordinary men and women who heard Anabaptist preaching. As he went to his death in November 1537, Jakob Störger decried baptism as a "swine's bath, a dog's bath."<sup>34</sup>

Many individuals' convictions about the persuasiveness of Anabaptist ideas on baptism were rooted not only in commitment to the adult confession of faith, but also doubt, uncertainty, and disgust over the validity of infant baptism. Infants did not have reason and could not believe.<sup>35</sup> But relinquishing the necessity of infant baptism was no small undertaking, for the practice was embedded in emotional ideas about the position of the

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<sup>31</sup> Hut, "Baptism," 152, 168–171.

<sup>32</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 78–80.

<sup>33</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 69–71; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 85.

<sup>34</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 446; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 155r.

<sup>35</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 120–26.

unbaptized child in the community and the family, as well as the state of its soul.<sup>36</sup> But it was precisely doubt created by Lutheran reforms which allowed alternative theologies to develop. Lutheranism disavowed the essential nature of infant baptism as an exorcistic act of purification and muddled the waters about how it washed away original sin. Baptism was a baptism until death, not a single good work, though it remained a sacrament and essential for salvation.<sup>37</sup> Yet ambivalence about how it actually worked left room for doubt and created space in which people's ideas on baptism developed.

In the ordinary responses of men and women who were accused of Anabaptism we see many responses similar to that of Hans Quinger. Quinger was not convinced about the value of adult baptism, but as he and others who heard Anabaptist ideas questioned and rejected infant baptism as redundant, they reimagined the relationship between faith and ritual. In central Germany individuals clung to an economy of salvation which focused on baptism as a redemptive act but not in the way in which Lutherans or Catholics would understand. Valentin Romeissen, interrogated in Grossenbach in December 1529, said preaching about the impending apocalypse “aroused in him such fear and terror, that he worried daily about such ruination.” Romeissen was baptised as an adult because he had heard that, “whoever does not believe and is then baptised, will be eternally lost.”<sup>38</sup> Ideas

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Gélis, *Les enfants des limbes. Mort-nés et parents dans l'Europe Chrétienne* (Paris: Audibert, 2006); Hill, *Baptism*, 109–120.

<sup>37</sup> Jaroslav J. Pelikan, “Luther’s Defense of Infant Baptism,” in Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Luther for an Ecumenical Age* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 200–18; Susan Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London and New York: Routledge), 50–53.

<sup>38</sup> *TAH*, 24–5.

which shaped the theology of believer's baptism saw it not simply as a mature account of faith but also as a salvific act that joined the faithful in a union bound in Christ's sacrifice in blood.

### **The Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper was essential to Anabaptists in central Germany, but there were surprising nuances to their interpretation of the rite. Scholarship on the theology of the Anabaptists on the Lord's Supper is generally less extensive than that on baptism and this is even more true for central German Anabaptism. As Anabaptists did elsewhere, individuals rejected the notion of transubstantiation. The bread and wine remained just that; eating communal meals was a commemorative celebration of Christ's Last Supper before his crucifixion, a rehearsal which united the faithful.<sup>39</sup> Hut stated that Christ spoke the words about the meaning of the chalice and testament before any food or wine was consumed. Interpreting Luke 22:20, he said there was no basis in the Bible for a miraculous transformation, and bread and wine were only a symbol for Christ's suffering.<sup>40</sup> Rinck also repudiated the real presence or any material presence of Christ in the rite and focused on the spiritual union of believers.<sup>41</sup>

In interrogations, many individuals seemed disgusted at the idea of the base act of eating and chewing Christ. They dismissed the Mass as simple bread and wine and would not receive communion in church. Kunna Genslerin, arrested in Frankenhasuen in 1530, provided

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<sup>39</sup> John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Waterloo, ON.: Herald Press, 1993). On central Germany see Hill, *Baptism*, 136–66.

<sup>40</sup> Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 477, 520, 479.

<sup>41</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 98–100.



a typical response when questioned, replying that “the bread and wine are there with much other nonsense, and Christ is not there.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly Anabaptists in Kleineutersdorf, questioned in November 1535, dismissed the Mass and infant baptism since they were “nothing other than simple bread, wine, and water.”<sup>43</sup> Kristina Strobel simply joked about the rite which she ridiculed as a ‘Sackmantel’ (a derisive insult which has no easy English translation).

However, in central Germany, eucharistic ideas remained deeply wedded to the body and matter in ways which were surprising. The sacrament did not involve a material transformation of bread and wine, but Anabaptists in central Germany expressed ideas which focused on a direct, corporeal connection with Christ’s sacrifice and were connected to ideas about baptism which focused on suffering and the redemptive power of Christ’s death. This emphasis on the bodily union with Christ and his blood shaped a set of ideas and practices distinctive to and different from the commemorative act of eating which emphasized the salvific bond with Christ.

In a radical interpretation of these ideas, the *Blutsfreunde* emphasized that the Lord’s Supper indicated “the suffering and death of the Lord. We must become part of this and not the enjoyment of the sacrament.”<sup>44</sup> Rejecting but also conflating all sacraments, they developed only one rite, as discussed previously, the *Christierung*: the sexual union of fellow Anabaptists. In a practice which embodied eucharistic ideas, women were referred to as wine and the men as bread, joining together to partake in the body of Christ through their sexual

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<sup>42</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 311.

<sup>43</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 399.

<sup>44</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 493; SAM, Sig.10/E6, No. 12, Acta betr. Wiedertäufer, 1529–1589, fo. 109r.

communion. Collapsing of experiences into one act which expressed the salvific, eucharistic bond was not unique, although this solution was more unusual than most. Whilst most Anabaptists denied that Christ could be on heaven and earth at the same time and rejected his presence in bread and wine, they did insist on a profound bodily union which connected Christ and the faithful, reminiscent of medieval theories of the mystical body.<sup>45</sup>

At the root of many central German Anabaptists' rejection of Protestant and Catholic sacramental theology was a different view of soteriology. They dismissed the Lutheran doctrine of justification, a dead faith as they called it, which was unable to produce Christian love and good works. Rinck expressed this disdain in disputes with Marburg theologians such as Balthasar Raidt, and it is echoed in ordinary men and women's words who emphasized a powerful union of spiritual brothers and sisters in love and suffering.<sup>46</sup> This did not mean that Anabaptists believed in a faith of good works, but they believed there was something lacking in Lutheranism's ethical framework. Dismissing *sola fide* and also rejecting Catholic beliefs, Anabaptists created powerful new ways of expressing the salvific bond with Christ.

### **Sexual Radicalism and Gender**

In addition to alternative views on the sacraments, central German Anabaptism fostered different models for gender relations. Anabaptism here did not follow the pattern which, it has been argued, shaped other movements of reform: female involvement in early phases of

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<sup>45</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 159–66; Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*.

<sup>46</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 76–77; Yutzy Glebe, "Anabaptists in their Hearts," 189–91, 355. On Hut's soteriology and Christology see Seebaß, *Müntzers Erbe*, 459–65, 467–71.

enthusiasm and then a drop-off.<sup>47</sup> In central Germany, there was an enduring pattern of mixed gendered engagement, and men and women were involved in fairly equal numbers.<sup>48</sup> Although preachers and leaders were all men, and early networks arising after the Peasants' War were male dominated, the gender composition became more balanced. Powerful female bonds played a crucial role in fostering Anabaptism, with women acting as hosts and forming strong networks of association. The circle that gathered around Jakob Storger included several women, and this was less a testament to the power of male charismatic authority and more to the connections between women such as Katharina Goldschmidt and her two daughters and friends such as Barbara Meißbrod.<sup>49</sup> Women's lasting connections and contacts to wider networks were as important as male authority figures in giving cohesion to the movement. With its emphasis on brotherhood and sisterhood in communities that were widely dispersed, central German Anabaptism challenged the hierarchies that structured familial life. The notion of being a brother or sister to all one's follower believers was not an automatic equalizer, but it did shape forms of association which allowed communities to accommodate a very broad range of relationships between men, women, and children with definitively anti-hierarchical ideas about relationships. Anabaptist

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<sup>47</sup> For further development of the "early/late" model, see Sr. Nicole Grochowina, "Women in Anabaptism," ch. 11 of this volume.

<sup>48</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 167–98.

<sup>49</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 456, 448–9; SAM, Urgichtbuch angefangen am Tage Margarethe 1534, fo. 161r; SHStAD, GA10024, Loc. 10328/1, fo. 165r.

Hans Peisker, for example, called his wife but also his daughter as ‘sister,’ and he spoke dismissively of traditional family ties’<sup>50</sup>.

However, there was also a strain of sexual radicalism associated with central German Anabaptism: the divine inspiration of the Dreamers, the communion of the *Blutsfreunde*, or the actions of a man like Hans Krug, an arsonist who also claimed a right to rape women.<sup>51</sup> As extreme as these practices seemed, however, the impulse sprang from the same place as the fraternal and sororal language of less radical groups, language which created the potential for forms of family and communal life that differed from patriarchal ideals. Precisely because the *Blutsfreunde* envisaged themselves as a fraternal community united in the body of Christ and because they imagined this in corporeal terms, it made possible notions such as sacramental sex. Anabaptists did not seek gender equality, but the levelling language of sisterhood and brotherhood provided the space for new gendered identities. Men, women, and children from scattered areas were drawn together in a form spiritual siblinghood, and this language of Christian fellowship shaped daily gender relations and constructed familial identities in ways which disrupted a world of Lutheran patriarchy.<sup>52</sup>

## Violence and Authority

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<sup>50</sup> Wappler, *Thüringen*, 399, 401–2; ThHStAW EGA Reg. N, No. 99, fo. 19v, 21r–23r; Hill, *Baptism*, 167.

<sup>51</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 188–93; Reinholdt, *Ehe und Sexualität*; Roper, “Sexual Utopianism”; Schubert, “Der Traum vom Tag.” For Hans Krug see ThStAM, GHA IV, No. 78, fo. 80r–81r.

<sup>52</sup> Hill, *Baptism*, 194–98.

Anabaptists in central Germany had a complex relationship with authority.<sup>53</sup> Some were arrested and interrogated, some executed, others exiled. However, the movement did not celebrate famous martyrs by singing songs and engaging in the shared practices of martyrological memorialization, so often a defining experience in the formation of Anabaptist identity elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> It may simply be that stories could not spread in print and by mouth so effectively in dispersed communities in central Germany. But there is also a more essential difference here, since the strategies to respond to Anabaptism differed from some harsher punishments enacted elsewhere, both through choice and necessity. The complicated jurisdictions within central Germany often allowed Anabaptists to evade punishment, whilst Philip Landgrave of Hesse was noted for his toleration of Anabaptists – not necessarily a toleration which extended to acceptance but meant exile rather than death.<sup>55</sup> Lutheran pastors such as Philip Melanchthon advocated harsh and uncompromising views in print – Melanchthon suggested death for those who would not recant – but in reality responses were rarely knee-jerk persecution. Reformers like Melanchthon, Raidt, the Eisenach superintendent Justus Menius, and the pastor in Niederdorla Sebastian Thiel debated with

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<sup>53</sup> On Anabaptist views on violence and resistance see James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (New edn., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2002).

<sup>54</sup> See Hill *Baptism*, 3–7, 66–67, 71 – 8; Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 91 –98; Yutzy Glebe, “Anabaptists in their Hearts,” 209–17.

<sup>55</sup> Ellen Yutzy Glebe, “Landgrave Philipp’s Dilemma: The Roots Of Tolerance And The Desire For Protestant Unity,” in Christopher Ocker, Michael Printy, Peter Starenko and Peter Wallace, eds., *Politics and Reformations: Histories and Reformations Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr.* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 293–312.

Anabaptists in disputes and interrogations, attempting to understand and hopefully dissuade radicals.<sup>56</sup>

However, if central German Anabaptists were not all martyrs nor were they violent revolutionaries. In the aftermath of the Peasants' War, lingering eschatological ideas shaped the movement, and the embers of revolt still glowed, as is evident with Hans Römer's plotted takeover of Erfurt. Flashes of violence occurred at other times, such as when Stoer and fellow arsonists roamed the countryside. Yet violence never defined Anabaptism in central Germany. Concerns about the relationship between faith and society, church and state have often been seen as crucial to Anabaptism and the 'left-wing' of the reformation generally.<sup>57</sup> But this concern did not dominate the Anabaptists of central Germany, and no clear pattern emerges on their views. In line with the rather scattered and dispersed movement here, a variety of views on authority prevailed, and there was no clear distinction between peaceful martyred Anabaptists and those who chose violence and revolution.

## Conclusions

Most scholarship on central German Anabaptism cites the case of the shepherd Hans Thon as the last sign of Anabaptism in central Germany, evidence of a movement which had little influence and coherence. But once we situate Thon, and men and women like him, against the backdrop of both the Lutheran Reformation and persistent Anabaptist activity in central Germany, their stories help shine a spotlight on what Anabaptism meant in this intellectual

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<sup>56</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 140–210; Wappler, *Stellung*, 227–30; ThHStAW EGA Reg. N, No. 1023, fo. 2r-5r.

<sup>57</sup> Ronald H. Bainton, "The Left Wing of the Reformation," *Journal of Religion* 41.2 (1941), 124–34.

and cultural landscape. The movement in central Germany developed in conversation with the impact of the Lutheran Reformation, and it was fundamental to the religious landscape of Saxony. It fed patterns of non-conformity over the *longue durée*, as people on the ground came to terms with the changes of the Lutheran Reformation. A study of central German Anabaptism provides a revealing picture of the lived experience of Anabaptists more broadly in the early modern world.

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