

'The Child's blood should lye at his Door': Local Divisions over Baptismal Rites during the English Civil War and the Interregnum

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By the 1640s, Prayer Book ritual had marked rites of passage in England for over eighty years. It formed a reassuring continuum with older Catholic rites and gave commonality to parish religion. However, puritans disliked its ceremonial elements, which were banned by Parliament in the 1640s. Anecdotal evidence suggests that parishioners continued to demand old-style rites of passage, and some clergy to offer them. This has led historians to suggest that traditionalist practice was condoned by the regime. This article uses loyalist memories of antagonisms between puritan and non-puritan clergy and parishioners over baptism, as well as evidence from legal prosecutions and other sources, to complicate such presumptions, showing how, with opinion sharply divided on their practice, rites of passage led to clashes and confrontations within parishes and remained a focus for local antagonism.

By the 1640s, Book of Common Prayer ritual had been used for rites of passage in England for over eighty years. Retaining elements of older rites, such as the idea of spiritual regeneration through ritual washing at the font, or familiar words of the liturgy (largely based on the Sarum manual of the medieval Catholic Church), gave a sense of continuity and commonality to parish religion.¹ However,

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¹ See Katherine Krick-Pridgeon, "Nothing for the godly to fear": Use of Sarum Influence on the 1549 Book of Common Prayer' (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2018), 196. Other continuities with Catholic practice included the idea of contest with the devil, the making of the sign of the cross, the baptism of infants and the use of godparents.

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puritans in the church objected to the ceremonial elements of the Book of Common Prayer, and in 1645 these were banned by parliamentary legislation.² Evidence from diaries suggests that some members of the elite, notably the diarist John Evelyn, continued to demand old-style rites, and some clergy to offer them.³ Because of this, historians have assumed that continuing use of traditionalist practice remained largely unquestioned during this period.⁴ Using loyalist memories of antagonisms between puritan and non-puritan clergy and parishioners, as well as evidence from legal prosecutions and other sources, this article complicates such presumptions, showing how, with opinion sharply divided on their practice, rites of passage led to clashes and confrontations within parishes.

The focus here is on baptism, as the rite of greatest importance within the Christian religion. Deriving from the Gospels, it was one of only two of the seven Catholic sacraments retained by Protestants.⁵ A very familiar ritual, commonly performed in the context of the gathered Sunday congregation, as David Cressy has shown, it also generated the most post-Reformation controversy over its precise theological meaning, as well as the way, time and place in which it should be conducted. If, as Anna French argues, the sacraments were ‘some of the most heavily debated aspects of reformed worship’ due to their ‘close connection to beliefs about salvation’, then in this period baptism was more contentious than the eucharist.⁶

David Cressy cites both theological polemic and parochial confrontations surrounding baptism over the longer post-Reformation period. Yet despite increased interest among religious anthropologists

² ‘January 1645: An Ordinance for Taking Away the Book of Common Prayer, and for Establishing and Putting in Execution of the Directory for the Publique Worship of God’, in C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660* (London, 1911), 582–607, at *British History Online*: <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp582-607>>, accessed 1 September 2021.

³ John Evelyn, *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn*, ed. William Bray (London, n.d.), 193, 195. Richard Drake, the ejected rector of Radwinter, Essex, lists baptisms, funerals and his own marriage using traditional rites in his diary: Oxford, Bodl., Rawlinson MS D 158, fols 13^v, 14^r, 15^v, 16^r, 17^{r-v}, 19^r.

⁴ See Robert S. Boshier, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement* (London, 1951), 5, 12; Paul Lay, *Providence Lost* (London, 2020), 70.

⁵ Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013), 329.

⁶ Anna French, ‘Disputed Words and Disputed Meanings: The Reformation of Baptism, Infant Limbo and Child Salvation in Early Modern England’, in Jonathan Willis, ed., *Sin and Salvation in Reformation England* (Farnham, 2015), 157–72, at 158.

in the role of religion within revolutionary contexts in recent years, Cressy notes the absence of research to substantiate patterns of response, within parishes, to the sharp change of official attitudes towards baptism in the mid-seventeenth century. ‘The demography of religious affiliation in this period has so far resisted scholarly investigation’, he writes, querying ‘how typical were the strategies’ of diarists like Evelyn or how attached people were to the new – post-Book of Common Prayer – style of worship.⁷

The tendency in recent years, following the arguments of John Morrill, has been to emphasize the continuing vitality of traditional practice in the 1640s and 1650s.⁸ Judith Maltby has argued convincingly for the existence of a ‘set of religious attitudes, practices and beliefs which found authenticity, comfort and renewal’ in traditional Church of England ritual while it was suppressed, although she and others rightly remind us not to see this as preserving a uniform, single strand equivalent to what we now think of as ‘Anglicanism’ within the pre-Civil War church.⁹ Anthony Milton argues that the content of the Prayer Book petitions of 1641–2 was ‘hotly contested’, rather than deriving from an unchanging ‘Anglican’ orthodoxy.¹⁰ Considering the example of Elizabeth Isham, Isaac Stephens wars against an oversimplified division between Maltby’s ‘prayer-book Protestants’ and puritans: individual religious practice such as Elizabeth’s might combine elements of both traditional ritual and

⁷ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), 125–134, 180; Ramon Sarró, Simon Coleman and Ruy Llera Blanes, ‘Introduction: One Hundred years of the Anthropology of Religion’, *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 3 (2012), 1–3, at 2.

⁸ John Morrill, ‘The Church in England 1643–9’, in idem, ed., *Reactions to the English Civil War 1642–1649* (London, 1982), 89–114; Derek Hirst, ‘The Failure of Godly Rule in the English Republic’, *P&P* 132 (1991), 33–66; Christopher Durston, ‘Puritan Rule and the Failure of Cultural Revolution, 1645–1660’, in idem and Jacqueline Eales, eds, *The Culture of English Puritanism* (Basingstoke, 1996), 210–33; Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁹ Judith Maltby, ‘Suffering and Surviving: The Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Formation of “Anglicanism”, 1642–60’, in Christopher Durston and eadem, eds, *Religion in Revolutionary England* (Manchester, 2006), 158–80, at 159.

¹⁰ Anthony Milton, ‘Unsettled Reformations: 1603–1662’, in idem, ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, 1: Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662* (Oxford, 2017), 63–83, at 71. These were petitions from the counties defending the use of the Book of Common Prayer against proposals to abolish it: see Maltby, *Prayer Book*, especially 23–4, 83–129.

puritan piety.¹¹ Eclectic practices before the English Revolution should prime us against making assumptions about how individuals and parishes responded to the religious changes that accompanied it, or assuming that any particular pattern of beliefs or practices, traditionalist or otherwise, had the support of the majority.

Although a number of historians have written about religion during this period, most substantively Christopher Durston and Bernard Capp, the reception and impact of the religious changes of the 1640s and 1650s within parishes has yet to be fully investigated. Since ‘social historians have long learned not to expect complete consistency between theological precept and practice’, as Susan Karant-Nunn observes, understanding the parochial context is at least as important as comprehending the doctrinal issues discussed in print or state policy.¹² Writing about the reception of the Reformation in Gloucestershire, Caroline Litzenberger alerts us to how the enforcement of ritual change on society results in a two-way process of ‘complicity, struggle and negotiation’ with official policy. ‘New or modified rituals not only changed people’s pious practices, but were in turn changed by those same practices’.¹³ At a statistical level, this response appears both as a rise in private baptism in the 1640s and 1650s, and as a decline of at least ten percent in the number of baptisms overall, according to Kitson, Wrigley and Schofield.¹⁴ If, as Kitson suggests, ‘there was a fundamental shift in the nature of religious observance’ in the mid-seventeenth century, it was qualitatively different to the one originally envisaged by puritan reformers, and requires further examination.¹⁵

¹¹ Isaac Stephens, ‘Confessional Identity in Early Stuart England: The “Prayer Book Puritanism” of Elizabeth Isham’, *Journal of British Studies* 50 (2011), 24–47.

¹² See also Christopher Durston, ‘“Preaching and sitting still on Sundays”: The Lord’s Day during the English Revolution’, in Durston and Maltby, eds, *Religion*, 205–25; Bernard Capp, *England’s Culture Wars* (Oxford, 2012); idem, ‘Introduction: Stability and Flux: The Church in the Interregnum’, in Fiona McCall, ed., *Church and People in Interregnum Britain* (London, 2021), 1–18; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford, 1994), 210–16; Claire Cross, *Church and People 1450–1660*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1999), 175–95; Susan Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual* (London and New York, 1997), 60.

¹³ Caroline Litzenberger, ‘Communal Ritual, Concealed Belief: Layers of Response to the Regulation of Ritual in Reformation England’, in James Tracy and Marguerite Ragnow, eds, *Religion and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge, 2004), 98–120, at 100.

¹⁴ Will Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Community in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2002), 53.

¹⁵ P. M. Kitson, ‘Religious Change and the Timing of Baptism in England, 1538–1750’, *HistJ* 52 (2009), 269–94, at 292; E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population*

Evidence of divisions over baptism appeared in many of the accusations against so-called ‘scandalous’ clergy made to Parliament and its committees in the early 1640s, which prefigured the changes introduced in 1645. Some reflect long-standing puritan opposition to making the sign of the cross in baptism as too reminiscent of Catholic gestures. Although Luther’s baptismal rites of 1523 and 1526 had retained the sign, Martin Bucer’s Strasbourg ritual of 1524 removed it and this influenced later Protestant groups, including Calvinists.¹⁶ The Millenary petitioners of 1603 had asked that instructions to use this gesture be removed from the Book of Common Prayer rubric, but this request was firmly denied in the church canons of 1604.¹⁷ The issue resurfaced in the 1640s, when several ministers were denounced for using the sign of the cross even before it had been officially banned by the parliamentary legislation of 1645.¹⁸

In this period, parishioners seem to have felt that they had the right to determine how baptism was performed for their children. In 1644 it was reported that Richard Peacock, minister of Swaffham Prior in Cambridgeshire, when asked to baptize a child without using the sign of the cross, refused to do so without an order from a higher authority.¹⁹ Cuthbert Nicholson, rector of Newbold Verdon in Leicestershire, was accused of baptizing a child with the sign of the cross ‘notwithstanding their fathers standing their forbade

History of England 1541–1871 (London, 1981), 28, 540, quoted in Durston, ‘Puritan Rule’, 227.

¹⁶ Karant-Nunn, *Reformation*, 52–3, 55; see Martin Bucer, *A Review of the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Arthur Roberts (London, 1853), 19, 21–2. When asked by Archbishop Cranmer to critique King Edward VI’s first Prayer Book, which had been published in 1549, before its revision in 1552, Bucer commented unfavourably on the ‘delight’ of the common people with signs and ‘scenic exhibitions’ they did not understand; however, he did not at this time express disapproval of the signing with the cross, as long as it was performed religiously and without superstition.

¹⁷ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 126–7.

¹⁸ London, BL, MS Add. 15672, Articles Exhibited to the Commissioners for Examining Scandalous Ministers in Cambridgeshire, 1643–4, fols 39^r, 46^r, 55^r. It is often unclear who raised such issues and how – or indeed whether – they were related to the baptismal family. In Cambridgeshire, the names of those testifying are known, but usually they are not; see also Bodl., Rawlinson MS D 158, fols 43^r–55^v, where Richard Drake chronicles several interventions during baptisms that were not led by the families.

¹⁹ BL, MS Add. 15672, fol. 4^r.

him'.²⁰ Thomas Newcomen, rector of Holy Trinity Church, Colchester, 'not being suffered' to cross a child, apparently retaliated by perverting the liturgy, saying, 'We doe not receive this Child into the Congregation'.²¹ Gentleman George Salter of King's Lynn testified that Thomas Holt, minister of All Saints in Stamford, had refused to christen his child except with the sign of the cross, 'nor would suffer' another minister to baptize without it. Salter's wife's puritan leanings perhaps swayed him; he also stated that she had 'fallen out' with Holt over the question of kneeling at the altar to receive communion.²²

Sometimes such concerns were long-standing and had previously been handled with some flexibility by church ministers. In 1646 Nicholas Hall of Loughborough, challenging his sequestration, claimed never to have used the sign of the cross in baptism, despite the church canons.²³ At Saddington in the same county, however, antipathy to the use of the cross was apparently a newly generated scruple. It was said that William Wood, 'an honest godly man', after taking the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, desired rector Bernard Flesher to omit the sign in baptizing his child, but Flesher refused, causing Wood 'great grief'.²⁴ Although the Covenant itself makes no mention of baptism, it probably encouraged further religious debate amongst those taking it.²⁵

Charles Hefling argues that the Prayer Book has long been a 'primary carrier' of meanings and values within Anglicanism, educating and informing its listeners, long before it was understood by philosophers 'that language is what bestows meaning' on the 'human mind and heart'.²⁶ The Prayer Book words taught parents to conceptualize baptism as the crossing of a highly significant threshold: baptized infants were 'born again', made 'dead unto sin', 'received into' and

²⁰ Bodl., MS J. Walker [hereafter: WMS], C11, Proceedings of the Leicester Sequestration Committee, 1646, fol. 65^f.

²¹ BL, MS Add. 5829, Acts of the Committee against Scandalous Ministers in Essex, 1643–4, fols 71–2.

²² F. Hill, ed., 'The Royalist Clergy of Lincolnshire', *Reports & Papers of the Lincolnshire Architectural & Archaeological Society* n.s. 2 (1941 for 1938), 34–127, at 80.

²³ Bodl., WMS, C11, fol. 76^f.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 29^f.

²⁵ *A Solemne League and Covenant, for Reformation, and Defence of Religion* (Edinburgh, 1643).

²⁶ Charles Hefling, 'Introduction: Anglicans and Common Prayer', in idem and Cynthia Shattuck, eds, *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford, 2006), 1–6.

made ‘lively members’ of ‘Christ’s holy church’, ‘regenerated with the holy Spirit’, utterly abolishing ‘the whole body of sin’.²⁷ Yet in the early 1640s, while the Prayer Book was still officially the form of service required by the church, a number of clergy had been denounced for expressing this very doctrine, including George Kindleton of Magdalen Laver in Essex, London ministers Benjamin Spencer and William Quelch, and Nicholas Felton at Stretham in Cambridgeshire.²⁸ Theodore Crosland, vice master of Trinity College, Cambridge, was blamed for the ‘debayst drunken man’ he employed as his substitute at Bottisham who preached that ‘Children that are Baptized are absolutely regenerate’.²⁹ Hugh Reeve, parson of Amphill in Bedfordshire, supposedly held ‘popish doctrines’, claiming that ‘the outward act of Baptism ... pronounced by the meanest or silliest priest’ was sufficient to ‘conferre grace on the child’.³⁰ A logical, if unacceptable implication of such theology, in the puritan mind, was the belief, supposedly held by Suffolk rector Jeremiah Ravens, that the rite itself conferred salvation.³¹ To these cases may be added, if we believe the sensationalized clerical denouncements in John White’s *First Century of Scandalous Malignant Priests* (1643), those of Sussex ministers John Wilson and Richard Gough, and of Essex ministers Edward Cherry and William Osbalston.³²

More distressing, if true, was the claim made by James Buck of Stradbroke in Suffolk that unbaptized children were ‘undoubtedly damned’ and the complaint that Thomas Bayly, of Brasted, Kent, refused to bury them.³³ Catholic theology postulated the idea of limbo for unbaptized infants, from which they would eventually be released, but, as Protestants, these clergy conceptualized a more

²⁷ *The Booke of Common Praier* (London, 1559), unpaginated.

²⁸ Leicester, Leicester University, MS 31, Reformation of the University of Cambridge and Essex Ministers, 1644, fols 13–14, where his first name is given as Francis; *Articles Exhibited Against Benjamin Spencer* (London, 1642), 2; London, Parliamentary Archives [hereafter: PA], HL/PO/JO/10/1/75, 23 December 1641; BL, MS Add. 15672, fols 1–2.

²⁹ BL, MS Add. 15672, fol. 3^r.

³⁰ PA, HL/PO/JO/10/1/47, 16 January 1641; HL/PO/JO/10/1/120, 30 April 1642.

³¹ Clive Holmes, ed., *The Suffolk Committees for Scandalous Ministers 1644–1646*, Suffolk Records Society 13 (Ipswich, 1970), 39.

³² John White, *The First Century of Scandalous, Malignant Priests* (London, 1643), 1, 3, 12, 14, 20, 32, 37, 44.

³³ *Ibid.* 40, 43.

clearly defined separation between the elect, destined for heaven, and the reprobate, headed for hell.³⁴ Another Kent minister, Dr Vane at Crayford, was said to have taught that children who died unbaptized could not be saved.³⁵ The reported doctrine of Richard Dukeson of St Clement Danes, that children dying before baptism are saved by the faith of their godparents, was perhaps an attempt to ameliorate a distressing circumstance, albeit not one which was appealing to puritan sensibilities.³⁶ All these charges reveal that puritan polemicists were determined to make an issue of the precise theological implications of baptism.

The introduction to the *Directory for Publique Worship* of 1645 gave parliamentary reformers at Westminster the chance to replace Prayer Book orthodoxy with their own. The *Directory* is often thought a rather anodyne document, but on baptism it represents a profound shift in the way the rite was supposed to be conducted and perceived.³⁷ Godparents were no longer involved and the use of the font was outlawed.³⁸ Where the Prayer Book normalized public baptism in the context of the gathered congregation, the *Directory* insisted on it.³⁹ Where the Prayer Book held ‘parents’ responsible for baptism (although in practice lying-in mothers did not usually take part), the *Directory* involved only fathers.⁴⁰ This masculine

³⁴ The Catholic Church has recently described limbo as merely a possible theological hypothesis: see The International Theological Commission, *The Hope of Salvation for Infants who die without being Baptized* (2007), online at: <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_unbaptised-infants_en.html>, accessed 22 November 2022.

³⁵ L. B. Larking, ed., *Proceedings, Principally in the County of Kent*, Camden Society o.s. 80 (1862), 118.

³⁶ White, *Century*, 40. Martin Luther employed similar arguments: see Madeleine Gray, ‘Ritual Space and Ritual Burial in the Early Modern Christian Tradition’, in Joan Allen and Richard C. Allen, eds, *Faith of our Fathers* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), 11–25, at 17.

³⁷ J. F. Merritt, ‘Religion and the English Parish’, in Milton, ed., *Anglicanism*, 122–47, at 142; Judith Maltby, ‘“Extravagencies and Impertinences”: Set Forms, Conceived and Extempore Prayer in Revolutionary England’, in Natalie Mears and Alec Ryrie, eds, *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham, 2013), 221–43, at 225.

³⁸ *A Directory for the Publique Worship of God* (London, 1645), 20.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 19–20; Kitson, ‘Religious Change’, 273–5.

⁴⁰ *Directory*, 20; Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 329; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 149. The inclusion of mothers in the spiritual responsibility for a child dates back to at least 1536: see Will Coster, ‘“From Fire and Water”: The Responsibilities of Godparents in Early Modern England’, in Diana Wood, ed., *The Church and Childhood*, SCH 31 (Oxford, 1994), 301–11.

bias perhaps derived from the Scottish or Genevan English baptismal rites, which involved fathers and godfathers but not mothers or godmothers.⁴¹ More significantly, the *Directory* removed much of the power attached to the ritual itself, particularly the idea that it was anything more than symbolic. The baptismal water, it stated, merely ‘representeth and signifieth’ the taking away of original sin by Christ. Baptized children were received only into the visible church, thereby distinguishing between the baptized and the elect. By baptism, they received a ‘Seale of the Covenant of Grace’, an endorsement of a state existing separately from the rite itself: the ‘inward Grace of Baptisme’ was not tied to the moment wherein it was administered, ‘the fruit and power thereof reacheth to the whole course of our life’, and ‘outward Baptisme is not so necessary; that through the want thereof the Infant is in danger of Damnation or the Parents guilty’. While this wording seemed to offer comfort to parents whose children had died unbaptized, the *Directory* refused any guarantees: all that could be done was to pray that, if a child died in infancy, the Lord would be merciful and ‘receive him up into glory’; and if he lived to ‘years of discretion’, his word and Spirit would ‘make his Baptisme effectual to him’.⁴²

Even if, as Alec Ryrie argues, this downgraded conception of baptism was commonplace in puritan circles – Stephen Dennison was charged before the High Commission in 1634 for preaching that ‘Baptisme without the word is like a seal without writinge, ... the word is the principall, and the Sacrament is the accessory’ – it was unfamiliar to parishioners whose doctrinal ideas were conditioned by the Book of Common Prayer.⁴³ Even amongst the puritan-inflected clerical accusations of the 1640s, complaints are found which revolved around more traditional concerns, notably that baptismal rites be performed as soon as the parents desired, and performed properly. In 1641 Bryan Walton was accused of refusing to baptize infants presented on a holy day before divine service, ‘for what cause, your petitioners know not, other than their parents were not in

⁴¹ Coster, *Baptism*, 85; *The Service, Discipline and Forme of the Common Prayers and Administration of the Sacraments, Used in the English Church of Geneva, ... approved by ... M. John Calvin, And the Church of Scotland* (London, 1641), 35.

⁴² *Directory*, 20–3.

⁴³ Kew, TNA, SP 16/261, High Commission Minute Book, October 1635, fol. 283.

his favour'.⁴⁴ Similar complaints were made to Parliament in 1641 against Andrew Sandiland of Great Waldingfield, Suffolk, for refusing to baptize children presented to him in the forenoons.⁴⁵ In August 1644 three working men complained that William Underwood, minister at Hareby in Lincolnshire, had not administered the 'sacrament of Baptisme' once since coming to the church in the Spring.⁴⁶

Such concerns echo earlier objections from the church courts of the 1630s, complaining of clerical neglect causing children not to be baptized when requested, or worse, to die unbaptized. In 1633 William Warmington was cited before the Exeter church courts for refusing to baptize a child brought into church on a Sunday, despite being told it was weak, forcing the parents to travel two miles to another church.⁴⁷ Such cases continued to trouble parents years later. Similar allegations against William Churton of Hartland in Devon in 1638 harked back to an incident eight or nine years previously, when his neglect had led to a child's dying unbaptized.⁴⁸

Other accusations in the early 1640s, as well as earlier cases in the church court records of the 1630s, concerned baptisms improperly conducted: Robert Guyon, minister of White Colne in Essex, was said to have confused the marriage and baptism services; Henry Wright of Brampford Speke in Devon was cited in 1636 for baptizing while drunk; Edward Jeffry of Southminster in Essex was accused of baptizing in 1638 while himself excommunicate.⁴⁹ Complaints to Parliament against Dr Richard Etkins, vicar of Kensington, in 1641 included his 'carelesse ... fashion of performing the divine offices', including 'omissions of no lesse moment' than forgetting the child's name in baptism.⁵⁰ A Harwich lecturer, Thomas Wood, was accused of inventing his own baptism service, to the 'great disturbance' of the inhabitants.⁵¹

⁴⁴ *The Articles and Charge Proved in Parliament against Doctor Walton, Minister of St. Martins Orgars in Cannon Street* (London, 1641), 4.

⁴⁵ PA, HL/PO/JO/10/1/51, 9 February 1641.

⁴⁶ Hill, 'Royalist Clergy', 65–70.

⁴⁷ Exeter, Devon Heritage Centre [hereafter: DHC], CC 178, Complaints against William Warmington of Yarnscombe, 1634.

⁴⁸ DHC, CC 178, Complaints against William Churton of Hartland, 1639.

⁴⁹ BL, MS Add. 5829, 9 April 1644, fol. 24^r; DHC, CC 178, Complaint against Henry Wright, 1636; Chelmsford, Essex Record Office [hereafter: ERO], D/AB/A9, Commissary of the Bishop of London Act Book, 1638–41, fol. 30^v.

⁵⁰ PA, HL/PO/JO/10/1/57, 13 May 1641.

⁵¹ Bodl., Tanner MS 62, fols 343–6.

Mock baptisms, soon to be an offence associated with soldiers and sectarians, were said to have been performed by Essex minister John Fenwick and Leicestershire minister Francis Squire in local ale-houses.⁵² David Cressy gives other examples, although he perhaps underplays the significance and prevalence of such inversion rituals during the Civil War and Interregnum.⁵³ Blanford Parker writes that each period has its own characteristic modes of satire, involving the ‘constant assimilation and displacement of generic norms’.⁵⁴ Keith Thomas argues that, for the early modern period, mockeries of ecclesiastical rituals were ‘stock methods’.⁵⁵ Indeed, James Mawdesley highlights their role in the confessional conflicts of the period.⁵⁶ The set forms of traditional religion were also often parodied in printed satire during the 1640s and 1650s: there were mock litanies, mock catechisms, mock sermons, and satires on the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and on biblical verses.⁵⁷ Such forms were mimicked precisely because they had such ‘serious and solemn Significations’, which the parody might critique, but also reinforce.⁵⁸ Repeated reports of mock baptisms in the mid-seventeenth century therefore suggest both the importance of the

⁵² Leicester University, MS 31, 1644, fols 1–2; Bodl., WMS, C11, fol. 69A; John Gauden, *Hinc Illae Lachrymae* (London, 1648), 12; Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena* (London, 1646), 58, 94; Cambridge, CUL, Ms.Mm., 1.45, Baker Transcripts, ‘Observat., Occasionall & Emergent Acts &c: in Parliament tyme’, 1640–41, 37; William Dugdale, *Short View of the Late Troubles in England* (Oxford, 1681), 560.

⁵³ David Cressy, ‘Baptized Beasts and Other Travesties: Affronts to Rites of Passage’, in idem, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), 171–85.

⁵⁴ Blanford Parker, ‘Modes of Mockery: The Significance of Mock-Poetic Forms in the Enlightenment’, in Ruben Quintero, ed., *A Companion to Satire* (Oxford, 2007), 493–509, at 495.

⁵⁵ Keith Thomas, ‘The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 January 1977, 77–81, at 77.

⁵⁶ James Mawdesley, ‘Antrobus the Cleric and Peter the Cock: Civil War, Ministry and Animal Baptism in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Cumberland’, *Local Historian* 46 (2016), 15–26.

⁵⁷ TNA, ASSI 45/2/2, 23 March 1647; George de Forest Lord, ed., *Anthology of Poems on Affairs of State*, 7 vols (London, 1975), 5: 218; Adam Fox, ‘Religious Satire in English Towns’, in Patrick Collinson and John Craig, eds, *The Reformation in English Towns, 1500–1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), 221–40, at 235; Chippenham, Wiltshire Heritage Centre, 865/587; Malcolm Jones, ‘The Parodic Sermon in Medieval and Early Modern England’, *Medium Aevum* 66 (1997), 94–114.

⁵⁸ Anon., *A Letter ... Concerning the Abuse of Scripture Terms* (London, 1743), quoted in Michael F. Suarez, ‘Secular Lessons: Biblical Satire, Parody, Imitation, and Emulation in Eighteenth-Century Chronicles of British Politics’, *Age of Johnson* 19 (2009), 69–128, at

ritual in popular consciousness and the degree to which its conduct and meaning were disputed.

Such antics were only one of the ways in which conflicting ideas about baptism led to turbulence in churches during and after the Civil War. Although there were contemporary complaints that most of the congregation left the Sunday service at the start of a baptism, as part of the regular service of public worship it was open to anyone who wished to remain.⁵⁹ At a time of civil war and accompanying social unrest, this risked the possibility of interventions from soldiers, unrelated parishioners or strangers less likely to be present at other rites. Sometimes the conduct of the rite itself was at the heart of the dispute. Chaos erupted at Saddington Church in Leicestershire when a parishioner pressurized the rector Bernard Flesher to use the *Directory* for the first time during a baptism. 'Much molested' at the font by one married couple, Flesher had to abandon the baptism until the afternoon.⁶⁰ Charges made in July 1644 against Lincolnshire minister Hugh Barcroft refer to an apparent stand-off between Barcroft and 'Captaine Moodies Troope', temporarily in the town, over the lawfulness of Barcroft baptizing with the sign of the cross.⁶¹ In August 1647, assize depositions were taken against Richard Dunwell, clerk, for baptizing with the sign of the cross using the Prayer Book at two churches in York. Three female parishioners testified against him. Ann Bird deposed that she 'tooke notice' of Dunwell's failure to use the *Directory* and told him there and then 'that he would answere it'.⁶² The public nature of the rite had facilitated her involvement; no doubt a desire to avoid such scenes encouraged the observed trend towards private baptism. From about 1649 onwards, public baptisms became vulnerable to disruption by Quakers, with two incidents reported in quarter sessions records for Somerset and one in Essex.⁶³ At Croscombe in

69; idem, 'Mock-Biblical Satire from Medieval to Modern', in Quintero, ed., *Companion*, 525–49, at 525.

⁵⁹ Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 333–4.

⁶⁰ Bodl., WMS, C11, fol. 30^r.

⁶¹ Hill, 'Royalist Clergy', 44–57.

⁶² TNA, ASSI 45/2/1, 16 August 1647, nos 80–1.

⁶³ ERO, Q/SBa 2/101, 20 November 1657; Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre [hereafter: SHC], Q/SR/91/59, 10 September 1655; for the chronology of prosecutions for disrupting church services during the Interregnum, see Fiona McCall, 'Tolerable and Intolerable Local Practices of Religion during the English Interregnum', in Mariëtta

Somerset in July 1653, minister John Whitborne complained that one George Hicks came into the church very irreverently, wearing his hat, and argued loudly concerning his son's baptism. He called for an officer to take Hicks away, but Hicks kept arguing and the congregation was dismissed. There is no specific indication of what the dispute was about.⁶⁴

Baptisms were also disrupted during disputes between clergy over titles to livings in the context of widespread clerical ejections. At Aldenham in Hertfordshire in 1643, the ejected vicar Joseph Soane reportedly waited until after the sermon and the start of the baptism to interrupt his replacement John Gilpin, who was 'kneeling downe to pray' at a font not yet made obsolete by the *Directory*. The violence of Soane and his supporters, including 'many women', halted the baptism.⁶⁵ In December 1646, Anthony Laphorne was forced to baptize in the church porch after having the church doors at Sedgfield in Durham shut against him on two successive Sundays, in a contest with parishioners who wished their existing minister to continue to serve the living.⁶⁶

Similar conflicts within parishes, sometimes even violence, are described in loyalist sources relating to Interregnum religion in the Bodleian Library's John Walker Archive. Such sources, collected in the early eighteenth century, are based on personal memories, oral tradition within families or parishes, and some documentary evidence. As I have argued previously, these were collected with a concern for truthfulness, and not often found to be seriously in error, although they were naturally selective in what they chose to share.⁶⁷ They recall the forcible prevention of traditionalist baptisms. The son of curate Philip Goddard, citing legal documents in his possession, related how his father was arrested by soldiers at Durley in Hampshire in 1644 for baptizing with the sign of the cross.⁶⁸ Another undated confrontation with soldiers was said to have occurred during a baptism at Barton Blount in Derbyshire, soldiers

van der Tol et al., eds, *Toleration and Religious Freedom in the Early Modern and Contemporary World*, (Oxford, 2021), 57–86, at 75–81.

⁶⁴ SHC, Q/SR/98/93, 18 February 1658/9.

⁶⁵ PA, HL/PO/JO/10/1/150, 24 May 1643.

⁶⁶ PA, HL/PO/JO/10/1/220, 17–31 December 1646.

⁶⁷ Fiona McCall, *Baal's Priests* (Farnham, 2013), 41–50.

⁶⁸ Bodl., WMS, C5, fol. 16^r.

tearing the leaves of the Book of Common Prayer out of the rector Emmanuel Haywood's combined Prayer Book and Bible.⁶⁹ The nephew of John Ferebee, minister of Woodchester in Gloucestershire, described his arrest by Colonel Massey's soldiers while 'at the font baptising a child'. Given the dates of Massey's commands, this probably occurred in 1643–4, before the introduction of the *Directory*.⁷⁰ Also described was a failed attempt by one Captain Hitch to arrest the vicar of Childwall in Lancashire, William Lewis, during a private baptism.⁷¹

'The Protestant Reformation', writes Madeleine Gray, 'was a compromise between the ideas of the more radical reformers and the traditionalism of a large number (possibly a majority) of the population'.⁷² The implications of further reformation in the 1640s came as a shock to many ordinary parishioners and clergy. Copies of accusations against clergy within the Walker archive add to the considerable number known to have been denounced for maintaining traditionalist rites, such as Derbyshire rector George Holmes, who used the Book of Common Prayer liturgy and the sign of the cross in baptism 'long after they were abolished'.⁷³ However, the desire to maintain traditional ways did not just originate with the clergy. Loyalists remembered traditionalist parents being just as forceful as puritans in dictating the terms of their children's baptism. Daniel Whitby recounted how at his wife's baptism in 1642 the incumbent, Mr Strickland, was already demurring at using the liturgy and the sign of the cross, but that her mother, Mrs Margaret Swanton, 'a strict Observer of the Rules of the church' overruled him; in the end he conducted the baptism privately in her house.⁷⁴

After 1645, traditionalists continued to press for baptisms to be performed in the way and by the person they preferred. At Everley in Wiltshire, parishioners were said to have taken their children to neighbouring ministers 'rather than suffer them to be touch't by

⁶⁹ Ibid., fol. 83^v; presumably the Bible and Book of Common Prayer had been bound together for Haywood's convenience.

⁷⁰ Bodl., WMS, C1, fol. 123^f; Andrew Warmington, 'Massey [Massie], Sir Edward (1604x9–1674)', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18297>>, accessed 12 August 2022.

⁷¹ Bodl., WMS, C3, fol. 253^f.

⁷² Gray, 'Ritual Space', 18.

⁷³ Bodl., WMS, C5, fol. 52^f.

⁷⁴ Bodl., WMS, C1, fol. 149^f.

the Hands' of the 'illiterate' 'Mechanick', Mr Eastman, a former brasier.⁷⁵ At Pontefract in Yorkshire, it was said, the 'Loyal Town', 'mightily disaffected' from Interregnum incumbent Joshua Ferret, took their children to nearby Featherstone and Darrington to be baptized.⁷⁶ After his sequestration from Cruwys Morchard in Devon, William Frank arranged for his son-in-law, Jonas Holmes, to serve the living in his stead, but according to Holmes 'his father Frank baptiz'd all the children', probably because Holmes was not then ordained, something that parishioners probably felt crucial for performing baptismal rites.⁷⁷ Ejected loyalist clergy who recalled making a meagre income from illicit baptisms included Samuel Forward of Gillingham in Dorset, who 'entertained ... now and then at Christenings', and William Seddon in Lancashire, who baptized at the request of loyalists 'according to the antient forms of the church'.⁷⁸ This was not without personal risk: 'it gave him sometimes the trouble of musquetiers to guard him into Preston as a Prisoner', but, by the mediation of neighbouring gentry, 'he was soon dismiss'd and returned to his family to recount his hazards'.⁷⁹ George Forster at Bolam in Northumberland was similarly said to have been sustained after sequestration by 'the Tokens and presents which he got for Baptisms', but when discovered 'was severely reprimanded' and 'sent to Newcastle to be imprisoned' before being bailed by two friendly JPs.⁸⁰

Legal records provide some evidence of tensions over the use of traditionalist rites. A study of over four thousand records of religious offences tried at assizes, quarter and borough sessions between 1645 and 1660 finds two dozen citations for the use of the Prayer Book, nearly half of them from Yorkshire.⁸¹ The arrests of Seddon and Forster, and the assize prosecution of Richard Dunwell would therefore fit with a greater willingness to prosecute in northern counties,

⁷⁵ Bodl., WMS, C8, fol. 163^v.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 11^r.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 57^v.

⁷⁸ Bodl., WMS, C5, fol. 23^r.

⁷⁹ Bodl., WMS, C2, fol. 217^v.

⁸⁰ Bodl., WMS, C3, fol. 171^v.

⁸¹ For the counties included, see Fiona McCall, "Breaching the Laws of God and Man": Secular Prosecutions of Religious Offences in the Interregnum Parish, 1645–60', in eadem, ed., *Church and People*, 137–70, at 140. These have been augmented with records from Devonshire, Wiltshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire.

Baptism during the English Civil War and Interregnum

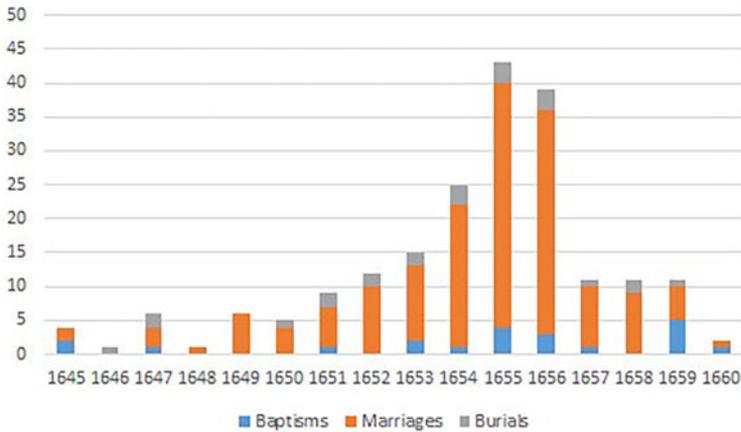


Figure 1. Prosecutions related to rites of passage, 1645–60.

which also had higher rates of clerical sequestration.⁸² Out of the whole set of records studied, nearly two hundred cases were found relating to rites of passage, including cases which do not mention the Prayer Book (Figure 1). Cases rise to a clear peak under the Major-Generals (1655–6) before declining. Cases relating to marriage predominate, because permissible practice was clearly defined after 1653 by the Marriage Act, but twenty-one relate to baptism.⁸³

Forster was eventually offered a low-valued living where he apparently continued to perform Church of England rites according to the Book of Common Prayer, suggesting the possibility that severity towards traditionalism waned towards the end of the Interregnum.⁸⁴ Also undisturbed in a low-valued living was the minister at Slapton in Devon, who, it was said, ‘used the service book as often as desired’, letting parents decide whether baptism should take place in the basin or the font.⁸⁵ On the other hand, continued use of

⁸² McCall, *Baal’s Priests*, 130–1.

⁸³ ‘August 1653: An Act touching Marriages and the Registering thereof; and also touching Births and Burials’, in Firth and Rait, eds, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 715–18, at *British History Online*: <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp715-718>>, accessed 24 November 2022; Christopher Durston, ‘“Unhallowed Wedlocks”: The Regulation of Marriage during the English Revolution’, *HistJ* 31 (1988), 45–59, at 45.

⁸⁴ Bodl., WMS, C3, fol. 171^v.

⁸⁵ Bodl., WMS, C8, fol. 45^f.

traditional rites of baptism was still used as grounds to deprive clergy in the late 1650s: Walter Bushnell, vicar of Box in Wiltshire, was charged in 1656 with habitually baptizing using the Prayer Book and making the sign of the cross.⁸⁶

Much depended on the zeal of local puritans to stir up trouble for traditionalists. Wiltshire clergy were subject to renewed attention following the Penruddock Rebellion of 1655; Bushnell, a non-associating traditionalist in a relatively rich living, was an obvious target and blamed Humphrey Chambers, minister at Pewsey, and Adoniram Byfield, rector of Collingbourne Ducis, for his ejection.⁸⁷ At St Mary's Lichfield, there was a notorious dispute between William Langley and his colleague John Butler because Butler was found to be baptizing using a false certificate of ordination, but it was Langley who ended up being removed.⁸⁸ Robert Bowber, rector of Stockleigh Pomeroy in Devon, was unfortunate that his neighbour was the officious Presbyterian Nathaniel Durant, rector of Cheriton Fitzpaine.⁸⁹ Bowber's son related that a 'loyal' 'person of quality', Sebastian Isaac, requested Bowber to baptize his child 'at his house called Combe' using the liturgy and the sign of the cross. The problem was that Isaac's house was in Durant's parish. Durant became 'so incensed against my Father', that he 'fought by all wayes and meanes to turn him out of his place, which at length he effected'.⁹⁰ Elizabeth Bentham related how a minister in a nearby living 'complained to Major General Packer' when her husband Samuel Bentham, rector of Knebworth in Hertfordshire, baptized his own son by his first wife, born in 1653, using the Book of Common Prayer rite, 'but

⁸⁶ Walter Bushnell, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Commissioners Appointed by O. Cromwell, for Ejecting Scandalous and Ignorant Ministers* (London, 1660), 3, 13, 25, 87.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, preface, 208.

⁸⁸ William Langley, *The Persecuted Minister* (London, 1655), 48–70; Bodl., WMS, C3, fols 57^r–; C5, fol. 317^r; TNA, SP 18/67, 3 March 1653/4, fol. 30; SP 25/78, 25 May 1658, fol. 633; A. G. Matthews, *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1648), 324. In this factional struggle, Langley was accused in turn of celebrating Christmas and allowing communions to resume, without ensuring that sufficient mechanisms were in place to hold back the scandalous from receiving. It seems that Butler's faction prevailed, although Langley was approved by the Triers as eligible of holding another living.

⁸⁹ Durant was particularly active against swearers: see DHC, QS/1/9, 4 October 1653; QS/4/58, Michaelmas 1656.

⁹⁰ Bodl., WMS, C2, fol. 231^r.

by the means of An Lightfoot who had an interest in Packer ... was not prosecuted any further'.⁹¹

The keenest reforming ministers sought to rip fonts out of churches altogether. The royal injunctions of 1561 had prohibited removing the font or using a basin, showing that there was already debate over this issue in the Elizabethan church.⁹² By the 1570s, some London churches were baptizing with basins placed near the pulpit, to stress the link between the sacraments and preaching.⁹³ Following the *Directory's* ban on using the font in 1645, churchwardens' accounts record fonts being removed in parishes across the country: at St Thomas in Salisbury by order of the committee in April 1647, at Pittington in Durham in 1651, and at St Petrock in Exeter in 1655.⁹⁴

Loyalist narratives challenge the idea that this was always an 'orderly' and consensual process, describing the font as 'torn down' at Modbury in Devon, and other places where the task of removal proved difficult due to unenthusiastic parishioners and the solidity of the workmanship.⁹⁵ At Bovey Tracey in Devon, the minister Tucker reportedly tried to dispose of the font with his own hands. He managed to saw halfway through it, 'but being weary, and no one helping him in so ill a work, he was forced to desist, and so it remains half saw'd to this day'.⁹⁶ A fifteenth-century font, with a font cover installed around 1660, seemingly in an attempt to restate its importance, survives in the church.⁹⁷ At Bedwas in

⁹¹ Bodl., WMS, C2, fol. 97^v; Knebworth Baptismal Register, online at: <<https://www.ancestrylibraryedition.co.uk/>>, accessed 17 September 2021, records the baptism of Samuel Bentham, son of Samuel Bentham, on 19 January 1653.

⁹² W. H. Frere and William Paul M. Kennedy, eds, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation Church of England*, 3 vols (London, 1910), 3: 109.

⁹³ Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored* (Oxford, 2007), 48–51.

⁹⁴ Henry James Fowle Swayne, *Churchwardens' Accounts of S. Edmund and S. Thomas Sarum 1443–1702* (Salisbury, 1896), 217, probably referring to the parliamentary committee for Wiltshire; James Barmby, ed., *Churchwardens Accounts of Pittington ...*, Surtees Society 84 (London, 1888), 304; Robert Dymond, 'The History of the Parish of St. Petrock, Exeter, as shown by its Churchwardens' Accounts and Other Records', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* 64 (1882), 402–92.

⁹⁵ Coster, *Baptism*, 62; Bodl., WMS, C2, fol. 411^r.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, fols 384–6.

⁹⁷ Described as 'Usual Octagonal Perp[pendicular] type' in Nicholas Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South Devon* (London, 1952), 56, online at: <<https://britishlisted-buildings.co.uk/101334077-church-of-st-peter-and-st-paul-and-st-thomas-of-canterbury-bovey-tracey>>, accessed 7 September 2021.

Monmouthshire, it was said that the Anabaptist Watkin Jones, who served the parish, attacked ‘a very fine font of stone’ and ‘when himself and his men cou’d not break it into pieces’ used it as a horse and cattle trough.⁹⁸ At Carsington in Derbyshire, parishioners remembered that a basin on the side of the pulpit had been used ‘after the mode of those times’; the font was removed to the parsonage yard where the incumbent fed his swine, but afterwards returned to the church.⁹⁹ With passive resistance to their removal, Fincham and Tyacke are probably right to suggest, on the evidence of the survival of many medieval fonts, that many were left *in situ* and ignored as the cheapest and least controversial option.¹⁰⁰ Some churchwardens’ accounts record the introduction of the basin, but not the removal of the font: at Aldeburgh in Suffolk in 1645, at Shepton Mallet in Somerset in 1647–9, and at Hartland in Devon in 1646–7.¹⁰¹ All three fonts survive.¹⁰² This, combined with the varying dates of font removal elsewhere, suggests that it often needed the personal impetus of active reformists to effect a font’s removal, against a backdrop of parochial inertia.

Yet there was more Interregnum font disturbance than font survival might suggest. Some fonts were restored soon after the Restoration, as early as January 1660 at St Thomas’s in Salisbury.¹⁰³ At Ackworth in Yorkshire, the restored rector Dr Thomas Bradley re-erected the font in 1663 with a Latin inscription attacking the ‘bile’ of the ‘fanatics’ who had demolished it.¹⁰⁴ Other surviving fonts have a chequered history, latterly retrieved from all sorts of misappropriations, including being used as wells, sinks and

⁹⁸ Bodl., WMS, C4, fol. 66^v.

⁹⁹ Bodl., WMS, C5, fol. 81^v.

¹⁰⁰ Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 281.

¹⁰¹ Arthur T. Winn, ed., *Records of the Borough of Aldeburgh: The Church* (Hertford, 1926), 50; SHC, D/P/she/4/1/1 1617–1704; I. L. Gregory, ed., *Hartland Church Accounts, 1597–1706* (Frome, 1950), 199.

¹⁰² Church of St Peter and St Paul, Aldeburgh, National Heritage List for England, online at: <<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1269731?section=official-list-entry>>, accessed 24 November 2022; R. W. Cramp, *The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in Britain*, 13 vols (Oxford, 2006), 7: 38; Church of St Nectan, British Listed Buildings, online at: <<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101333125-church-of-st-nectan-hartland#.YhzjFOjP02w>>, accessed 24 November 2022.

¹⁰³ Swayne, *Churchwardens’ Accounts*, 333.

¹⁰⁴ E. Tyrrell-Green, *Baptismal Fonts* (London, 1928), 156.

cisterns, as sundials and for feeding farm animals.¹⁰⁵ A tradition of reverence for redundant fonts against profane uses (or destruction) may perhaps explain how often they have been found in nearby churchyards or gardens, or even in the church itself.¹⁰⁶ If only a minority of parishes removed fonts during the Commonwealth era, where this happened it was as an intentional signal of the new religious order. Loyalists blamed such actions on fanatical factions and depicted the clergy involved as isolated and unpopular.

Interregnum ministers did not help their cause by quibbling about children's rights to receive baptism. There was contemporary debate amongst reformist clergy over the concept of 'believers' baptism', the idea that, for baptism to be effective, the candidate must understand the essentials of the faith it signified.¹⁰⁷ Equally, if baptism were, as the *Directory* implied, not essential for salvation, refusing it now seemed acceptable.¹⁰⁸ Some Independents would only baptize amongst their select congregation: a set of 1660 articles against Henry Butler of Yeovil charge him with denying the sacraments to anyone of 'what quality soever' not amongst his 'particular' congregation, hindering infants from being baptized for years.¹⁰⁹ Parishioners at St Bartholomew's Exchange in London refused to pay tithes to the curate appointed by the Independent Philip Nye because he refused to 'crissen children ... except wee would bee joyned in Communion with his Church'; in twelve months none of the regular congregation had done so.¹¹⁰

Sometimes there was rigidity over where and when baptism could take place. A set of 1660 articles against Richard Herring at

¹⁰⁵ Francis Bond, *Fonts and Font Covers* (Oxford, 1908), 275–9; Tyrrell-Green, *Baptismal Fonts*, 39–42.

¹⁰⁶ David Stocker, 'Fons et Origo: The Symbolic Death, Burial and Resurrection of English Font Stones', *Church Archaeology* 1 (1997), 17–25; Tyrrell-Green, *Baptismal Fonts*, 39–40.

¹⁰⁷ Rachel Adcock, 'Believers' Baptism, Commemoration and Communal Identity in Revolutionary England', in Alexandra Walsham et al., eds, *Memory and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2020), 388–402.

¹⁰⁸ *Directory*, 20–1.

¹⁰⁹ SHC, DD/PH/221/56, Articles against Henry Butler, 'Pretended' Vicar of Yeovil, 1660; Crawford Gribben, 'Defining the Puritans? The Baptism Debate in Cromwellian Ireland, 1654–56', *ChH* 73 (2004), 63–89, at 83, 85.

¹¹⁰ Cross, *Church and People*, 217; Edwin Freshfield, ed., *The Vestry Minute Books of the Parish of St. Bartholomew Exchange in the City of London: 1567–1676* (London, 1890), xxxii.

Drewsteignton in Devon, copied in the Walker archive, claim that he refused to baptize except on Sunday afternoons, forcing parishioners to ‘repaire to strangers (much to their greife)’.¹¹¹ The diary of Philip Henry records, in November 1658, his unease over a private baptism which he conducted reluctantly when the father was absent and the mother lying-in.¹¹² Francis Drake’s account characterized Mr Walker, minister at Wakefield, as ‘a very Rigid man’ in religious practice. He refused to baptize even sick children, Drake said, ‘unless brought to Church’, leading to an exchange of letters with a Mr Rogers over his refusal to baptize his sick child, but ‘Mr. Rogers got the better of him’, pleading necessity in this case of private baptism. Another parishioner, Drake recalled, had a seven weeks premature child, ‘weak, but yet alive’, and ‘besought’ Walker to christen it; Walker refused unless it was taken to the church. The father warned him that in bad weather this would hazard the child’s life; if it died ‘the Child’s blood should lye at his Door’. The child died while being carried over the church stile.¹¹³

At Ottery St Mary in Devon, the incumbent Mr Tuchin apparently set public interrogations for the parents, causing a dispute that was just as devastating for the family concerned. According to local people, gentleman Mr Nicholas Haydon brought his child to be baptized. Tuchin first asked Haydon to give a demonstration of his faith before the congregation. This was not unusual in the Reformed churches of Europe, but evidently unfamiliar to Haydon who, apparently not quite able to understand the question, replied that ‘several Articles of my faith are indemonstrable, as the Doctrine of the Trinity the Incarnation’.¹¹⁴ Haydon’s answer being deemed unsatisfactory, the child was brought home unbaptized, the trauma of which was blamed for the death of Haydon’s wife soon after.¹¹⁵

The baptizing of children born out of wedlock had previously been encouraged by the Church of England. Even Calvin had been willing to baptize infants of the wicked and the idolatrous, as long as faith still

¹¹¹ Bodl., WMS, C4, fol. 166^v.

¹¹² Philip Henry, *Diaries and Letters of Philip Henry*, ed. Mathew Henry Lee (London, 1882), 42–3, 64–5.

¹¹³ Bodl., WMS, C8, fol. 87^v.

¹¹⁴ Hannah Cleugh, ‘Teaching in Praying Words? Worship and Theology in the Early Modern English Parish’, in Mears and Ryrrie, eds, *Worship*, 11–30, at 18.

¹¹⁵ Bodl., WMS, C2, fol. 246^f.

existed within the community: the parents were reprov'd, and there were sponsors to vouch for the children. But others thought differently and, in England, this now became a contentious issue.¹¹⁶ In an extraordinary story related by John Walker's correspondent John Kemble, it was said that neighbours, out of charity, brought an illegitimate child to be baptized by the minister at Minchinhampton in Gloucestershire, Mr Herne. He 'made a scruple to baptise it, but at last took up water in his hand, and basely struck the child in the face, and with Invocation of the Blessed Trinity baptized it Whoresbrat', seemingly in echo of the use of exorcism in the older Catholic rite.¹¹⁷ In November 1652, John Lake, then minister at Oldham in Lancashire, was removed by the Manchester Presbyterian classis. The charges against him included baptizing 'bastards' from his own and other congregations, including a 'child begotten in adultery' without the parents' 'giving satisfaccion' to the congregation, 'very much' discouraging the 'harts of the Godly'. Lake, later a bishop, defended his actions, saying 'Christ is all in all', and that 'not only bastards but children of heathens and excommunicated persons' should be baptized.¹¹⁸ Legal cases relating to Interregnum clergy restricting baptism include a Cheshire minister, John Brereton, who in 1653 refused to baptize the child of a woman accused of adultery.¹¹⁹ In Staffordshire in 1659, two ministers were accused of refusing to baptize 'natural' sons, one also being quoted as saying 'it is not lawfull to baptise Children'.¹²⁰

Parishioners sometimes acted against what they perceived as poor service provision. Complaints were made to the Sussex quarter sessions in October 1653 that the minister of Heyshott, Richard Garret, refused to 'execute the function of minister' in baptizing

¹¹⁶ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 104–5, cites parish records registering the baptism of illegitimate children, and cases of ministers or parents threatened with punishment for failure to perform the rite, dating from the 1570s to the 1620s; see also G. W. Bromiley, 'The Elizabethan Puritans and Indiscriminate Baptism', *The Churchman* 62 (1948), 30–3, citing the arguments of Archbishop John Whitgift (1530–1604) and Richard Hooker (1554–1600).

¹¹⁷ Bodl., WMS, C7, fol. 36^r; French, 'Disputed Words', 161.

¹¹⁸ William A. Shaw, *Minutes of the Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, 3: 1646–60, Chetham Society n.s. 24 (Manchester, 1891), 386–9.

¹¹⁹ Chester, Cheshire Archives, QJF 81/2, Trinity 1653, fol. 283; QJF 81/3, Michaelmas 1653, fol. 14.

¹²⁰ Stafford, Staffordshire Record Office, Q/SR/308/6, 22 May 1659; Q/SR/306/57, 10 July 1659.

the children of the parish.¹²¹ According to the ‘ancient inhabitants’ at High Halden in Kent, ‘one Web ... refused to Baptize Children saying he was sent to preach, not to Baptize’, but was removed after a petition to the authorities.¹²² In November 1658, Judge Wyndham reportedly pronounced to a Western Circuit assize jury that they should pay ministers who refused to baptize only the minimum ‘agreeable to the Law’.¹²³

What should we conclude from the conflicts over rites of passage discussed here? Loyalist accounts express the outraged sensibilities of traditionalists towards the new ritual practices of the 1640s and 1650s. They do not suggest that traditional rites carried on blithely through the Interregnum but that, given the virulence of reformist opposition to them from the early 1640s onwards, they often required evasive tactics to proceed. If authorities rarely sanctioned the gentry involved, for the clergy it was a different matter. They might be arrested and potentially lose their livings, but this simply left a large necessitous cohort of ejected clergy willing to meet the demand. Baptism was a rite at the centre of mid-seventeenth-century people’s experience and consciousness. It provoked strong emotions and disagreement in its every aspect: where and when it should take place; the conduct, form and meaning of the ceremony; and who should be baptized. The reduced incidence of baptism and the rise of private baptism during this period may have been influenced, at least in part, by a desire to avoid such controversies.¹²⁴ Ministerial rigidity over the issue is depicted in loyalist accounts as counter-productive. So was the *Directory*’s emphasis on masculine authority: loyalist accounts and other sources tell stories of women’s active desire for involvement in a rite reframed to exclude them, hardly surprising given women’s role in childbirth. Private baptism facilitated this. With legal processes disrupted by civil war, many of the earlier confrontations described by loyalists went unrecorded elsewhere. As legal record-keeping recovered after 1645, some clergy were prosecuted for performing Prayer Book rites, although more usually for solemnizing illicit marriages. Faced with acute sensitivities and earlier clashes over baptisms or burials, authorities rarely chose to inflame tensions

¹²¹ Chichester, West Sussex Record Office, QR/78, 1 October 1653, no. 6.

¹²² Bodl., WMS, C1, fol. 386^r.

¹²³ TNA, SP 18/183, 25 November 1658, fol. 235.

¹²⁴ Kitson, ‘Religious Change’, 275, 279–80.

further by resorting to formal prosecution, which were of doubtful legality in any case after the Instrument of Government of December 1653 abrogated the legal requirement to use the *Directory*.¹²⁵ None of the recorded prosecutions after 1656 cite the use of the Prayer Book for rites of passage. Yet rites of passage remained a sensitive issue, and a grumbling focus of local antagonism.

¹²⁵ William Sheppard, *A View of All the Laws and Statutes of this Nation Concerning the Service of God or Religion* (London, 1655), 22; Nancy L. Mathews, *Cromwell's Law Reformer* (Cambridge, 1984), 117.