

Power, Politics, and the Theology of Menno Simons

by

Henry Suderman

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Religion

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Abstract

Sixteenth-century Anabaptism is often assumed to have been, and is frequently labelled, an apolitical movement in the secondary literature. Such an interpretive framework does not do justice to the thought or actions of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, and therefore, does not provide an adequate understanding of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. The purpose of this thesis is to challenge the “apolitical” labelling of Anabaptism, and provide an alternate interpretive framework for understanding sixteenth-century Anabaptist thought and actions.

Through the application of recent theory to two Anabaptist mechanisms of power, the ritual of Anabaptist baptism and the Anabaptist act of writing, evidence of their political interests, and their active political engagement become obvious. Such a theoretically reframed interpretive perspective makes better sense of sixteenth-century Anabaptist literature, theology, and actions. As a corollary benefit, such an interpretive perspective also provides a better solution to questions surrounding the severe persecution of sixteenth-century Anabaptists.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Egil Grislis for many years of thorough instruction and conscientious guidance. Thank you for the enjoyable seminars and the impact those seminars had in shaping my understanding of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. The time we spent chatting in the close confines of your study were always valuable and enjoyable, and will always be treasured.

I thank Dr. Dawne McCance for consistently leading thought provoking and challenging seminars. Thank you for generating and then nurturing my interest in theory. You have demonstrated excellence in teaching, producing a standard worth emulating.

I thank Dr. Johannes Wolfart for his willingness to be my advisor given the rather large commit of time and energy such a relationship involves. Thank you for always being forthright, constructive, and helpful in making suggestions and offering criticism. You have played a significant role in my academic development. The end result, are a student and a thesis that are stronger because of your generous and skilfully directed investment.

I thank Nat, Nicole, Tom, Jason, and of course Samantha for your valuable friendship, advice and encouragement. May each of you continue to enjoy the success that you are.

Finally, I thank Linda, Kristen, Jared, Daniel and Garrett for their understanding, patience and encouragement when it was most required. Thank you for permitting me the opportunity to follow a dream. And, thank you for continuing to believe in me, even when I had stopped believing in myself.

Dedication

To the memory of a loving mother
and father. Sadly missed, gratefully
remembered, not forgotten.

What you have given has left an
indelible mark for all to read.

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*To work is to undertake to think something other than what one has thought before.*¹

*This work of modifying one's own thought and that of others seems to me to be the intellectual's reason for being.*²

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Thesis Question, Statement, and Method

How, and under what conditions, can a movement that resisted political and religious authorities, focused its energies on establishing an alternate social order, and therefore, exercised power continue to bear an “apolitical” label in scholarship? By definition an “apolitical” label signifies an aversion to, apathy for, or disinterest in “politics” and “political affairs.” Through established usage an “apolitical” label has come to privilege Anabaptist spirituality. The designation “apolitical” for Anabaptism now boasts a long and well-established history. For example, Franklin Hamlin Littell not only argued that sixteenth-century Anabaptists were “apolitical,” but that they were the only group in the sixteenth century who can legitimately bear that label. He wrote: “The Anabaptists were the only people who *kept* their movement clear of political taint.”³ When applied to Anabaptism, the term “apolitical” is often used to privilege all that such a label is thought to imply. And, such usage has not always been independent of the interpreter's own values.

My thesis will address this question of an “apolitical” Anabaptism through the application of a body of theory to select Anabaptist literary works probing three themes:

¹ Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: (Interviews, 1966-84)*, trans. John Johnston, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 293.

² Foucault, *Foucault Live*, 303.

³ Franklin Hamlin Littell, “The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution of the True Church,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24 (Jan., 1950), 33.

power, resistance, and community.⁴ Recent theoretical work will be applied to two centrally important Anabaptist practices: baptism and the act of writing. Both practices functioned as important mechanisms of power during the sixteenth century. And, both mechanisms were appropriated by Anabaptists, becoming essential components in the function and formation of Anabaptist community and resistance: that is, sixteenth-century Anabaptist religion and politics.

I use the term “politics” throughout this project to indicate, as Christopher Friedrichs has defined it, a “system of interaction between groups of people [...]. [Politics] has to do with the efforts made by groups of people who have some common identity or some common interests and join together to use some form of pressure or persuasion in order to fulfill their wishes or achieve their aims.”⁵ Thus, in my definition of “politics,” activity is deemed to be political if such activity involves maintaining, changing, or restoring power relations in a society.⁶ Such a definition includes, but goes well beyond the typical “the way a country is governed” to include efforts that are not necessarily focused on the state itself, but on social institutions and communities.⁷ Expanding the definition of what constitutes the political is not merely an attempt at increasing its breadth in order for the term to be more inclusive. Rather, it is apparent that a narrow definition of what constitutes the political is unable to explain many aspects of

⁴ However, it is not my primary intent to articulate, establish a synthesis, or to argue for the “historical significance” of the theological, and/or political, views of Anabaptists. Nor, is it my objective in this project to arrive at an evaluative judgement of either their actions or thought.

⁵ Christopher Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe, in Early Modern Europe* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), xiv. This is not to suggest that Anabaptists developed, or sought to develop, a coherent political system. Rather, it is an indication that Anabaptists actively exercised power and worked toward the goal of access to political power.

⁶ Jill Vickers, *Reinventing Political Science: A Feminist Approach* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997), 16. However, as Vickers points out such a definition does not include “matters that intrinsically involve only personal relationships, such as the negotiation of household duties between individual partners.” *Reinventing Political Science*, 16.

⁷ Vickers, *Reinventing Political Science*, 16.

human interaction and power relations that can rightly and legitimately be labelled “politics.” One impoverishes the question of politics when it is presented solely or primarily in terms of legislation, constitution, or the state and state apparatus. Politics are always more complicated and more differentiated than a set of laws, or the established state apparatus.

As mechanisms of power demonstrating political engagement, the Anabaptist practice of baptism and act of writing played an important part in the intricate and elaborate negation of the discourse of the dominant power. The established sixteenth-century practices of baptism and writing each had a discourse of truth built around them, which was challenged, appropriated, adapted, and re-constructed by Anabaptists in acts of social, religious, and political resistance.⁸ By placing their own practice of baptism and acts of writing in the service of resistance, Anabaptists denied the widely proclaimed hegemony of the dominant religious and political powers. The appropriation and redeployment of these two important mechanisms of power and the discourse in which they were embedded, constituted serious attacks on both the authority and legitimacy of established church and government. Together, they constituted a concerted attack directed at established power centres on a more profound level, than heterodoxy by itself could ever present.⁹

⁸ I am using the phrase “acts of resistance” here in much the same manner as James C. Scott. He has defined acts of resistance as follows: “Any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims [...] made on that class by superordinate classes [...] or to advance its own claims [...] vis-à-vis those superordinate classes.” *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 290. The strength of Scott’s definition of resistance lies in the fact that it avoids defining resistance purely in reference to its methods and/or consequences.

⁹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 204. I do not here wish to dispute or disparage the significant motivational force religiously inspired belief can supply. However, I do not accept the thesis of Brad S. Gregory that “divergent belief” is an entirely adequate explanation, in and of itself, for the severe persecution Anabaptists faced during the

The question of power was itself an essential component of the social processes under investigation and was fundamental to Anabaptist politics. Anabaptist political engagement was a process centred on the interaction and interrelations in which the exercise of power took place. A political study of Anabaptism is therefore, necessarily concerned with structures and mechanisms of power, and the way in which they organize, structure, and dominate human life and consciousness.¹⁰

The basic purposes of this thesis are threefold: (1) To claim that sixteenth-century Anabaptists did in fact practice and were engaged in “politics;” (2) That such a claim is a substantial claim given the rather large literature assuming its opposite; (3) To defend and demonstrate my claim of political Anabaptism through the application of particular data to a certain interpretive operation.

Focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on the life and work of Menno Simons (1496-1561) as a case study,¹¹ I critically reassess the now widespread presentation of sixteenth-century Anabaptism as an “apolitical movement,” and draw attention to the way in which such a representation obscures important facets of Anabaptist thinking and actions. I have deliberately avoided choosing individual

sixteenth century. See, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 85, 346, and 350. Gregory's entrenched position closes off the discussion precluding further investigation into other possible contributing factors and other possible explanations for sixteenth-century persecution.

¹⁰ Harold D. Lasswell, and Abraham Kaplan. *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 75. See also, Foucault, *Foucault Live*, 187-191.

¹¹ I recognize that Menno Simons is often presented as a “second generation Anabaptist” from a historical point of view. Nevertheless, he was the same age as Michael Sattler and Melchior Hoffman, and became an Anabaptist within five years of the appearance of Anabaptism in the Netherlands. Irvin Buckwalter Horst, “Menno Simons: The New Man in Community,” in *Profiles of Radical Reformers: Biographical Sketches from Thomas Müntzer to Paracelsus*, ed. Hans Jürgen Goertz and Walter Klaassen (Kitchener; Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1982), 212. My choice of Menno Simons, as my paradigmatic example, is further justified by what Robert W. Scribner describes as the “active interchange between the Low Countries and Germany” during the sixteenth century. Robert W. Scribner, “Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print in the Early German Reformation,” in *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 23: Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 256.

Anabaptists such as Melchior Hoffman, Hans Hut or Balthasar Hubmaier, or a movement like Münsterite Anabaptism as prime targets of my investigation for two reasons. Firstly, these individuals clearly “expressed” “political interests” and perhaps for that reason have been cast as representatives of an earlier, unusual, or inferior Anabaptism that gave way to the later largely “apolitical” Anabaptism.¹² Secondly, Münsterite Anabaptism occurred only once, and then only existed for a very short period of time. Drawing on Münsterite Anabaptism as my paradigmatic example would allow my readers to question and possibly dismiss the plausibility of the extension of my argument to the larger movement. I have chosen what I think would be seen by my readers and critics as a broadly acceptable example of an “apolitical” Anabaptist for my study, in an effort to maximize the credibility of my argument.

I will argue in this thesis that Anabaptists did not in fact avoid political questions or political engagement, nor were they apathetic to various sixteenth-century forms and expressions of power, or innocent of social formation and their relation to the larger social body. Anabaptist politics were focused on the politically disadvantaged, on those who were on the margins of sixteenth-century society. Their political efforts were directed at the removal of injustice and the establishment of religious tolerance, from a perspective in which the world became turned upside down and inside out. The Anabaptist view of established church and society required that religious and political reform be initiated through the development of a new consciousness, which in turn produced important new social and ethical values. Anabaptist resistance to exploitation was empowered through newly found religious knowledge, which resisted central control and domination affected through enforced ideological and behavioural conformity.

¹² See for example, Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 200-201.

Anabaptists claimed, on a broader level as part of their political program, the pursuit of justice and moral principles substantially higher than those practiced or subscribed to, by either secular governments or established religious authorities.¹³

Modern historiography often reflects a primary sixteenth-century assumption: namely, that it makes a great deal of sense to dichotomize the world into sacred and profane, into spiritual and material spheres, thereby implying a clear boundary between religion and politics.¹⁴ In this project I challenge what has come to be the more or less taken-for-granted separation of “religion” and “politics” in the study of Anabaptism, arguing that such an interpretive posture lacks historical support. Thus, this project is offered as a corrective effort to such a representation and is, therefore, directed at established interpretive postures and methodologies. It is a corrective that attempts to re-establish and re-contextualize the “political” thinking and actions of Anabaptists as important primary forces within the movement during the sixteenth century. My study challenges the assumed “religion” and “politics” dichotomy inherent in an “apolitical” label, when it is applied to sixteenth-century Anabaptism, by proposing a theoretical reframing of Anabaptist history at both the behavioural and theoretical levels.

What has been lacking in scholarly discussions of Anabaptist “religion,” “politics,” and “power” is a theoretical model that could more adequately account for the

¹³ Menno frequently asserted that he and his followers, unlike the authorities, followed a moral code that demonstrated justice in every area of life. See for example, Menno Simons, “The New Birth” in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c.1496-1561*, trans. Leonard Verduin, ed. J.C. Wenger (Scottsdale; Kitchener: Herald Press, 1956), 99. Hereafter abbreviated *CW*.

¹⁴ See Natalie Zemon Davis’s discussion of what she calls “a central assumption” of sixteenth-century reformers, which she claims has been “inherited” by modern historians. She argues that “the belief that proper or “true” Christianity implies clear boundaries between sacred and profane, between spiritual and material, between heaven and earth” has found its way into the thinking of modern historians. Barbara B. Diefendorf, and Carla Hesse. *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800): Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 20.

political character of Anabaptist theology and actions.¹⁵ That is, a model that can provide a better account for the specific forms that Anabaptist resistance and exercise of power took, without reducing such an analysis to a discussion of theological differences. It is often thought that heterodox sixteenth-century Anabaptist theological positions and hermeneutical approaches are wholly adequate in and of themselves for understanding Anabaptist actions and thought. And, such differences are frequently advanced as being the reason for their persecution. That is, it is commonly assumed that theological differences alone formed the basis for the justification of their persecution.¹⁶

This project will propose a critical reinterpretation of a crucial formative phase of Anabaptist history, which will, as a corollary benefit, provide a better explanation for the

¹⁵ Benjamin W. Redekop has aptly stated: "Any consideration of power is bound to present problems of conceptual clarity." "Power and Religion in the Western Intellectual Tradition", in *Power Authority and the Anabaptist Tradition*, eds. Benjamin W. Redekop, and Calvin W. Redekop (Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1. Yet, he also writes: "It will not do to simply follow a particular theory of power; rather, what is needed is empirical, interdisciplinary analysis and reflection on the issue", "Power and Religion in the Western Intellectual Tradition," viii. Gregory also holds out little hope for new theoretical models aiding our understanding of martyrdom. He suggests: "No social scientific or cultural theory undergirded by a tacit atheism, the historical imagination of which is restricted to people competing for influence, striving for power, resisting the exercise of power, "constructing" themselves, "reinventing" themselves, manipulating symbols, and the like, can explain martyrdom." *Salvation at Stake*, 350. He suggests that theoretical tools "undergirded by a tacit atheism" are not only unnecessary, but are ultimately ineffective and distortive. The only viable option he offers to his reader in their place, that can act as an aid in understanding martyrdom, is that of "taking religion seriously, on the terms of people who were willing to die for their convictions. When we do, the intelligibility of martyrdom hits us like a hammer." *Salvation at Stake*, 350. Gregory assumes that the analysis of martyrdom, like any facet of history, can be undertaken from something like a "pure place," "without recasting or judging the convictions, attitudes, or actions of the protagonists through any theories or values that distort them." *Salvation at Stake*, 15. His own work is presumed to be "theory free" and therefore without "distortion" by virtue of his method, which he argues, allows the protagonists to "speak for themselves." Unlike Redekop and Gregory, I would argue that without a better theoretical model, we continue our "analysis" and "reflection on the issue" within the more or less closed loop of established methods and theories of investigation. Therefore, a better theoretical model is primary to the ongoing investigative process, and a necessary first step toward the goal of conceptual clarity.

¹⁶ The assessment of Hermina Joldersma and Louis Grijp that Anabaptists were severely persecuted for their "beliefs" valuable as it might be, does not tell the whole story. It was often Anabaptist actions, their behaviour, which incited violent persecution. "*Elisabeth's Manly Courage: Testimonials and Songs of Martyred Anabaptist Women in the Low Countries*, trans., and ed., Hermina Joldersma, and Louis Grijp (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 12.

severe persecution Anabaptists faced during the sixteenth century.¹⁷ My examination of sixteenth-century Anabaptist political thought and action will set out a framework that is centred on an analysis of Anabaptists texts as the product of the marginalized.

Employing Michel Foucault's work on "power" for my conceptual framework,¹⁸ and James C. Scott's work on domination and resistance for my presentation and understanding of the political and resistance, I argue that, the coercive subordination of Anabaptists by the dominant power, in keeping with the dominant value system supporting that power, did not preclude Anabaptists from the exercise of political power.

For, when power is constructed as a matrix of force relations without an outside, regardless of how unequal or strictly hierarchical the force relations are at a given time, within a given society,¹⁹ then, there are no relations of power, that is, there is no exercise of power that is without resistances.²⁰ Resistances to power are themselves the exercise of power, and are always formed at the very point at which power is exercised. Through a

¹⁷ C. Arnold Snyder has formulated the problem I wish to address in this way. "If the Anabaptists of Zollikon were committed to non-resistance from the start, why did Zürich seem to consider them a military and political threat, and react accordingly?" "Zollikon Anabaptism and the Sword," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (69, 1995), 205. Sigrun Haude, following the interpretive position already established by Luther in the sixteenth century states: "One of the reasons for the political leaders' fierce response, therefore, was the fear of social and political chaos." "Anabaptism," in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 249.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault has stated that he was not interested in developing or presenting a "theory of power," declaring that his interests were centred on an "analytics of power." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed., Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 198. However, his aversion to using the word "theory" in relation to power, and as an accurate description of his work on power, reflects his aversion to what he describes as "the role of theory today," which is, he claims, an effort "to formulate the global systematic theory which holds everything in place", *Power/Knowledge*, 145. His analytics of power attempts to "analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic knowledge". *Power/Knowledge*, 145. In employing Foucault's model for power, the challenge for the academic becomes establishing a "grid of analysis which makes possible an analytics of relations of power", without constructing a holistic and systematic set of principles. *Power/Knowledge*, 198.

¹⁹ Herbert L. Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 186.

²⁰ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 142.

study of Anabaptist resistances to the exercise of coercive power, as the starting point of an analysis of power, mechanisms of Anabaptist power are exposed.²¹

Therefore, any project aimed at being in any way an adequate discussion of Anabaptist “power and politics” must take into account Anabaptist mechanisms of resistance to power as an important part of its methodological approach. The examination of Anabaptist mechanisms of resistances to the exercise of power moves the discussion away from an analysis of asking why certain people want to dominate, what it is that they seek to accomplish, and what is their overall strategy, to an investigation of what Michel Foucault describes as the analysis of “how things work at the level of on-going subjugation”.²² Working from the bottom up reveals how mechanisms of power, and resistances to power, are politically useful.²³ Like the exercise of power by the dominant, Anabaptist resistances to exercises of power were always multiple. And, Anabaptist resistances to power remained inter-dependent at all times on the mechanisms of power they created.²⁴

1.1 Theoretical Orientation and Conceptual Framework

It is now well recognized in the academy that no study of social or religious phenomena is undertaken from a “pure place,” where investigative objectivity, and the search for “the truth” are unmediated. That is, there are no “facts” where “fact” is understood as that which is generated, and there is no “data” where “data” is understood

²¹ Barry Smart, “The Politics of Truth and the Problem of Hegemony,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1986), 170.

²² Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 97.

²³ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 100.

²⁴ Foucault suggests: “Apparatuses of power are linked in a constitutive interdependence.” Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 239.

as that which is given and must be processed in order to be meaningful, apart from the interpretive structures that construct a place for them in a coherent interpretive whole.²⁵ The present project is no exception. Nasr M. Arif has effectively argued that all social research is mediated, such that the phenomenon under investigation “is approached and their truths investigated through the mediation of conceptual frameworks, or theoretical structures, by use of specific methodological tools.”²⁶ The investigation of historical matter is always mediated through the employment of theories and methods that stand firmly between the researcher and the researched. As means for the investigation of objects, theory and method do not occupy or construct a neutral investigative position, or objective conceptual framework. Rather, as means, they function within the investigative and interpretive process as factors determining, shaping, and establishing their own perceptions.

Together, theory and method act as the determinative investigative tool through which the phenomenon they are seeking to explain is analyzed, classified and labelled. This is not to say that this activity is context free, ahistorical, or objective description. In the interpretive process, regardless of the sincerity of the investigator, the object under investigation is inevitably compromised. Phenomena under investigation are always distorted, and the subject is reformulated through the investigative process. As Arif states: “Nothing appears except that which appears through the means, within the structures of theoretical frameworks, such as concepts, hypotheses, and notions.”²⁷ Any and every study is based upon certain postulates, irrespective of whether they are or are

²⁵ Thomas W. Heilke, “Theological and Secular Meta-Narratives of Politics: Anabaptist Origins Revisited (Again),” *Modern Theology* 13, issue 2 (April 1997), 233.

²⁶ Nasr M. Arif. *The Reenchantment of Political Science: An Epistemological Approach to the Theories of Comparative Politics* (Lanham; New York; Oxford: University Press of America, 2001), ix.

²⁷ Arif, *Reenchantment of Political Science*, ix.

not openly apparent, consciously engaged, or subliminally active. Again, Arif has observed: “Theory is a production and reflection of a certain scientific concept, and that determines its nature and gives it legitimacy and acceptance. Theory develops in the framework of a particular paradigm and emerges with a method that may be synonymous with it.”²⁸ Method does not develop independent of theory, nor does it end at the boundaries of description. Method enters the area of prescription through the emphasis it places, the preferences it chooses, and all that it displaces.

Within the academy—that is, within certain generally accepted parameters of the academy—this much is generally agreed to and accepted. What is not readily welcomed, or as quickly agreed upon, is the ongoing need for unrelenting theory and methodology testing to accompany the construction of all theories and methodologies. Arif reminds us that in order to maintain truly useful theories and methods, “researchers must continuously analyze, criticize, deconstruct, and synthesize in order to avoid falling into the trap of treating a [...] theory in an ideological manner.”²⁹

The need to rethink and re-evaluate taken-for-granted approaches and virtually unquestioned interpretive postures and conclusions concerning Anabaptist history, their exercise of power, and their relation to political activity is long overdue. In this project, the deliberate choice of a particular theory of power is intended to function as an analytical tool for the purpose of drawing out, and analyzing specific mechanisms of power employed positively by Anabaptists to build resistances. Anabaptist resistances to

²⁸ Arif, *Reenchantment of Political Science*, 1.

²⁹ Arif, *Reenchantment of Political Science*, x.

the exercise of power were multiple, just as the exercise of power was multiple, and these resistances were always formed at the very point where power was exercised.³⁰

The broader purpose of this thesis, as stated earlier, is to offer a theoretical reframing of the existing body of secondary literature as a means of stimulating further analysis regarding the Anabaptist exercise of power as religious and political resistance. A reformulated and reframed theoretical perspective opens up new possibilities for understanding Anabaptist behaviour, the relation of Anabaptist theology and politics, and Anabaptist discourses on power. Furthermore, a theoretically reframed understanding of the Anabaptist exercise of power will enable an examination of specific mechanisms of Anabaptist political engagement without closing off discussion on the complexity of *Gemeinde*. It will provide a theoretical basis for understanding the political and social actions Anabaptists took with their attendant socio-political implications, without reducing the discussion to an examination of theological differences.

A theoretical reformulation of Anabaptist history casts Anabaptist understandings of *Gemeinde* as political engagement in the process of the construction of a new social body. Power, its strategies and its mechanisms can be, and are here formulated in terms of their positive effects.³¹ If power's only function were to repress it would be a fragile thing.³² Power can and does produce a discourse of truth, and only functions within a discourse of truth,³³ remaining dependent at all times on that discourse for its

³⁰ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 145.

³¹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 59.

³² Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 59.

³³ My use of the term "truth" for this project is not epistemologically or ontologically grounded. My interest in "truth" lies quite simply in displaying power's employment of "truth" for the purpose of privileging certain discourses while disqualifying others, thereby firmly establishing a particular interpretive method and framework as normative for seeing the world.

legitimation.³⁴ The construction of the Anabaptist social body was dependent on the circulation and functioning of a discourse of truth that was consolidated, established, implemented, and propagated through manifold relations of power.³⁵

The Anabaptist exercise of power was an action directed against the actions of established religious, political, social and moral powers, and their enforced and coerced construction of a specific subjectivity.³⁶ Menno's ardent advocacy of the individual's right of control over her or his spiritual life in the work of salvation, and the interpretation and application of the "truth" of the scriptures, was a political, not an "apolitical" struggle toward a new subjectivity.³⁷ Anabaptist resistances were directed at a coerced and enforced subjectivity, were formed at the very locus of the exercise of dominant power, and took aim at the dominant discourse of truth used to support and justify the exercise of coercive power.³⁸ The Anabaptist exercise of power sought separation from the relationship of violence in which it was caught, and aimed to minimize or alter the established relations of coercion through the construction of a new subjectivity by means of a new social body. By first becoming and then remaining individuals through ritualized acts of resistance, Anabaptists maintained and remained what the dominant power sought to efface. As individuals, they continued to exercise the very powers the dominant power denied.

When we consider "small" acts of resistance such as the ritual practice of baptism and/or act of writing they may appear to be "insignificant" compared with the weightier

³⁴ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 93.

³⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 93.

³⁶ Herbert L. Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 213.

³⁷ Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault*, 213.

³⁸ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 93.

matters of “revolution.” However, they are none the less the elementary building blocks, and in that way, constitute the essential foundation of larger organized political action.³⁹ Without these so-called “small acts of resistance,” larger and institutionalized political actions simply could not exist.

³⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 201.

Chapter Two: The Problem of “Apolitical Anabaptism”

2.0 Brief Excursus on *Gemeinde*

This present project comes out of a longstanding interest in the emphasis and understanding sixteenth-century Anabaptists invested in the concept of *Gemeinde*,¹ and the way in which that emphasis has been interpreted and represented in scholarship. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that *Gemeinde*-talk during the sixteenth century was politics, sixteenth-century style. As a readily available discursive concept, *Gemeinde*, was not imbued with political content during the sixteenth century, it was politics. That is, *Gemeinde* was already and inherently political during the sixteenth century.² Therefore, because sixteenth-century Anabaptists actively engaged in *Gemeinde*-talk, they were actively engaged in sixteenth-century politics.

The work of Peter Blickle,³ Johannes C. Wolfart,⁴ Heinz Schilling,⁵ Tom Scott,⁶ Robert W. Scribner,⁷ R. Po-chia Hsia,⁸ and others directed at sixteenth-century

¹The words Menno used are: *Gemeynte*, *Gemeente*, *de gemeenten*, and *de gemeenschap*.

²I am indebted to Johannes C. Wolfart for this observation. June 5, 2006.

³For example, Peter Blickle, “Communal Reformation and Peasant Piety: The Peasant Reformation and Its Late Medieval Origins,” *Central European History* 10 (1987), 216-28; and “Kommunalismus, Parlamentarismus, Republikanismus,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 242 (1986), 529-545.

⁴For example, Johannes C. Wolfart, *Religion, Government and Political Culture in Early Modern Germany: Lindau, 1520-1628* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave), 2002. Wolfart suggests: “The most significant result of religious reform and of the establishment of a city church, therefore, was that it gave new life to the (parish) commune, just as the fortunes of the (guild) commune appeared to be on the wane.” *Religion, Government and Political Culture*, 63.

⁵For example, Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1992); and “The Reformation and the Rise of the Early Modern State,” in *Luther and the Modern State in Germany*, ed. James D. Tracy (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Bros., 1986).

⁶For example, Tom Scott, “Community and Conflict in Early Modern Germany,” *European History Quarterly* 16 (1986), 209-217.

⁷For example, Robert W. Scribner, “Communalism: Universal Category or Ideological Construct? A Debate in the Historiography of Early Modern Germany and Switzerland,” *The Historical Journal* 37 (1994), 199-207.

understandings and usage of *Gemeinde*, does not present a single, or simple, understanding of *Gemeinde*, (commune, communal, parish, congregation, community, parliament, political body, fellowship).⁹ Their work demonstrates that there was not one, but many discourses on *Gemeinde* in the sixteenth century. Because the concept of *Gemeinde* did not have a more-or-less fixed or invariable meaning assigned to it in the sixteenth century, it was easily appropriated for use by both secular and religious authorities of various types, and was employed for diverse purposes.¹⁰ The variable content with which *Gemeinde* was invested came through definition and redefinition as a process of struggle.¹¹ Exactly what meaning *Gemeinde* was invested with was dependent on usage, and often became an important political matter. Though representations and understandings of *Gemeinde* ranged widely,¹² sixteenth-century usage and understandings of *Gemeinde* tended toward the fusion of the “bodies politic and religious.”¹³ Hsia reminds us: “As a conceptual species, *Gemeinde* subsumes the subspecies of *Stadtgemeinde*, *Dorfgemeinde*, and *Kirchengemeinde*.”¹⁴ *Gemeinde* came to be used, and was therein frequently understood to be, diametrically opposed to

⁸ For example, R. Po-chia Hsia, “The Myth of the Commune: Recent Historiography on City and Reformation in Germany,” *Central European History* 20 (1987), 203-215.

⁹ See Wolfart, *Religion, Government and Political Culture*, 69, 73, 80, 159, and 112. See also Steinar Imsen and Günter Vogler, “Communal Autonomy and Peasant Resistance in Northern and Central Europe,” in *Resistance, Representation, and Community*, ed. Peter Blickle (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-43.

¹⁰ Wolfart, *Religion, Government and Political Culture*, 69, 73, 80. See also, Scribner, “Communalism: Universal Category or Ideological Construct?,” 206.

¹¹ Scribner, “Communalism: Universal Category or Ideological Construct?,” 206.

¹² Scribner has described the “communal thesis” of Peter Blickle as “One of the most challenging historical debates in early modern German history.” “Communalism: Universal Category or Ideological Construct?,” 199. For Blickle’s construction of *Gemeinde* as “communal” see “Kommunalismus, Parlamentarismus, Republikanismus,” 529-545.

¹³ Hsia, “The Myth of the Commune,” 204. Thomas A. Brady has argued that though the “dominant tendencies around 1500 were to distinguish governmental functions [...] the almost fifty prince-bishoprics [...] united spiritual office with temporal jurisdiction [...] and remained one of the Empire’s great peculiarities. The fusion of spiritual and temporal authority had important implications for both offices.” *The Politics of the Reformation in Germany: Jacob Sturm (1489-1553) of Strasbourg* (Atlantic Highland, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 22.

¹⁴ Hsia, “Myth of the Commune,” 211.

Obrigkeit and *Herrschaft*.¹⁵ Wolfart points out that on occasion *Gemein nutz* became an important principle for legitimizing political action,¹⁶ and was at times invoked as an important principle for regulating commercial activity.¹⁷

Though Robert Scribner rejects the thesis of Peter Blickle that “communalism” provides an overarching model for German history, he does agree with Blickle that *Gemeinde* was a communal idea that could be, and often was, quickly “mobilized for social and political change when inspired by religious fervour.”¹⁸ The concept of *Gemeinde*, though diversely used, frequently inspired loyalties, transmitted traditional political culture, and became an expression of living constitutional forms.¹⁹ The conceptual use made of *Gemeinde*, and the evident diversity among sixteenth-century discourses on *Gemeinde*, often resulted in these discourses coming into conflict with each other, playing a significant role in the religious and political power struggles of that period.

Though *Gemeinde* was not the conceptual invention of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, it was one that they appropriated, adapted and employed effectively toward their desired ends.

2.1 Critical Literature Review

Scholarly approaches to Anabaptist writings and actions have generally speaking argued for, and/or assumed, one of two closely related interpretive postures.

¹⁵ Hsia, “Myth of the Commune,” 211.

¹⁶ Wolfart, *Religion, Government and Political Culture*, 69.

¹⁷ Wolfart, *Religion, Government and Political Culture*, 73, and 188 (note 24).

¹⁸ Scribner, “Communalism: Universal Category or Ideological Construct?,” 205.

¹⁹ Hsia, “Myth of the Commune,” 215.

The first widespread interpretive assumption posits that because Anabaptists were religiously motivated persons, they held limited social or political interests.²⁰ Such an interpretive perspective is clearly evident in the work of W. J. Kühler. Kühler has stated:

“The Anabaptists took up arms not because of a desire for a just society, for riches or power, or any other social motive. [...] The object of all Anabaptists, peaceful or revolutionary, was a religious one, the Kingdom of God. [...] No one can find his way through the maze of their confused and over-excited spiritual life unless he is able to distinguish the real motive of their actions from all the incidental ones.”²¹

Writing specifically about Menno Simons, Kühler states: “Menno was occupied exclusively with spiritual and religious concerns. Never did he longingly anticipate a total transformation of social life. [...] [N]either the one [Menno] nor the other [Melchior Hoffman] had the least concern with social relationships”.²² Like Kühler, Claus-Peter Clasen has stated that Anabaptists were religiously motivated persons with severely limited social aspirations, and political concerns. Clasen has argued that Anabaptists were “intent only on following the teachings of Jesus in their own way,”²³ being “too concerned with saving their souls to waste much time worrying about their families.”²⁴ Clasen further asserts: “Anabaptists did not care who held power or whether that power

²⁰ G. R. Evans for example argues that Anabaptists were “mostly nothing like the threat the authorities thought. Their talk of the overthrow of society was commonly apocalyptic and other-worldly.” *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211. Claus-Peter Clasen has stated: “From its beginnings in January 1525 until 1618, indeed, Anabaptism was primarily a religious movement [...]. Anabaptists only condemned the existing political institutions as unchristian and withdrew from the world as much as possible.” *Anabaptism; a Social History, 1525-1618: Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 425.

²¹ W. J. Kühler, “Anabaptism in the Netherlands,” in *Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer*, ed. James M. Stayer, and Werner O. Packull (Dubuque, Iowa; Toronto : Kendall/Hunt Pub Co, 1980), 96.

²² Kühler, “Anabaptism in the Netherlands,” 103.

²³ Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History*, 77. Clasen insists that there is little evidence Anabaptists envisioned anything beyond a spiritual reformation, and that they became intent on practicing a strict legalism after becoming disillusioned and embittered from persecution.

²⁴ Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History*, 412.

was justly or unjustly wielded.”²⁵ Yet, he has also recognized and asserted that “The Anabaptists were not purely religious thinkers like the fourteenth-century mystics; they envisaged a new form of society. Nor were they isolated intellectuals like the humanist scholars. On the contrary, they were a movement of thousands of ordinary peasants and craftsmen.”²⁶ Clasen has furthered confused his interpretation of Anabaptism by declaring that his interest in Anabaptism is centred on “whether during the sixteenth-century, or even today, the political doctrines of the Anabaptists could be considered a workable basis for the functioning of society.”²⁷ He concludes that Anabaptist “political doctrines, in condemning all governmental office, all courts of law, and all use of force as unchristian, went far beyond any of the specifically revolutionary programs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They threatened to destroy sixteenth-century society altogether.”²⁸

The second widespread interpretive assumption posits that because sixteenth-century Anabaptists were, or became “separatists” who simply wanted to disengage with the world, they can be said to have held severely limited political interests.²⁹ Stayer has argued that the Anabaptist desire for separation from the world *developed*, and became established, only after the “more radical, separatist apoliticism [...] won out following his [Menno’s] death.”³⁰ Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop have suggested that

²⁵ Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History*, 154.

²⁶ Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History*, xi.

²⁷ Clasen, *Anabaptism A Social History*, xviii.

²⁸ Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*, 208. Clasen echoes the fears of Philip Melanchton, which appear to have been centred on his fear that the acceptance of Anabaptism would undermine society by abolishing the magistracy, the oath, and private property.

²⁹ See Stephen Boyd, “Anabaptism and Social Radicalism in Strasbourg, 1528-1532: Pilgram Marpeck on Christian Social Responsibility,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 63 (1989), 58-76.

³⁰ James M. Stayer, *Anabaptism and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1972), 321. Stayer makes this point even more forcibly in “Anabaptists and the Sword Revisited: The Trend from Radicalism

Anabaptists chose to ignore “the problematic relationship between power and faith,” and chose to direct their attention “toward survival, and a quietistic retreat from the world.”³¹ Such an interpretive perspective does not typically present Anabaptist separation as a significantly political posture, but rather as political disinterest resulting from their disappointment or persecution.³²

Both of the above interpretive perspectives presume to investigate and make substantial pronouncements regarding Anabaptist intentionality, deriving their interpretive conclusions from such assumed intentionality. Both interpretive positions typically privilege the theological interests of Anabaptists as indicative of their primary interests and concerns, diminishing any political interests they may have held. The political effects, consequences and actions of sixteenth-century Anabaptists are then discounted or even dismissed. Such scholarship typically proceeds by way of an investigation of Anabaptist theological viewpoints as the interpretive key to understanding their behaviour. Anabaptist theology is generally thought to inform and direct Anabaptist action. As a result, neither interpretive perspective focuses its analytical investigative efforts on an examination of the mechanisms through which Anabaptists exercised power, and through which Anabaptists were politically engaged during the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, it is through just such an analysis of Anabaptist mechanisms of power that the level and locus of their political engagement is elucidated.

to Apoliticism”, in *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 111-124, 112-113.

³¹ Redekop and Redekop, (eds.), *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, xii. Such an interpretive perspective is also clearly reflected in the work of John D. Derksen, *From Radicals to Survivors: Strasbourg's Religious Nonconformists Over Two Generations 1525-1570* (The Netherlands: Hes & de Graaf Pub.), 2002.

³² Sigrun Haude writes: “Early [Anabaptist] visions of reform involved the entire society, yet persecution left them no alternative but to live a sectarian existence.” “Anabaptism,” 242.

2.2 Apoliticism and the Representation of Anabaptism

Through my construction of a typology of scholarly interpretations of sixteenth-century Anabaptism in the following sections, which can then act as a diagnostic tool, it becomes evident that many of the works on Anabaptism fail to acknowledge sixteenth-century Anabaptism as political. In fact, my analysis indicates that the assumption that sixteenth-century Anabaptism was “apolitical” has become the established norm. The scholarly representation of Anabaptism as a “powerless apolitical movement” cuts across the now well-established interpretive boundaries of “evangelical,”³³ “profane,”³⁴ and “social history”³⁵ perspectives.³⁶ Walter Klaassen has summarized the matter quite bluntly. He has stated: “Practically all of the secondary literature on the subject [Anabaptism] assumes or states that the movement was apolitical.”³⁷

Hans Jürgen Goertz describes what has come to be a general attitude in scholarship toward sixteenth-century Anabaptists. He wrote: “The Anabaptists have been accused of irresponsibly wishing to leave the political sphere to itself. This charge is partially true [...] For them, the political sphere was not a stretch of neutral ground between the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light; it was the Kingdom of

³³ I use the term “evangelical” in this context to refer to those scholars who, either directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, follow or reflect, the interpretive perspective developed by scholars such as John C. Wenger, Harold S. Bender, and John Howard Yoder. Stayer has labelled this perspective “The North American Mennonite Historiography,” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 13.

³⁴ This label is based on Stayer’s self-referential description. He has called himself “a profane historian with a liberal perspective,” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 6.

³⁵ This label includes a broad range of scholarship. Claus Peter Clasen and Hans Jürgen Goertz are two prominent examples. However, Goertz attempts to bring together what he calls the “evangelical” and “historical” claims to knowledge in his work. *The Anabaptists*, 2. In so doing he presents Anabaptism as a religiously motivated and politically aware movement, without discussing the significant levels at which, or the mechanisms through which, Anabaptists were politically engaged.

³⁶ Thomas Heilke has argued that not only are these boundaries well-established, but that “neither group has really heard the other in certain key areas.” *Re-enchantment of Political Science: Christian Scholars Engage Their Discipline*, eds. Thomas W. Heilke, and Ashley Woodiwiss (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001), 42.

³⁷ Walter Klaassen, *Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 3rd ed., 2001), 52.

Darkness itself and had to be left well alone.”³⁸ Goertz does advocate interpreting Anabaptism in light of sixteenth-century ecclesiastical and social history, but without advancing the interpretation to the point at which the mechanisms of Anabaptist political engagement are examined. Yet, he rightly notes that Anabaptists tended to “weave their political and social experience into their theological declarations to the extent that they become inseparable.”³⁹ Through an analysis of the work of Goertz, it becomes evident that in his interpretation of Anabaptism, the thinking and actions of sixteenth-century Anabaptists demonstrate a decidedly and unapologetically “apolitical” attitude that was cultivated and enforced through separation from the political sphere. Yet, Sigrun Haude has rightly asserted: “Religious criticism was seldom independent of social, economic and political protest. [...] In a society where religious, political, economic and social concerns were tightly interwoven, often inseparable, it seems natural that Anabaptist criticism would reflect a similarly integrated spectrum of concerns.”⁴⁰ However, Haude then goes on to apply an “apolitical” label to Swiss Brethren Anabaptists, suggesting that this group “remained apolitical” because of their separatist nature as is evident in their refusal “to serve in civic offices, swear oaths and take up arms to defend the country.”⁴¹

James M. Stayer is a prominent historian, he is without confessional allegiances, and yet like confessional historians he has unequivocally labelled the Anabaptist movement an “apolitical movement.”⁴² His willingness to do so is a further clear indication that scholarship’s use of an “apolitical” label for sixteenth-century Anabaptism

³⁸ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 99-100.

³⁹ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 134.

⁴⁰ Haude, “Anabaptism,” 242.

⁴¹ Haude, “Anabaptism,” 243.

⁴² Stayer has written: “The mistake of those who would regard early Anabaptism as fundamentally violent is to miss the basic apoliticism of the movement.” And, he concludes: “The essential qualities of the early Anabaptist teaching on the Sword were apoliticism and radicalism.” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 337.

can accurately be described as being widespread, cutting across established interpretive boundaries. Stayer defines his use of the term “apolitical” as the tendency to “deny that politics, the gamesmanship of coercion, can ever achieve ethical goals.”⁴³ In describing Anabaptism, Stayer suggests: “The apolitical moderates affirm that force is necessary to the life of society but say that it is irrelevant to the achievement of the highest values.”⁴⁴ Stayer’s definition of “apolitical,” correlates, perhaps even equates, apoliticism with pacifism.⁴⁵ Yet, while pacifism may accurately describe an important component in the thinking of many sixteenth-century Anabaptists, making it synonymous with “apoliticism” obscures the centrally important supporting and defining role that both “power” and “politics” *continued* to play in Anabaptist theology and actions throughout their increasing separation from the larger social body. That is, to label Anabaptists like Menno “apolitical,”⁴⁶ even if the label is intended to be provisional or heuristic, such a usage is to ignore, in fact deny, the nature of their ongoing political engagement.

Thus, an “apolitical” label, used expressly by Stayer and assumed by Goertz, misses the level at which, and the mechanisms through which, Anabaptists like Menno

⁴³ Stayer, *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 3

⁴⁴ Stayer, *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 3

⁴⁵ Stayer acknowledges the cogent objection of Rodney Sawatzky to his use of the term “apolitical” to describe Anabaptist non-resistance. Stayer acknowledges: “*Anabaptists and the Sword* fudged the difference” between “the perspectives of two generations of North American Mennonites [...] when it declared both apoliticism and radicalism to be typical of sixteenth-century Anabaptism.” “Anabaptism and the Sword Revisited,” 112. What Stayer fails to acknowledge, even after this admission, is the basic inappropriateness of using the term “apolitical” to describe sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The term “apoliticism” glosses over the persisting and ongoing political nature and activity of Anabaptists throughout the sixteenth century, regardless of whether that political activity was expressed as “radicalism,” or “separation.” Therefore, Stayer has “clarified and reframed” his position without resolving the problem inherent in applying the term “apoliticism” to Anabaptism. He stated: “Instead of seeking a static resolution of the tension between radicalism and apoliticism, I ought to have recognized that there was a dynamic tendency from radicalism to apoliticism.” “Anabaptism and the Sword Revisited,” 112-113. For Rodney J. Sawatzky’s review, see *Anabaptists and the Sword, Mennonite*, 29 (Oct. 1974).

⁴⁶ Stayer wrote: “Menno’s statement of 1535 that “it is not permitted to Christians to fight with the Sword” put him firmly on the *apolitical* [my emphasis] side of the Melchiorite schism then developing.” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 311.

were politically engaged. It glosses over, neglects, and in some cases even dismisses the political aspirations, thinking, and actions of sixteenth-century Anabaptists. Anabaptist separatism and pacifism simply cannot be conclusive indicators of disinterest in the organization and maintenance of society.⁴⁷ Menno recognized at least some of the important social and political implications of Anabaptist separation and declared: “We do not condemn them by our separation, as they complain, but we teach and admonish them by word and deed with all diligence and fidelity to cease from evil, to do that which is good.”⁴⁸ That the political aspirations and actions of Anabaptists like Menno were expressed as separatism and pacifism does not then make sixteenth-century Anabaptists disinterested or apathetic political dissenters.⁴⁹

Gewalt,⁵⁰ with all its connotations of coercive force and domination, which presumed to determine important facets of sixteenth-century life and society, was practically and theoretically resisted by Anabaptists, where it presumed to reach to and into their very lives and bodies.⁵¹ They resisted the exercise of coercive power at the very point where it sought to insert itself into their actions, consciences, attitudes, discourses, and everyday lives. Menno could then insist: “And we conclude in this matter, [baptism] as in all matters of conscience, [...] that we must not and may not have our eye on lords

⁴⁷ Catherine Bell has stated that under certain conditions “the only real alternative to negotiated compliance is either total resistance or asocial self-exclusion.” *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 215.

⁴⁸ *CW*, “Cross of the Saints,” 611.

⁴⁹ Andrew Pettegree, for example, has argued that “toleration was a weapon, and in the sixteenth century it could be used as ruthlessly and cynically as persecution and intolerance to further particular political ends.” “The Politics of Toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572-1620,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, eds. Ole Peter Grell, and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183.

⁵⁰ Menno uses the word “kracht.”

⁵¹ For example, *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 118, 119, 129, 202; *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 233, 285; and *CW*, “Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing,” 314, 317, and 318.

and princes".⁵² Anabaptists were among those most immediately caught up in the machinery of coercion during the sixteenth century, and therefore, were able to expose those mechanisms for what they effectively were.

Anabaptist resistance to political and religious coercion was often centred on the implicit disavowal of established public and symbolic goals.⁵³ Menno, like so many Anabaptists, placed a clear limit on all political power, making obedience to all such power conditional at all times. His theological statements include the clear and plain imposition of jurisdictional boundaries on the dominant power.⁵⁴ Menno legitimized passive resistance, justifying such disobedience to secular authorities through theological argument, insisting that Anabaptists were constrained to act in accordance with their primary allegiance to the Word of God.⁵⁵ In so doing, he placed Anabaptists outside the jurisdictional powers of established sixteenth-century secular and religious coercive power and authority. Menno's declaration of freedom from compulsion in all religious matters was coupled with strategies, that is, with mechanisms that sought to establish power and authority positively. It is misleading at best to label such a profound and fundamentally political posture, "apolitical."

Anabaptist actions and writings are rarely cast as mechanisms of power, and seldom are they examined for their effects and the nature of their relation to the larger society.⁵⁶ Much of the emphasis in scholarship has been focused on what Anabaptists *did*

⁵² *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129.

⁵³ See, Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 33.

⁵⁴ See for example, *CW*, "The New Birth," 91; and *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 115, 119, 129, 199, 204; *CW*, "Why I do not Cease Teaching and Preaching," 304, 309; and *CW*, "A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates," 550 and 629.

⁵⁵ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129, 211, 219, and 226.

⁵⁶ Foucault observed some time ago that in general, mechanisms of power have not been studied much in history, *Power/Knowledge*, 51. This interpretive condition has not changed substantially in the study of sixteenth-century Anabaptism.

not do. That is, the emphasis in scholarship has been placed on data that indicates they did not tend to participate in civil duties, defence of country, armed conflict, etc. This historical data is then taken as indicative of their limited social and political goals and aspirations, and is ultimately deemed adequate for establishing their “apolitical” descriptive identity. Seldom are the political aspirations and actions of Anabaptists, including the mechanisms that were utilized to realize their political goals acknowledged or investigated. Rarely do the words “power,” “politics,” or “authority” even appear within the text, or index of the scholarly literature with reference to sixteenth-century Anabaptism.⁵⁷ For example, the table of contents in Hans Joachim Hillerbrand’s *Anabaptist Bibliography 1520-1630*,⁵⁸ published in 1991, does not contain a single section or subsection devoted to “Anabaptism and power,” or “Anabaptism and authority,” or “Anabaptist politics.”⁵⁹ This deficiency is also readily evident in the multi volume, *The Mennonite Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement*, published from 1955 (vol. 1) to 1990 (vol. 5), which does not contain the category “politics,” and neither does it contain an entry titled “power.” When these terms do appear in the indexes of scholarly works, “power” and “politics” are most frequently used in reference to, and for, “government.”⁶⁰ These terms

⁵⁷ Brenda Hostetler Meyer, “Mennonites and Power: Returning to a Thwarted Conversation,” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 5 (no. 2, 2004), 25.

⁵⁸ Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *Anabaptist Bibliography 1520-1630*, 2d ed. (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1991).

⁵⁹ Hillerbrand does include a short section on “Political Ethics” containing entries dealing primarily with Anabaptist pacifism or non-resistance. Many of the entries in this section are a discussion of the theological origins and/or Anabaptist justification for pacifism. The subsection on “political ethics” is found in the section titled “Anabaptist Theology and Spirituality,” *Anabaptist Bibliography*, 447-450.

⁶⁰ Hostetler Meyer, “Mennonites and Power,” 25.

are generally presented or constructed negatively as something that Anabaptists sought to avoid.⁶¹

C. Arnold Snyder has included a chapter titled: “Anabaptism and Political Reality,” in his recent work *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*. This chapter is further subdivided by Snyder into: “Internal Factors: Toward an Anabaptist Political Ethic;” “External Factors: Anabaptism and Political Reality;” and “Anabaptist Political Arrangements.”⁶² Snyder’s subsection on “Internal Factors” does not discuss “power relations,” or “political” conditions, aspirations or goals of Anabaptist communities as might be expected given the title. Rather, it asserts that the relation of Anabaptist communities to the larger society was a function of their “internal,” or “theologically limiting factors.”⁶³ Snyder suggests that the marginalization of Anabaptists was the result of, and based on, the “internal core principles” of Anabaptism, which are presented as theological and not political principles.⁶⁴ Snyder assumes that Anabaptist theology informed and directed Anabaptist action and does not entertain the possibility that Anabaptist actions are indicative of significant political goals, or perhaps more importantly, that their actions had significant political effects. Instead, Snyder suggests that sixteenth-century political authorities bore an “almost uniformly negative reaction [...] to the “core principles” of Anabaptist reform.”⁶⁵ Snyder presents Anabaptism as a

⁶¹ For example, Benjamin W. Redekop stated: “Human beings, when left to themselves in a state of nature, tend naturally to scramble for power and in the process come into conflict with each other.” “Power and Religion,” 25. A little later Redekop writes: “Anabaptists responded by attempting to expunge earthly powers from their midst, others began seeking to structure and control the unruly powers of human beings and nature in what they believed to be a useful fashion”, “Power and Religion,” 28.

⁶² C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 177-184.

⁶³ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 177.

⁶⁴ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 178.

⁶⁵ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 178.

religious movement within a society that precluded “a political space” for “believers churches,” which therefore, “*developed into separatism.*”⁶⁶

Snyder’s general study of Anabaptism does not acknowledge, address, or take seriously, the political interests, activities, structure or effects of the Anabaptist movement, and avoids altogether any discussion of power relations within Anabaptist communities. His discussion does not acknowledge, let alone discuss, the nature or presence of Anabaptist mechanisms of “internal” politicization, nor does it examine the mechanisms for “external” Anabaptist political engagement. Yet, it is clear that to dream of a “pure” society that functions without power relations is to dream of an abstraction.⁶⁷ To ignore serious enquiry into the nature of Anabaptist power relations and the mechanisms employed to establish and maintain them, both internally and in relation to the larger society, constitutes the failure to recognize an important formative force in early Anabaptism.⁶⁸

In its failure to recognize that the political activity of subordinate groups is rarely to be found in either overt defiance, or complete hegemonic compliance,⁶⁹ scholarship on Anabaptism has often overlooked the subtle, but important, acts of resistance sixteenth-century Anabaptists directed at established religious, social, and political structures.⁷⁰ Acts of “everyday resistance” were a large and important part of the political activity of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, occurring on a level we rarely recognize as political.⁷¹ For

⁶⁶ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 178.

⁶⁷ Dreyfus, *Foucault*, 222.

⁶⁸ Menno’s tracts repeatedly address, warn, exhort, and offer unsolicited advice to political authorities. Such an active political posture alone would make it difficult to maintain an “apolitical” label for Anabaptism.

⁶⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 136.

⁷⁰ These descriptors are somewhat anachronistic, in that, sixteenth-century institutions and structures were not strictly separated into “social,” “religious,” or “political” categories.

⁷¹ The term “everyday resistance” is borrowed from Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 198.

as James C. Scott has stated: "All political action takes forms that are designed to obscure their intentions or to take cover behind an apparent meaning. Virtually no one acts in his own name for avowed purposes, for that would be self-defeating. [...] Things are not exactly as they seem."⁷² Scholarly fixation on the openly declared, (or in the case of Anabaptism denied), political intentions, aspirations, and actions of marginalized groups will hardly capture a small portion of their political thought and activity.

Through the work of Foucault,⁷³ Scott,⁷⁴ and others, we now recognize that a large part of what constitutes the political activity of subordinate groups has been previously unrecognized as such, and therefore, has been systematically ignored. Any attempt to move beyond an assessment of apparent consent and submission to dominant power, such as that expressed by Menno, in order to more successfully read and interpret the actions and words of subordinated Anabaptists, requires reading for what Scott has labelled, that group's "fugitive political conduct."⁷⁵ Such a reading is only possible, as Scott has noted, through a reading, that is, an examination of "the sequestered sites at which such resistance can be nurtured and given meaning."⁷⁶ Limiting our investigation to instances of openly declared resistance of socially and politically marginalized groups will not open up to our enquiry the activities, mechanisms, and processes by which, and through which, new political energies germinate and develop, before ever becoming open and "advanced" resistance.⁷⁷

⁷² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 199-200.

⁷³ See for example, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; and Foucault, *Foucault Live*.

⁷⁴ See for example Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

⁷⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 17.

⁷⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 20.

⁷⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 199.

2.3 A Critical Interpretive Assumption

Scholarship has largely assumed that the efforts Anabaptists like Menno Simons directed at the creation of a new Anabaptist community, as an alternative to established sixteenth-century society, were not logically in conflict with their “apolitical” stance. That is, this interpretive perspective assumes that such efforts were not in conflict with their proclaimed “disinterest” in politics, and apparent “disregard” for the social and political organization of the larger society.⁷⁸ Scholars have often harmonized this readily apparent difficulty, by suggesting that Anabaptist thinking and practice were *always* directed at establishing and maintaining small separate communities, and were *never* intended to become normative for larger society.⁷⁹ Scholars have often assumed that because Anabaptist efforts were directed at establishing a “religious” community and not a “political community,” and that because this community was distinct from the larger community, Anabaptists can accurately and legitimately be labelled “apolitical.”

Such an interpretive posture typically relies heavily on the declarations of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, though these statements are in fact strategic, and not analytical statements.⁸⁰ Menno Simons for example, from the time of his earliest

⁷⁸ Stayer, *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 318.

⁷⁹ For example, in discussing the “radical” nature of Anabaptist economics, Peter James Klassen writes: “Community of goods was regarded as an expression of the love ethic for a spiritually-united group, and was never intended for society as a whole. [...] Since the foundation of this communal living was strictly a spiritual one, references to society as a whole were out of the question.” *The Economics of Anabaptism: 1525-1560* (London; The Hague; Paris: Mouton & Co., 1964), 64. It is often (falsely) asserted that the one exception to this rule was Balthasar Hubmaier who clearly intended and worked toward larger societal reform. Sigrun Haude rightly claims: “Their early visions of reform involved the entire society,” “Anabaptism,” 242.

⁸⁰ I am indebted to Johannes C. Wolfart for this observation, December 12, 2005. An example would be the declaration of Menno Simons. He often asserted: “We seek nothing on earth but that we may in our weakness willingly walk in the footsteps of Christ, in obedience to His Word, at the expense of ourselves; that we would so much like to re-light the extinguished lamp of truth, teach many unto righteousness, and save our souls by the help and grace of the Lord.” *CW*, “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 627. See also, *CW*, “Meditation on the Twenty Fifth Psalm,” 65; *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 195; *CW*, “Christian

surviving tract “The Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” (1535)⁸¹ until his death in 1561, claimed an “apolitical” posture for himself,⁸² his followers, and all “true” Anabaptists.⁸³ Anabaptist writings frequently include the admonition that their writings must be read in a certain way, that the meaning of the text is only discernible if it is approached with a particular attitude, and with a certain frame of mind.⁸⁴ Menno declared that the text must be examined with “faithfulness” and judged “by Christ’s own Spirit and Word.”⁸⁵ The sincerity and trustworthiness of the Anabaptist author is unconditionally asserted as a necessary precondition for acceptance of the veracity of his argument.

Because Menno’s assertion of political disinterest has been taken at face value, and because it has been interpreted as the impetus for his practice of separation from “worldly politics and power,” the extent to which Menno tended to weave his political and social thinking/experience into his theological declarations has remained largely unexplored.⁸⁶ Much of the emphasis and discussion in scholarship has been centred on the framework of Menno’s theology, and not on the political character, which was expressed through and helped shape that theology. Menno’s thoroughly biblical theological language grounded authority on the scriptures, which afforded him the

Baptism,” 236, 284; *CW*, “Why I do not Cease Teaching and Preaching,” 320; and *CW*, “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” 525.

⁸¹ See for example, *CW*, “Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” 42-45.

⁸² Though Menno did not use the term “apolitical” for himself or any of his followers, he did insist that he did not hold any political interests.

⁸³ Stayer notes that Menno’s statement of 1535, “it is not permitted to Christians to fight with the Sword,” put “him firmly on the apolitical side of the Melchiorite schism then developing.” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 311. Stayer goes on to suggest that Menno “wavered between the goal of withdrawing from the world and that of its transformation.” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 318.

⁸⁴ Menno insisted: “I beseech you all, whether you be lord, prince, learned or unlearned, whoever you may be, to peruse these and all my writings with a pious mind.” *CW*, “Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Preaching,” 319. See also, *CW*, “The New Birth,” 92; and *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 106.

⁸⁵ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 192.

⁸⁶ Goertz points out: “All Anabaptist movements began by closely interweaving political experience with scriptural reading and theological reflection.” *The Anabaptists*, 132. I am not suggesting, however, that the source for all of Menno’s religious ideas, or theological thinking happened to be the political or social context in which he was active.

vehicle for decisive interaction with established authority.⁸⁷ His political values were expressed through theological language as a ready form, and were then applied to concrete social and political situations. Not only were Anabaptist political concerns expressed through theological language, Anabaptist “ecclesiastical concerns” were often rooted in “secular politics.”

2.4 Another Critical Interpretive Assumption

Scholarship has for the most part assumed a theory or model of power as “commodity,” thereby casting power in a substantializing mode.⁸⁸ Armed with a model of power as commodity, scholarship has assumed that because Anabaptists were socially and politically marginalized in the sixteenth century they held little if any power, and that they therefore held little if any hope or desire for a shift in the balance of power. Such a formulation of power fails to acknowledge that all power relations are a strategy in the appropriation and exploitation of possibilities that power itself discerns, creates, and employs.⁸⁹ Conflicts and struggle do not occur, or develop, between power and non-power,⁹⁰ or between those who have power and those who do not. It is both more helpful and accurate to argue as Foucault does, that power is omnipresent covering all human

⁸⁷ Menno wrote: “All rulers who propose and practice these things [persecution] are not Christ’s disciples. [...] How good if you had never been born, for many of you regard neither law nor Gospel, heaven nor hell, God nor the devil.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian ‘Doctrine,” 202.

⁸⁸ Such a conceptualization of power is notably unlike Foucault’s, and therefore unlike the one adopted for this project. Foucault rejects the conceptualization of power as a commodity and describes power as “neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and [...] it only exists in action.” *Discipline and Punish*, 89. According to Foucault, power is “a net-like organisation. [...] Individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.” *Discipline and Punish*, 98.

⁸⁹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 251.

⁹⁰ Foucault, *Foucault Live*, 188.

interactions.⁹¹ This does not then mean that particular, or present, power relations are either desirable or necessary.

“Power” as commodity and associated with repression is often presented as something alien to Anabaptism; something Anabaptists sought to avoid. Lawrence J. Burkholder has noted: “Mennonites have almost completely neglected—indeed, have held off with deep suspicion—the philosophical tradition in which power has been discussed as an ineluctable component of reality. Almost all classical philosophers have reflected upon power ontologically and politically. But Mennonites have paid little to no attention.”⁹² Calvin Redekop has stated: “The analysis of power and its implications has not received much attention in the Mennonite community. [...] Power has also been largely ignored in Anabaptist discourse, especially theologically and ecclesiologically.”⁹³ Discussions of “power” in evangelical historiography are rare, and the possibility of such discussions are often cast as “illegitimate,” opting to present, as Thomas Heilke has noted, “a new conception of church as brotherhood and separated from political power.”⁹⁴

In defining the exercise and effects of power negatively as domination and repression, the prevailing conception of power has identified power with repression.⁹⁵ Such a wholly negative conceptualization of power has become widespread in Anabaptist scholarship. Yet, a solely negative construction of power ignores its complexity and

⁹¹ David Couzens Hoy, “Power, Repression, Progress: Foucault, Lukes, and the Frankfurt School,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1986), 144.

⁹² Lawrence J. Burkholder, “Power”, in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, eds. Benjamin W. Redekop, and Calvin W. Redekop (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 4.

⁹³ Calvin W. Redekop: “A Sociology of the Anabaptist Theology of Power,” 2001 Plenary Address, *ASAA Newsletter* 6 (no. 2, June, 2002).

⁹⁴ Thomas Heilke, “Theological and Secular Meta-Narratives of Politics: Anabaptist Origins Revisited (Again).” *Modern Theology* 13 (no. 2, April 1997), 243.

⁹⁵ Foucault states: “It has become almost automatic in the parlance of the times to define power as an organ of repression.” *Power/Knowledge*, 90. See also *Power/Knowledge*, 119, where he asserts that a negative conception of power has become “curiously widespread.”

density, and avoids enquiry into the moral, and political forms it takes, and frameworks it establishes. Power is not solely or only repressive, but also productive, inventing, promoting, affirming, and creating.⁹⁶ A re-valuation of power giving it productive and positive possibilities, and refusing to limit it to negative domination enables the examination of power as the exercise of one action on another action.⁹⁷

Thus, conflicting or competing truth regimes during the sixteenth century were generated through the exercise of power, and proved to be the locus of the conflict between Anabaptists and established religious and secular authorities. Avoiding the study of the productive exercise of power in Anabaptism, which is dependent on a theoretical reformulation of power, precludes arriving at a better understanding of sixteenth-century Anabaptist thought and actions. The apparent “failure” of sixteenth-century Anabaptism becomes understandable when their actions are conceptualized as participation in the sixteenth-century interplay of competing programmes and technologies of power.

2.5 *Gelassenheit*: Political Posture and Political Engagement

The writing of *Gelassenheit*, that is, the encouragement to live a life of yieldedness, which was widely initiated and perpetuated by sixteenth-century Anabaptists, was the writing of power constituting political engagement, albeit in an often-overlooked form. The Anabaptist practice of *Gelassenheit* was not an essential separation from power, or an ultimate and final expression of passivity. It was not simply a stoic posture of accommodation to “life” or the circumstances of life, in which the

⁹⁶ John Caputo, and Mark Yount. *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 6.

⁹⁷ David Couzens Hoy, “Power, Repression,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1986), 135.

individual or group adopted a particular attitude, which is then presented by subsequent interpreters as evidence of political disinterest. For *Gelassenheit* is, as John D. Caputo has carefully argued:

A certain transgression of the ruling power plays which dominate our world. It is the point where one awakens to the manifold efforts which are everywhere in place to hold things in the grip of one system of power or another—both metaphysical and socio-political systems. *Gelassenheit* is a certain intervention in these power systems which releases their grip and lets things be and lets mortals be, lets them go. *Gelassenheit* is freedom. It is not the privilege of some ancient golden age not a promise held out for the future. It is a quiet intervention, here and there, which *denies the ruling power systems their authority*. [Emphasis mine] *Gelassenheit* is possible [...]. It is a small intervention which opens things up for us, giving us a taste of a nonmetaphysical experience of things—and one another.⁹⁸

What the practice of *Gelassenheit* firmly established, maintained, and reinforced for Anabaptists, is the conviction that all authorities are always suspect, and that their value as an authority, is always contingent on their utility such that their “tenure” cannot exceed, or outlive, their conditionally held “tenure.”⁹⁹ Rather than being the adoption of an attitude of political passivity or disinterest, as is often assumed, the Anabaptist practice of *Gelassenheit* is an action and an attitude of “exposure.” That is, the practice of *Gelassenheit* is to expose both oneself and others, in our relations of power, to open view; it is to awaken to the concealment of things, as Caputo notes. *Gelassenheit* is an overt recognition, insistence and acceptance of human limits, the fragility of life, the fallibility of human judgement, and the imperfection of authority and expressions of power.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 205.

⁹⁹ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 206.

¹⁰⁰ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 106, 109, 117, 192, 194, 202, 206, and 207.

The Anabaptist practice of *Gelassenheit* is, therefore, not simply the practice of a “spiritual” discipline as is sometimes thought, nor is it simply an attitude establishing a moral boundary for an individual’s involvement in the world, nor is it a pragmatic method for finding one’s way through “issues of power and authority.”¹⁰¹ *Gelassenheit* is a political perspective that is determinative of our relatedness. The practice of *Gelassenheit*, like the exercise of power, demonstrates that our relatedness is without an outside; that is, without an exteriority. That is, the Anabaptist practice of *Gelassenheit* is a political posture and perspective that reveals and establishes one’s relation to power, and thereby one’s relation to all other persons.

Gelassenheit is recognizing and yielding to power in its ubiquity, without endorsing or accepting its present composition or manifestation. It is the firm refusal to endorse the present set of power relations, or the ideology used to justify those established relations. The Anabaptist practice of *Gelassenheit* recognizes the inherent difficulty in power securely embedded within the discourse and ideology of power and the power of discourse, without necessarily glossing, or covering over those difficulties.¹⁰² It establishes not only a “new world view,” but also a new perception of the self and others through the formation of a subjectivity based on a new founded self esteem in relation to power.

Therefore, the Anabaptist commitment to *Gelassenheit* tempered the widespread sixteenth-century insistence on human depravity, frequently invoked as justification for political and religious coercion with a view of the self as fully responsible with agency.

¹⁰¹ This phrase is borrowed from C. Arnold Snyder, “Gelassenheit and Power: Some Historical Reflections,” in *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* (5, no. 2, Fall, 2004), 12.

¹⁰² See Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 206.

Menno described this posture positively as “believing with the heart,”¹⁰³ a perspective in which “externals” have no ultimate or substantial final value having been substantially displaced by a subjective personal matter of faith.¹⁰⁴ According to Menno, all remaining action is important only insofar as it proceeds from “divine fear,” which “warns, exhorts, disciplines, urges, and deters [...] so that they will nevermore consent to such carnal, ungodly works, much less do them.”¹⁰⁵

2.6 Power, Salvation, and Community

When there is an acknowledgement that power relations, or “politics,” were an ineluctable component of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, this acknowledgement is, generally speaking, quickly qualified. Power relations are then presented as a far distant concern, or at very best, of secondary importance to sixteenth-century Anabaptists. Secondary that is, when compared with their theological interests, and the religious thrust of Anabaptism.¹⁰⁶ Snyder, for example, has recently stated: “The early Anabaptists were concerned, above all, with salvation, and not with issues of power and authority. The basic question they asked was, How may we come into a right relationship with God and be saved? Not, How should power be exercised among us?”¹⁰⁷ Snyder’s analytical statement, though accurate on a certain level, glosses over and would deny the extent to

¹⁰³ *CW*, “True Christian Faith,” 337-338.

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, “True Christian Faith,” 337-338.

¹⁰⁵ *CW*, “True Christian Faith,” 337.

¹⁰⁶ W. J. Kühler for example, argues that Menno was solely occupied with spiritual and religious concerns. At no time, according to Kühler did he “longingly anticipate a total transformation of social life. As with Melchior Hoffman [...] neither the one or the other had the least concern with social relationships.” “Anabaptism in the Netherlands,” 103. Stayer on the other hand asserts: “Menno wavered between the goal of withdrawing from the world and that of its transformation.” *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 318.

¹⁰⁷ C. Arnold Snyder. “Gelassenheit and Power: Some Historical Reflections”, *Vision 5* (no. 2., Fall 2004), 6. On more than one occasion Menno would seem to offer justification for Snyder’s interpretive point of view when he writes: “The salvation of our poor souls means more to us than all that human eye can see.” *CW*, “Reply to False Accusations,” 530; and *CW*, “Why I do not Cease Teaching and Writing,” 320.

which issues of power informed and directed political and theological positions and actions in the sixteenth century. Peter Matheson has observed:

But for all lay people certain power issues tended to recur: Who had the right to pronounce excommunication, to hear confessions, to oversee wills, to formulate prayers? It was not just the priests or theologians of the Old Church who frustrated the desire of lay people to have control over their own spirituality. [...] Virtually every Protestant city saw protracted tussles between magistrates and ministers.¹⁰⁸

Snyder and others have highlighted the importance that the quest for salvation played in Anabaptism. However, to speak of salvation in the sixteenth century as somehow fundamentally independent of power relations is to gloss over the fact that power struggles in the sixteenth century were often centred on competing and conflicting understandings of salvation.

“Salvation” was a suitable form and vehicle in the sixteenth century for perpetuating and propagating competing programmes and ideologies of authority structures.¹⁰⁹ Power struggles between Anabaptists, Catholics, and magisterial reformers were often centred on the authority of scripture, and the struggle over the right to interpret those scriptures.¹¹⁰ The matter of who had authority to establish the “truth,” with “truth” being both normative and prescriptive, and the matter of exactly what the role of the layperson was to be in the decision making process within the *Gemeinde* were

¹⁰⁸ Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 60.

¹⁰⁹ Luther, for example, advocated: “The Christian nobility should set itself against the pope as against a common enemy and destroyer of Christendom, and should do this for the salvation of the poor souls who must go to ruin through his tyranny.” “An Open Letter To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,” in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 46. What was required for salvation, and how salvation was effected were directly related to power during the sixteenth century. Competing discussions of salvation reveal very different understandings of power and how authority is to be exercised.

¹¹⁰ G. R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 241.

important, but not always clearly separated issues during the sixteenth century.¹¹¹

Salvation meant different things to Anabaptists, Lutherans and Catholics being a ready conceptual form that was easily appropriated for the propagation of differing visions of society. Therefore, the manner in which salvation was conceptualized, as well as who was advancing a particular understanding of salvation, had important implications and consequences for society. Each and every conceptualization of salvation was inextricably linked with a particular conception of authority and therefore power. The manner in which salvation was obtained, defined, and what it did or did not include, laid bare the fundamental divisions within sixteenth-century society. Each competing group pushed for the implementation of its own particular understanding of salvation as the normative structure for society to the extent of its political power.

Power and authority were not peripheral or secondary Anabaptist themes. They were of primary importance to sixteenth-century Anabaptists. Lydia Harder has noted: “Struggles between various theologies were also political struggles between religious leaders seeking to re-establish authority on a firm basis.”¹¹² Personal piety and political aspirations were not neatly separated or even separable for Anabaptists during the sixteenth century. For as Michael G. Baylor has stated: “To say that the radical reformers saw themselves as “religious” rather than “political” in the modern sense is inaccurate; the distinction is anachronistic.”¹¹³ Any attempt to emphasize the religious character of

¹¹¹ Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates*, 241.

¹¹² Lydia Harder, “Power and Authority in Mennonite Theological Development”, in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, eds. Benjamin W. Redekop, and Calvin W. Redekop (Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 74-75.

¹¹³ Michael G. Baylor, *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge; New York; Port Chester; Melbourne; Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xvii.

Anabaptist thinking at the expense of, or in opposition to their political aspirations does not accurately reflect sixteenth-century realities.¹¹⁴

Snyder's attempt to separate sixteenth-century Anabaptist religious aspirations from political activities, privileging the religious over the political in his discussion, ignores the sixteenth century importance of *Gemeinde* for salvation. For Menno, as Egil Grislis has noted: "Salvation and sanctification were correlated."¹¹⁵ And, both were a function of community. That is, to be a Christian was to be a Christian *together* in community, and community is always a network of power relations.¹¹⁶

In Anabaptist thinking *Gemeinde* was not only thought to be the organ of salvation, but also the means of sanctification through which a life was moulded according to biblical ideals.¹¹⁷ The "salvation of souls" took place within the sacramental observances and activities of the body politic. The Anabaptist hope of salvation was closely tied to the desire for their earthly lives to be lived in a godly manner within a godly society, inextricably binding religious and political issues in their thinking and behaviour.¹¹⁸ Because Anabaptist reform efforts were directed at wresting control of salvation away from the established church, and rival reform movements, Anabaptists were actively engaged in the matter of redefining and redistributing "salvation," and "political" power. Anabaptist "salvation" was not an individualistic experience, and therefore did not occur in isolation. It was not independent of moral amelioration, nor

¹¹⁴ Baylor, *The Radical Reformation*, xvii.

¹¹⁵ Egil Grislis, "Menno Simons on Sanctification," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (no. 2, April, 1995), 226.

¹¹⁶ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 119.

¹¹⁷ Sonia Riddoch, "Stepchildren of the Reformation or Heralds of Modernity: Ernest Troeltsch on Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists, Sectarians and Spiritualists", in *Radical Reformation Studies: Essays Presented to James M. Stayer*, eds. Werner O. Packull, and Geoffrey Dipple (Aldershot; Brookfield, VA; Singapore; Sydney: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), 147.

¹¹⁸ Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 31.

was it isolated from “politics” or “power” during the sixteenth century. Salvation for Anabaptists was only thought possible within the context of a godly community within which authority could be legitimately exercised.¹¹⁹

The distinctive Anabaptist conception and continuation of *Gemeinde* became a key element in their own self-understanding. It introduced the possibility of principled resistance to religious and secular political power by reserving ultimate authority for God and his Word alone.¹²⁰ Menno insisted that the best way to assail human power structures (the old Church) was with and through a greater power structure, (*Gemeinde*), which held and exercised the power of God in the form of the scriptures.¹²¹ What imbued the scriptures with power and authority for Anabaptists was faith, making the written Word become spirit and life in the community.¹²² Therefore, *Gemeinde* was not only the vehicle for salvation; it was also its pre-condition. It embodied and retained the process of sanctification blurring the distinction between secular and spiritual usage with the emphasis placed on the interplay of power within the community. Thus, power and its exercise were essential components of sixteenth-century Anabaptist “religious politics.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 99, and 101.

¹²⁰ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 90-92, and 100-101; and *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 108-115.

¹²¹ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 101.

¹²² William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings and Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 59.

¹²³ Lorna Jane Abrey, “Confession Conscience and Honour: The Limits of Magisterial Tolerance in Sixteenth-Century Strassburg,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, eds. Ole Peter Grell, and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95.

*Ritual does not disguise the exercise of power, nor does it refer, express, or symbolize anything outside itself. In other words, political rituals do not refer to politics [...] they are politics. Ritual is the thing itself. It is power; it acts and it actuates.*¹

Chapter Three: Anabaptist Baptism

3.0 The Appropriation of Ritual and Its Discourse

Though the proliferation of polemical literature and oral sermons were instrumental in establishing the theoretical or dogmatic foundation of the Reformation, it was in the arena of ritual practice, in the battle over the correct forms for sacramental rituals, that much of sixteenth-century reformation activity was centred.² Reform was often advanced through a transformation in ritual, and not only through the development, or implementation, of a new understanding of biblical mandates. Edward Muir has noted: “Melancton and Karlstadt did not eliminate ritual so much as change it in a dramatic, expansive way.”³ Robert W. Scribner has noted that even though theologians, then and now, have placed great emphasis and value on sixteenth-century theological differences, the vast majority of the uneducated and untutored laity, whether Protestants or Catholics, affirmed their identity by ritual practice, rather than in or through dogmatic confession.⁴ That is, though most of the common people in the sixteenth century were poorly educated in theology, they were generally quite adept at ritualized ways of behaving.⁵ For as

¹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 195.

² Edward Muir has stated: “The Reformation itself was largely achieved through a “ritual process.”” *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 186. See also, Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997).

³ *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 186.

⁴ Robert W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London; Ronceverte: Hambledon Press), 105, and 121. See also Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 212.

⁵ Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 121. Edward Muir argues very much the same point in *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, especially, 186.

Scribner notes, it was through the “process of ritualization” that participants “acquired fully formed convictions.”⁶ Scribner has effectively argued that it was through “ritual process, [that] times, places and persons, as well as the participants themselves, were sacralised and desacralised.”⁷ It was largely as a result of, and through, the Reformation that ritual practices became re-oriented, raising new questions about what rituals mean and what they do for participants, and what they are thought to accomplish, according to interpreters.⁸

The sixteenth-century ritual of baptism was not only or simply a religious exercise; it was also the direction and deployment of significant social and political power. As the pre-eminent “rite of admission into the polity of Christians,” baptism initiated and constituted an “agreement to a social contract.”⁹ Because baptism formed an important component in the foundation of sixteenth-century society, being the initiation into the community, it was an important civil matter, and any revision threatened to rupture the long established “seamless Christian society.” Anabaptists were among the first in the Netherlands to insist that the Catholic Church had moved so far away from biblical ideals that its amelioration was out of the question, and therefore to maintain that the only solution was the establishment of an entirely different church.¹⁰ Michel Foucault has pointed out that in feudally structured societies, “power,” functioned *primarily* through signs and levies. The exercise of power included “signs of loyalty to the feudal

⁶ Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 121.

⁷ Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 121.

⁸ Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, “Mafia Burlesque: The Profane Mass as a Peace Making Ritual,” in *Power, and Protest in Local Communities: The Northern Shore of the Mediterranean*, ed. Eric R. Wolf (Berlin; New York; Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 122; see also Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 186.

⁹ See Michael G. Baylor’s introduction to *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge; New York; Port Chester; Melbourne; Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1991), especially, xvii.

¹⁰ Lammert G. Jansma, “The Rise of the Anabaptist Movement and Societal Changes in The Netherlands,” in *The Dutch Dissenters: A Companion to Their History and Ideas* (Leiden, E. J. Brill), 85.

lords, rituals, ceremonies [...] and levies in the form of taxes, pillage, hunting, war, etc.”¹¹ Foucault’s assessment of the late medieval exercise of power would then indicate that the Anabaptist appropriation and re-deployment of a ritual such as baptism, which held important socio-political implications, for the purpose of resistance, struck at the very centre of sixteenth-century power, and society.¹² The conflict surrounding the sixteenth-century “correct form” for baptism occupied a central place in the reformation of ritual, acting as an important catalyst in the political and social turmoil of that period.

3.1 Statement of Chapter Objective

This chapter forms a twofold challenge. Firstly, it will discuss and challenge the prevalent tendency in ritual theory to align ritual with the conserving forces of culture¹³ and society.¹⁴ Through a theoretical and historical analysis of the Anabaptist practice of “faith baptism” as a case study,¹⁵ I will argue that ritual is not necessarily, inherently, or categorically socially conservative. Secondly, I will argue that the Anabaptist practice of baptism was the appropriation of an important mechanism of power in the dominant

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 125. James C. Scott makes the same observation, but unlike Foucault, Scott emphasizes the inherent difficulties this structure presented for the effective exercise of power. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), 33, and 47-52.

¹² Baylor wrote: “Baptism was a sacrament with socio-political implications.” *The Radical Reformation*, xvii.

¹³ I use the term “culture” in this project to describe the shared beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, goals, and values that characterized sixteenth-century society.

¹⁴ I use the term “society” in this project to describe established sixteenth-century organized patterns of relationships developed through interaction.

¹⁵ I have chosen the term “faith baptism” for its descriptive value. Menno decisively linked “faith” and “baptism” arguing that the two always attend each other, with faith always retaining pre-eminence and always existing prior to baptism. The term “faith baptism,” and not “adult baptism,” accurately reflects historical realities and the intended inclusiveness of the Anabaptist practice of baptism. That is, faith baptism included children as well as adults, providing the child had reached the “age of understanding,” or “age of reason.” Rollin Stely Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale, Penn: Herald Press, 1966), 55. Menno wrote: “Little ones must wait according to God’s Word until they can understand the holy Gospel of grace and sincerely confess it; and then, and then only is it time, no matter how young or old, for them to receive Christian Baptism.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 120.

discourse, which was redeployed to function as an act of resistance, precipitating a conflict that Michael G. Baylor suggests “threatened the whole structure of authority and obedience.”¹⁶ That is, Anabaptist practice of baptism challenged the established discourse of truth surrounding pedobaptism, which was integrated with power to the extent that the one implied the other during the sixteenth century. The sixteenth-century practice of baptism and the politically efficacious discourse built around it, were appropriated and re-deployed by Anabaptists in an act of behavioural and ideological political resistance.¹⁷ The Anabaptist practice of baptism was a subversive ritual that functioned to both create and mobilize a group of individuals for resistance. It exposed and challenged the assumed division between “spiritual” and “worldly” spheres of influence,¹⁸ working to establish a new “moral” and “autonomous” social community.

3.2 Ritual Theory

Much of the theory of ritual assumes and then proceeds on the basis of what Catherine Bell has called the “intrinsically and categorically conservative nature of ritual.”¹⁹ Theory of ritual tends to align ritual with the conserving forces of culture.²⁰ Roy

¹⁶ Baylor, *The Radical Reformation*, xvii.

¹⁷ I am using the phrase “acts of resistance” in much the same manner as James C. Scott. He defines acts of resistance as follows: “Any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims [...] made on that class by superordinate classes [...] or to advance its own claims [...] vis-à-vis those superordinate classes.” *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 290. Such a definition of resistance avoids defining resistance purely in reference to its consequences.

¹⁸ Baylor argues that: “Few radicals shared Luther’s notion, designed to meet the political situation in Saxony, that there was a sharp division between “spiritual” and “worldly” kingdoms, and that secular rulers performed functions which had nothing to do with the Christian faith.” *The Radical Reformation*, xviii.

¹⁹ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* 212. In using the phrase “intrinsically and categorically conservative nature of ritual” Bell is echoing the conclusion of Max Gluckman. He argues that ritual confines or contains conflict. Nevertheless, Bell’s discussion of “ritual control” dismisses all “strong versions” of ritual theory, which construct ritual as the resolution of social conflict. However, it remains difficult to “pin her down” neatly on the issue. For example, Bell argues that “ritualization is more effectively viewed as a ‘mastering’ of relationships of power relations within an arena that affords a negotiated appropriation of the

Rappaport for example, has argued that ritual constitutes and constructs order.²¹ Tom Driver echoes Rappaport's argument on many fronts, concluding that the "effects" of ritual are "order," "community" and "transformation."²² According to Rappaport, one of ritual's most interesting and important characteristics is its innate ability to establish order and regulate society.²³ Rappaport describes ritual as the "font of sanctity," suggesting, "sanctity escapes from ritual and may flow to all the expressions through which a society is regulated."²⁴ According to Rappaport, it is ritual that stabilizes the norms and conventions of society. Rappaport wrote: "Societies must establish at least some conventions in a manner which protects them. [...] Ritual does so, and as such it may be without equivalents."²⁵ Theorists of ritual typically assume that the reinforcement, maintenance, promotion, substantiation, and perpetuation of the existing social order are the most obvious, and perhaps the most important function of ritual, or ritual practice. Moreover, recognizing the dynamic character of all societies, theorists

dominant values embedded in the symbolic schemes." *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 182. Yet, she describes the "ultimate purpose" of ritual as "nothing other than the production of ritualized agents." *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 221. Bell remains silent on the possibility of ritual functioning as anti-ritual, subversive ritual, ritual reversal or liberating ritual.

²⁰ Bell concedes that ritual is an effective means for mediating tradition and change. That is, she argues that it is a good form for appropriating some changes while *maintaining* social or cultural continuity. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 251. Michael Aune states that ritual does not resolve fundamental conflict, but instead that ritual "deals practically with specific circumstances." Unfortunately, Aune neglects to clarify how "dealing specifically with circumstances" differs from conflict resolution. Michael B. Aune, "The Subject of Ritual: Ideology and Experience in Action," in *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, eds. Michael B. Aune, and Valerie DeMarinis (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 143. Martha Ellen Stortz is one theorist of ritual who challenges the so-called social conservatism of ritual in her essay "Ritual Power, Ritual Authority," in *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Explorations* eds. Michael B. Aune, and Valerie DeMarinis (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 106.

²¹ See Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially chapter 11 "Truth and Order," 344-370.

²² Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform our Lives and our Communities* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 132.

²³ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 321.

²⁴ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 321

²⁵ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 323.

such as Rappaport frequently insist that the adaptive nature of ritual is an essential quality, and its most important value. For Rappaport, ritual's value is centred in its "pliability" and "adaptability," which enables the "adaptation" necessary for all dynamic societies, being the mechanism through which "living systems of all sorts maintain themselves."²⁶

Victor Turner has taken the widely assumed socially conservative nature and function of ritual one step further, arguing that in general, "ritual functions to master the chaotic", in order to both disclose and establish good order.²⁷ Ritual, according to Turner, not only maintains society, but also presents and resolves chaos. Following Turner's lead, Scribner has assumed and argued for the mediating capacity of ritual, suggesting that during the sixteenth century "rituals created orderly relationships with the sacred powers on which the world and human life were dependent, as well as among humans and between humans and the material world. And when any kind of disorder threatened this world, people were able to use various rites and rituals to overcome that disorder."²⁸

René Girard and Walter Burkert, who also follow the lead of Turner, have been concerned to show that ritual controls and displaces rebellious and violent possibilities within society in order to safeguard, and thereby maintain, an ordered social life.²⁹

According to Turner, ritual is best conceptualized as a dialectic of structure and anti-structure, which works to forestall threats to society, and at times conveniently

²⁶ Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 408.

²⁷ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).

²⁸ Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 105.

²⁹ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 173. Bell points out that theorists Girard and Burkert drew on ethological as well as psychological models and concluded "ritualization is the controlled displacement of chaotic and aggressive impulses."

converts that which is obligatory into that which is desirable.³⁰ At the very centre of Turner's thinking on ritual is the question: "What does ritual do for society?"³¹ Turner's interest in ritual is clearly focused on, and assumes that, the efficacy of ritual is grounded in the way in which it serves society. Bell, however, faults theorists like Turner for their failure to explicitly address *how* ritual controls, and not only how ritual defines social norms and presents them for internalization.³² It is a deficiency Bell attempts to redress with her own work, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, by arguing that ritual controls and maintains society through its "production of ritualized agents."³³

Bell, like many other theorists, holds out severely limited possibilities for any theory of ritual that would construct ritual as radically subversive, due to what she describes as the significant limitations, or restrictions, inherent in a socially constructed body. She has argued that the social body is schooled in "the pleasures of and schemes for acting in accordance with assumptions that remain far from conscious or articulate."³⁴ However, Bell does qualify her socially conservative theoretical construction of ritual slightly, insisting that ritual is not simply the "foremost tool for inculcating social values."³⁵ Like Rappaport, she argues for the adaptability of ritual, arguing that ritual changes as the needs and conditions of the community change, and that these changes are always dependent on "many factors such as the psychological state of the participants, the degree of participation in the ritual, the frequency of repetition of the ritual, [and] the

³⁰ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 172.

³¹ Schneider and Schneider, "Mafia Burlesque," 122.

³² Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 175.

³³ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 221.

³⁴ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 220.

³⁵ Bell, *Ritual Perspectives*, 252.

degree to which the values embedded in the ritual are also reflected in other areas of social life.”³⁶

3.3 Subversive Ritual and Resistance

Theorists generally concede that rituals are complex phenomena that can and do accomplish many things at once,³⁷ serving many ideological masters.³⁸ Theorists such as Bell and Rappaport tend to recognize that ritual has served, and continues to serve diverse functions, generating a variety of effects, accomplishing several things at once. Yet, Bell and Rappaport remain entirely silent on the possibility of ritual functioning as anti-ritual, subversive ritual, ritual reversal, or liberating ritual.³⁹ Moreover, the presence of competing ideologies and power strategies centred in the practice of baptism during the sixteenth century, suggest a very complex spectrum of possibilities for the practice and understanding of ritual and/or subversive ritual.⁴⁰

Subversive ritual is neither by definition or function socially conservative. It may even at times constitute a significant act of resistance; setting itself against the dominant power and the value structures and institutions that power has created. It may at times include the drastic violation of contemporary norms and conventions. Subversive ritual contains at least two possibilities: the possibility of subverting the existing order

³⁶ Bell, *Ritual Perspectives*, 252.

³⁷ John Hilary Martin, “Bringing the Power of the Past into the Present,” in *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, eds. Michael B. Aune, and Valerie DeMarinis (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 25-29. Martin argues that rituals always “transform” people; they create, and re-create. They are a form of communication, and they are performances. They are patterned behaviours, which communicate meaning.

³⁸ Bell, *Ritual Perspectives*, 252.

³⁹ For a discussion on liberating ritual see Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform our Lives and our Community*. For a discussion of ritual reversal see Schneider and Schneider, “Mafia Burlesque;” and Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,” in *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents*, ed. Alfred Soman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

⁴⁰ Bell, *Ritual Perspectives*, 252.

comically through carnival,⁴¹ or threatening it dangerously through the propagation of an alternate order. Carnival may mock, or act out a desire to overthrow the existing order or social hierarchy. However, it very rarely if ever goes beyond the level of posturing or acting.⁴² Faith baptism on the other hand was a second order subversive ritual, which threatened sixteenth-century society “dangerously” through the creation of a new vision, or new possibility, for social order.⁴³ It was a subversive ritual of a kind described by James C. Scott as: “The refusal to accept the definition of the situation as seen from above and the refusal to condone their own social and ritual marginalization.”⁴⁴ As an act of resistance, the Anabaptist practice of faith baptism not only verified or solicited belief; it was a ritual that was to be engaged and acted upon.⁴⁵

Resistance, as Scott notes, often contains the “implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals.”⁴⁶ As an act of such resistance, faith baptism was a subversive ritual that was directed at, and sought to strip established power of its symbolic mystifications, targeting the formal structure of established institutions and the practices maintaining them. According to Scott, “real resistance” contains at least four ingredients all of which can be found in the Anabaptist practice of baptism when it is conceptualized as a subversive ritual. Real resistance is, according to Scott, “(a) organized, systematic, and

⁴¹ Two good examples of subversive ritual expressed as carnival are: a) the “youth abbeys,” discussed in Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Rites of Violence,” and Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 27-35; and, b) the mocking of the mass described in Schneider and Schneider, “Mafia Burlesque.” James C. Scott suggests that the most interesting thing about carnival is that it “allows certain things to be said, certain forms of social power to be exercised that are muted or suppressed outside this ritual sphere. [...] Carnival, then, is a lightning rod for all sorts of social tensions and animosities.” *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 173.

⁴² Scribner notes that one notable exception is the case of Münster where the attempt was made to “accompany social degradation in carnival with a broader social change.” *Popular Culture*, 96.

⁴³ *CW*, “New Birth,” 93.

⁴⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 240.

⁴⁵ Menno insisted that it was through baptism that the goal of living a pleasing life before God and others became possible. *CW*, “The New Birth,” 89, 93, 99, 124, and 139.

⁴⁶ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 33.

cooperative, (b) principled or selfless, (c) has revolutionary consequences, and/or (d) embodies ideas or intentions that negate the basis of dominion itself.”⁴⁷ Scott describes token resistance as unorganized, unsystematic, and individual without revolutionary consequences.⁴⁸ Though Scott demarcates a difference between token and real resistance, he challenges their frequently assumed strict division, arguing that “token acts of resistance” are no less “real” than acts of “real resistance,” and should not be dismissed quickly. Nevertheless, the insistence of some scholars on qualitatively assessing the “social” or “revolutionary” actions of sixteenth-century Anabaptists proceeds with the rather well worn method of seeking to assess Anabaptist intentionality. That is, deciding on whether they wanted to “merely” “alter” society or “revolutionize” it.⁴⁹ The distinction between real and token resistance, according to Scott, is an arbitrary one.⁵⁰ He effectively argues that resistance is best differentiated, or classified, as either behavioural or ideological.

3.4 Practice and Significance of Baptism

In order to appreciate the revisions and innovations that faith baptism brought to an established tradition, and understand the way in which a ritual and its discourse were appropriated and employed as acts of resistance, one must first understand that tradition or practice.

⁴⁷ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 292. How one determines such intentionality is a huge problem for Scott and one that he dismisses too quickly. He assumes too easily that one can determine such intentionality by simply questioning the participants. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 341.

⁴⁸ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 292.

⁴⁹ This line of investigation was already well established in 1979 by Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation*, trans. Malcolm Wren, ed. Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 339.

⁵⁰ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 292, and 295.

As the pre-eminent rite of passage for Christians during the medieval period and well into the sixteenth century,⁵¹ baptism was one of two sacraments Protestants retained in their break from Catholicism.⁵² From approximately the fourth century Christian baptism was primarily associated with the newly born child. One of its primary functions was to “wash away” original sin, thereby constituting the sacrament of regeneration.⁵³ Baptism was thought to provide the means for the conquest of sin, while simultaneously comprising the remedy for sin. During the medieval period, baptism was thought to address both the power and presence of evil in the world. Baptism had tremendous power ascribed to it over the unseen world, which held important consequences for the seen world.⁵⁴ Sixteenth-century thought and practice surrounding baptism, equated original sin with having been bewitched, which therefore required undoing.⁵⁵ Edward Muir suggests that the official rituals of the church surrounded childbirth, and were accompanied by a body of magical beliefs, which worked to relieve the anxiety attending childbirth.⁵⁶ Baptism was thought to provide a means of physical, spiritual, and social protection for the newly born child.

Baptisms were generally conducted at a place where a sense of civic consciousness, loyalty, and identity were particularly evident and considered important.⁵⁷ The ritual of baptism included the naming of the child, which was the primary and

⁵¹ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 21.

⁵² The other retained sacrament was the Lord's Supper or Eucharist.

⁵³ Cornelius Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought* (Scottsdale; Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), 46

⁵⁴ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 53.

⁵⁵ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14.

⁵⁶ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 25.

⁵⁷ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 23.

essential rite in establishing the newly born child's identity.⁵⁸ After the child received her or his name at baptism it was "marked" with the sign of the cross and anointed with holy oil.⁵⁹ Baptism confirmed the child's parentage, incorporated the child into the Christian community, and provided the child with "surrogate parents" in the form of godparents. It expanded the child's range of potential benefactors.⁶⁰ Parents often looked for advancement for their child through baptism, though the child and godparents were generally of similar social and economic standing.⁶¹ During the sixteenth century godparenthood,⁶² through the rite of baptism, had become an important mechanism in the cultivation of relationships by marriage through complex bilateral systems.⁶³

Through baptism, the child was not only thought redeemed from original sin, but also entered the community of faith. As the pre-eminent rite of passage in Christendom, it incorporated the newly born child into both the community and the Church. In fact, it was through baptism that these separate, or potentially divergent, identities and communities became fused. Fritz Blanke has aptly noted that in Zurich during the sixteenth century, "as throughout the rest of the Christian world, every newborn child was baptised and thereafter considered a member of the church. The result was that church and people were identical: the church was a church of everyman."⁶⁴ To Menno's dismay, all baptized

⁵⁸ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 22. See also *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 256-257, for Menno's detailed description of Catholic baptism.

⁵⁹ Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, (2nd ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 88.

⁶⁰ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 22.

⁶¹ John Bossy indicates that parents would at times choose distant relatives, or a knight as godparents, largely for their gift-giving ability. *Christianity in the West*, 15-16. See also Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 63 for her discussion of gift giving and baptism. She suggests, laity understood baptism in utilitarian terms. It provided an opportunity to expand the kinship network and improve the material well-being of the child. *Reformation of Ritual*, 65.

⁶² See Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 44, for a list of the qualifications for godparenthood.

⁶³ Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 16.

⁶⁴ As quoted in Hans Jürgen-Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 43.

persons were considered Christian and members of Christendom irrespective of their moral character.⁶⁵ He stated that this would continue “as long as they baptize irrational children, and consider Christian all those who are baptized, [...] so long will the world be their church, and their church the world.”⁶⁶ Pedobaptism had fused church and society.

Baptism included two major segments: exorcisms,⁶⁷ and baptism with water. Exorcisms dominated the first portion of the baptism ceremony.⁶⁸ The baptism liturgy began at the threshold of the church with exorcisms, prior to the newborn child being allowed within the precincts of the church building.⁶⁹ The priest remained within the sanctuary of the church while the child remained just beyond it, that is, just across the threshold. This feature of baptism symbolically and visually demonstrated the separation of the Church from the devil, and the separation of the child from the Church. The devil stayed at the door of the church and was refused entry. Exorcisms prepared the uninitiated child for incorporation into the mystical body of Christ. Godparents were required to reply for the child when clergy questioned it, and make pledges and a brief profession of faith on the child’s behalf.⁷⁰ Godparents represented the transfer of the child from its natural to its godly parents.⁷¹ Salt, the font, and water were all used to exorcize the devil, with salt acting as a purifying agent, assuming significant supernatural

⁶⁵ He wrote: “For all who receive it [baptism]—even though their whole life is so completely pagan [...] are called Christians.” *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 128.

⁶⁶ *CW*, “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 725. Menno stated that though pedobaptism was “practiced by nearly the whole world and maintained by tyranny, [it] is nothing but a ceremony of Antichrist.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 133.

⁶⁷ See Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 14, and Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 21-24, for a good account of the formula for performing exorcisms.

⁶⁸ Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 45.

⁶⁹ Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 44.

⁷⁰ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 88. See Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 44-49, for further details of the responsibilities of godparents both at baptism and thereafter.

⁷¹ Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 15.

powers.⁷² Muir suggests that the “most powerful accomplishment” of medieval Catholic rituals, such as baptism, was their ability to “go beyond representing abstract truths [...] to evoke deeply disturbing emotions, especially fear and grief.”⁷³

Baptism was, first and foremost, considered to be an “adornment of the soul” during the sixteenth century through which hitherto inaccessible salvation became possible, and divine protection from evil forces was assured. Baptisms were performed throughout the year as need arose, though clergy only blessed the water of the baptismal fonts annually at Easter Eve.⁷⁴ Oil used in baptism was blessed each year on Maundy Thursday by the bishop, and was thereafter distributed to the clergy.⁷⁵ Though midwives and fathers could, and often did under necessity baptize a dying child, only a priest was thought capable of exorcising demonic presence from a child.⁷⁶

Susan Karant-Nunn has described the sixteenth-century form of baptism as “archaic,” claiming it failed to “keep up with, or reflect social reality.”⁷⁷ She argues that a good deal of the ritual was socially “inappropriate and therefore it created disjuncture.”⁷⁸

Anabaptists recognized, and were quick to point out, one feature of this disjuncture. They frequently, consistently, and persistently mocked what they saw as the irrationality and impracticality embedded in the baptism liturgy, at the point where the priest questions a newborn child regarding her or his intentions and wishes at baptism, as though the child had the ability to respond. Questions at baptism were addressed to the newborn child in spite of the fact that it was commonly understood that it was the godparents who would,

⁷² Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, 45.

⁷³ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 207.

⁷⁴ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 87.

⁷⁵ Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West*, 87.

⁷⁶ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 24. These exorcisms took the form of a curse on the devil. Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, 14.

⁷⁷ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 43.

⁷⁸ Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, 43.

and did, respond on behalf of the child. Balthasar Hubmaier ridiculed the reform that changed the language used in the baptismal liturgy from Latin to vernacular German, satirically pointing out that the reform did little to aid the infant's ability to understand or respond to questions.⁷⁹ Menno further criticized and ridiculed what he called the "abominations" of pedobaptism claiming that "parents, godfathers, and baptizers, do not themselves know in their hearts either knowledge or faith, or truth [...] by no other means than by crucifixes, breathings, by salt, oil, chrisms candles, cloths, empty questions and answers."⁸⁰ Anabaptists on the other hand tended to couple baptism with faith, privileging reason as faith's essential counterpart thereby rejecting, what they termed "magical rites" as wholly inappropriate.⁸¹

3.5 Function and Significance of Anabaptist Baptism

Anabaptist resistance required a suitable social context for both its creation and maintenance and became embedded in the practice and discourse of faith baptism.⁸² It was employed as a mechanism of power that operated as a ritual of power, investing its political efficacy in the body. As the exercise of power, faith baptism worked to effect a modification in the larger social body through a series of clashes, which in turn re-constituted the social body.⁸³

⁷⁹ See Wayne H. Pipkin, and John H. Yoder, (trans. and eds.), *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Penn: Herald Press, 1989), 196.

⁸⁰ *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 256.

⁸¹ Menno wrote: "We are to baptize upon faith and not without it." *CW*, "The New Birth," 101.

⁸² Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 329.

⁸³ See, Foucault, *Foucault Live*, 188.

The one practice common to all Anabaptist groups, in spite of evidence of significant diversity in other areas, was their practice of faith baptism.⁸⁴ Aside from the fact that it makes a certain amount of sense to label based on what is implied in the name,⁸⁵ it was their practice of faith baptism, and therefore, their rejection of pedobaptism, that most clearly set Anabaptists apart socially and theologically from Catholics and Protestants. The practice of faith baptism, more so than any other distinctive and widespread Anabaptist practice, became the centrally important arena of contention between Anabaptists, the established Church, and magisterial reformers.⁸⁶ The complaint most frequently levelled against Anabaptists by Catholics and Protestants alike, centred on their distinctive practice of faith baptism.⁸⁷

Anabaptist conflict with the authorities turned almost exclusively on their practice of faith baptism.⁸⁸ Menno repeatedly cited the Anabaptist practice of baptism as the source of their persecution. Menno wrote: "For this [faith baptism] we poor, miserable men are grievously reviled, punished, robbed, and slain in many countries like innocent sheep."⁸⁹ He recognized: "We teach, receive, assert, and maintain baptism upon

⁸⁴ James M. Stayer, *Anabaptism and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1972), 20. This is not to say that Anabaptists understood, or practiced baptism in something resembling an entirely uniform or consistent manner.

⁸⁵ Stayer, *Anabaptism and the Sword*, 20.

⁸⁶ Menno wrote: "Nor do they know why he reformed his life and received the baptism of Christ, or what drives him so willingly to suffer, or even die for his faith. They only ask, is he baptized?" *CW*, "True Christian Faith," 385.

⁸⁷ See Hubmaier's "On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them," in Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*. See also *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 103-226.

⁸⁸ Walter Klaassen, "The Rise of the Baptism of Adult Believers in Swiss Anabaptism," in *Anabaptism Revisited: Essays on Anabaptist/Mennonite Studies in Honor of C. J. Dyck*, ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale; Waterloo: Herald Press, 1992), 93.

⁸⁹ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129. And, in "Christian Baptism" Menno wrote: "We for the sake of baptism, are so miserably abused, slandered, and persecuted by all men [...] For you may plainly see that we are made a prey to the world on account of it," 236. See also *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 125-126, 197.

confession of faith, at the cost of so much sorrow and misery.”⁹⁰ Often the very first questions interrogators asked of accused Anabaptists were centred on the practice of, or theological justification for, baptism.⁹¹ Accused Anabaptists would frequently comment to fellow “brethren” after their interrogation, that they had remained firm on the matter of baptism.⁹² Re-baptism was a clear and unmistakable benchmark for prosecution in the sixteenth century.

The label “Anabaptist”⁹³ became an important identifying characteristic, in spite of the tendency of Anabaptists to dislike the term.⁹⁴ The claim established by Franklin Littell,⁹⁵ and Rollin Armour,⁹⁶ perpetuated by Hans Jürgen-Goertz,⁹⁷ and assumed by much of the scholarship on Anabaptism, that baptism was not a key concern for Anabaptists, and that it was not at the “centre of Anabaptism,” is an interpretive assessment that is not in accord with the historical data. C. Arnold Snyder has accessed the central importance of baptism for Anabaptism. He has stated: “Contemporary critics

⁹⁰ *CW*, “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 513.

⁹¹ See for example the questioning of Claesken Gaeleochter (drowned March 14, 1559, in Leeuwarden) in *Elisabeth's Manly Courage: Testimonies and Songs of Martyred Anabaptist Women in the Low Countries*, Hermina Joldersma and Louis Grijp, (eds. and trans.) (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 75. The first question she was asked sought to establish her identity, that is, her name, age, and residence. The second question was “Sijt ghy gedoopt?” (Have you been baptized?). See also the testimony of Elisabeth van Leeuwarden who in a similar manner “confessed before the court of Friesland (freely, without bonds) that she was rebaptized.” Joldersma, *Elisabeth's Manly Courage*, 113.

⁹² See the testimonies of Anabaptist women recorded in Joldersma, and Grijp, *Elisabeth's Manly Courage*, especially Mayken Boosers, 179-185.

⁹³ “Anabaptist” is to baptize again.

⁹⁴ Menno's did not hide his disdain for the label “Anabaptist.” See for example, *CW*, “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 626-627. The Anabaptist dislike for the term “Anabaptist” was centred on their disavowal of practicing a “second” baptism, and was not an indication of embarrassment over their chosen form for baptism, or the meaning they ascribed to their practice of baptism.

⁹⁵ Franklin Hamlin Littell, “The Quest for the Essence of Anabaptism,” in *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958). See 1-26 for his discussion of the far less than central role he suggests, baptism played in Anabaptism.

⁹⁶ Rollin Stely Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study*. (Scottsdale, Penn: Herald Press, 1966), Armour writes: “Baptism is not the center of Anabaptism,” 17.

⁹⁷ Hans Jürgen-Goertz writes: “Baptism was not and did not become their key concern.” *The Anabaptists*, trans. by Trevor Johnson (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 84. He also writes: “Baptism was not Anabaptism's dominant characteristic,” 132.

of the movement were close to the mark when they emphasized baptism on confession of faith as a central teaching by which to identify the Brethren.”⁹⁸ In his writings, Menno argued that baptism was the confirmation par excellence of regeneration,⁹⁹ the entrance into a new life, (that is, the birth of a new subjectivity),¹⁰⁰ and the “binding to one other.”¹⁰¹ Baptism was, according to Menno, the initiation and assured inclusion into a new community that was also presented as a different kind of community.¹⁰²

As a ritual of resistance, faith baptism shaped a new social order by forming new subjects, and thereby re-forming relations between various individuals and groups.¹⁰³ Menno insisted: “In baptism they bury their sins in the Lord’s death and rise with Him to a new life. [...] They put on Christ and manifest His spirit, nature, and power in all their conduct.”¹⁰⁴ It was as a result of baptism that Menno could claim: “Regenerated people have a spiritual king over them who rules them by the sceptre of His mouth.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, faith baptism integrated the construction of effective strategic power relationships becoming politically useful and expedient, incorporating individuals as the vehicles of power into a new social body.¹⁰⁶

Faith baptism was employed as an effective means of destabilizing established power relations, ritual behaviour, and practice. It contained the possibility of informing participants with a heightened sense of an alternate order, presenting competing

⁹⁸ C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 91.

⁹⁹ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 139; and *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 247, 265.

¹⁰⁰ *CW*, “Why I do not Cease Teaching and Writing,” 302; “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 508; “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” 526; and “The New Birth,” 93.

¹⁰¹ *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 125.

¹⁰² *CW*, “Reply to False Accusations,” 555; and “The New Birth,” 93, 98, 99.

¹⁰³ See, Jan Platvoet, “Pluralism and Identity,” in *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, eds. Jan Platvoet, and Karel van der Toorn (Leiden; New York; Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995), 220.

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 93.

¹⁰⁵ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 94.

¹⁰⁶ Platvoet, *Pluralism and Identity*, 220. See also Bell, *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice*, 197; 206; and 213.

possibilities for community through an increased awareness of the possibilities of freedom, and possibility itself. For Anabaptists, faith baptism was centred on the creation of a new subject, through which all established “illusions” of moral or spiritual superiority were challenged.¹⁰⁷ The new subjectivity created through faith baptism required that all persons regardless of their position, rank or worldly achievement recognize and re-evaluate their humanity in light of all of its inherent limitations.¹⁰⁸ Menno never tired of accusing secular and religious leaders of hubris, charging them with forgetting that they were only mortal and not gods.¹⁰⁹ Moral qualities such as patience, compassion, and humility were associated with, emphasized, and privileged by Anabaptists in faith baptism as the consequents of regeneration, whereas all distinctions based on status and property were denigrated.¹¹⁰

In Menno’s thinking, faith baptism also established both the need and means for self-declaration and self-assertion.¹¹¹ Power was demonstrated in baptism and became evident through a “renewed life,” which in turn exercised further power through preaching “the Word unblamably in the power of the Spirit.”¹¹² Faith baptism created

¹⁰⁷ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105-107, 119, and 128.

¹⁰⁸ Menno wrote: “Hearken now, O mighty princes and kings, and all those who suffer themselves to think that they are believing rulers and Christian princes. To you is my admonition. If you have any fear of God, [...] or any reasonable nature—you who have understanding—then acknowledge that you are not gods from heaven, but poor mortal men of the impure, mortal seed of Adam.” *CW*, “True Christian Faith,” 359. See also, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 194.

¹⁰⁹ Menno stated: “Dear noble lords, learn rightly to know yourselves, whence you are, what you are, and what you will be. All of you, each and every one, be he emperor or king, issues from the same seed as we poor and common people. You came into this sorrowful world as we did, and you are but vapor, frail flesh, a withering flower, dust and ashes, as are we all. Today you are kings and exult in great and high honor; tomorrow you are laid low, and must be food for snails and worms.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 194. See also, *CW*, “Why I do not Cease Teaching and Preaching,” 314, 318; and “The True Christian Faith,” 400.

¹¹⁰ See Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).

¹¹¹ Menno wrote: “All who are born of God, rightly baptized in the Spirit, fire and water as the Scriptures teach, are heavenly minded and godly. [...] They show the nature and power of Christ which dwells in them by word and work.” *CW*, “The New Birth,” 99.

¹¹² *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 170.

subjects, who challenged, their prevailing treatment as objects.¹¹³ It was the refusal to authorize or endorse the presumption of established authorities to speak for them, vehemently contesting the dominant way of seeing things.¹¹⁴

Structurally inferior Anabaptists were able to aspire to symbolic structural superiority through faith baptism.¹¹⁵ With the innate equality of human beings firmly and fundamentally established in and through faith baptism, the ritual challenged the established authority structure, translating the practice into a struggle to determine whether the church or scriptures would become the ultimate authority. The supreme authority of God established in faith baptism produced freedom of conscience, which in turn created the necessary platform for the plethora of warnings and admonitions Menno directed at secular rulers and religious leaders.¹¹⁶ Faith baptism established a sense of divine mission, which enabled and propelled Menno's attacks on established church and society.¹¹⁷ "Faith," evident in the individual through baptism, empowered and liberated the individual from the inequalities and inequities of the existing authoritarian religious, social and political authorities and structures.¹¹⁸ Faith baptism created the freedom, that

¹¹³ Menno wrote: "There is not a false syllable nor deceitful word heard from our mouths or found in us. But we are forced and led by you to the sword, to fire, and to water, as poor, innocent sheep to the slaughter." *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 284.

¹¹⁴ The refusal to accept the dominant way of seeing things is underwritten by Menno's assertion: "Know with certainty why you are unable to frighten us from our doctrine, faith, and practice by coercion, poverty, misery, persecution, and death." *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 117.

¹¹⁵ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 203.

¹¹⁶ See for example, *CW*, "The New Birth," 89-90, 95, and 98; "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 105-106, 109, 117, 118, 119, 129, 163, 174, 190, 192, 194, 197, 199, 202, 204, 205, 206, 209, 211, 219, and 226.

¹¹⁷ *CW*, "The New Birth," 89.

¹¹⁸ Menno wrote: "Sometimes poor frail women or girls, are so fortified in God that they fear neither judge nor executioner[...] I fear scarcely one is to be found among a hundred thousand who will lay to heart such a courageous strong faith, obedience, confidence, power, great suffering, and shameful death." *CW*, "The True Christian Faith," 385. Bell's argument that "Ritualization is a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship" is particularly cogent in this instance. *Ritual Theory: Ritual Practice*, 8.

is, both the condition and pre-condition for the Anabaptist exercise of power by creating a space in which the marginal could speak and act, and the marginal could be spoken.¹¹⁹

Thus, faith baptism offered a radically different way of looking at the world, the self, and the position of the self in the world.¹²⁰ It was a ritual in which the political, religious and social interests of its participants came first, not last. Faith baptism was a gesture that was structured and functioned as a power contest working to achieve significant adjustments in the balance of power. Domination was contested in faith baptism through a politics and philosophy in which disparity and powerlessness as results of the enforcement of the law were challenged, and the right to make decisions that affect their own lives asserted.¹²¹ As a counter-measure, the public torture and execution of Anabaptists for their practice of faith baptism became a political ritual displaying the magnitude of the power underwriting the law, attempting to reassert and re-establish the power and integrity of established law.¹²² In the face of such a counter-measure, Menno's construction of a new subjectivity encouraged the adoption of "reason" as an ultimate guide for conduct, subordinating all secular and religious law, power, and authority to its direction.¹²³

¹¹⁹ The idea of political resistance creating a space for the marginal to speak and in which the marginal can be spoken is taken from Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

¹²⁰ It was, as Young has noted of postcolonialism, a matter of "looking at the photograph from the other side." *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2.

¹²¹ Menno frequently asserted that the enforcement of the law underwriting pedobaptism was an effort to control and dominate "conscience," and created many social ills and social instability. See for example, *CW*, "Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Preaching," 299.

¹²² Herbert L. Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 145. It was a way of seeing that Young describes as starting "from its own knowledges, [...] knowledges that come from the subaltern, the dispossessed, and seek[s] to change the terms and values under which we all live." *Postcolonialism*, 20.

¹²³ *CW*, "Why I do not Cease Teaching and Writing," 359. Of course, Menno taught that the scriptures were the infallible guide for conduct, but injected "reason" as the mechanism for mediating truth claims and evaluating all religious behaviour. Menno insisted that "reason" must accompany "revelation" and claimed both were ignored by, and absent with, the clergy. *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 209.

Subordinate classes rarely have the luxury of open and organized political activity. However, this does not preclude them from resistance to dominant power, its structures, and the society organized and supported by them. When power is defined in such a way that the refusal to submit to it is itself the exercise of power, freedom becomes the very condition of its exercise and the production of an alternate truth.¹²⁴ As a subversive ritual, faith baptism was a form of resistance employed to initiate, substantiate, maintain, and promote social, political and religious protest through the construction of new subjects. It was one of the few means of resistance available to marginalized Anabaptists in sixteenth-century society that stopped short of open defiance or rebellion.¹²⁵ Münster established the undesirability of overt defiance, and the “impossibility” of establishing an “earthly kingdom” in direct competition with established power.¹²⁶

It is by examining what Anabaptists complained of most, namely the unethical use of political and religious coercion, and the imbalance of power coercion established, that the key to understanding what was of primary political importance to them becomes clearly evident.¹²⁷ The practice of faith baptism was structured in such a way that it penetrated, demystified, and subverted the prevailing ideology, and social structures the

¹²⁴ Barry Smart, “The Politics of Truth and the Problem of Hegemony,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1986), 170.

¹²⁵ Robert Brenner has argued: “The peasant wars in both western and eastern Germany were largely a failure, as were most of the really large scale peasant movements of the later medieval period in Europe. What was successful, however, not only in western Germany, but throughout most of western Europe, was the less spectacular but ultimately more significant process of stubborn resistance”. “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” in *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, eds. T. H. Aston and C. H. Philpin (Cambridge; New York; New Rochelle; Melbourne; Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 44.

¹²⁶ *CW*, “Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” 37.

¹²⁷ Scott argues that the key to understanding the marginalized is to be found in searching for what they complain of the most. *Weapons of the Weak*, 239.

dominant ideology had created.¹²⁸ For all the talk of spiritual matters, the discourse surrounding and supporting pedobaptism was a politically constituted and embodied discourse used to control, and when deemed necessary, punish human bodies. Faith baptism worked to expose the hidden relations of power embedded in pedobaptism and the truth it had created, as well as the truth it repressed.¹²⁹

3.6 Anticlericalism: Prophetic Posture, Prophetic Power

It was Anabaptist conduct, and not only Anabaptist teaching that levelled severe criticism at the Catholic Church.¹³⁰ Anabaptist anticlericalism established and expressed through faith baptism was an ideological resource, which had a functional political role. Anabaptist anticlericalism was not simply “a knee-jerk reaction.” It was a resource carefully employed as a political strategy,¹³¹ and was used as an instrument toward a desired end.¹³² Scribner has stated that anticlericalism retains two possible explanations.¹³³ It can be framed as a psychological stance, or it may be understood as a

¹²⁸ Menno repeatedly accused “the preachers” and the “learned ones” of deceiving secular rulers into thinking that they had become members and companions of the body of Christ with all its attendant benefits by virtue of their baptism. See for example, *CW*, “The New Birth,” 95, 98; “Epistle to Micron,” 920; “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 634, 665, 725; and “Reply to False Accusations,” 554.

¹²⁹ Deleuze, *On Foucault*, 28-29.

¹³⁰ Martin Haas, “The Path of the Anabaptists into Separation: The Interdependence of Theology and Social Behaviour,” in *The Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer*, eds. James M. Stayer, and Werner O. Packull (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/ Hunt Pub. 1980), 83.

¹³¹ Natalie Zemon Davis argues: “There is little evidence that laity traced this lack of attention to the insufficient training that contemporary ecclesiastics and present-day historians identified as the culprit [of anticlericalism.]” In *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800): Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, eds. Barbara B. Diefendorf, and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 141. In fact, Davis argues: “The reform of the parochial clergy pushed the rural laity further away from the church.” *Culture and Identity*, 141.

¹³² Scribner, *Religion and Culture*, 170. See also, Heinold Fast, “Reformation durch Provokation: Predigtstörungen in den Ersten Jahren der Reformation in der Schweiz,” in *Umstrittenes Täuferium: 1525-1975 Neue Forschungen*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 79-110.

¹³³ Scribner has suggested that the reformation revealed three important things about the clergy, which were responsible for anticlericalism. Firstly, they had lied, cheated and swindled the laity. Secondly they were

form of behaviour.¹³⁴ He states that anticlericalism “involves a perception of, and reaction to, the power wielded by the clergy as a distinctive social group, power which expressed itself in the economic, political, legal, social, sexual, and sacred spheres of daily life.”¹³⁵ The observation of Natalie Zemon Davis that “religious riot is likely to occur when it is believed that religious and/or political authorities are failing in their duties or need help in fulfilling them”,¹³⁶ aids in explaining the impetus underpinning Anabaptist anticlericalism.

Strict clerical control, and not only clergy abuses, fuelled the anticlerical rhetoric and actions of Anabaptists. Both were part of a strategy that levelled an anticlerical attack on the despotic character of the established Church,¹³⁷ embodying and displaying a lay desire for control of the church.¹³⁸ Clergy provided religious and social stabilization through control of religious power, mediating relations between humans and nonhuman powers.¹³⁹ Anabaptist anticlericalism attacked this established role and was often centred on what Anabaptists thought the signifying and charitable role of the Church and clergy should be.¹⁴⁰ Anabaptist anticlericalism also established the right of the layperson to speak to the community,¹⁴¹ providing a forum within the community for propagating

shown to be the personification of evil. Thirdly, the priests could not stop blaspheming and therefore, everyone had to act against them all at once. *Popular Culture*, 251.

¹³⁴ See “Anticlericalism and the Reformation in Germany,” in Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 243-256.

¹³⁵ Scribner, *Religion and Culture in Germany*, 149.

¹³⁶ See Natalie Zemon Davis, “Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,” in *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents*, ed. Alfred Soman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

¹³⁷ Hans Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 12.

¹³⁸ Walter Klaassen argues that the rejection of pedobaptism and the practice of faith baptism was more than “a logical step. It had to do with desire for lay control of the church.” “The Rise of the Baptism of Adult Believers in Swiss Anabaptism,” in *Anabaptism Revisited: Essays on Anabaptist/Mennonite Studies in Honor of C. J. Dyck*, ed. Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1992), 90.

¹³⁹ Bell, *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice*, 134.

¹⁴⁰ See Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 191, for his discussion of anticlericalism being more than simply social rebellion against a corrupt clergy.

¹⁴¹ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, 42.

convictions suppressed by established power. Thus, faith baptism was an important mechanism for bypassing the clergy, thereby appropriating and claiming the authority and power to define, and/or redefine reality.

Anabaptist preachers and laypersons frequently claimed that they were better able to understand the truth of the scriptures than the clergy, or “the learned ones.”¹⁴² It was largely due to their claim of faithfulness in living the truths of the gospel that Anabaptists considered themselves better able than the clergy to determine what course of religious, social, or political action needed to be implemented, as well as how it should be implemented.¹⁴³ The scriptures were often used as a diagnostic tool to point out and emphasize the moral failures of the clergy,¹⁴⁴ and to label and thereby denigrate their theology as “human additions,”¹⁴⁵ “invented,” “human righteousness,”¹⁴⁶ or “human wisdom and philosophy.”¹⁴⁷ It was evangelical preaching, the “preaching of God’s Word,” as Scribner describes it, which gave rise to an “impatience for change which expressed itself in direct action, and the Gospel afforded a powerful weapon to legitimize these struggles.”¹⁴⁸ To a large degree, it was the practice of faith baptism that accommodated this “impatience” for Anabaptists.

The exercise of power in the Anabaptist community quickly became a debate over the roles and responsibilities of the laity within the *Gemeinde*. Anabaptist resistance, as it was evident in faith baptism, was not the rejection of the legitimacy of all authority as

¹⁴² Klaassen, “The Rise of Anabaptism,” 90.

¹⁴³ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 98-99; “Why I do not Cease Teaching and Preaching,” 303; and “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 162.

¹⁴⁴ *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 253; “The True Christian Faith,” 377; “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 508; and “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 724-726.

¹⁴⁵ *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 53; “The True Christian Faith,” 382; “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 513.

¹⁴⁶ *CW*, “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 513.

¹⁴⁷ *CW*, “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” 526.

¹⁴⁸ Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 174.

Claus-Peter Clasen has suggested.¹⁴⁹ But rather, it was a commitment to the process of resisting the exercise of coercive power over body and conscience. It was through such resistance that Anabaptists found their role in society.¹⁵⁰ Menno assumed a prophetic posture in relation to state and church power, “warning,” “admonishing,” and “directing” those powers.¹⁵¹ Roy Rappaport has aptly noted that when “a sanctified authority becomes oppressive [...] that authority may be deprived of its sanctity by those subordinate to it. [...] Prophets may arise, and may sanctify new political movements that may challenge the traditional sanctity of existing institutions.”¹⁵² Through faith baptism, Anabaptists enacted and communicated their fundamental values, and established the foundation and self-definition of the Anabaptist community. It was an act of resistance that refused to acknowledge the prevailing totalizing coercive authority of the secular state, the established Church, and the clergy.¹⁵³ Faith baptism was the appropriation of official church and state practice, revising them in such a way that they no longer served established power, but now served lay resistance to those authorities.

¹⁴⁹ Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism; a Social History, 1525-1618: Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 180, and 208. Egil Grislis has more accurately stated: “Certainly not an anarchist, Menno upheld the ordinary sword of the magistrates as ordained by God. [...] But appreciation of and obedience to magistrates was in the last analysis possible only “in so far as they are not contrary to the Word of God.”” “The Concern for Christian Liberation According to Menno Simons,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 55, no. 4 (October 1981), 288.

¹⁵⁰ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 345.

¹⁵¹ Though Menno did not dedicate any of his writings to lords or noblemen as was customary, he did directly address them in his treatises. For example, *CW*, “The New Birth,” 95; “Foundation of Christian Doctrine, 106, 117, 118; “Exhortation to Magistrates,” 192, 194, 202; “Why I do not Cease Teaching and Preaching,” 314, 319; “The True Christian Faith,” 359, 363, 400; “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 520; and “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” 521, 525, 527, 528, 530.

¹⁵² Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, 311.

¹⁵³ Alastair Duke, “The Face of Popular Religious Dissent in the Low Countries, 1520-1530.” In *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (no. 1, January, 1975), 41-67.

3.7 Anabaptist Revisions, Effects

Muir has noted: "Any attempt to change any ritual had implications for the distribution of power within the community and the prestige of individuals and groups."¹⁵⁴ Much in the Anabaptist practice of baptism is in sharp contrast, and in violation, of established norms, traditions and ritual practice. Anabaptist practice rejected the obligations inscribed in the religious and civil law underwriting pedobaptism.¹⁵⁵ That is, it rejected the privileged discourse of truth built around pedobaptism, as well as the power that was exercised to enforce that truth and pacify all competing truth claims.¹⁵⁶ Pedobaptism, which was presented and defended as the mechanism tempering and preventing violence by establishing a unity, was rejected by Anabaptists as the very mechanism by which and through which, both domination and violence were advanced.¹⁵⁷ Anabaptists held pedobaptism responsible for systematically denying important attributes of humanity and ultimately justifying their own harsh treatment.¹⁵⁸ The rejection of pedobaptism, that is, the rejection of the social order it had created and now maintained, was centred on the rejection of the characterizations the dominant power gave to its actions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 211.

¹⁵⁵ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129; and "Christian Baptism," 284-285.

¹⁵⁶ It is quite clear from his writings that Menno understood that the Anabaptist conflict with authorities was centred in the struggle for the "truth" and for the "church." That is, for the right to claim to be the repository of truth with all the benefits and responsibilities attending it. See, *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 628.

¹⁵⁷ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129, 133; "Christian Baptism," 268.

¹⁵⁸ Menno argues that reason and intelligence are important human qualities and form the rule of life. He argued that both are negated in pedobaptism and are replaced with church practice, authority and structure. *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 236.

¹⁵⁹ Menno insisted that "noble, illustrious lords," and "judges and officers of the law" could not hide behind the law but must recognize their tyrannical actions for what they were. He insisted that "as often as you take, condemn, and put to the sword such people, that you thrust your tyrannical sword into the blessed flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ." *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 285. See also, Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 236.

One of the most constant features of the practice of faith baptism was that it mocked and worked to undermine the established church practice of pedobaptism. One of Conrad Grebel's earliest baptisms vividly illustrates this point. Grebel reportedly baptized Wolfgang Uliman in the Rhine while Uliman was "entirely naked like a child."¹⁶⁰ On other occasions adults were re-named during their baptism.¹⁶¹ Moreover, the important reliance on church clergy, which perpetuated the distinction between the sacred and profane, was effaced in the Anabaptist practice.¹⁶² The centrally important role of the office of clergy in baptism, and the power invested in that office, were replaced with the simple requirement of a "clear conscience" as the only necessary pre-condition for an administrator of faith baptism.¹⁶³ The efficacy of faith baptism was centred in the pledge of the one being baptized, and not on the power invested in the office of the one administering it. Many of the most readily apparent Anabaptist revisions constituted an assault directed at the Catholic Church clergy's claim to the power to control the divine.¹⁶⁴ Faith baptism worked to diminish, if not eliminate, the established dependence of the laity on the clergy.

The practice of faith baptism notably rejected the prominence that sacred places occupied in the cultural and religious life of the sixteenth century. Most Anabaptist baptisms were performed within homes or outdoor places, shunning church buildings as

¹⁶⁰ Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 143.

¹⁶¹ Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*, 106.

¹⁶² Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 254.

¹⁶³ Armour, *Baptism*, 133.

¹⁶⁴ See Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 255 for a summary of the everyday things for which the laity was dependent on the clergy.

suitable locations.¹⁶⁵ On one occasion, Lutherans reported that Melchior Hoffman was “conducting mass baptisms in the open street.”¹⁶⁶ Balthasar Hubmaier and his followers reportedly held their baptisms in barns, inns, kitchens, fields, forests, pits, along roadsides and at, or near, creeks and rivers.¹⁶⁷ Any location appeared to be suitable, provided that participants had some assurance they were not likely to be disturbed by the authorities. Faith baptisms tended to take place whenever and wherever the Anabaptist community assembled, irrespective of whether or not the Catholic Church deemed the location sacrosanct, waiting only on a willing and suitable candidate.¹⁶⁸

The extent to which faith baptism effaced the distinction between sacred and profane was graphically demonstrated by Hubmaier and his followers on Easter Day, April 16, 1525, when they baptized 300 persons using water from a milk pail.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, in 1530, Melchior Hoffman reportedly baptized approximately 300 persons from a barrel in the *Geerhammer*,¹⁷⁰ a room that served as a vestry for priests.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, on at least two occasions, the first taking place in Switzerland in 1525, and the second taking place in Bavaria in 1527, water used for faith baptism was taken from wagon wheel ruts in a roadway.¹⁷² Such action flouted Catholic practice while graphically demonstrating Menno’s insistence that, “We are not cleansed by the washing

¹⁶⁵ Armour, *Baptism*, 109. They were shunned because they were thought to house the “fallen church” and a strict separation between the “false” church and the “true” church was considered essential to Anabaptists. See Menno’s treatise “The New Birth,” *CW*, 89.

¹⁶⁶ Armour, *Baptism*, 109.

¹⁶⁷ Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*, 103.

¹⁶⁸ Not all who requested faith baptism were in fact baptized, as the example of Hans Kendtner illustrates. It was explained at Augsburg that the request for baptism is honoured only after an examination of the believer’s life is found to be satisfactory. Menno makes this process and prerequisite especially clear in his “Christian Baptism,” *CW*, 227-288.

¹⁶⁹ Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism*, 19. Vedder relates the same story in his biography, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Leader of the Anabaptists*, 112. See also Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 133.

¹⁷⁰ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 108.

¹⁷¹ Armour, *Baptism*, 108.

¹⁷² Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History*, 105.

of water, but by the Word of the Lord.”¹⁷³ Hoffman was known to have performed baptisms without any water at all, thereby thoroughly denigrating and revising traditional baptismal practice, placing the emphasis in the ritual on the marking of the elect, and their participation in redemptive history.¹⁷⁴

Susan Karant-Nunn’s suggestion that reformers sought to limit, or eliminate, the ritual accretions of the ages through the reformation of ritual practice, does not adequately explain the drastic Anabaptist departure from generally accepted and well-established medieval tradition. Anabaptist revisions to the practice of baptism went beyond simply restoring ritual practice to some earlier pristine state. Anabaptists deemed that the efficacy of the ritual was not to be found in its material elements, but in its political expediency. Baptism was a ritual in which its participants were initiated into and formed a new community. Water baptism gained newfound importance for Anabaptists because it corresponded with a new conceptual mandate. As Hubmaier stated: “The meaning ought to receive more consideration than the sign itself.”¹⁷⁵ Anabaptist revisions moved the emphasis in the ritual away from what had become in its physical components an essentially mystical understanding of baptism, and then moved it toward a more rationally based and politically rooted understanding, in which “faith” identified the convert with a new faith community. It was deemed to be a community in which the members were separated from the relationship of violence in which they were caught, and

¹⁷³ *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 245.

¹⁷⁴ Hoffman’s followers thought of believer’s baptism as “the magical “Thau sign.” Anyone with this seal on his forehead was thought protected from the terrors of the apocalypse and from the punishment of God. Klaus Deppermann, *Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation*, trans. Malcolm Wren, ed. Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979). See also, Armour, *Baptism*, 108. Hans Hut also thought himself “sealing the elect” in baptism, and would dip two of his fingers in water and then make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one baptized with those fingers. Armour, *Baptism*, 94. For Menno’s use of the “Thau” sign see, “Spiritual Resurrection,” *CW*, 59; “Admonition on Church Discipline,” *CW*, 416; and “Reply to Gellius Faber,” *CW*, 686.

¹⁷⁵ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 262.

which simultaneously empowered them to remain that which the dominant powers were seeking to efface. By remaining individuals through their practice of baptism, Anabaptists continued to exercise the freedom that exists as the condition and effect of power at the centre of the power relation.¹⁷⁶ It was a ritual practice that has been accurately described by Bell as “the very production of power relations.”¹⁷⁷

According to Balthasar Hubmaier, positing baptism as entrance into the place of salvation, as Catholicism did, does not fully explain it.¹⁷⁸ He maintained that faith baptism was an action that incorporated the individual into a community based on the individual’s pledge to live according to the rule of Christ, in submission to the community of Christ. Thus, faith baptism was the contravention of the established social order through the creation of a new community of empowered individuals, and the baptismal pledge in a reciprocal action, established the authority of the community over the individual. Through faith baptism, the individual voluntarily placed herself or himself within the influence and discipline of the community.¹⁷⁹ It was a community the empowered individual helped to create and sustain.¹⁸⁰ It was an effort to break with the norms and values of the dominant ideology and its program of coercion by establishing new subjects, which in turn created and maintained a new social order.¹⁸¹ Faith baptism established a covenantal relation with one’s fellows in which the faith and commitment of the individual was announced to the community, and the community in turn witnessed

¹⁷⁶ Dreyfus, *Foucault*, 221. See also Hoy, *Power Repression*, 139.

¹⁷⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 196.

¹⁷⁸ Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, “On the Christian Baptism,” 127.

¹⁷⁹ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 93, 94, and 98.

¹⁸⁰ See Menno’s, “A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline,” *CW*, 407-418, and “A Clear Account of Excommunication,” *CW*, 455-486. See also Balthasar Hubmaier’s “On the Christian Baptism of Believers,” Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 95-149; and “A Public Challenge to all Believers,” Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 78-80, make very similar points.

¹⁸¹ See *CW*, “The New Birth,” 98; “The True Christian Faith,” 370, and “Christian Baptism,” 238.

to the faith of the individual, acknowledging the all-important presence of the Spirit within the individual.¹⁸²

Thus, faith baptism resisted and worked against the dominant authority, its practice of baptism and the discourse embedded in it, as an essential part of its larger program of social transformation. Faith baptism was a program that rejected the domination and tyranny of political and religious power by establishing a “spiritual community” outside the jurisdiction of all temporal authority.¹⁸³ Faith baptism established and fostered freedom, creativity, and deliverance from coercive domination within the context of a new community. It constituted a significant initiative and act of resistance, when the issues of dignity and autonomy are privileged as opposed to material exploitation. The thrust of the ritual was centred on the rejection of Church and clergy, and the society organized around them.¹⁸⁴ It worked positively, providing the vehicle for the re-formation of the human being and then the larger society.¹⁸⁵ It was a ritual in which and through which its participants were transformed from objects to subjects against the prevailing tendency to establish and maintain them as objects. The stubborn Anabaptist refusal to admit, conform to, and submit to the legitimacy of pedobaptism cast domination as tyranny and insubordination as righteousness.¹⁸⁶ Menno claimed:

All properly believing parents are thus minded toward their children, that they would a hundred times rather see them jailed in deep, dark dungeon for the sake of the Lord and His testimony than sitting with the deceiving priests in their idol

¹⁸² See Menno's *CW*, “The New Birth,” 89-102; and Balthasar Hubmaier's “On the Christian Baptism of Believers,” in Pipkin and Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 95-149, especially 115-117.

¹⁸³ See Menno's treatise “The True Christian Faith,” *CW*, especially 326. See also Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 22-23.

¹⁸⁴ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 99; “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 129; “Christian Baptism, 252-253, 268; and “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 513.

¹⁸⁵ Menno wrote: “We who were formerly no people at all and who knew of no peace are now called to be such a glorious people of God, a church, kingdom, inheritance, body, and possession of peace.” *CW*, “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 555.

¹⁸⁶ See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 58.

church [...]. A hundred times rather would they see them, for the sake of the truth of the Lord, bound hands and feet and dragged before lords and princes [...]. A hundred times rather would they see them exiled, burning at the stake, drowning or attached to a wheel, for righteousness' sake, than to see them live apart from God in all luxury and carnal pleasures, or be emperors and kings and therefore sent to condemnation.¹⁸⁷

Established power relations existed by virtue of points of insubordination, which are by definition, also means of escape.¹⁸⁸

The moderation of the dominant power was made possible in faith baptism through the creation of an additional layer of authority, diffusing the direct power of the magistrates.¹⁸⁹ Through faith baptism, participants were removed, or separated from the dominant society and established in a new order, no longer ultimately accountable to the old order.¹⁹⁰ The visible community that was formed was itself a forum for articulating a particular ideology of faith, friendship and trust.¹⁹¹ Through separation from the existing social order initiated by the practice of faith baptism, the oppressive and disagreeable features of the present order were excluded in the construction of an alternate order.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ *CW*, "True Christian Faith," 386-387

¹⁸⁸ Dreyfus, *Foucault*, 225.

¹⁸⁹ See Christopher R. Friedrichs discussion on the effective moderation of sixteenth-century authority. *Urban Society in an Age of War: Nördlingen, 1580-1720* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 16.

¹⁹⁰ Menno wrote: "And we conclude in this matter, [baptism] as in all matters of conscience, in view of the wrath of Almighty God, that we must not and may not have our eye on lords and princes, nor on doctors and teachers of schools, nor on the councils of the fathers, and customs of longstanding. For against God's Word, neither emperors nor kings [...] nor proscriptions matter." *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129.

¹⁹¹ Menno wrote: "In baptism they bury their sins in the Lord's death and rise with Him to a new life. They circumsise their hearts with the Word of the Lord; they are baptized with the Holy Ghost into the spotless, holy body of Christ, as obedient members of His church[....] They put on Christ and manifest His spirit, nature, and power in all their conduct." *CW*, "The New Birth," 93

¹⁹² *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 284. It should be noted that Bell argues ritualization alone cannot "turn a group of individuals into a community if they have no other relationships or interests in common." *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice*, 222.

3.8 Conclusion: A New Model for Society

Anabaptist religious devotion was expressed through political and social organization. Anabaptists advocated for and insisted upon the suspension of all political violence in order to establish a new community. The Anabaptist demand for communal autonomy was the pre-eminent precondition for positive resistance, which was expressed in and through their practice of faith baptism. Faith baptism was appropriated, adopted, adapted, and specially suited to the Anabaptist view of the church and model for society. As the primary model for Anabaptism, faith baptism did not conserve or maintain the existing social order.¹⁹³ In fact what it sought to do is undermine the prevailing order by establishing a new moral order among its participants. This new moral order was in turn thought to construct a new social order.

The Anabaptist model of a new community, worked to not only bring transmutation, but wholesale change. It presented a “new” community that was by definition immobile or “demobilized,” and therefore “more amenable to control from above and outside” than an established community.¹⁹⁴ As a model, it was an ideal explicitly directing a functioning that was never entirely complete.¹⁹⁵ Faith baptism was presented as predicated on a foundation of mutuality, not domination, producing all-together new relations of power, and thereby, developing another or competing vision for both church and society. Faith baptism initiated a process of “auto-translation,” being the vehicle whereby the self was translated through the seizure of agency, and the acquisition

¹⁹³ Clerical control of baptism was enforced through government decrees with severe penalties attached for any infractions. These decrees stipulated that every child was to be baptized by a priest within the confines of a church without exception. Such decrees were issued as early as February 1, 1525 in Zurich. Furthermore, in Zurich no one was to preach unless officially authorized to do so. For further discussion see, Klaassen, “Baptism of Adult Believers.”

¹⁹⁴ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 191.

¹⁹⁵ This understanding of “model” is borrowed from Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 30.

of newfound self-respect.¹⁹⁶ It established the arena in which free agents interacted with other free agents creating a forum for imagining new social possibilities, and casting a new vision for society.¹⁹⁷ Pedobaptism was the fundamental sign of a clerical church and lay disenfranchisement, and therefore, reflected a model of the church and society Anabaptists rejected.¹⁹⁸

Faith baptism threatened to undermine the compact long established between the Church and *Obrigkeit*.¹⁹⁹ The organization, structure, and influence of the Church had insured that the laity remained dependent on the clergy for what were important religious, social and cultural needs.²⁰⁰ Faith baptism was a response to, and an attempt to, remedy the clergy's abuse of power through the empowerment of a new lay community.²⁰¹ It was an important step in removing the clergy's privileged status, forcing the integration of clergy into secular social and economic life, and thereby evoking a new social context as its desired end.²⁰² Faith baptism was a mechanism of power that dismissed one expression of power by establishing another. As a mechanism of power its efforts were directed at the inversion of the existing social and religious order through the creation of

¹⁹⁶ See Young's *Postcolonialism*, 146 for his discussion on auto-translation and its effects.

¹⁹⁷ It was through "holy baptism of believers in which we bury our sinful flesh and take to ourselves a new life" that the first step toward envisioning a new society became possible, according to Menno. *CW*, "Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing," 302.

¹⁹⁸ Klaassen, "Rise of Anabaptism," 90.

¹⁹⁹ While Clasen may or may not be right about the potential threat Anabaptism posed to established sixteenth century society, which was predicated on coercion, and essentially an authoritarian system, it does not follow, and it is far from certain, that a base of mutuality, such as that propagated by Anabaptism, was wholly inadequate as a foundation for society. The Anabaptist refusal to "acknowledge" existing conditions as the only possible political alternative, was the first necessary step toward exploring alternatives to the existing system.

²⁰⁰ Klaassen, "Rise of Anabaptism," 90.

²⁰¹ See Scribner, *Popular Culture*, 244-256 for an extensive, though by no means exhaustive, list and discussion of the various forms and extents of clerical abuse.

²⁰² John Hilary Martin argues that subversive ritual always preserves a certain degree of continuity with the past. "Bringing the Power of the Past into the Present," in *Religious and Social Ritual: Interdisciplinary Exploration*, eds. Michael B. Aune, and Valerie DeMarinis (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 30.

what the dominant ideology denied. In subverting the actions of the dominant ideology by establishing a competing ideology, faith baptism was a mode of political action and social intercourse directly aimed at revising power relations and thereby de-structuring the existing social organization.²⁰³ It refused to leave established modes for the exercise of power unchallenged, and through that refusal, Anabaptist resistance generated new creations, and new self-understandings emerged. Thus, faith baptism held all the implications for the constitution of the Anabaptist community in a ritual practice.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ For a brief discussion of how ritual may destructure social organization see Rappaport's section: "Intervals, Eternity and Communitas," in *Ritual and Religion*, 216-235, especially 219.

²⁰⁴ Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 178.

*To preach unto men by means of the hand, to untie the tongue by means of the fingers . . . to fight the Devil . . . with pen and ink. [...] Though seated in one spot, the scribe traverses diverse lands through the dissemination of what he has written.*¹

Chapter Four: Anabaptist Writing and Power

4.0 Statement of Chapter Objective

In this chapter, my thesis that sixteenth-century Anabaptists cannot accurately be labelled “apolitical,” because they were in fact politically engaged during that period is advanced through four closely interwoven propositions. Firstly, that the act of writing and publishing are always political actions in theory, regardless of whether or not the content of those acts is deemed to be political. That is, though the content of sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings was political at times and not at other times, the act of Anabaptists writing was always a political action in theory. Secondly, that writing was an important mechanism in the sixteenth-century exercise of power, defining the dominant powers, and was used by the dominant religious and political powers as an important tool for establishing and maintaining power relations. Thirdly and consequently, that the Anabaptist appropriation of writing and its powers constituted the appropriation of an important political mechanism, with such an appropriation and redeployment functioning as a significant instrument for establishing, promoting, and maintaining Anabaptist resistance. Finally, that sixteenth-century Anabaptists practiced writing and publishing, and moreover that they were aware, to some degree at least, of the significance of

¹ The instruction of Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus (490-585) to monks, as quoted in Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformation in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge; New York; Port Chester; Melbourne; Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 372.

propositions one to three above. That is, that the Anabaptist act of writing was a self-conscious and deliberate practice, which was inherently political.

4.1 Writing: Politics and Power in Theory

Peter Lucke has aptly noted: “Die grundlegende Veränderung der Gewaltstruktur ist eines zentralen Probleme der Reformationsflugschriften.”² [The fundamental change of the power structure is a central problem in reformation pamphlets.] The fundamental “problem” of the transformation of power to which Lucke draws our attention, was not as he points out, a problem that was external to Reformation pamphlets.³ Therefore, the transformation of power during the sixteenth century was not necessarily or categorically external to sixteenth-century writing.⁴ In fact, the fundamental problem of power during the sixteenth century, which was centred in the transformation of power structures, and therefore, the restructuring of power, was intimately linked to writing, and the act of writing. The restructuring of power was not only discussed in the literature of the sixteenth century, but was facilitated, perpetuated, and to some degree generated through writing. For, as Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has noted of the medium of print: “Publishers did

² Peter Lucke, *Gewalt und Gegengewalt in den Flugschriften der Reformation* (Göppingen: A. Kümmerle, 1974), 33.

³ Andrew Pettegree estimates that well over 10,000 pamphlets were published in Germany between 1520 and 1530. “Books, Pamphlets and Polemic,” in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 110.

⁴ Jacques Derrida defines “writing” as “that [which] gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: [...]. All this to describe not only the system of notation secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and the content of these activities themselves.” *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1979; reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2002), 9 (page citations are to reprint edition). However, Goldberg rightly insists that “the recognition that everyone writes, that there is no culture without violence, cannot efface the historicity of the discipline”. *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 17. With the exception of those occasions at which it is imperative to distinguish between the various forms “writing” took in the sixteenth century in order to accurately reflect historical realities, the term “writing” is used generically to refer to inscription in general.

much more than mirror the Reform; they prepared its way, they secured its results.”⁵

Eisenstein has further argued that the advent of print, and the exercise of the power inherent in the medium of print “contributed [...] to the permanent fragmentation of Latin Christendom.”⁶ Power and writing, as Lucke and Eisenstein have argued, and as I will demonstrate, were intimately connected in the sixteenth century, with writing always emerging as a political action.

Writing was, and still is, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, “venerated.”⁷

Writing, according to Derrida, has been a revered technology and as such it has occupied not only an important, but privileged place in history. Romy Clark and Roz Ivanič have effectively argued that writing is a privileged social practice and important in social formation. As a social practice, they argue, it is “embedded in social relations within a specific community, each with its own complex ideological and conventional practices.”⁸

Clark and Ivanič further describe the power values of writing as they are inscribed in the everyday use of language. They write:

The interests, values, beliefs and sets of power relations in the social context as a whole are inscribed in the prototypical ways of doing things that people draw on in their day-to-day uses of language. Where writing is concerned, prototypical ways of doing things can be divided into, on the one hand, the physical, mental and interpersonal practices that constitute and surround the act of writing, and on the other hand, ‘textual practices’ or ‘discourse conventions’: conventions for using the semiotic system itself. These two aspects of writing are often so closely interrelated that it does not make any theoretical sense to distinguish them.⁹

⁵ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 374.

⁶ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 118.

⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 17. Pettegree acknowledges the “tendency in recent scholarship to play down the importance of the book,” but effectively argues that when we “allow ourselves to be guided by participants and observers of Reformation activities and controversies, “it is clear that they quickly came to discern the power of the book.” “Books, Pamphlets and Polemic,” 111.

⁸ Clark and Ivanič, *The Politics of Writing*, 5.

⁹ Clark and Ivanič, *The Politics of Writing*, 12.

As an important and privileged social practice during the sixteenth century, writing was intimately connected to the production of knowledge, and the political power to establish the truth.

Although sixteenth-century Anabaptists declared themselves employed in an all-important task of recovery,¹⁰ being actively engaged in the restoration of the “true Christian church,”¹¹ at least one of the tools they appropriated and utilized to achieve their desired ends, was truly “novel.” Eisenstein argues: “What was new was the chance to make the message stick; to bring Bible-reading and book learning within the reach of all. For purposes of persuasion, the reformers used the pulpits no less effectively than the press. But it was the latter rather than the former which enabled them to change the educational institutions [...] for good.”¹² The possibilities inherent in the widespread distribution and circulation of writing, which was made available through the introduction of print technology made writing an entirely “new” device.¹³ Writing, according to Eisenstein, “opened new opportunities to preachers and teachers who wished to address large congregations.”¹⁴ As a novel and effective means of spreading Anabaptist reform, the act of writing, was not limited to generating religious effects, but

¹⁰ Menno described the source of the degeneration of the world as follows: “Writers and learned ones have little by little so corrupted everything through their counsel, decretals, and statutes, with all tyranny and violence of the great that there is (help, Lord) scarcely an article entire of all that Christ and His holy apostles taught.” *CW*, “Why I do Not Cease Teaching and Preaching,” 303. Menno credits his own writing, though described as “little talent,” with effectively bringing “back to light” “God’s holy Word.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105.

¹¹ Menno described their task as follows: “I and my brethren in the Lord desire nothing, [...] than that we may to the honor of God so labor with His fallen city and temple and captive people [...] that we may rebuild that which is demolished, repair that which is damaged, and free those who are captives with the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. And we would bring it back to its earlier state.” *CW*, “The New Birth,” 91.

¹² Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 371.

¹³ Eisenstein argues that protestant “doctrines harnessed a traditional religion to a new technology”. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 378. I am using writing here in the “narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation”, and referring to a form of inscription that is “related to the history of the West,” as Jacques Derrida has described it. *Of Grammatology*, 109, and 79, respectively.

¹⁴ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 402.

held significant social and political implications. As an eminently suitable mechanism for the exercise of power, writing established, directed, maintained and advanced the Anabaptist cause.

The sixteenth-century Anabaptist propagation of reform was expressed as religious devotion, was advanced through writing, and was intimately concerned with political and social organization, and therefore, the exercise of power. The Anabaptist propagation of reform was far more complex than simply the effort to correct errant doctrine.¹⁵ That is, the Anabaptist propagation of reform operated within an environment in which competing ideologies contended for audiences. It included a concerted attempt to reform people's behaviour, and it sought to present and establish an alternate social order. The conflict ensuing from competing sixteenth-century religious theologies was, as Lydia Harder rightly points out, "Also a political struggle between religious leaders seeking to re-establish authority on a firm basis. A focus on the authority of the Word of God did not do away with a merging of the power of the state and a newly reformed church."¹⁶

The Anabaptist commitment to the restoration of the "true Christian Church," did not preclude them from the exercise of power, nor did their commitment or actions exclude political engagement. Both power and political engagement were available to Anabaptists in and through writing, as both are securely entrenched within the written word. Anabaptist writing permitted the articulation of problems and situations as the essential first and primary step in moving towards reform. It was a form that enabled the

¹⁵ This fact is clearly evident in the hundreds of references in Menno's writing to political leaders, to their activities and especially to their exercise of power.

¹⁶ Lydia Harder, "Power and Authority in Mennonite Theological Development," in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, ed. Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 74.

expression of a point of view or posture that quite often looked idealistically ahead at that which might be presenting challenges, rather than back at the past seeking solutions. That is, Anabaptist writing and their purposes in writing were not centred on the delivery of established meanings, but instead were centred on the creation of a forum in which the discovery and dialogical creation of new meanings became possible. That is, for Anabaptists like Menno, writing was not limited to descriptions of political truth or the investigation of political realities. Menno was fully aware in his use of writing that he wrote "against the greater part of the doctors or the learned men."¹⁷ He did so, not only because he recognized in writing the opportunity and power to resist "such perverse, rebellious, disobedient, and contentious persons, according to the Word of the Lord",¹⁸ but more importantly because he recognized in writing the power to establish new understandings of the "pure, heavenly Word."¹⁹ Anabaptist writing involved, and was centred on, the matter of meaning making, the process of generating meaning, and not only the process of transcribing readymade social or political meanings.²⁰

The sixteenth-century struggle between competing ideologies, each attempting to establish, promote and/or maintain conflicting or competing religious, social and political orders, was a struggle centred in communication, and often in the interaction between various forms of communication.²¹ For as Robert W. Scribner has argued, both orality

¹⁷ *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 233.

¹⁸ *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 231.

¹⁹ *CW*, "Christian Baptism," 234, 237, and 284. Menno worked to create a new society through his writing though it was presented as a continuation of the early church.

²⁰ See, Clark and Ivanič for further discussion of writing as a suitable vehicle for meaning making. *The Politics of Writing*, 110.

²¹ See for example Scribner's work in this area. "Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print," 259. Scribner argues that literacy was not privileged as an authoritative mode of communication when compared with oral communication. He insists: "Both were assumed to be equally authoritative." "Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print," 260. Eisenstein on the other hand, has argued that the advent of printing must be given pride of place as the catalyst responsible for "all the problems associated with the disruption of Western

and literacy were important in forming public opinion, with political authorities keenly aware “of the political significance of choosing oral or written proceedings in many kinds of negotiation.”²² Furthermore, it was writing’s displacement of the pulpit’s earlier primacy, according to Eisenstein, that has weakened “local community ties.”²³ Orality and literacy, as well as various other visual media, as Scribner has pointed out, were effectively employed, and served as important instruments in the sixteenth-century political struggle for ideological supremacy.²⁴ Thus, it was through profound changes in communication during the sixteenth century that the Anabaptist propagation of reform became possible, was established and advanced with writing often taking on a primary strategic role.

It was the relative permanence of writing, that is, in comparison with oral forms of communication, and it was the power invested in writing during the sixteenth century, that made writing well suited to Anabaptist resistance, enabling pamphlets to make their profound assault on existing power. Eisenstein argues: “Because religious dissent was implemented by print, it could leave a much more indelible and far-reaching impression than dissent had ever left before.”²⁵ The written word was for Menno, “living” in the

Christendom” by virtue of its chronological priority. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 450. Nevertheless, it is an interesting aspect of sixteenth-century writing that texts frequently merged word and image in print. As Pettegree notes: “The German pamphlets drew on a rich visual tradition, a tradition which was itself developed and adapted by the Reformation.” “Books, Pamphlets, and Polemic,” 123.

²² Scribner, “Heterodoxy, Literacy, and Print,” 261. However, I do not accept Scribner’s argument and its implicit theoretical assumptions, which suggest that the authority of reformers was established through the spoken word, and that that authority was then transferred to the written word. Derrida’s argument that writing is not a supplement of speech and that the power of writing is not dependent on the authority of speech is not only directly applicable here, it makes better sense of the historical record. *Of Grammatology*, 10.

²³ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 131.

²⁴ Scribner, “Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print,” 261.

²⁵ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 311. Robert W. Scribner however, dismisses studies of the “impact of the printed word on the spread of evangelical ideas” as representative of “naïve methodological assumptions” with a “limited understanding of ‘public opinion’ and the processes of its formation.” “Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print in the Early German Reformation,” in *Cambridge Studies in*

sense that it was a speaking that could continue to be heard.²⁶ Anabaptist dissent expressed through writing proved to be difficult to silence, more difficult to suppress than their human voices. C. Arnold Snyder notes: "Controlling the rural pulpits was difficult enough; what followed would prove even more difficult for the Zurich authorities: they needed to silence the rank and file in the rural districts".²⁷ For as Andrew Pettegree has noted, the "effectiveness of the printed medium as a vehicle both for theological controversies and wider social criticism was recognized on all sides, even by Luther's Catholic opponents as they struggled to find an effective response to the barrage of printed criticism."²⁸ As an effective medium for the propagation of reform, writing, unlike oral communication, was thought to possess longevity and to some degree permanence, thereby making Anabaptist "writing" superior to "speaking."²⁹

The complex relationship between politics, writing, power and religious action in the sixteenth century, was a struggle between competing factions and ideologies in the constantly shifting power relations for a more desirable set of relations.³⁰ It was through the power available in writing, and through its intimate association with knowledge that Menno could claim in his writings to "testify to the truth" so that "all those who see, read, or hear these our writings may know with clarity that the faulty, fruitless faith of the

Medieval Literature 23: Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 263. Nevertheless, Scribner does acknowledge that literacy "was an important trigger of potentially dangerous knowledge." "Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print," 278.

²⁶ Nevertheless, Menno was critically aware that he was "not allowed to speak" and therefore, took up writing. *CW*, "Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden," 34; and "The True Christian Faith," 325.

²⁷ C. Arnold Snyder "Word and Power in Reformation Zurich," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 81 (1990), 280. Snyder notes that a state determined to enforce "religious uniformity as a means of consolidating political power" required the silencing of all dissenting voices. "Word and Power," 284.

²⁸ Pettegree, "Books, Pamphlets, and Polemic," 111.

²⁹ *CW*, "The New Birth," 100.

³⁰ Travis Mogler, "Pamphlets, Preaching and Politics: The Image Controversy in Reformation Wittenberg, Zürich and Strassburg" (*Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75, no. 3, 2001), 346.

world is useless, vain, and dead”.³¹ The effective employment of writing was instrumental in bringing an important shift; it was a vital force in initiating, perpetuating and facilitating a transfer or diffusion of power, acting as an important vehicle in the transformation of power structures through the exploitation of new modes of communication.³² Menno noted of his own writing that it had “been productive of much good to some.”³³ He further recognized the political implications of his writing and stated: “I am well aware, most beloved readers, that we because of our teaching and writing are cursed, loathed, hated, reviled, persecuted, and eagerly condemned to death by innumerable persons of both high and low estate.”³⁴

4.20 Writing: Representation of State Power and Politics

Writing is, in the end, always concerned with establishing, maintaining, preserving and promoting certain social, religious and political interests. As Romy Clark and Roz Ivanič have argued:

By choosing to write rather than use another form of social action, by engaging in particular writing practices, by putting certain messages or ideas into writing, by participating in certain discourses and genres through writing, people are reproducing particular sets of values, beliefs and power relations in the social context, thereby reinforcing the existing hegemony.³⁵

Jonathon Goldberg has noted that literacy can be accurately conceptualized as a “culturally generated need;” a need that “is met in ways that maintain social hierarchies and divisions.”³⁶ He argues that from about the sixteenth century on, “there was an

³¹ *CW*, “True Christian Faith,” 328.

³² What was “written,” and not what was “read,” is of primary importance for this project. These are two very different sorts of enquiries.

³³ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105.

³⁴ *CW*, “Why I do Not Cease Teaching And Writing,” 292.

³⁵ Romy Clark and Roz Ivanič, *The Politics of Writing* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 118.

³⁶ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 48.

increasing need for literate skills [...] but also a need to maintain these skills within the limits of an increasingly differentiated educational apparatus.”³⁷

Jacques Derrida echoes Goldberg’s argument on many fronts and notes in a similar vein: “It has long been known that the power of writing in the hands of a small number, caste, or class, is always contemporaneous with hierarchization, let us say with political difference; it is at the same time distinction into groups, classes, and levels of economico-politico-technical power, and the delegation of authority.”³⁸ Jack Goody reinforces Derrida’s argument in his own discussion on the hegemonic value of writing. He concludes: “Where writing is, ‘class’ cannot be far away.”³⁹ Goody suggests that since “the teaching of writing [...] was virtually everywhere [...] taken over by the priesthood, which has shown a strong attachment to canonized texts for which it is intermediary, thus bolstering its position, instruction often took on forms that supported and froze the status quo.”⁴⁰ Henri-Jean Martin has noted even more pointedly that the established mission and appointed task of sixteenth-century theologians, was to “clarify dogma under the supervision of the hierarchy, which drew conclusions from their findings; their debates were not to weaken the edifice of the church.”⁴¹

Goldberg has argued, that during the sixteenth century writing was intimately linked with the political controls of the state.⁴² Writing came to define the state, and the powers of writing were representative of the state. Goldberg has furthered argued that the

³⁷ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 48.

³⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 130.

³⁹ Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge; New York; New Rochelle; Melbourne; Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1987), xv.

⁴⁰ Jack Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington; London: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 128.

⁴¹ Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 172.

⁴² Goldberg, *Writing Matter*.

interdependence of power and writing during the sixteenth century meant that the control of the means of communication secured hegemonic social, religious and political control for the dominant religious authority and political powers.⁴³ And, according to Goody, that religious and political power was in turn used to maintain hegemonic control over the means of communication.⁴⁴ The state employed writing as an important mechanism in the exercise of its power, but it too in time was required to submit to the power of writing, as Goldberg has noted.⁴⁵

The history of writing exposes writing as intimately allied to the hands of power. Alphabetic scripts, which had become legible over time, were replaced with other scripts that worked to keep the “reserves of illegibility in the service of the state,”⁴⁶ as Goldberg has noted. He has further argued that an educational system directed at forming intellectuals with power cannot be separated from the establishment of hierarchies of class and power. For it was often through the written word, during the sixteenth century, that cultural institutions and activities were both promoted and transformed, thereby maintaining and concentrating power in the hands of the literate who held power. According to Goldberg, pedagogy “represents and reproduces the state in its differentiated and bureaucratized form, and attempts to secure for itself a sphere of power as the place from which and within which the state is produced.”⁴⁷ Established sixteenth-century authorities required the repression of writing, and strict control of the power available in and through it.⁴⁸

⁴³ See Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, especially 131, and 262.

⁴⁴ Goody, *Power of the Written Tradition* 128.

⁴⁵ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 113.

⁴⁶ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 210.

⁴⁷ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 45.

⁴⁸ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 174.

Power was written into the discourse and ideology of established sixteenth-century authority becoming synonymous with it, functioning as the vehicle for its self-perpetuation, self-legitimation and self-preservation. Such power necessarily contained the capacity to exclude, to declare abnormal, to delegitimize, to devalorize, to repress, and to degrade.⁴⁹ For, the exercise of power in writing, as in all other structures or technologies of power, necessarily affirms by denying its opposite. Written words in the Netherlands and Low Countries were not simply catalysts for discussion or debate, though their Anabaptist authors often presented them as such.⁵⁰ They could constitute evidence of heretical belief, according to the authorities, and all such writings were subjected to rigorous inspection and regulation as part of a determined effort that was intended to curb heterodoxy and enforce conformity.⁵¹ Christopher Friedrichs has argued that the posting of placards, “No matter how innocuous, was regarded as a grave attack on the authority of the council and the peace of the community.”⁵² The history of writing is not to be dissociated from the history of censorship.⁵³

Henri-Jean Martin has insisted on the close relation of writing, politics and power, and has indicated that during the sixteenth century it was common practice for “sovereigns to have the texts of their decisions printed and distributed to those who needed to know of them. Later the various courts and still later the ecclesiastical authorities and local governments imitated their example. Finally, first sovereigns and

⁴⁹ John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 193.

⁵⁰ Menno stated that his writings were solicitations for public discussion. *CW*, “Reply to Micron,” 938.

⁵¹ Pettegree, *Books, Pamphlets and Polemic*, 119.

⁵² Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban Society in an Age of War: Nördlingen, 1580-1720* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 203.

⁵³ Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 157.

then leaders of political factions published circular letters in support of their policies.”⁵⁴

In other words, sixteenth-century political realities were organized around, and perpetuated through, the medium of written decrees and public records.⁵⁵

This fact was not lost on the “common man” during the sixteenth century. Gerald Strauss points out that peasants, the poor, and the victimized, as well as some among the educated such as Thomas Murner, held lawyers, jurists, and written laws in deep suspicion.⁵⁶ The designation of being a jurist, according to Strauss “carried automatic association with the Roman law”, which was, as a written law, commonly perceived to be in direct opposition to customary law, conscience and faith.⁵⁷ Peasants would often claim: “Their books allow them to prove anything they wish to prove;” with peasants charging that “mere words” were employed by lawyers and authorities in violation of custom, conscience and faith, as Strauss notes.⁵⁸

Menno recognized and lamented the powers inherent in writing when allied with religious and political authorities, which he then claimed could “corrupt everything” “through decretals, and statutes.”⁵⁹ Menno held “writers and learned ones” personally responsible for the dire consequences that resulted from aligning, supporting and ultimately endorsing with their writing, what he described as “all the tyranny and violence of the great.”⁶⁰ Menno decried writing and the exercise of its power when it was maintained as the privileged possession and prerogative of established authorities, and

⁵⁴ Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 295.

⁵⁵ Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 134.

⁵⁶ Gerald Strauss, *Law, Resistance, and the State: The Opposition to Roman Law in Reformation Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 1-12, especially 6.

⁵⁷ Strauss, *Law, Resistance, and the State*, 24.

⁵⁸ Strauss, *Law, Resistance, and the State*, 28.

⁵⁹ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 91.

⁶⁰ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 91.

was, as he claimed, effectively employed to “corrupt the Word.”⁶¹ According to Menno, it was the “high and mighty lords, princes, [...] rulers, [...] all popes, cardinals, bishops, and wise and learned ones, who from the beginning have perverted and darkened the Scriptures.”⁶² It was the alliance of religious and political authorities through the mechanism and employment of writing that had resulted in twisting, subverting, and finally displacing the authority of the scriptures, according to Menno.

The argument that the extension of literacy necessarily consolidates power in the hands of the dominant and thereby works to maintain the status quo, has a corresponding anxiety: that the extension of literacy places power into anyone and everyone’s hands.⁶³ Through the state controlled extension of literacy and the wider distribution of the power inherent in it, the consolidation of state control became a possibility through the “instruction” and thereby control of society. For as Goldberg has noted:

A social terrain is remapped through properties that rewrite what will count as noble, renegotiations that correspond to the extensions of civility beyond the court to the schoolroom, and to the pedagogization of society, extending the skills of writing and, with it, the assurance that those extensions only confirm the structures of power—so long as those with power will confirm those structures by submitting their hands to it.⁶⁴

The extensions of literacy, through which Anabaptists appropriated writing, also worked to redefine but not necessarily abolish established relations of power, or the “class of power.”⁶⁵ Extensions of literacy during the sixteenth century did not automatically establish or guarantee extensions of power, or political privilege. For as Goldberg points out, “simple schools of “seamstresses and weavers could not claim the social prestige of

⁶¹ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 178.

⁶² *CW*, “The New Birth,” 95.

⁶³ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 145.

⁶⁴ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 113.

⁶⁵ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 48.

humanist establishments—but neither could they simply be written off.”⁶⁶ Yet, the power of writing, as Goody has argued, “Is not always wielded by nor confined to those in authority who hold political office. Writing can also be used for countercultural, revolutionary, or critical purposes; and, that development is more characteristic of printing than of manuscript cultures.”⁶⁷ For as Goody once again notes, the “hegemonic force of the canon or of the dominant ideology does not go entirely unchallenged in the written word”.⁶⁸

Because sixteenth-century princes and political leaders ruled through writing, if princes had had no writing, then they would most certainly have had a very different kind of ruling, their subjects a very different kind of living, and both a very different kind of religion.⁶⁹

As a venerated technology and closely allied with established power, writing performed an important ideological task for Anabaptists. Its inherent powers enabled the development of an explicit ideology for social and political change through the written creed, while simultaneously serving as a political tool for bringing the religious and political interests of oppressed and marginalized Anabaptists into the political arena.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 137.

⁶⁷ Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 130.

⁶⁸ Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 130.

⁶⁹ Goldberg *Writing Matter*, 206. Goldberg makes the further point that during the sixteenth century, secretaries to the nobility were not only able to forge the hand of their master, but were permitted, even expected, to do so. Secretaries would frequently write letters in one hand and sign it in another. Goldberg argues that administrative reforms established “prescribed routes, through proper hands, and towards the attachment of necessary signatures and seals to authenticate the sign [...] and to guard against forgery.” *Writing Matter*, 262.

⁷⁰ See, Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 100.

4.21 Sixteenth-Century Politics and Petitioning

Petitioning was a well recognized and fully acceptable, even preferred form for political action in the sixteenth century, being deemed to be a satisfactory mode for political engagement by the municipal elite.⁷¹ According to Christopher Friedrichs, petitioning was a political right everywhere in Europe, and was enjoyed by individuals and groups, constituting “a fundamental feature of urban politics” during the sixteenth century.⁷² However, as an established political vehicle, it was a form for political expression that acknowledged the legitimacy of established authority and reinforced established structures, hierarchies and instruments of power. Political action through petition confirmed and reinforced the established hierarchical structure, and the political position of the ruling elite. It reinforced their perception of themselves as the ultimate arbiters in the community for the community, confirming their political prerogative to decide in their own time and on their own terms how they would respond to petitionary requests.⁷³

Though Anabaptists, with few exceptions, tended to not have any direct access to established administrative positions of power during the sixteenth century, they did employ the power and political possibilities inherent in writing to convey their expectations, warnings and wishes. However, written treatises by Menno were not typically framed as petitions in the usual sixteenth-century manner,⁷⁴ but were more often

⁷¹ Friedrichs, *Urban Politics*, 38. Friedrichs suggests that two forms of political were acceptable to magistrates: “petition” and “consultation,” with consultation being an acceptable mode during “moments of high risk or danger to the community”. *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 39.

⁷² Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 38.

⁷³ Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 39.

⁷⁴ Menno’s treatise “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” might be one exception to this pattern among his writings. However, even this treatise does not assume a submissive posture toward the authorities to which it is addressed. It is framed as a defense of Anabaptist thought and action, it accuses the magistrates of wrongdoing, and it’s critical tone clearly challenges the authority of the magistrates by

than not framed and presented as accusations or charges against authority, casting the decisions and actions of religious and political authorities as violations of biblical norms.⁷⁵ In spite of the relative secrecy of the political decision making process, many sixteenth-century Anabaptists had a good grasp of how their political system worked and how they could manipulate that system to achieve their desired goals.⁷⁶ Because writing was an activity deemed to be social by its very nature,⁷⁷ it could be and was employed by Anabaptists as an effort to establish, and facilitate direct communication with the authorities, their opponents, and fellow Anabaptists where speech was deemed to be impossible or indiscreet.⁷⁸

From the very beginning, that is, from the writing of his very first treatise,⁷⁹ Menno prefaced and underwrote his work with an epigraph that must have been received by the authorities during the sixteenth century, as a highly provocative quotation.⁸⁰ Provocative, that is, given the sixteenth-century context of problems surrounding social and political structures and relations of power that were brought about through the

suggesting it is they who must reflect, reconsider and alter their course of action and decision making principles, not the Anabaptists.

⁷⁵ See for example, *CW*, "The New Birth," 95; and "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 105-106, 117, 118, 119, 166, 190, 192, 194, 202, 204.

⁷⁶ Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 73.

⁷⁷ Lorna Jane Abrey argues in a similar manner that blasphemy "was an overt, public act, not a private mental state." "Confession Conscience and Honour: The Limits of Magisterial Tolerance in Sixteenth-century Strassburg," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101.

⁷⁸ Menno stated: "Nor shall I hereafter ask or solicit a public discussion with any person and that for these reasons: I have these many years desired it by numerous written and verbal requests and have never been granted it. [...] Secondly, because your principal teachers and leaders [...] are men of blood. [...] Thirdly, because your brethren, [...] have at Frankfurt in their publication vowed against us." *CW*, "Epistle to Martin Micron," 938.

⁷⁹ I assume for the purposes of this project that the "The Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden" (1535) was Menno's first treatise while recognizing that some scholars dispute his authorship.

⁸⁰ Menno's epigraph was taken from 1 Corinthians 3:11 and read: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." New Revised Standard Version. Though Menno's epigraph was consistently taken from 1 Corinthians 3, spelling and word choice reveal some slight variations.

behavioural and ideological challenges that Anabaptism presented to established authority.

Lydia Harder notes that “Menno’s motto” was a pointed criticism of “all who based their religiosity on human resources [...]. It smashed the foundations of the powerful and laid bare the one foundation that could sustain a Christian existence.”⁸¹ Through his epigraph, and therefore from the very outset of his writing, Menno dismissed all efforts to organize, and all attempts to structure, society on a “foundation” that did not build on Menno’s conception of the one “true foundation” for a Christian society. Therefore, beginning with the very first page of his treatises, Menno continued the argument and confrontation with the authorities over authority, and over what constituted the legitimate exercise of power. His epigraph suggested that all their attempts to, maintain or uphold the existing societal structure, or else construct a new basis for society were structurally flawed, and were therefore, incapable of sustaining a “true” Christian community.

Though many of his treatises contain Menno’s lament that he was not granted an opportunity to “speak” to those in authority in spite of his many requests to do so over the years,⁸² he recognized in his writing not only an opportunity to “speak” to those in authority, but considered his writing to be a divinely directed and empowered action that could speak warning to all persons in positions of religious and/or political authority.⁸³ Menno insisted that God had made his writing program possible, and had ultimately

⁸¹ Harder, “Power and Authority,” 78.

⁸² *CW*, “Epistle to Martin Micron,” 938.

⁸³ *CW*, “Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” 34; and “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105, and 190.

authorized it, thereby giving it divine sanction.⁸⁴ The divine sanction of his writing enabled Menno to assume a posture of prophetic authority, and his authorial prerogatives empowered him to remain resistant to all in authority. Menno could openly declare: “Christians should fight, namely, with the Word of God which is a two edged sword, of which we will by the assistance of God say a few things”.⁸⁵ The act of writing warnings against established authorities and positions of power was for Menno the expression of a living voice that was wholly divine in both its origin and authority, but human in its operation.⁸⁶

Menno’s frequent “call on all the high and mighty lords, princes, and rulers, on all popes, cardinals, bishops, and wise and learned ones,” clearly indicates that they were the target of much of his writing, for it was they “who from the beginning have perverted and darkened the scriptures”,⁸⁷ according to Menno. Though Menno wrote that he wished to “humbly intreat the Imperial Majesty, kings, lords, princes, magistrates, and officers, everyone in his calling, dignity, and rank, and all our dear and gracious rulers by the crimson blood and wounds of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ,”⁸⁸ he also made it clear to his reader that his writing was not petitionary in the usual sixteenth-century manner. Though he addressed many of his comments to nobility and political leaders in his writings, his treatises are not dedicated to any of them in the customary manner.⁸⁹ Menno made it clear to his reader that his writing was an “Admonishing Request” and was not

⁸⁴ Menno referred to his ability to write as a “small talent” that with the “assistance of God” could and does bring “back to light” “God’s holy Word.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105.

⁸⁵ *CW*, “Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” 43.

⁸⁶ *CW*, “Meditation on the Twenty-fifth Psalm,” 65; “The New Birth,” 89.

⁸⁷ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 95.

⁸⁸ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 117.

⁸⁹ Though Menno addresses the “illustrious, noble, wise lords and princes” in his treatises, they are often addressed as equals and instructed to “listen carefully” to his words. See for example, *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 236.

intended to be flattering or petitionary. Though directly addressing nobility and authorities, his treatises often formed an open challenge to his “noble reader.” Menno declared: “You are unable to frighten us from our doctrine, faith, and practice by coercion, poverty, misery, persecution, and death.”⁹⁰ Rulers were further exhorted by Menno to “read our doctrine carefully” and to “understand it correctly,”⁹¹ for he claimed that their failure to do so in the past, had demonstrated to Menno that they are “altogether careless” and “unobservant.”⁹²

Though Menno held that the “illustrious lords and princes, [...] are appointed by God to be heads and rulers,”⁹³ they were not spared his harsh criticism and prophetic warnings. They must recognize, according to Menno, that their divine sanction does not displace their earthly origins, nor does it expand their earthly powers to unlimited proportions. Menno’s tone in writing to secular and religious leaders is direct, judgemental, and condemning.⁹⁴ His exhortations and tone were justified by Menno and were deemed to be absolutely necessary, for he was compelled to write with strong language “on account of the terrible deceptions and manifold dangers in these times.”⁹⁵

Menno’s posture toward secular authority and power as an author was not one of flattering obsequiousness. Rather, he assumed a prophetic posture accusing established

⁹⁰ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 117.

⁹¹ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 117.

⁹² *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 109.

⁹³ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 118.

⁹⁴ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 163, 166, 178. Menno’s tone is decidedly softer, paternal and gentler when addressing his “well-disposed children,” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105; those who qualify as his “worthy reader,” “The New Birth,” 117; his “friends,” “The New Birth,” 98; his “faithful reader,” “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 187; and his “beloved reader,” “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 140-160.

⁹⁵ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 190. In his “Reply to Gellius Faber,” Menno states of his writing, that it was a “forcibly extracted reply and defense.”

authorities of insurrection,⁹⁶ while warning them that as “poor mortal flesh” they will not go unpunished in rising up against “the almighty Emperor, the King.”⁹⁷ Menno not only reminded those in authority of their God-given duties, but also reminded those in positions of authority that they are only “earthly,” merely “pillars” of the earth and not of heaven.⁹⁸ Menno repeatedly pointed out and reminded political leaders of the common humanity they shared. Menno reminded them: “All of you, each and every one, be he emperor or king, issues from the same seed as we poor common people.”⁹⁹ Their origin, nature and ultimate destinies were pointed out by Menno as no different from those of the “common” person, for they too are “but vapor, frail flesh, a withering flower, dust and ashes, as are we all.” Menno further reminded them: “Today you are kings and exult in great and high honor; tomorrow you are laid low, and must be food for snails and worms.”¹⁰⁰

4.3 Anabaptist Writing and Resistance

Anabaptist writing is indicative of defiant, assertive and passionate expressions of resistance. Anabaptists exploited writing as a political mechanism in the exercise of power for the purposes of resistance. For it was through writing—that is, through their practice of writing and through the power of writing—that Anabaptists were constructed and enabled as free subjects, empowered to intrude into, and thereby influence, the established process of domination, and established pattern of hegemonic control.

⁹⁶ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 119.

⁹⁷ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 119.

⁹⁸ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 119.

⁹⁹ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 194.

¹⁰⁰ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 194.

Anabaptist reform was often advanced through the medium of the printed word with the Anabaptist conceptualization of reform nearly always taking the form of overt propaganda, that is, the earnest dissemination of the faith.¹⁰¹ Anabaptist reform efforts were frequently advanced through polemical writing and were directed against established power and authority.¹⁰² The Anabaptist appropriation and employment of writing established a forum that was disruptive and destabilizing of that which was presented as a coherent and civil social order by authorities. As an appropriated resource, writing gave Anabaptists power in the community, which was then utilized in highly effective ways against the exercise of coercive, dominant power. Much of Anabaptist writing fits within Robert E. Lerner's observation:

No sharp line can be drawn between propaganda and instructional manuals meant to clarify tenets and codify precepts of behaviour for groups of believers. Nevertheless, egregious propaganda reveals, denounces and arouses; that is, it communicates truths long hidden or hitherto unknown, identifies enemies and instils emotions of partisanship. Although propaganda can serve to recruit non-believers, it need not be designed primarily for that goal; instead it may aim to sustain the morale of those already converted. Similarly, although it aims to influence conduct, it need not intend to incite violent action.¹⁰³

Writing, power and reform are inextricably bound together in Anabaptist writing, forming a triad for Anabaptist resistance. The hegemonic force of the dominant power and its control of communication did not go unchallenged in Anabaptist writing, nor did Anabaptists accept its authority uncritically.

¹⁰¹ Robert E. Lerner points out that propaganda grows out of pedagogy with the word itself being derived "from the Latin for propagating – earnestly disseminating – the faith." "Writing and Resistance Among Beguins of Languedoc and Catalonia," in *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 23: Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 186.

¹⁰² Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 303-304.

¹⁰³ Lerner, "Writing and Resistance," 186.

It was through the Anabaptist appropriation of writing, which was a privileged means of communication and exercised significant power, that reform not only became desirable but possible for sixteenth-century Anabaptists. For as Eisenstein has argued, the most innovative and widely available means of propagating reform came through the popular spread of the gospel, which she argues was made possible with the advent of printing.¹⁰⁴ Though historians have tended to separate written culture into the age of the manuscript and the age of print, thereby emphasizing the displacement of the former by the latter,¹⁰⁵ it must be remembered that a “new procedure never eliminates its predecessor,” as Martin has pointed out.¹⁰⁶ A new technique of communication only establishes a new method. That is, a new division of labour, which conditions and re-conditions the way we think and behave.¹⁰⁷

The appropriation and redeployment of writing can and often does serve the interests of the dominated, as Clark and Ivanič have noted. Thus, it was through Anabaptist writing that Anabaptists were capable of “reproducing alternative values, beliefs and power relations, thereby challenging the existing hegemony.”¹⁰⁸ It was in and through writing that Anabaptists resisted political power, as the custodian of unjust coercive power, through the appropriation of the source of such power.¹⁰⁹ Through their

¹⁰⁴ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 342-349.

¹⁰⁵ Eisenstein for example, writes: “By 1500, one may say with some assurance that the age of scribes had ended and the age of printers had begun.” *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 167.

¹⁰⁶ Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, 283. Andrew Pettegree argues on the other hand, that the manuscript continued to play an important social role “as a vehicle for religious debate, especially among more intimate circles. Indeed, there is some indication that participants in religious controversies regarded the manuscript in precisely this light, as an opportunity for franker exchanges than would be appropriate in the medium of print.” “Books, Pamphlets and Polemic,” 109.

¹⁰⁷ Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, 283.

¹⁰⁸ Clark and Ivanič, *The Politics of Writing*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Derrida suggests: “Political power can only be the custodian of an unjust power.” *Of Grammatology*, 131.

practice of writing, Anabaptists resisted established ideological constructions that were preserved and maintained by the dominant power through writing.

Heterodoxy alone, without any supplement, denoted a political and social threat in the sixteenth century.¹¹⁰ However, the depth and nature of the threat that Anabaptists were thought to present to sixteenth-century society became evident in their own statements of their conditional civil obedience. Though Menno could claim that he and his fellow Anabaptists were “Your Noble Highnesses and Honorable Excellences faithful and obedient subjects,”¹¹¹ Anabaptist claims of allegiance made their civil obedience conditional on the authorities aligning themselves and their actions with the scriptures.¹¹² And, even if that should occur, Menno insisted that an individual’s faith and conscience always remained outside the jurisdiction of temporal rulers and their authority.¹¹³ Menno could issue the challenge: “Say, my good people, where do the holy Scriptures teach that in Christ’s kingdom and church we shall proceed with the magistrate, with the sword, and with physical force and tyranny over a man’s conscience and faith, things subject to the judgement of God alone?”¹¹⁴ Anabaptists such as Menno did not locate the ultimate basis for authority in church or society, or the exercise of legitimate power in any human institution, regardless of its history or established tradition. Menno insisted that “in view of the wrath of Almighty God, [...] we must not have our eye on lords and princes, nor on doctors and teachers of schools, nor on the councils of the fathers, and customs of

¹¹⁰ Sigrun Haude, “Anabaptism,” in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 249.

¹¹¹ *CW*, “Confession of the Distressed Christians,” 521.

¹¹² *CW*, “Brief Defense to all Theologians,” 537.

¹¹³ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 129, and *CW*, “Brief Defense to all Theologians,” 537.

¹¹⁴ *CW*, “Brief Defense to all Theologians,” 537.

longstanding. For against God's Word, neither emperors nor kings [...] nor proscriptions matter."¹¹⁵

Menno's exhortations to those in authority were framed in such a way that they undercut the widespread tendency he claimed existed for those who were in positions of authority to see themselves "born for nothing but to live in splendor and show, and to lead a vain, carnal life."¹¹⁶ He reminded those in positions of authority and exercising coercive power, that "the task to which you are called: namely, to chastise and punish, [...] to restrain by reasonable means, that is, without tyranny and bloodshed,"¹¹⁷ was a God ordained office, but that that office only retained a conditional power, with its authority always dependent on the manner in which those divinely ordained duties were discharged.

Writing, which had long been restricted to and reserved for clergy and official political offices, had disrupted some of the earlier "channels of the oral tradition." For as Strauss has pointed out, the written law, which was equated with Roman law in the sixteenth century, began its deliberations concerning what was legitimate by asking the question "What does the law say?" whereas, the common person during the sixteenth century, who appealed to conscience, faith and tradition, began his deliberations from a position of "natural reason" beginning with the question "What is just?"¹¹⁸ In a similar manner the Anabaptist appropriation and redeployment of writing in turn disrupted, or at least threatened to disrupt, "channels of established written tradition."¹¹⁹ Therefore, the appropriation, that is, the seizure of writing by Anabaptists such as Menno, and its

¹¹⁵ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 129.

¹¹⁶ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 192.

¹¹⁷ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 193.

¹¹⁸ Strauss, *Law, Resistance, and the State*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, 332.

redeployment as a medium for resistance, placed writing into service as an express vehicle for actively and decisively engaging with their social and political environment.¹²⁰

There is a glaring disparity between the charges of rebellion levelled at Anabaptists by authorities and their own insistence of complete obedience to all secular authorities. Menno claimed that he and his fellow brethren were “your Noble Highnesses and Honorable Excellences’ faithful and obedient subjects”.¹²¹ He further defended his actions and insisted: “I never in my life spoke an insulting word against the rulers or against their office and service. I have from the beginning of my ministry fraternally warned them in my writings in faithful, unadulterated truth from my soul against the destruction of their souls.”¹²² Though Menno’s words emphasized obedience, and though his posture professed faithful allegiance and even personal concern for political leaders, the appropriation of writing for the purposes of resistance implied, and demonstrated, dissent. That is, though Menno presented a message of compliance in his writing, his appropriation of the medium of writing for the transmission of that message demonstrated resistance.

The act of Anabaptists writing was itself an act of resistance, and Menno’s claim of compliance and faithful obedience notwithstanding, it was a message of resistance that Anabaptists such as Menno were busy writing.¹²³ The medium that had been

¹²⁰ See, Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 1.

¹²¹ *CW*, “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” 521.

¹²² *CW*, “Epistle to Martin Micron,” 920.

¹²³ Brad S. Gregory points out that “literate Dutch Mennonites printed sources as plentifully as their Protestant and Catholic counterparts.” *Salvation at Stake*, 4. In Menno’s case, the roughly six hundred pages of the *Opera Omnia Theologica of alle de Godtgelleerde Wercken van Menno Symons* (Joannes van Veen, tAmsterdam, 1681. Reprinted Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1989), would lend support to such an assessment. Gregory also notes that Jan Wouters van Cuyck was another prolific Anabaptist writer who

appropriated, and the message being written by the hand of Menno became united in the work of resistance. That is, Anabaptist writing was employed as an important political tool and was embedded as a social process. As such, writing did not just make the views of Anabaptists known through publication, it demonstrated resistance, shaping and determining further necessary courses of action, constructing and creating agents.¹²⁴ As an important sixteenth-century social action coupled with power, Anabaptist writing played an important role in the ongoing construction and development of fully ritualized political agents.¹²⁵

Sixteenth-century Anabaptist writing, like all writing, challenged, revised and re-worked established power relations, presenting new possibilities, new relations of power. As an apparatus of power, the act of Anabaptist writing was an attempt to insert oneself into the structures of power, redirecting, redefining, and thereby fixing altogether new relations of power. As an expression of power by the powerless, writing directly resisted and thereby denied, the obligation of obedience established in and through the writing of the dominant power. That is, Anabaptist writing resisted and rejected the ideological obligation established by the dominant power, in which every action opposed to it was cast either as rebellion or disobedience.¹²⁶ And, the ideology of Anabaptist resistance in turn rejected the characterization those in power give to their actions.¹²⁷ The Anabaptist appropriation of writing permitted and enabled Anabaptists to be radically resistant in

“was writing letters every day for at least a couple of hours, considering their length”. *Salvation at Stake*, 128.

¹²⁴ Clark and Ivanič *The Politics of Writing*, 82. Goldberg notes that writing produces a socialized and civilized body, which is decidedly different from the “natural body.” *Writing Matter*, 98.

¹²⁵ I owe this notion of ritual’s ability to create ritualized agents to Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially, 221.

¹²⁶ This is not to suggest that the dominant power necessarily had a well-defined and coherent ideology. Ideological coherence is in fact quite rare as Scott points out. *Weapons of the Weak*, 341.

¹²⁷ CW, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 202-206.

their “ideological principles” while remaining “obedient” in their behaviour,¹²⁸ which was more strictly controlled through the coercive powers of the dominant authorities.¹²⁹

4.31 Menno’s Word as God’s Word

Though Anabaptists did not generally have a formal political role during the sixteenth century, they often found that writing could function as a political tool in the exercise of power in historically specific ways, even within an absolutist regime.¹³⁰ That is, through the appropriation of writing and the written word, Anabaptists forcibly and directly applied God’s Word to sixteenth-century social and political realities.¹³¹ Because Anabaptists like Menno were convinced that the established church had failed in its divinely instituted obligations, and because they maintained that political authorities were entirely bent on using coercive force to achieve and maintain their political objectives, it became clear to Menno that in order for reform to be established a more powerful force had to be introduced. Menno’s written word, which was presented as the incarnation and embodiment of God’s Word served that purpose.¹³² It not only enabled and spread heterodoxy;¹³³ it permitted and facilitated a disruption in moral thought and political practice.

¹²⁸ Such a posture enabled Menno to write: “We resist neither the emperor, the king, nor any authority in that to which they are called of God; but we are ready to obey to the death in all things which are not contrary to God and His Word.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 118.

¹²⁹ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 331.

¹³⁰ Menno wrote: “Since then for reasons I cannot teach publicly, I will serve you nevertheless in writing as long as the Lord will permit me and I live”. *CW*, “The True Christian Faith,” 325.

¹³¹ It was through the application of his understanding of biblical mandates that Menno could stand “against all philosophy and human wisdom” creating a “new standard” in the knowledge/power relation that was in competition with the established truth regime. *CW*, “A Pathetic Supplication to all Magistrates,” 526.

¹³² *CW*, “The New Birth,” 90.

¹³³ Scribner, “Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print,” 257.

The introduction and direct application of God's Word to political forces, institutions and structures that routinize, legalize, and institutionalize human activity through the power of writing filled the need for a powerful counter-force, while heightening the sense of the self in relation to the dominant power. The further assertion of the self through the exercise of powers available in writing was a direct challenge and in opposition to the sense of hegemonic autonomy that sixteenth century political and ecclesiastical leaders thought they had. Such self-assertion introduced the possibility of principled resistance to secular and religious power by reserving ultimate authority for God and his Word alone.

The intimate relation Anabaptists claimed existed between their written words and God's Word established the platform for Anabaptist political and social reform. It was through the self-confidence generated by the firm conviction that he was acting as God's messenger and spokesperson, that Menno could address his written words to "all people," and exhort all regardless of their position, to "attend to my words," clearly and easily separating those "who are," from those, "who are not in the possession of the grace of God."¹³⁴ The close relation Menno explicitly established between his word and God's Word endowed Menno the confidence to permit "the learned ones to clamor and write as long as they please."¹³⁵ All the while Menno remained confident and consoled himself in his authorial calling, recognizing that, "If men will not believe the Word of God, neither I nor any other man can help them."¹³⁶

Menno was not embarrassed to use the word "power" to describe his writing activity, which was understood as both a reflection and extension of God's activity.

¹³⁴ *CW*, "The New Birth," 89.

¹³⁵ *CW*, "The New Birth," 96.

¹³⁶ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 135.

Writing enabled him to remain confident that the “power”¹³⁷ he held was greater than the coercive “power” exercised against them or on them.¹³⁸ Menno’s privileging of his own writing with quasi-divine status,¹³⁹ permitted him to keep on insisting of his own writing: “these words are not invented or instituted by man, nor are they resolved and decreed by any council.”¹⁴⁰ Through the close association, perhaps even identification at times, of Menno’s word with the Word of God, Menno subverted and undercut the hermeneutical authority of the church to interpret, and the power of the state to enforce, established interpretations of biblical mandates as prescriptive and normative.¹⁴¹

It was through the distribution and propagation of their own writings that Anabaptists sought to firmly establish the presence and authority of the written “Word;” thereby, encouraging laity to stand firm against Catholics, magisterial reformers, priests and monks based on that “Word.”¹⁴² In Anabaptist writing, it was frequently claimed that the divine mediated wisdom and knowledge directly through the written Word, with knowledge becoming the privileged possession of the powerless.¹⁴³ Through the Anabaptist propagation of the written word, and by virtue of the privileged position they sought to give it, Anabaptists insisted that the trinity of reason, intelligence and scripture

¹³⁷ Menno’s word for power was “kracht.”

¹³⁸ *CW*, “The True Christian Faith,” 326.

¹³⁹ Menno wrote: “Here and there I have made additions, explained that which was vague, corrected what was spoiled, and omitted what was not needed. [...] But the former edition as well as this is God’s Word.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 105.

¹⁴⁰ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 90

¹⁴¹ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 129.

¹⁴² Menno could claim: “You are not reigning with the weapons of death, such as muskets, spears, swords, horses, [...] but with the invincible and eternal scepter of the power of God, namely, with the sharp cleaving sword of the holy Word, over gold, silver cities, countries, lords, princes, [etc.]” *CW*, “The True Christian Faith,” 326. See also, *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 225; “Christian Baptism,” 233.

¹⁴³ Snyder notes: “The more unskilled a man is in human devices and at the same time devoted to the divine, the more clearly that spirit informs him.” “Word and Power in Reformation Zurich,” 268. Eisenstein argues: “On the popular level, ordinary men and women began to know their scripture as well as most parish priests.” *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 355.

must be the rule of life, and become firmly established as the ultimate guiding authority.¹⁴⁴

4.4 Anabaptist Writing: Deliberate and Self Aware Political Action

The huge gap, which Anabaptists claimed existed between church practice and textual precept, was not only underlined in their writings,¹⁴⁵ but it also provided the justification for their writing.¹⁴⁶ For Anabaptists it was writing that proved to be an important and suitable vehicle for the generation and promotion of cultural—that is, social and political—activities through a process of establishing, preserving, perpetuating and investigating the “truth.” Writing was put into the service of the community, with Menno claiming, “I have served you all with this small talent as I have received it from my God.”¹⁴⁷ Menno could also unequivocally claim: “Sunshine is clear, and clearer still the truth [waerheydt or waerhey] I write,”¹⁴⁸ recognizing in his role as a writer the sixteenth-century competition for the right to establish the truth.¹⁴⁹ With respect to his authorial intentions, Menno wrote: “I have not done this as though the cross of Christ may thereby be avoided; [...] but I have written in order that the noble, pure truth might be revealed”.¹⁵⁰ For, it was often through their practice of writing, which became a

¹⁴⁴ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 219.

¹⁴⁵ Menno wrote: “The greater part of the preachers are such heedless, blind, and carnal people that they acknowledge neither God nor His Word, and seek nothing but that they may feed their carefree, lazy flesh in all luxury and have a good time.” *CW*, “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 728.

¹⁴⁶ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 190, 225; “Christian Baptism,” 233, 252-256; and “Confession of Poor Distressed Christians,” 501, 514, and 516-517.

¹⁴⁷ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 189. Menno further clarified his authorial intentions and gave some indication of his intended readership when he wrote: “I have written from a sense of pious affection, not that I may injure any one, but for the benefit of all men.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 229.

¹⁴⁸ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 210.

¹⁴⁹ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 219. See also Symons, Menno. *Opera Omnia Theologica, of alle de Godtgeleerde Wercken van Menno Symons* (Joannes van Veen, tAmsterdam, 1681, reprinted Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1989), 66.

¹⁵⁰ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 225.

powerful tool of self-expression and self-assertion, working toward the goal of liberation, that Anabaptists resisted an established tradition of hegemonic control through coercion and enforced conformity.¹⁵¹

It was the act of writing, and not only the content of Anabaptist works, that diminished the priestly role practically and ideologically, with writing becoming more important than priests for mediating, and communicating the scriptural text.¹⁵² Therefore, as an act of political and religious resistance, writing played a deliberate and crucial role for Menno in the sixteenth-century religious and political struggle for “ideological mastery.”¹⁵³ Menno described the ideological struggle as a struggle over the “truth” and for the “church,” that is, for the right to be called the Church of Christ as the repository of Truth with all the rights, privileges, blessings and responsibilities appertaining to it.¹⁵⁴

Menno wrote in the vernacular, shunning Latin.¹⁵⁵ Writing in the vernacular was a deliberate and self-conscious choice, for he insisted that the vernacular was a more suitable form given his goals. He claimed: “I am not well able to treat this matter in Latin, and even if I were able, I should not want to, lest my labor should perish in the hands of my opponents.”¹⁵⁶ Menno makes it clear that the vernacular was the best choice given his intended reader, and given his intended goals. By writing in the vernacular and decisively linking such writing with resistance Menno made writing an important tool in

¹⁵¹ Menno insisted that it “was forbidden to us to fight with physical weapons.” *CW*, “Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” 45. But no restrictions were applied to “fighting” with “the Word of God which is a two-edged sword,” which empowered and legitimized a war of words for Menno. *CW*, “Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” 43

¹⁵² Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 61.

¹⁵³ This phrase is borrowed from Clark and Ivanič, *The Politics of Writing*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ *CW*, “Reply to Gellius Faber,” 628.

¹⁵⁵ Menno typically wrote in Dutch or the Oostersch dialect of North Germany, often with a style that has been described as “peasantlike speech.” *CW*, vi.

¹⁵⁶ *CW*, “Christian Baptism,” 229. On another occasion Menno is disparaging of those who “have a smattering of Latin” for he claims they behave as though “the office of God and cure of souls depended not on piety and the gift of grace, but on linguistic attainment.” *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 162.

the Anabaptist arsenal. For it was largely through their appropriation of writing and their writing of resistance that Anabaptists recognized and established their part, their role that is, within the existing social and political order.¹⁵⁷

The political motivations for Anabaptist writing can and often do include the desire of the author to appease or appeal to his opponents,¹⁵⁸ to further opposition to his opponents,¹⁵⁹ and/or rally a group of supporters who share the illicit beliefs of the author.¹⁶⁰ For Anabaptists such as Menno, writing most importantly maintained the task of wresting power away from clergy through the consolidation of a competing basis for authority.¹⁶¹ Anabaptist attitudes of cynicism toward established religious and political practice, and the ideology operating within the dominant society, were able to exist within that established structure, only insofar as they were able to establish and develop their own competing ideology around a “stable supporting structure,” one that facilitated the accumulation and perpetuation of ideas, observations, and competing biblical interpretations.¹⁶² It was through their redeployment and utilization of writing as a mechanism of political power for resistance, that Anabaptist ideological and behavioural resistance was developed, maintained and propagated. In this process Anabaptist writing worked to not only challenge sixteenth-century orthodoxy; it was also directed toward changing the very notion of orthodoxy, truth, and identity by presenting a competing

¹⁵⁷ Scott argues: “The poor realize their part in the [social] contract only through its violation.” *Weapons of the Weak*, 345.

¹⁵⁸ Menno’s treatise “The New Birth” is one such example. It was written as a broad appeal to all who are in positions of authority and power. That is, “all ye who think yourselves to be Christians, and with boldness boast of the grace of the Lord.” *CW*, “The New Birth,” 89.

¹⁵⁹ Two examples of such writing include Menno’s: “Reply to Gellius Faber,” and “Reply to Martin Micron.”

¹⁶⁰ Joanna Summers, *Late-Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4. Menno’s treatise “Foundation of Christian Doctrine” is one such example.

¹⁶¹ *CW*, “The New Birth,” *CW*, 99.

¹⁶² Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, 87.

ideological foundation for authority in society.¹⁶³ Though Menno accepted power and its expression through authority as necessary, he did not necessarily accept the present concentrations, or manifestations, of power. Writing became a truly remarkable form for establishing, propagating and perpetuating Anabaptist thought and action beyond the realms of the literate with writing becoming a defining characteristic of Anabaptist political action and spirituality.¹⁶⁴

Menno's own authorial commission involved "revealing the truth,"¹⁶⁵ which included pointing toward a foundation for society in which authority was firmly grounded in the "Word." The written "Word" was ultimately the vehicle of salvation, according to Menno, establishing the truth. It was capable of directing human behaviour, and forming the basis for a moral society, and served as a critical structural tool for chastising established authorities. Anabaptist writing exemplifies, what James C. Scott has described as resistance: "Acts of resistance and thoughts about [...] resistance are in constant communication—in dialogue".¹⁶⁶ It was in and through writing that Anabaptist thought and action were in harmony and worked toward a common goal. Anabaptist writing was an act of resistance that became a necessary action for Menno. For as he put it on one occasion: "We might have been excused from writing but necessity impels us, [...] partly because we are not allowed to speak."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition*, 56.

¹⁶⁴ Brad S. Gregory suggests that the "greatest legacy" left by Anabaptist martyrs "consists of the hundreds of Dutch and German songs written by and about them." *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

¹⁶⁵ *CW*, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," 225.

¹⁶⁶ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 38.

¹⁶⁷ *CW*, "Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden," 34.

In criticizing the ignorance of the priests, especially as it related to their lack of knowledge of the scriptures,¹⁶⁸ Anabaptists regarded their own literature, including the process of its production, as an important vehicle for improving the current unsatisfactory situation. Menno could claim: "But I have written in order that the noble, pure truth might be revealed; this or that man be won thereby; the blind pointed to the right way; the hungry fed with the Word of God; the erring directed to Christ their Shepherd; the ignorant taught; God's kingdom extended, and His holy name magnified and praised."¹⁶⁹ All-important salvation, according to Menno, was mediated through direct communion with God's word, and God's word was made available through Menno's writing,¹⁷⁰ thereby reducing lay dependency on the priesthood.

Menno was astutely aware of political realities and the way in which power relations were established and maintained. He repeatedly warned political leaders about their dangerous predicament while severely criticizing magisterial reformers for the unacceptable relation they had established with authorities. Anabaptists accused magisterial reformers of being responsible for inscribing; that is, training and indoctrinating princes, lords, and all those in positions of political authority through their writing.¹⁷¹ Menno complained of Martin Micron that he was one such individual who was responsible for inscribing the princes with his writing. Menno claimed: "It is also

¹⁶⁸ See Menno's treatise "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," *CW*, 174-178. Menno also wrote: "They have moreover written and contended so urgently for the idea that their church was the only church, that they brought the poor, reckless people to such a state of wild disorder that they alas, usually lead such a fruitless impenitent life as if neither prophetic or apostolic writings, nor God's Word, nor Christ nor Spirit had been on earth." *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 637.

¹⁶⁹ See Menno's "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," *CW*, 225.

¹⁷⁰ Menno wrote: "This regeneration of which we write, from which comes the penitent, pious life that has promise, can only originate in the Word of the Lord", *CW*, "The New Birth," 92.

¹⁷¹ *CW*, "Reply to False Accusations," 554, 556. Menno wrote: "They stir up lords and rulers of cities and countries everywhere, peddling the idea that we are an ungodly sect and Anabaptists; that we plan to raise turmoil and rebellion, and more such turbulent inventions and slander, in order that they may thus obscure and extirpate and restrain the noble Word of God." *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 627.

manifest that you [Martin Micron] encourage and strengthen the rulers in their impenitent lives not a little by your writing.”¹⁷² Conversely, Menno presented himself and his writings as “friends” of those in authority. Unlike the writings of the clergy, which Menno claimed only “deceived them miserably” and resulted in unfortunate decisions and actions,¹⁷³ Menno claimed he had “fraternally warned them in my writings in faithful, unadulterated truth from my soul against the destruction of their souls, admonishing them to a godly, penitent, Christian life”.¹⁷⁴

Anabaptists frequently accused other reformers of holding through their writing what Goldberg has accurately described as “the controlling and gathered hand of power—which has allowed for the differentiation of hands and of social domains only to regather them within power and, at the same time, to deny overt coercion through disciplinary function to which even nobles submit—or, [...] are said to submit.”¹⁷⁵ For as Goldberg has noted: “Those to whom it [the text] is extended [...] are offered the same disciplinary submission as that to which the nobles submit [...] It is within such scenarios of an empowering disempowerment that humanistic pedagogy circumscribes itself so that it can inscribe the world.”¹⁷⁶ The magisterial reformers writing of reform, which was itself the writing of power, sought to inscribe the sixteenth-century world through the inscription of political leaders, and worked by effacing its own hand, presenting the hands of another to write for it.¹⁷⁷ Menno claimed unequivocally that it was the ecclesiastical authorities who:

¹⁷² *CW*, “Epistle to Martin Micron,” 920.

¹⁷³ *CW*, “The New Birth,” 98.

¹⁷⁴ *CW*, “Epistle to Martin Micron,” 920.

¹⁷⁵ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 114.

¹⁷⁶ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 114.

¹⁷⁷ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 120.

So embittered and still embitter all lords, princes, rulers, and magistrates against us by their hateful, unmerited revilings, slanderings, and defamings that we cannot, alas, move them sufficiently with Scriptures, [...] and so that we cannot secure a promise of safe conduct [...] to defend the doctrine of God, the blessed truth. [...] That they are the real cause and instigators of these things, I write and testify without hesitation.¹⁷⁸

Power, during the sixteenth century as Goldberg has pointed out, often passed from the princes and nobles to their secretaries, for political leaders were often unwilling to write, read, or sign letters or documents.¹⁷⁹ It was through such an established process that magisterial reformers found a ready-made avenue for influencing the political process. It was by assuming, as Anabaptist noted, a relation like that of these secretaries to the princes and nobles that reformers sought to hold and manipulate the hands of power through writing, inserting themselves into the political process by functioning as an attached/detached hand of political authorities.

4.5 Conclusion: The Political Role and Function of the Written Word

The written Word, which included both the Word of God and Menno's own written word, were established as the final Anabaptist authority, and functioned as resistance being deemed the only truly suitable and entirely reliable guide to truth. It was as a result of the power and authority of the written word that Menno could confidently "conclude in this matter, as in all matters of conscience, [...] that we must not and may not have our eye on lords and princes, nor on doctors and teachers of schools, nor on the councils of the fathers, and customs of long-standing. For against God's Word, neither

¹⁷⁸ *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 634. See also "Reply to False Accusations," 554; and "Reply to Gellius Faber," 627.

¹⁷⁹ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 260.

emperors nor kings, nor doctors, nor licentiates nor councils, nor proscriptions matter.”¹⁸⁰

Through the importance that Anabaptists placed on the written word and through their practice of writing, the political struggle for Anabaptists was effectively relocated from the physical, material world where “weapons of death, such as muskets, spears, swords, and horses” reigned supreme, to a realm in which the power of the Word that originated with “the invincible and eternal sceptre of the power of God,” which was capable of exercising power over the physical world of “gold, silver, cities, countries, lords, princes, [...] sword, stake, water, fire, [...] the law, fear, death, and the devil” existed.¹⁸¹ Menno argued that the “holy divine Word” propagated through Anabaptist writing was not only “abundant in power,” but that it was “tangible” and “may be felt with the hands that it is the finger and work of the Lord.”¹⁸²

Menno accurately anticipated the refusal of those in authority and occupying privileged positions of power to yield to the requests, warnings and admonitions Menno placed before them, and therefore “commended” them “collectively to the Lord.”¹⁸³ This act of “commendation” was not solely an indictment for the purpose of exposing them to God’s judgement, but was once again also a clear reminder to all those in positions of authority and power that their power and authority was not ultimate. As a clear and final reminder of the limits of their power, it was once again a clear indication of Anabaptist political resistance to the exercise of such power.

Writing and its power were used by Menno to dislodge established power, which had entrenched itself in writing and in the written word, and thereby presented itself as

¹⁸⁰ *CW*, “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 129.

¹⁸¹ *CW*, “The True Christian Faith,” 326.

¹⁸² *CW*, “The True Christian Faith,” 384.

¹⁸³ *CW*, “Reply to False Accusations,” 540.

immune to criticism. Menno's desperate attempt to influence, and admonish "princes, regents, and lords" to voluntarily limit their coercive activity,¹⁸⁴ was advanced through writing, without Menno's writing of religious and political reform being dependent on securing the favour of those authorities.¹⁸⁵

For Anabaptists such as Menno, it was the written word and the power that was available in and through the "Word," and not physical weapons or positions of authority, that were ultimately considered to be capable of establishing, maintaining and perpetuating a desirable society with all its relations, its necessary authorities, and its institutions.¹⁸⁶ Thus, it was through the word, that is, through writing that power found its legitimate outlet according to Menno.¹⁸⁷ Though Menno insisted that, "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power,"¹⁸⁸ it is clear that he conceptualized power as mediated through the Word of God, which was made available through his own writing. Thus, according to Menno power was "bestowed" through the word of "truth,"¹⁸⁹ was communicated through Menno's writing, and was effectively disseminated through the creation of a morally distinct society.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ *CW*, "Reply to False Accusations," 544.

¹⁸⁵ *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 629. Sigrun Haude has noted: "Among the motives for the Anabaptists' break with the evangelical reformers, frustration about the lack of morals, the retention of infant baptism [...], and the new alliances with the secular powers rank highest." "Anabaptism," 239.

¹⁸⁶ *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 779.

¹⁸⁷ Lydia Harder argues that "the use of power became valid—authoritative—if it moved the church toward embodying the Word of God." "Power and Authority," 81.

¹⁸⁸ *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 656.

¹⁸⁹ *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 722.

¹⁹⁰ *CW*, "Reply to Gellius Faber," 725. In this manner, power loses its negative connotations and is presented positively, as Rodney J. Sawatzky notes: "Power, then, is not primarily "power over" but rather "empowering under". "Leadership Authority and Power" (*Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71, 1997), 450.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Concluding Summary and Statements

This thesis began with the presentation of a question for consideration. That question was: How, and under what conditions, can a movement that resisted political and religious authorities, focused its energies on establishing an alternate social order, and therefore, exercised power continue to bear an “apolitical” label in scholarship? This question outlines what has come to be a commonly accepted and seldom-challenged interpretive assumption currently operating in the study of Anabaptism. The now widespread assumption that the sixteenth-century Anabaptism movement was an “apolitical” movement cuts across what have become well-established interpretive boundaries in the study of Anabaptism. The assumption that sixteenth-century Anabaptism was “apolitical,” and the interpretive framework from which such an assumption derives were outlined, examined and challenged in this thesis, and formed the basis for this thesis.

The objectives of this thesis have been threefold: (1) To claim that sixteenth-century Anabaptists did in fact practice, and were actively engaged in politics; (2) To assert that such a claim is a substantial claim given the rather large literature assuming its opposite; (3) To defend and demonstrate my claim of sixteenth-century political Anabaptism through the application of particular data to a certain interpretive operation and thereby propose a theoretical reframing of a crucial phase of Anabaptist history. In this final chapter I conclude on the examination of these objectives, I outline a few of the benefits my thesis holds for scholarship engaged in the study of Anabaptism, and I make

a few recommendations for future research, given the data set that has been created as part of this thesis.

In order to meet the first objective established in this thesis, I applied a select body of theory to sixteenth-century Anabaptist literary works and actions probing three relevant themes: power, resistance, and community. Recent theoretical work on these themes was applied to two centrally important Anabaptist practices: baptism and writing. Both of these practices were examined for their function as important mechanisms of power during the sixteenth century and their effects within sixteenth-century society. I argued that Anabaptists appropriated both of these mechanisms of power, and that the appropriated use made of these mechanisms identifies the level and locus of their politics, becoming essential components in their political engagement.

The sixteenth-century ritual of baptism was not examined within a theological framework, but rather for the significant social and political power it held. The Anabaptist appropriation and re-deployment of baptism, which held important socio-political implications for the purpose of resistance, was examined as an important catalyst in the political and social turmoil of that period. Through the Anabaptist appropriation of baptism and the politically efficacious discourse built around it, Anabaptists re-deployed baptism in an act of behavioural and ideological political resistance that functioned to both create and mobilize a group of individuals for resistance while working to establish a new “moral” and “autonomous” social community.

I presented the act of writing and publishing as always being political actions in theory, regardless of whether or not the content of those acts can be deemed to be political. That is, though the content of sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings was

political at times and not at other times, the act of Anabaptists writing was presented as always being a political action in theory. I also examined the premise that writing was an important mechanism in the sixteenth-century exercise of power, defining the dominant powers, and was used by the dominant religious and political powers as an important tool for establishing and maintaining power relations. I also argued that the Anabaptist appropriation of writing and its powers constituted the appropriation of an important political mechanism, with such an appropriation and redeployment functioning as a significant instrument for establishing, promoting, and maintaining Anabaptist resistance. Finally, I suggested that sixteenth-century Anabaptists practiced writing and publishing as a self-aware and deliberate practice, which was inherently political.

In order to meet the second objective established in this thesis, I constructed a typology of scholarly interpretations of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, which then acted as a diagnostic tool making it evident that many of the scholarly works on Anabaptism fail to acknowledge sixteenth-century Anabaptists as political. In fact, my analysis indicated that the assumption that sixteenth-century Anabaptism was “apolitical” had become the established interpretive norm.

I examined the usage of an “apolitical” label for Anabaptism and determined that while separatism and pacifism may accurately describe an important component in Anabaptism, making it synonymous with “apoliticism” obscures the centrally important supporting and defining role that both “power” and “politics” *continued* to play in Anabaptism. Such a label, even when used provisionally or heuristically, ignores and denies the nature of ongoing Anabaptist political engagement. Such a label obscures and

misses the level at which, and the mechanisms through which, Anabaptists like Menno were politically engaged.

I established a framework for recognizing Anabaptist political behaviour, which was founded on the premise that the political activity of subordinate groups is rarely to be found in either overt defiance, or complete hegemonic compliance. Anabaptist resistance was presented as occurring on a level we rarely recognize as political taking a form that by its very design obscured their intentions and took cover behind an apparent meaning. I argued that scholarly fixation on the openly declared (or in the case of Anabaptism denied) political intentions, aspirations, and actions of marginalized groups, has been unable to capture even a small portion of their political thought and activity.

In order to meet the third objective established in this thesis, I instituted an understanding of politics as activity, which has to do with “those efforts made by groups of people who have some common identity or some common interests and join together to use some form of pressure or persuasion in order to fulfill their wishes or achieve their aims.”¹ In my understanding and use of the term “politics,” activity is deemed to be political if such activity involves maintaining, changing, or restoring power relations in a society. Such a definition includes, but goes beyond “the way a country is governed” to include efforts that are not necessarily focused on the state itself, but on social institutions and communities. It became apparent in my study that one impoverishes the question of politics when it is presented solely or primarily in terms of legislation, constitution, or the state and state apparatus. Politics, I argued, are always more complicated and more differentiated than a set of laws, or the established state apparatus. I argued that by

¹ Christopher Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe*, in *Early Modern Europe* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), xiv.

expanding the definition of what constitutes the political one is better able to explain particular aspects of human interaction and power relations.

By focusing primarily, though not exclusively, on the life and work of Menno Simons (1496-1561) as a case study I was able to critically reassess the presentation of sixteenth-century Anabaptism as an “apolitical movement,” and was able to draw attention to the way in which such a representation obscures important facets of Anabaptist thinking and actions. I presented Anabaptist political philosophy, as largely based on a simple message of freedom of conscience in religious matters, and the illegitimacy of coercion, which worked to place a strict limit to sixteenth-century state and religious power. Anabaptist political thought and action were primarily oriented toward practical religious and social needs, through which their perception of the individual’s role, or place in society, was transformed, which in turn transformed the individual.

5.1 Benefits for Scholarship:

By setting out a critical reinterpretation of a crucial formative phase of Anabaptist history in which that reinterpretation acknowledges that sixteenth-century Anabaptists had politics, and that those politics had significant political implications and effects, at least four benefits to scholarship become readily evident.

Firstly, it becomes evident that such a reinterpretation is able to provide a better explanation for the severe persecution Anabaptists faced during the sixteenth century. Such a reinterpretation of their history takes seriously the actions and effects of Anabaptist political activity just as political authorities during the sixteenth century took

them seriously. Furthermore, it avoids reducing the analysis of Anabaptist persecution and the action surrounding that persecution to a discussion of theological differences without necessarily denying the significant role such differences played. It creates an interpretive perspective and framework through which the political activity of sixteenth-century Anabaptists is rightly treated as politically significant by virtue of its effects without requiring the further determination or evaluation of the intentions of Anabaptist political practitioners. That is, such a perspective acknowledges Anabaptist religious and political persecution without collapsing into a discussion of Anabaptist theology and intentionality.

Secondly, by setting out my examination of sixteenth-century Anabaptist political thought and action as a framework that is centred on an analysis of the political effects of those actions, Anabaptist texts become more readable. Anabaptist writings, as the product of the politically marginalized, become more, and not less, intelligible at crucial junctures. Previously ignored or glossed Anabaptist texts and/or politically nuanced portions of these writings can now be read without declaring such texts or selected portions of texts to be aberrations or indicative of some unimportant, unusual or uncharacteristic phenomena.² Within such a critical political framework Anabaptist actions previously unintelligible (or uninteresting?) to interpreters can be seen to have held significant importance and value for Anabaptist political practitioners, (and therefore, may hold potential interest for their interpreters).

² One such example would be J.C. Wenger's introductory comments to Menno's treatise, "Reply to Martin Micron," where he writes: "His [Menno's] arguments are wearisome, and his style is less than courteous; there is no excuse for the sharp polemics of sixteenth-century authors. Section X is perhaps the only edifying section in the entire *Reply*. The average reader may turn to that, and omit the rest of the book, for it is unprofitable." *CW*, "Introduction," 837. In a similar vein, in Wenger's "Introduction" to Menno's treatise "Reply to Gellius Faber," Wenger remarks that this "Reply" is "the largest of Menno's writings, but by no means the most significant." *CW*, 624.

Thirdly, by proposing a reinterpretation of sixteenth-century Anabaptist history in which Anabaptist political activity is taken seriously, we are able to emerge from the constraints imposed by sixteenth-century Anabaptists, and taken up by their interpreters, at the point at which Anabaptist writings and actions are said to be void of political content. By relocating sixteenth-century Anabaptist thought and action to a political framework it becomes possible to examine the political content of their writings, the political effects of their actions, and ultimately the political effectiveness of both their actions and thought. Such an interpretive posture helps to re-establish an important historical interconnectedness between their political actions and their theological writings.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, postulating that sixteenth-century Anabaptists had politics is the first and primary step toward removing the privileged “apolitical” status that has been hoisted onto sixteenth-century Anabaptists, which inherently rejects the possibility of Anabaptist political activity. Under such a label scholarship has for the most part ignored and avoided looking into their political history for the purposes of determining the circumstances under which that history originated, and for the purposes of examining the conditions under which that history developed. Because the existing self-imposed, narrow and therefore constricting paradigm is built on a narrow conception of politics it is unable to explain many aspects and nuances of Anabaptist behaviour satisfactorily. Given such a condition, a new political framework becomes more readily acceptable.

By approaching Anabaptist theology and actions with a paradigm in which politics have been largely associated with the official politics of the state and thereby

paying little attention to any other form of political activity, sixteenth-century Anabaptist political action remains confined within the archives as an “apolitical” entity. Anabaptist political interests, actions and their effects remain trivialized and neglected.

A political framework in which Anabaptist history is subjected to critical reinterpretation creates a space for studying sixteenth-century Anabaptist political interests and activities. Their interests, and not those of the dominant powers, are then placed at the very centre of such a political analysis and not at the margins. In and through such a critical process, Anabaptist studies are reinvented.

Though it may be possible to find a few exceptions to the established pattern outlined in this thesis, as a general account of the theories, assumptions and positions of interpreters currently operating in the study of Anabaptism, the present account holds true.

5.2 A Possibility for Further Research

As established above, a political framework in which Anabaptist history is subjected to critical reinterpretation creates a space for studying sixteenth-century Anabaptist political interests, activities and effects. An area of Anabaptist political history toward which such an investigation could be productively directed would be centred on an examination of the political mechanisms through which sixteenth-century Anabaptist communities were internally politicized.

Two questions that could be asked as the stimulus for further investigation are: What sort of problems of the self did Anabaptists seek to address with the ban? And secondly, How was the Anabaptist practice of the ban employed as an effective agent of

social control and an organ of socialization? By casting the Anabaptist employment of the ban as an important sociological and political mechanism in the exercise of Anabaptist power, utilized in the socialization and politicization of the new Anabaptist community, an investigation into its positive role in resisting religious coercion could be undertaken. The Anabaptist employment of the ban could be investigated for the way in which it functioned positively directing and enforcing: class and gender distinctions, confessional conformity, and a new religious identity.

As a mechanism of internal politicization which functioned to maintain a precarious religious, sociological and political identity through a process of enforced moral and social conformity, the ban could be examined for the way in which it enabled the development and negotiation of important aspects of Anabaptist identity through the adaptation of new social and political structures, and the displacement of traditional social structures. The ban could be investigated to determine its role in facilitating religious identity change, which was supported, promoted, and accommodated through heavy reliance on theological language. Being aimed at a process of socialization, the ban could be investigated for the way in which Anabaptists continually renegotiated the political boundaries and definitions of their religious identity to include and inject a positive valuation. As a process of adult socialization, and committed to social formation this identity negotiation whether religious, social, or sexual in its orientation, was presented as divinely directed and instituted, being the restitution of the divine order. The Anabaptist practice of the ban enforced moral and social conformity, which were presented as spiritually grounded and therefore, divinely sanctioned.

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