

# *Why did Henry Dunster Reject Infant Baptism? Circumcision and the Covenant of Grace in the Seventeenth-Century Transatlantic Reformed Community*

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*In 1653 Henry Dunster, Harvard's first President, refused to baptise his fourth child, initiating a controversy that would end in his resignation from the Harvard presidency in October 1654. This article offers an explanation for Dunster's rejection of infant baptism by re-examining the causes behind the spread of antipaedobaptism across 1640s England and New England, attributing special significance to the Anglophone reception of continental European covenant theology. Supporting this account, it presents an annotated edition of a previously unknown item in Dunster's correspondence, a letter sent to him by a concerned onlooker just months after his heterodoxy became public.*

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S ometime after the autumn of 1653, news reached the settlement of Rumney Marsh, Massachusetts, that Harvard's first President, the learned and pious Henry Dunster (1609–59), had refused to

AHTL = Andover-Harvard Theological Library; HL = Houghton Library, Harvard; MHS = Massachusetts Historical Society; ODNB = *Oxford dictionary of national biography*

This research would not have been possible without the award of the Katharine F. Pantzer Jr Fellowship in Descriptive Bibliography from the Houghton Library, Harvard, as well as an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship from the Massachusetts Historical Society. I would like to thank both institutions for their generosity, as well as the Andover-Harvard Theological Library for permission to publish an edition of the letter from Edward Holyoke to Henry Dunster in their collections. I would additionally like to thank Nell Carlson for her invaluable expertise in navigating the Andover-Harvard Theological Library's collections, Nicholas Hardy for his feedback on an early draft of this article, as well as Alec Ryrie and the anonymous peer reviewer for such helpful feedback on this article.

baptise his fourth child. The news was disturbing, particularly for one of the town's most eminent residents, landowner and godly autodidact Edward Holyoke (1586–1660). Holyoke had spent the past twenty years worrying about anabaptism, considering it an equivalent threat to mid seventeenth-century godly society as Catholicism had been to sixteenth-century religion.<sup>1</sup> Alarmed, Holyoke wrote to Dunster to persuade him of his error, diligently transcribing this epistle into an interleaved copy of a book by his favourite writer, the Hebraist Hugh Broughton, now in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library.<sup>2</sup>

Since Holyoke penned his letter in December 1653, many more scholars have considered Dunster's rejection of infant baptism important enough to warrant further ink. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts focused on establishing the events that led from this initial refusal to his resignation from the Harvard presidency in October 1654. The debates concentrated on who was to blame for this difficult episode in Harvard's history, whether the university authorities, the magistrates or Dunster himself.<sup>3</sup> More recently, historians have examined the implications of Dunster's actions within the spheres of politics, Church-State relations and mechanisms for controlling dissent in New England.<sup>4</sup> These have offered valuable insights into the ramifications of Dunster's heterodoxy, but they have done so often by sidelining the controversy's theological

<sup>1</sup> 'Teachers haue ^in our natiue country^ most resisted Popery these 80. y. now they must looke to it against Anabaptistry': Holyoke's copy of Hugh Broughton, *A concent of Scripture*, London 1590 (RSTC 3851), HL, \*AC6 H7482 Zz59ob, fo. 50r.

<sup>2</sup> Broughton, *Concent*, AH TL, 343 B875co 1590. The letter is in an unpaginated, unfoliated manuscript insert bound into Broughton's *Concent* after sig. B[1]v. I will supply my own folio numbers in citation, with the first folio of the insert labelled fo. <1>r. The letter covers fos <32>r-<33>r.

<sup>3</sup> Josiah Quincy, *The history of Harvard University*, i, Cambridge, MA 1840, 17–21; Jeremiah Chaplin, *Life of Henry Dunster, first president of Harvard College*, Boston 1872, 135–43; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the seventeenth century*, Cambridge, MA 1936, i, 312–13. See generally Francis Bremer, 'Dunster, Henry (*bab.* 1609, d. 1659)', *ODNB*.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan den Hartog, "'National and provincially churches are nullities': Henry Dunster's Puritan argument against the Puritan established Church", *Journal of Church and State* lvi (2014), 691–710; Timothy Wood, *Agents of wrath, sowers of discord: authority and dissent in Puritan Massachusetts, 1630–1655*, Abingdon 2006, 80–110, and "'I spake the truth in the feare of God": the Puritan management of dissent during the Henry Dunster controversy', *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* xxxiii (2005), 1–20; Mark Noll, *In the beginning was the word: the Bible in American public life, 1492–1783*, Oxford 2015, 136–41; William McLoughlin, *New England dissent, 1630–1833: the Baptists and the separation of Church and State*, Cambridge, MA 1971, i, 7–9, and *Soul liberty: the Baptists' struggle in New England, 1630–1833*, Providence, RI 1991, 32–4, 53.

issues, treating them as ciphers for political and social problems.<sup>5</sup> Because of this, the question persists as to what persuaded Dunster, an erudite scholar and pinnacle of godly orthodoxy, to reject infant baptism in the first place. Why, having been content with the practice for four decades of his life, did Dunster throw it away and, with it, all he had achieved in New England?

The problem is that the classic explanation for the spread of antipaedobaptism during the 1640s – the theological empowerment of overzealous, biblicist but untutored believers – cannot account for learned, powerful members of the scholarly elite like Dunster. One potential solution can be found in a recent book by Matthew Bingham which, though it does not discuss Dunster, argues that predestinarian congregationalists were drawn to antipaedobaptism by the combined logic of their ecclesiology and their Calvinism. According to Bingham, the congregationalist principle of voluntary churches of visible saints undermined the logical basis for paedobaptism provided by a comprehensive national (and therefore mixed elect-reprobate) Church. Thus those who rejected infant baptism were not forging a new doctrinal identity but shedding a theologically incoherent piece of their old one, and so were not baptists but ‘baptistic congregationalists’.<sup>6</sup>

Bingham’s argument can account for the general emergence of 1640s Calvinist antipaedobaptism, and it could also account for Dunster’s repudiation. However, there is an alternative explanation for why antipaedobaptism appealed to scholars like Dunster. This article offers such an explanation by examining how developments in contemporary covenant theology changed the way in which scholars received longstanding proof texts for infant baptism, as well as the arguments and assumptions that bound such proof texts together. In the course of doing so, it offers a fresh interpretation of the growth of antipaedobaptism in the mid seventeenth-century transatlantic Anglophone world, including important antipaedobaptists who were not congregationalists, such as John Tombes.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this interpretation is supported by a previously unknown item in Dunster’s correspondence: Edward Holyoke’s letter, edited and annotated in the Appendix to this article.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Dunster’s challenge went even deeper than theology; it challenged the entire system of Church, state, and society’: Den Hartog, ‘National and provincial churches are nullities’, 706.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Bingham, *Orthodox radicals: Baptist identity in the English revolution*, Oxford 2019, 8–9, 43–4, 65–89.

<sup>7</sup> John Tombes, *An apology or plea for the two treatises and appendix to them concerning infant-baptisme*, London 1646 (Wing T.1801), 91–9; Julia Smith, ‘Tombes, John (1602–1676)’, *ODNB*.

*Antipaedobaptism and Reformed covenant theology across the Atlantic*

One of the oldest, most important arguments for infant baptism came from analogy with the practice of infant circumcision.<sup>8</sup> This argument relied on more than a similarity between circumcision and baptism, but rather assumed a divinely-mandated equality or parity that allowed features of the former to be rigorously applied to the latter.<sup>9</sup> For the Reformed, this parity was important thanks to its intersection with covenant theology, particularly with the idea of a single, substantially unchanging covenant of grace that stretched across Old and New Testament history.<sup>10</sup> While individual variations are beyond this article's scope, most Reformed theologians thought that the covenant of grace was given after the fall and promised man's salvation on condition of faith in Christ, remaining unchanged in essence from its first utterance in Genesis iii.15 through its promulgation to Abraham in Genesis xvii down to contemporaneity, even as its outward manifestation (from Old Testament to New) shifted.<sup>11</sup>

This unchanging covenant had the advantage of enabling theologians to say that the Old Testament patriarchs had been saved in the same way as contemporary Christians: by faith in Christ. But it was also on the basis of this immutability that the logical parallelism of circumcision and baptism was predicated, because a covenant that remained essentially unchanged before and after Jesus' coming required seals (i.e. circumcision/baptism) that were also the same in their essence, even if their outward administration differed.<sup>12</sup> To exclude infants from baptism when they had been granted circumcision was unacceptable as it would constitute an essential

<sup>8</sup> Bryan Spinks, *Reformation and modern rituals and theologies of baptism: from Luther to contemporary practices*, Burlington 2006, 32–4; Bingham, *Orthodox radicals*, 69–71.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Marshall, *A defence of infant-baptism in answer to two treatises, and an appendix to them concerning it*, London 1646 (Wing M.751), 165. For this distinction between parity and similarity see Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae foederis: or, A treatise of the covenant of God entered with man-kinde*, London 1652/3 (Wing B.3149), 374–9.

<sup>10</sup> As noted by Bingham, *Orthodox radicals*, 69–70. See also J. van Rohr, *The covenant of grace in Puritan thought*, Atlanta, GA 1986; David Weir, *The origins of the federal theology in sixteenth-century Reformation thought*, Oxford 1990; Willem van Asselt, *The federal theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, trans. Raymond Blacketer, Leiden 2001; and Richard Muller, 'Divine covenants, absolute and conditional: John Cameron and the early orthodox development of Reformed covenant theology', *Mid-America Theological Journal* xvii (2006), 11–56.

<sup>11</sup> Muller, 'Divine covenants', 19–29; Samuel Renihan, *From shadow to substance: the federal theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)*, Oxford 2018, 20–3.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Ainsworth, *A censure upon a dialogue of the Anabaptists*, Amsterdam 1623 (RSTC 226), 42–5, 49–54. See also Thomas Hall, *The font guarded with XX arguments containing a compendium of that great controversie of infant-baptism*, London 1652 (Wing H.432), 8–22, and Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, the true fountain of independency, brownisme, antinomy, familisme*, London 1646 (Wing B.452), 138–41. This argument originated in Zwingli's anti-anabaptist writings: Jack Warren Cottrell, 'Covenant and baptism in the

change, and would also contravene the universally accepted notion that God's grace should be more bountiful after Jesus' coming than before it.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this argument enabled proof texts for infant baptism to be located in the Old Testament texts (primarily Gen. xvii) that discussed infant circumcision, an important strength given the scarcity of New Testament proofs.<sup>14</sup>

To undermine such arguments, early antipaedobaptists divorced the covenant of grace from the Abrahamic covenant in which the command to circumcise was given. They deemed Abraham's covenant (and the whole Old Testament covenant) to be an independent, now-obsolete covenant of works, meaning that its seal (circumcision) must have been abolished with the New Testament and was not relevant to Christian baptism.<sup>15</sup> This argument was made by continental European anabaptists in the 1530s and persevered into seventeenth-century England.<sup>16</sup> It was used by predestinarian antipaedobaptists such as the antinomian Paul Hobson and the Calvinist Henry Den, as well as baptists with more complex relationships to predestination like Thomas Lambe.<sup>17</sup> According to them, the 'carnal' Abrahamic covenant was not the covenant of grace (from which ancient Jews were excluded) and therefore no binding parity linked circumcision and baptism.<sup>18</sup> They admitted that there were typological connections between the covenants; that ancient Jews had a promise of Christ; and that pre-Christian worthies were saved by God's grace in the general sense, but insisted that none of this amounted to a single pan-historical covenant of grace sealed successively with parallel stamps of infant circumcision and infant baptism.<sup>19</sup>

theology of Huldreich Zwingli', unpubl. ThD diss. Princeton Theological Seminary 1971, 194–214, 236–49, 306–16.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Wynell, *The covenants plea for infants: or, The covenant of free grace*, Oxford 1642 (Wing W.3778), 36–8; John Gere, *Vindiciae paedobaptismi: or, A vindication of infant baptism*, London 1646 (Wing G.603), 36–8.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard Vossius listed Genesis xvii.13 as the foremost proof: *De baptismo disputationes XX*, Amsterdam 1648, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Cloppenburg, *Gangraena theologiae anabaptisticae disputationibus XLIX*, Franeker 1645, 234–8.

<sup>16</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch. Dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung der frühen Gespräche zwischen Schweizerischen Täufern und Reformatoren*, Zurich 1968, 33–43.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Den [Andrew Ritor], *The second part of the vanity & childishnes of infants baptisme*, London 1642 (Wing, R.1541), 22–7; Thomas Bakewell, *A justification of two points now in controversie with the Anabaptists concerning baptisme*, London 1646 (Wing B.534), 19–20. On Lambe see Stephen Wright, *The early English Baptists 1603–1649*, Woodbridge 2006, 99–100.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Lambe, *A confutation of infants baptisme*, London 1643 (Wing L.209), 9–23, 29–34.

<sup>19</sup> Den, *The second part*, 18–19, 22–5; Lambe, *A confutation*, 11–12, 15–16, 18–19.

In response, advocates of infant baptism focused on proving the continuity and immutability of the covenant of grace across the Testaments and the consequent need for its seals to be perfectly equivalent. The Watertown pastor George Philips began his reply to Lambe by countering the ‘audacious cries of a carnall covenant God made with *Abraham*’.<sup>20</sup> William Cooke’s response to Den spoke similarly of the ‘unchangeable tenour of the Covenant of grace’ since Gen. xvii, and decried Den’s earthly Abrahamic covenant as ‘absurd and unchristian’.<sup>21</sup> But Cooke and Philips were not alone. Throughout the paedobaptist pamphlets produced to the mid-1640s, from the Westminster divine Stephen Marshall to the Gloucester preacher Thomas Wynell, all argued from the proposition that ‘*the Covenant of grace, for substance, hath always been one and the same, both to the Jewes and to the Gentiles*’ and that circumcision was the primary seal and entrance to this covenant before Christ.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, these men had a powerful riposte to antipaedobaptists who argued otherwise: that to deny the immutability of the covenant of grace was one of the ‘*Old rotten studs and principles of Popery*’.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in this respect the antipaedobaptist argument overlapped with the critique of Reformed covenant theology made by none less than the Jesuit controversialist Robert Bellarmine.<sup>24</sup>

However, the paedobaptists’ position also had vulnerabilities, and these lay in its apparent strength – its roots in Reformed covenant theology. For while the unchanging essence of the covenant of grace drew the Testaments together in soteriological terms, theologians preserved their historical distance and hierarchy by emphasising how this core immutability intersected with the gradual progress of revelation. This progress saw the obscure, partial and imprecise Old Testament understanding of Christ and salvation becoming clearer through the succession of prophets until Christ’s coming brought perspicuous, complete comprehension. Along with this transition from obscurity to clarity, covenant theologians pointed to other changes such as an increasing inclusivity of salvation

<sup>20</sup> George Philips, *A reply to a confutation of some grounds for infants baptism*, London 1645 (Wing P.2026), sig. Bv, 1–33.

<sup>21</sup> William Cooke, *A learned and full answer to a treatise intituled; the vanity of childish baptism*, London 1644 (Wing C.6043), 32–3, 80–1.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Marshall, *A sermon of the baptizing of infants preached in the Abbey-Church at Westminster*, London 1644 (Wing M.774), 9–12; Thomas Blake, *The birth-priviledge: or, Covenant-holinesse of beleevors and their issue in the time of the Gospel*, London 1644 (Wing B.3143), 6–15; John White, *Infants baptizing proved lawfull by the Scriptures*, London 1644 (Wing I.162), 3–11; Wynell, *The covenants plea*, 29–33, 53–64.

<sup>23</sup> Blake, *Vindiciae foederis*, 176; Thomas Shepard, *The church membership of children and their right to baptisme*, Cambridge 1663 [written 1649] (Wing S.3108), sig. A4r–v.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes Roberti Bellarmini politiani, societatis Iesu, de controversiis christianae fidei, adversus huius temporis haereticos, tribus tomis comprehensae*, ii, Ingolstadt 1599, ii.17.254.

after Jesus admitted Gentiles, as well as a broader movement from particular, temporal, earthly, painful modes of worship to universal, permanent, spiritual and comforting ones. These were the ‘accidentals’ or outward aspects of the covenant’s administration whose evolution until Jesus’ coming was necessary to prevent the two Testaments from being collapsed into each other.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, from the late sixteenth century, it was precisely the extent and significance of these outward changes that attracted the most innovative covenant theologians. Most famous is John Cameron, whose unprecedented emphasis on the gradation of revelation through time served more than any previously to prise apart the covenant of grace before and after Christ, which he distinguished as the *foedus promissum* and the *foedus promulgatum*. Cameron was working thoroughly within mainstream Reformed covenant theology: his distinction between *promise* and *promulgation*, for example, echoed earlier comments by the Scottish presbyterian Robert Rollock.<sup>26</sup> But Cameron’s more expansive expression of how this gradation manifested opened the door for unexpected extrapolations of his theology. For instance, in elucidating how the covenant of grace under the Old Testament was characterised by more carnality and typological obscurity than under the New Testament, Cameron made the commonplace remark that the sacraments of the Old Testament looked only secondarily to Christ’s benefits. And to expand this, Cameron noted in passing that this was how circumcision worked, since it ‘primarily separated the seed of Abraham from the rest of the peoples, sealing the earthly promise, and secondarily signified sanctification’.<sup>27</sup>

With this suggestion that the circumcision-seal belonged only indirectly and secondarily to the covenant of grace’s permanent spiritual core, Cameron’s passing remark threatened the parallelism between circumcision and baptism as direct entrances to that covenant.<sup>28</sup> Even worse, this comment in many ways merely crystallised the threat to the circumcision-baptism parity made by covenant theologies that emphasised the changes, rather than constants, in the covenant of grace over time. In

<sup>25</sup> William Bucanus, *Institutiones theologicae seu locorum communium Christianae religionis ... analysis*, Geneva 1609, 208–15. See also Willem van Asselt, ‘Christ, predestination, and covenant in post-Reformation Reformed theology’, in Ulrich Lehner, Richard Muller and A. Roebler (eds), *The Oxford handbook of early modern theology, 1600–1800*, Oxford 2016, 221–6.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Rollock, *Quaestiones et responsiones aliquot de foedere Dei*, Edinburgh 1596 (RSTC 21284), sigs B5v–B6r. See also Muller, ‘Divine covenants’, 11–16, 53–6.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Sic Circumcisio primariò Abrahæ semen à reliquis Gentibus separabat, promissionem terrenam obsignabat, secundariò sanctificationem significabat’: John Cameron, ‘De triplici dei cum homine foedere theses’, in *Joh. Cameronis S. Theologiae in academia Salmuriensi nuper professoris, praelectionum tomus tertius et ultimus*, Saumur 1628, 629.

<sup>28</sup> Renihan, *From shadow to substance*, 53–4.

short, while the basic ideas of Reformed covenant theology buttressed paedobaptist arguments for a perfect symmetry between circumcision and baptism, its development by scholars like Cameron enabled antipaedobaptists to negate this symmetry's probative force. This negation worked by prising apart the covenant of grace as *promised* and *promulgated*, emphasising the discontinuity between these two phases, and attaching circumcision to the earthly, temporal and particular administration of the former and baptism to the spiritual, permanent and universal administration of the latter.

The opportunity that this represented for antipaedobaptists is clear in the work of Cameron's English follower, John Ball. Ball believed in infant baptism, and his 'Tryall of the New Church Way in New England' emphasised the importance of the parity between baptism and circumcision for its proof. Nevertheless, to refute the New England practice of limiting baptism to the children of church members on analogy with the limiting of circumcision to the children of the Jewish Church, he emphasised that such parity was 'not found in every thing'. Rather, differences arose from the earthly-particular/spiritual-universal distinction between the Testaments, and enough features of circumcision were peculiar to Abraham and his earthly promises that in many things 'a reason cannot be drawn from the one to the other affirmatively'.<sup>29</sup> It was this exact withdrawal from complete parity, organically arising from mainstream contemporary covenant theology, that would later cause John Tombes to refer to 'the argument from Circumcision for Infant baptism' as the 'Paedo-baptists Achilles'.<sup>30</sup>

It is unsurprising then that alongside the arguments of men like Lambe and Den, the 1640s also saw antipaedobaptists adopting highly Cameronian covenant hermeneutics. A good example is the preacher Christopher Blackwood who, unlike Lambe and Den, saw the covenant of grace in the Old Testament, but distinguished between its promised and promulgated phases to undermine the circumcision-baptism parity.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the separatist minister John Spilsbury affirmed that the Abrahamic covenant was the covenant of grace, but emphasised the typical, fleshly expression of this covenant in its promised phase, interpreting Abraham's covenanted 'seed' of Gen. xvii.7 as encompassing both spiritual descendants (Christians) and fleshly descendants (the Jewish

<sup>29</sup> John Ball, *A tryall of the new-church way in New-England and in old*, London 1644 (Wing T.2229), 36–45.

<sup>30</sup> *Letters that passed between Mr. Baxter and Mr. Tombes concerning the dispute*, London 1652 (Wing T.1812), 412.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Blackwood, *The storming of AntiChrist, in his two last and strongest garrisons; of compulsion of conscience and infants baptisme*, London 1644 (Wing B.3103), 31–6, 65–8.



Church).<sup>32</sup> Some features of the promise applied only to the latter, including (unsurprisingly) the ‘earthly’ promise of Canaan and its ‘fleshy’ seal circumcision, which related to the covenant’s permanent spiritual core purely typologically.<sup>33</sup>

In making such arguments, Spilisbury pushed antipaedobaptist covenant theology into new ground.<sup>34</sup> And yet, this was ground prepared by orthodox Reformed covenant theologians: it was the logical next step from Cameron’s comment about circumcision primarily sealing an earthly promise and secondarily signifying a spiritual one. Furthermore, this argument exploited the ‘Achilles heel’ of the argument from circumcision: the fact that paedobaptists had already conceded not only that there were exceptions to the parity of the sacraments, but that these arose from the gradation of revelation across the Testaments.<sup>35</sup> Now antipaedobaptists could reject the circumcision-baptism parallelism in a way that seemed consonant with cutting-edge Reformed covenant theology, rather than (as had been the case for Lambe and Den) a Catholicising denial of its foundational assumption.

This shift in antipaedobaptist argument did not go unnoticed on either side of the Atlantic. The New England minister Thomas Hooker noted that, by 1649, the ‘wisest’ antipaedobaptists no longer identified the Abrahamic covenant as a carnal covenant of works; Thomas Cobbet described those who still argued for this as ‘the more vulgar sort’ of antipaedobaptists; and Blake in 1652/3 made the same classification.<sup>36</sup> William Hussey, minister at Kent, even explicitly identified the weakening of the circumcision-baptism parallelism as the ‘main reason’ for the sudden spread in baptist belief, and attributed this weakness directly to confusions about the ‘different manner of administration’ of the covenant of grace across history.<sup>37</sup> Precisely because of its power and impressive Reformed credentials, by 1645 the question of whether covenant theology supported infant baptism became central on both sides.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> John Spilisbury, *A treatise concerning the lawfull subject of baptisme*, London 1643 (Wing S.4976), 5–7. For Spilisbury’s context see Michael Haykin, ‘Separatists and baptists’, in John Coffey (ed.), *The Oxford history of Protestant dissenting traditions*, I: *The post-Reformation era, 1559–1689*, Oxford 2020, 123–7.

<sup>33</sup> Spilisbury, *A treatise*, 12–14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 26–7, 29–31.

<sup>35</sup> This is noted in most pamphlets, for example Cooke, *A learned and full answer*, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Hooker, *The covenant of grace opened*, London 1649 (Wing H.2644), 4; Thomas Cobbet, *A just vindication of the covenant and church-estate of children of church-members*, London 1648 (Wing C.4778), 39; Blake, *Vindiciae foederis*, 175–88.

<sup>37</sup> William Hussey, *An answer to Mr Tombes his scepticall examination of infants baptisme*, London 1646 (Wing H.3815), sigs A3v–A4r.

<sup>38</sup> John Tombes, *An exercitation about infant-baptisme*, London 1646 (Wing T.1805), 1; c.f. Spinks, *Reformation and modern rituals*, 63.

This was also the case for the most prolific antipaedobaptist and influence on Dunster, John Tombes. By his account, Tombes's initiation into antipaedobaptism was through covenant theology and the weakness of the baptism-circumcision parity.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, one of Tombes's early influences, Gerard Vossius' disputations on baptism, clearly illustrated how important the covenant of grace was to upholding the force of the mandate of Gen. xvii to Christians.<sup>40</sup> It is unsurprising then that Tombes's main argument against infant baptism developed the covenant theology that Spilsbury had advocated. Tombes argued that Abraham's covenant was a mixed covenant, with some promises relating to Christ and grace, and others relating to the Israelites and works.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the 'seed' of Abraham in Gen. xvii was twofold, including natural fleshly descendants and the spiritual seed, i.e. the elect.<sup>42</sup> This mixed covenant shed its earthly, temporal and civil aspects over time until it was stripped to the pure covenant of grace as promulgated in the Gospels.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Tombes drew on Cameron's comment about circumcision's primary (earthly) purpose and secondary (spiritual) significance to argue that circumcision, like the covenant it sealed, was mixed evangelical-civil in nature, and therefore not parallel to (purely spiritual) baptism.<sup>44</sup> The promises directly sealed by circumcision – the land of Canaan, the earthly privileges of Abraham's descendants – were all particular and temporal. The evangelical aspects of circumcision lay only in its secondary signification of the promises of Christ, and thus it belonged to the disposable shell of the mixed covenant.<sup>45</sup> Thus only a 'poor ... proof, or rather none at all may be drawn' from comparing circumcision and baptism, for without the perfectly parallel administrations of an immutable covenant of grace, the comparison was a 'bare Analogy' invented by man.<sup>46</sup> Tombes's vision of a mixed covenant of promised grace and works evolving into a pure promulgated covenant of grace neatly undermined the logical parity between circumcision and baptism while looking like a legitimate extension of Reformed covenant theology.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, Tombes emphasised that his argument had developed organically from two theologians in particular: Cameron and Ball. He cited Cameron both for the primarily civil purpose of circumcision and for the mixed nature of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Tombes made

<sup>39</sup> Tombes, *An apology or plea*, 6–7; Michael Renihan, *Antipaedobaptism in the thought of John Tombes*, Auburn 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Vossius, *De baptismi disputationes* XX, 169–73.

<sup>41</sup> Tombes, *An exercitation*, 2–3, and *An examen of the sermon of Mr. Stephen Marshal, about infant-baptism*, London 1645 (Wing T.1825), 39–47.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, *An examen*, 49–50.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, *An exercitation*, 2–5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 4, and *An examen*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Idem, *An examen*, 46–7, 78, 83–8.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 85, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, *Refutatio positionis eiusque confirmationis paedobaptismum esse licitum affirmantis ab Henrico Savage*, London 1653 (Wing T.1814), 34–6.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, *An exercitation*, 4, and *An examen*, 39.

this link multiple times, even emphasising the extent to which Cameron's treatise was accepted by the most orthodox Reformed: approved at Heidelberg by a synod of the French Churches, and translated by the Westminster assembly divine Samuel Bolton.<sup>49</sup> He cited Ball for the dangers of arguing from analogy, and twice noted that Ball's aforementioned comments to the New England ministers 'cut the sinews' of paedobaptism.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it was not just Ball's comments to the New England ministers that seemed a step away from antipaedobaptist theology: Tombes's evolving 'mixed covenant' had strong echoes in Ball's Cameronian notion of a covenant of grace that transformed from 'more of the temporall, lesse of the spirituall ... in the first ages' to 'in the latter ages more of the spirituall blessings, lesse of the temporall and outward'.<sup>51</sup>

This intellectual genealogy did not go unnoticed by the many scholars who countered Tombes. These men rejected the notion of a 'mixed' covenant, insisting on the purity and sameness of the covenant of grace throughout history and arguing that Tombes had misunderstood Cameron and the style of covenant theology he represented.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Blake wished that Cameron 'had spoken more fully' to prevent such misinterpretations, presenting himself as taking on the 'burden' of 'an enlarged full discourse'.<sup>53</sup> Nathaniel Homes even offered a detailed reinterpretation of Cameron's problematic comment on circumcision. Homes argued that when Cameron had said that circumcision *primariò* sealed earthly promises and *secundariò* signified spiritual ones, he had meant not 'primarily' and 'secondarily' in the sense of 'chiefly' and 'not chiefly' but rather first and second in chronological order. By this reading Cameron was simply saying that Canaan preceded Christ, and Homes insisted that beyond this Cameron's treatise maintained that 'circumcision did more chiefly intend *sanctification*' than any civil or earthly promise.<sup>54</sup> Homes's willingness to re-interpret Cameron's treatise in this manner says much about the importance for paedobaptists of keeping circumcision as a direct spiritual seal of the covenant of grace. But Homes was not alone: Stephen Marshall offered the same interpretation of Cameron, and Robert Baillie followed suit, albeit lamenting Cameron's 'incommodious

<sup>49</sup> Idem, *An addition to the apology for the two treatises concerning infant-baptisme*, London 1652 (Wing T.1794), 3; Samuel Bolton, *The true bounds of Christian freedome*, London 1645 (Wing B.3532), 353–401.

<sup>50</sup> Tombes, *An exercitation*, 5–9; *An examen*, 2–3; and *An apology or plea*, 56–7.

<sup>51</sup> John Ball, *A treatise of the covenant of grace*, London 1645 (Wing B.579), 55.

<sup>52</sup> Nathaniel Homes, *A vindication of baptizing belevers infants*, London 1646 (Wing H.2578A), 12–17; Hussey, *An answer*, 7–10, 16–18; Baillie, *Anabaptism*, 141–3; Richard Baxter, *Plain scripture proof of infants church-membership and baptism*, London 1651 (Wing B.1344), 251–2; Bakewell, *A justification*, 10–11.

<sup>53</sup> Blake, *Vindiciae foederis*, sig. a3v.

<sup>54</sup> Homes, *A vindication*, 18–20.

expression'.<sup>55</sup> Others, such as Cobbet in Ipswich, Massachusetts, found it easier to reject Cameron than to save him.<sup>56</sup>

It is not coincidental that scholars like Marshall, Cobbet, Blake, Baillie and Homes all identified Cameron's *De triplici foedere* as a flashpoint for antipaedobaptist thought. Cameron's work at once went further than his predecessors, without ever seeming eccentric or anomalous, and while retaining a suggestive and occasionally ambiguous economy of expression. This offered a rare opening for antipaedobaptists to connect their ideas to the mainstream of Reformed scholarship. And once the link was made, it was easy to claim that antipaedobaptism was not just the next step from one unfortunate comment by Cameron, but rather from the whole style of covenant theology that he epitomised.

While Spilsbury and Blackwood were undeniably influenced by Cameron, Tombes made his debt explicit, and so instituted a new phase of debate from the late 1640s, in which agitations over infant baptism were viewed as a symptom of the deeper disturbance over the covenant of grace. The Boston minister Thomas Shepard in 1649 explicitly called the baptism debate 'the quarrel of [God's] covenant'.<sup>57</sup> Thomas Hall cited Lambert Daneau to identify the immutability of the covenant of grace as the foundation of paedobaptism.<sup>58</sup> Blake presented his response to Tombes as a 'treatise of the covenant', arguing that the 'most satisfactory' way to refute him was 'to adventure upon a full treatise of the Covenant'.<sup>59</sup> From Connecticut, Hooker too styled his contribution as 'The Covenant of Grace Opened', focusing on how much of this changed from Abraham's time to the Gospel.<sup>60</sup>

While historians have nodded to the prominence of the covenant in debates over infant baptism, most scholars have skipped over the developments responsible for this prominence.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, much earlier research did not recognise the crucial Cameronian shift in antipaedobaptist covenant theology described above, despite its acknowledgement by contemporary observers in New and Old England alike.<sup>62</sup> Such acknowledgement is important not least because this shift can explain why antipaedobaptism attracted learned converts such as Tombes, as well as appealing to other elite figures such as John Milton, John Bunyan, and Thomas and Lucy

<sup>55</sup> 'if by *primarily* be intended principally, that Circumcision did *chiefly seal earthly blessings*, the opinion is too unsavory to be received': Marshall, *A defence of infant-baptism*, 98–9; Robert Baillie, *The dissuasive from the errors of the time*, London 1655 (Wing B.458), 64. <sup>56</sup> Cobbet, *A just vindication*, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Shepard, *The church membership of children*, sig. A3v.

<sup>58</sup> Hall, *The font guarded*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Blake, *Vindiciae foederis*, sigs \*4v, a2r.

<sup>60</sup> Hooker, *The covenant of grace opened*, 1–2.

<sup>61</sup> With the exception of Renihan's survey, *From shadow to substance*, 98–103.

<sup>62</sup> McLoughlin, *New England dissent*, i. 27–42, and *Soul liberty*, 52; Philip Gura, *A glimpse of Zion's glory: Puritan radicalism in New England, 1620–1660*, Middletown, CT 1984, 94–5, 113–15, 125.

Hutchinson.<sup>63</sup> This analysis also complements the recent historiographical trend of emphasising the intellectual gravitas of heterodox thinkers, primarily in order to counterbalance the impression of a purely popular radicalism given by older secondary literature, but additionally to explain the serious attention granted to these thinkers by learned contemporaries, and to underline the unstable, often highly contingent nature of the lines between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, after Spilisbury and Tombes, antipaedobaptism appeared to have impressive roots in the best European scholarship, a perception bolstered by Tombes's use of famous Hebraists like John Selden and John Lightfoot to support his arguments.<sup>65</sup> In one work, Tombes even printed a letter he sent to Selden in 1644, asking what Hebrew sources said about ancient water baptism and the historical origins of paedobaptism.<sup>66</sup> In his famous 1652 *Antipaedobaptism*, Tombes went further to argue that paedobaptists had misunderstood important baptismal proof texts due to their ignorance of the New Testament's immersion in Jewish culture and frequent Hebraisms.<sup>67</sup> Such arguments were subservient to those drawn from the covenant, but this combination of *avant-garde* philological-historical and theological scholarship would have appealed deeply to university-educated men such as Dunster, who prided themselves on keeping up to date with the findings of learned Europe.

*Henry Dunster, Edward Holyoke and the view from New England*

Of course, all such findings were circulating freely in the American colonies: the sphere of debate over infant baptism was inextricably transatlantic, with Tombes in particular widely distributed.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the covenantal argument from the circumcision-baptism parallelism was

<sup>63</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of glory: John Bunyan and English dissent*, Stanford, CA 2002, 271–301; Crawford Gribben, 'Lucy Hutchinson's theological writings', *Review of English Studies* lxxi (2020), 292–306; Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich, 'Introduction: heretical Milton', in Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich (eds), *Milton and heresy*, Cambridge 1998, 1–21.

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas McDowell, *The English radical imagination: culture, religion, and revolution, 1630–1660*, Oxford 2003, 50–89. This trend is clearest in Anthony Milton (ed.), *The Oxford history of Anglicanism, I: Reformation and identity, c. 1520–1662*, Oxford 2017, and explicitly described in John Coffey, 'Introduction', in Coffey, *Oxford history of Protestant dissenting traditions*, 12–15.

<sup>65</sup> Tombes, *An examen*, 89.

<sup>66</sup> Idem, *An apology or plea*, 90.

<sup>67</sup> Idem, *Antipaedobaptism: or, No plain nor obscure scripture-proof of infants baptism, or church-membership*, pt 1, London 1652 (Wing T.1798), 102–7, 140–1.

<sup>68</sup> Idem, *An apology or plea*, 5–6; Marshall, *A defence of infant-baptism*, 244; Matthew Bingham, 'English Baptists and the struggle for theological authority, 1646–1646', this *JOURNAL* liviii (2017), 551–62.

central to the debate in New England. John Cotton, writing in 1647, said that he had ‘heard much agitation’ about this argument, ‘more of that then of any other’.<sup>69</sup>

Cotton’s words are doubly unsurprising since in some respects the argument from circumcision was even more important in New England than across the Atlantic. This was because unlike the English godly, New Englanders could not use the defence of infant baptism that arose from a national Church: namely, that infants were baptised not into the invisible Church of the elect but into a comprehensive visible Church which, being mixed elect-reprobate, did not require the ability to profess one’s elect status.<sup>70</sup> Thus, in debates with antipaedobaptists, New Englanders like Richard Mather relied heavily on establishing baptism and circumcision as parallel seals of the unchanging covenant of grace: this was identified as the ‘maine argument’ of the American Churches by English antipaedobaptists like Den and, as seen above, even English paedobaptists like Ball limited this parity when arguing against New England baptismal practices.<sup>71</sup> But this heavy reliance also explains why contemporary accounts of the spread of antipaedobaptism in New England are strikingly different from modern historians’ accounts, which have traditionally characterised the doubters of paedobaptism as unlearned believers zealously taking Puritan biblicism to its logical extreme. Contrast this with the works of New England pastor Thomas Cobbet who, writing in 1648, described the spreaders of antipaedobaptism as ‘precious Professors’ who entered into heterodoxy by ‘first entertain[ing] some scruples’ about the covenant of grace and its seal.<sup>72</sup> Hartford minister Thomas Hooker in 1649 offered a similar account, explaining that he aimed to unpack the Abrahamic covenant and its seal, circumcision, because misunderstandings about it had allowed ‘a generation of Anabaptists ... secretly to seduce persons, and lead them into error’.<sup>73</sup> Such comments clash with conventional accounts of American antipaedobaptism, but are unremarkable in light of this article: a Tombesian extrapolation of Cameronian covenant theology would be especially problematic given New England’s reliance on a perfect parallelism between baptism and circumcision, and the ‘precious Professors’, assiduously keeping up with European scholarship, were exactly those who would be vulnerable to such ‘scruples’.

From this perspective, Henry Dunster appears not as an anomaly but as the archetype of the American convert to antipaedobaptism. Early

<sup>69</sup> John Cotton, *The grounds and ends of the baptisme of the children of the faithfull*, London 1647 (Wing C.6436), 38.

<sup>70</sup> Tombes, *Antipaedobaptism*, 90–1.  
<sup>71</sup> Richard Mather, *Church-government and church-covenant discussed, in an answer of the elders of the severall churches in New-England*, London 1643 (Wing M.1269), 12–14; Den, *The second part*, 18; Ball, *A tryall*, 36–45.

<sup>72</sup> Cobbet, *A just vindication*, sig. a2v.  
<sup>73</sup> Hooker, *The covenant of grace opened*, 1.

evidence of his thinking suggests that, before his conversion, Dunster followed the New England line on covenant theology. In his notebook, now in the Massachusetts Historical Society, Dunster offered five defences for why New Englanders baptised the children of church members but not the children of non-church members.<sup>74</sup> All five arguments were predicated on the continuity and immutability of the covenant of grace and the subsequent parallelism of circumcision and baptism. Within these, to establish the permissibility of infant baptism generally, Dunster described an unbroken history of children brought into the covenant of grace through their parents, from mankind's confederation in Adam in Genesis, through Abraham's children confederating in him in Genesis xvii, to the children under the Gospel confederating in their parents. As would be expected, Dunster identified the Abrahamic covenant as substantially the same as the New Testament covenant of grace and called baptism 'the gospel Circumcision'.<sup>75</sup> Thus children's confederation was 'by divine institution' as expressed in the command in Genesis xvii to circumcise, a command never repealed since the covenant it sealed was never repealed, and since 'Baptisme (as concerning the substantial part thereof) succeeds Circumcision in place and use'.<sup>76</sup>

This was the standard Reformed paedobaptist account of the covenant of grace, its parallel seals and their implications for Christian baptism. Indeed, throughout the rest of Dunster's account the circumcision-baptism parity underlined more specialised arguments about New England baptismal practice, from why the children of censured, excommunicated or deceased parents could be baptised, to technical points such as whether children were actually and formally or just potentially church members.<sup>77</sup> Most notably, this account was prompted by Dunster's having received an outline of 'three opinions concerning child's baptisme', which equated to (1) believers' baptism; (2) baptising all Christian children into a comprehensive national Church (defined as the Scottish presbyterian position); and (3) baptising only the children of visible saints who were members of gathered churches (the New England position).<sup>78</sup> Unsurprisingly, this final position Dunster classed as the 'mean opinion', rejecting the others as 'extremes', but his language was tentative, noting the opinions were 'of remarkable consequence' and describing this judgement as only 'for ye present'.

In other words, this document gives us three pieces of information about Dunster's attitude to infant baptism before 1653. Firstly, it shows that to defend New England baptismal practices he relied heavily on the classic paedobaptist concept of the covenant of grace and a logically binding circumcision-baptism parity. Secondly, he was actively receiving comments

<sup>74</sup> MHS, MS N-1143, 145.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 146-7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 148-9.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 150.

on alternative baptismal practices and trying to formulate a theologically rigorous response. Thirdly, despite the seeming assurance of his defence of congregational infant baptism, he was troubled enough to qualify his opinions as only ‘for ye present’.

At the same time, Dunster was exposed to the very arguments that could destabilise the covenant theology on which his claims were based. We know that he was reading Tombes’s 1652 *Antipaedobaptism*, as his copy survives in the Houghton Library.<sup>79</sup> But this book is only one glimpse into Dunster’s reading, not just because so many other works on the same topic were circulating in New England, but also because Tombes’s *Antipaedobaptism* itself was written as merely one part of an ongoing controversy.<sup>80</sup> Most tellingly of all, the record of Dunster’s position after his rejection of infant baptism, his 1653/4 disputation on believers’ baptism, clearly shows the shift in his covenant theology away from the paedobaptist assumptions of his early notes. This disputation, which took place between Dunster, nine ministers of Boston and two elders, has been transcribed and contextualised by Chaplin, with the original in Dunster’s notebook.<sup>81</sup>

The thesis for debate was whether ‘only visible believers should be baptised’, and from the start the covenant was central. John Norton, proposing that infants should be included among ‘visible believers’, gave as proof the binding analogy between infants under the law ‘unto whom ye original promise was made’, and infants under the Gospel who have the promise now, arguing from the immutability of the covenant of grace. Moreover, Dunster’s first riposte was as predictable: he argued that ‘God made a special promise to Abraham concerning his seed’, thereby splitting the Abrahamic covenant from the covenant of grace and severing the parity between baptism and circumcision.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence in the disputation record to establish precisely what Dunster thought about the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, although his language, identifying Abraham’s as a ‘special promise’ rather than as the covenant of works, suggests that he followed the more fashionable Cameronian antipaedobaptists. This would be the obvious option for a scholar like Dunster and seems probable given the books he was reading as well as the fact that throughout the disputation he did not object to statements that identified the Abrahamic covenant as the covenant of grace.<sup>83</sup> This was a major departure from the Dunster who had called baptism the ‘gospel Circumcision’.

As would be expected, questions over the covenant only became more urgent after this first exchange. The topic came to a head on the second day, when Dunster argued that infants had been members of the Jewish Church (and were therefore eligible for circumcision), but that this

<sup>79</sup> Tombes, *Antipaedobaptism*, HL, GEN \*AC6.Dg236.Zz652t.

<sup>81</sup> Chaplin, *Life of Henry Dunster*, 289–301; MHS, MS N-1143, 157ff.

<sup>82</sup> MHS, MS N-1143, 157.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 160–2.



membership was repealed with Jesus' coming, making them ineligible for baptism.<sup>84</sup> This provoked Richard Mather to make the covenantal underpinnings of the debate explicit, pointing out that if 'the same covenant & the blessings of it' existed under the law as now, then 'the same privileges internall and externall' must also exist, even if those privileges differed in degree. Removing church membership from infants would constitute a change in kind, not merely in degree, of these privileges.<sup>85</sup> This was, of course, a standard paedobaptist argument, which we have mentioned earlier. It is significant, then, that Dunster's response did not deny the premise (the underlying immutability of the covenant of grace) but rather denied that the repeal of infants' church membership constituted a change in kind. God did not deprive infants of the covenant-seal, as John Norton had framed it, but negated the seal itself, for the seal of circumcision was 'out of date' and the seal of baptism was 'not instituted to Infants' in the New Testament.<sup>86</sup> This argument, which accepted the permanence of the covenant of grace but viewed circumcision as part of its disposable outward administration, is strongly reminiscent of Tombes. It was only after these covenant issues had been aired, half-way through the second day of the two-day debate, that the participants turned to paedobaptism's scriptural proof texts.<sup>87</sup>

In short, the evidence from Dunster's notebook, reading material and disputation strongly suggests that his conversion to believers' baptism resulted from the development of transatlantic antipaedobaptist covenant theology in the wake of the English reception of Cameron. Far from surprising, Dunster's rejection of infant baptism now appears the natural outcome of several intersecting factors: his early, characteristically New England reliance on the circumcision-baptism parity; his characteristically Reformed emphasis on the immutability of the covenant of grace; his initial uncertainty about the strength of these arguments for paedobaptism; and his subsequent exposure to cutting-edge antipaedobaptist covenant theology through men like Tombes.

This interpretation of why Dunster converted to antipaedobaptism is supported by the new evidence that this article introduces: Edward Holyoke's letter. Holyoke wrote to Dunster in December 1653, at the same time as other concerned citizens.<sup>88</sup> Although Holyoke lacked a university education, his interest in theology was not unusual: the mid-seventeenth century saw the beginnings of mass lay engagement with theological issues.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, like the writers cited above,

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 160.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 161–2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 162.

<sup>88</sup> Morison, *Harvard College*, i. 307.

<sup>89</sup> Murray Tolmie, *The triumph of the saints: the separate churches of London, 1616–1649*, Cambridge 1977, 50; Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in colonial Massachusetts*, Cambridge 1991, 22; Bingham, 'English Baptists', 547, 555.

Holyoke identified confusion over the covenant of grace as the cause of antipaedobaptism. Holyoke's habit of heavily annotating his books allows us to reconstruct his opinions with unusual precision. In one book, for instance, he complained that 'if our godly Teachers had or would yet make playne the covenant of God in Christ to their herers from Moses, & that the N. Testament for the substance hath the same; people it is hoped would be more settled against Anabaptistry'.<sup>90</sup> In another he described an anabaptist as someone 'that despiseth the Couenant & the Seale of the couenant for Infants', and outlined the typical covenantal argument for paedobaptism: that 'the Gentiles [were] receiued into equall couenant with the Jewes: & therefore the infants of godly parents of the Gentiles haue as great a priuiledg <...> in baptisme as euer any of the Jewes had in Circumcision'.<sup>91</sup>

But Holyoke's annotated books are not our only sources. His sole published work was a treatise on the covenant of grace, intended to show that it 'is one and the same in all ages, though the outward administration differ', and responding to 'the errors that get quickning in these times', doubtless a nod to New England antipaedobaptism (perhaps even to Dunster).<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Holyoke was familiar not just with common paedobaptist arguments, but also with their antipaedobaptist rebuttals.<sup>93</sup> Take, for instance, Holyoke's threefold comment that 'the promise concerning Christ to *Abraham*, was not onely of temporal blessings ... but also of spiritual: and that chiefly'; that 'circumcision sealed the same' spiritual promise; and that those who taught otherwise were 'vain talkers and deceivers of mindes'.<sup>94</sup> Holyoke's insistence that circumcision chiefly sealed spiritual blessings indicates his awareness of the debates over Cameron's comment on circumcision, and his reference to the 'vain talkers' who argued contrariwise must allude to Tombes.

Holyoke's strong reaction to antipaedobaptist covenant theology arose not just from anxieties over heterodoxy, but from his lifelong pre-occupation with the connections between the Old and New Testament as one manifestation of scriptural harmony. The most obvious demonstration of this harmony was, in his eyes, the immutability of the covenant of grace, and because of this he went much further than his Reformed contemporaries in terms of how much continuity he saw across its two administrations.<sup>95</sup> His opinion of this continuity was so high that at times he almost collapsed the two Testaments into each other

<sup>90</sup> Holyoke's copy of Broughton, *Concent*, HL, \*AC6 H7482 Zz59ob, fo. 50r.

<sup>91</sup> Broughton, *Concent*, AHL, 343 B875co 1590, fo.<23>v.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Holyoke, *The doctrine of life, or of mans redemption*, London 1658 (Wing H.2534), sig. A2r.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 63–4, 69, 195–8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

<sup>95</sup> See Holyoke's annotations in HL, \*AC6 H7482 Zz59ob, fo. 14; AHL, 343 B875co 1590, fos <11>r<13>v.

entirely.<sup>96</sup> Partly because of this, his covenant theology was controversial in its own right, but the direction in which he departed from the mainstream placed him even further than most from antipaedobaptist covenant theology, making him exceptionally sensitive to arguments that disrupted the constancy of the covenant of grace.<sup>97</sup>

Unsurprisingly then, a deep concern with the covenant permeated Holyoke's letter to Dunster. Holyoke wrote the letter after composing a paraphrase of Isaiah liv, which appears just before the letter in his copy of Broughton's *A conceit of Scripture*. Holyoke found Broughton's *Conceit* a valuable tool for reflection, filling up multiple copies with densely-annotated interleaved pages, and emphasising its importance for his intellectual development.<sup>98</sup> In this case, Holyoke's reflection on Isaiah liv was prompted by considering the events that occurred between the flood and the promise to Abraham, which he saw reflected in the prophecy.<sup>99</sup> Specifically, Holyoke interpreted the deserted wife of Isaiah liv as the descendants of Noah who were excommunicated by the confusion of tongues at Babel, but would be returned to the Church (in the prophecy, embraced by the husband) by the opening up of God's covenant of grace with the coming of the messiah.<sup>100</sup> Isaiah's conceit of God as husband to the Church was the device that prompted Holyoke to ponder antipaedobaptism, for as a husband should care for the children produced by his union, so too would God care for the infants of his union. As Holyoke put it: 'when any of you take a spouse, dare any of you deny to be a father to her infants?'<sup>101</sup>

These thoughts led Holyoke to write an address 'To the anabaptists' in which he expounded on how Isaiah's prophecy disproved antipaedobaptism, enlarging on the motif of God as husband, and how the prophesied joy of the wife was impossible if her infants were excluded.<sup>102</sup> This address formed the core of Holyoke's letter to Dunster, and it was because of this close relationship between Holyoke's letter to Dunster, his address to the

<sup>96</sup> See the comments in HL \*AC6 H7482 Zz590b, fo. 14; AHTL, 343 B875co 1590, fo. <13>r-v; AHTL, 343 B875co 1590, fo. <13>r; HL, \*AC6 H7482 Zz590b, fo. 14.

<sup>97</sup> Holyoke's covenant theology was near-identical to that of his friend William Pynchon: Michael Winship, 'Contesting control of orthodoxy among the godly: William Pynchon reexamined', *William and Mary Quarterly* liv (1997), 795–822; C. de Jong, "'Christ's descent" in Massachusetts: the doctrine of justification according to William Pynchon (1590–1662)', in C. de Jong and J. van Sluis (eds), *Gericht Verleden: kerkhistorische opstellen aangeboden aan prof. dr. W. Nijenhuis ter gelegenheid van zijn vijftienvigste verjaardag*, Leiden 1991, 129–58.

<sup>98</sup> Holyoke, *The doctrine of life*, sig. A2r–v. Holyoke's annotated books and his relationship to Broughton will be discussed in my forthcoming book, *Amateur divines: lay learning and the Bible in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world*.

<sup>99</sup> AHTL, 343 B875co 1590, fo. <31>r.

<sup>100</sup> Isaiah liv.5–6.

<sup>101</sup> AHTL, 343 B875co 1590, fo. <31>v.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. fos <31>v–<32>r.

anabaptists and his paraphrase of Isaiah that Holyoke transcribed the letter into his copy of Broughton.

While Isaiah liv informed the letter's rhetoric and structure, its argumentative force came from the covenant. This was clear from the start, with Holyoke's stormy opening declaration that 'all the doctrine of the couenant of God in Christ is against your vnsound & vncomfortable opinion'.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the immutability of the covenant of grace and parity between Jewish and Christian infants underwrote all his arguments, most of all his application of Isaiah's spousal rhetoric to the contemporary Christian Church: that just as God 'was an husband to Israels parents & children, the same he is to the Gentiles called', since 'the Lord God ... hath never repealed his *prømissè* or couenant'.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, this point was repeated throughout the letter, in prose that varied from elaborately rhetorical ('What promises are made to Israel of old the same are to Iapheths persuaded-Corinthians') to logical ('as God did justifie & sanctifie by his couenant the Circumcised infants, so God by the same couenant doth justifie & sanctifie the vncircumcised infants of the gentiles that are in couenant').<sup>105</sup> Finally, he deployed the standard argument from the need for God's grace to become more, not less inclusive over time.<sup>106</sup> And, as Holyoke concluded, he expressed his confidence that Dunster would know the many authors who had written on this topic, and hoped that he would return to belief in God's '*prømissè* & couenant'.

In short, Holyoke's letter corroborates this article's argument. Holyoke was prompted to write to Dunster due to his idiosyncratic modes of reading, but his identification of what arguments lay behind Dunster's rejection was in accordance with others of his time. Furthermore, these arguments did not concern ecclesiology, Church-State relations or biblical literalism, but rather core issues of Reformed covenant theology as had gained especial urgency since the Anglophone reception of Cameron.

From this perspective, the story behind Dunster's conversion and the mid seventeenth-century spread in antipaedobaptism belongs less to the history of ecclesiology or Puritanism than to the history of European Reformed covenant theology. Even before ecclesiology and religious temperament, there were several basic theological obstacles that had to be removed before antipaedobaptism became viable for the otherwise orthodox. Specifically, as this article has argued, at the heart of the debate over infant baptism lay questions about the inauguration, nature and administration of the covenant of grace throughout history. For the first one hundred years or so after the Reformation, antipaedobaptism appeared to be in fundamental conflict with orthodox Reformed answers

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. fo. <32>r.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. fo. <33>r.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. fo. <32>r-v.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. fo. <33>r.

to these questions. However, the seventeenth-century evolution of covenant theology, especially after Cameron's *De triplici foedere*, not only eliminated this problem, but opened up the theological space for antipaedobaptism to appear as the exact opposite: an organic development of Reformed thought. Simultaneously, this same evolution accidentally undermined the assumptions behind several important arguments for infant baptism and threatened its strongest proof texts, which had been located in the Old Testament and extended to Christianity on the strength of the covenant of grace.

With this in mind, one might even argue that congregationalists were more likely to reject infant baptism not due to the problems it caused their ecclesiology, but because the absence of the positive case for infant baptism from a national Church forced them to lean heavily on the arguments that were most vulnerable to Cameronian hermeneutics. The spread of congregationalism might have predisposed mid seventeenth-century England and North America to believers' baptism, but it was by itself neither a sufficient nor (as Tombes shows) a necessary condition. Before antipaedobaptism could appeal to the Reformed, it needed to seem compatible with the assumptions behind their covenant theology.

As well as offering a general explanation for the spread of antipaedobaptism in the transatlantic Anglophone world, this article has also offered new insight into the most prominent conversion of seventeenth-century New England, that of Henry Dunster. Dunster was attracted to antipaedobaptism not from congregationalist logic or Puritan scripturalism, but from changes to his ideas about the evolution of the covenant of grace. This is apparent not just from contrasting his early notes with his 1653/4 disputation, but also from Edward Holyoke's response to his conversion. Indeed, when viewed through the framework of this article, the 1640s spread of antipaedobaptism, the conversion of Dunster and the response of Holyoke all form a cohesive narrative.

In presenting this narrative, this article has offered two further revisions. The first concerns the audience to whom antipaedobaptism appealed, an audience which consisted not only of the enthusiastic but untutored believers prominent in older accounts, but also of 'precious Professors' and their ilk, who were drawn to antipaedobaptism after it refashioned itself as an offshoot of cutting-edge covenant theology. As described above, this complements the broader recent tendency to emphasise the intellectual heft and academic appeal of religious radicalism as a way of explaining its ability to attract highly learned individuals who were otherwise conformist. The second revision concerns the sources of and influences on Anglophone believers' baptism. Scholars have long argued that English and American antipaedobaptism were indigenous phenomena, arising in parallel from

the impulses inherent in Puritanism.<sup>107</sup> However, in light of this article, the situation looks more complex. The Anglophone baptists may have lacked connections to the Swiss anabaptists or Dutch Mennonites, but neither were they divorced from European influence. In many ways the antipaedobaptism of both 1640s England and Harvard President Henry Dunster was directly descended from the innovative world of European Reformed theology.

Given this, one subsequent question might be why the Reformed Churches of seventeenth-century continental Europe did not witness quite the same efflorescence of baptist belief as in England and America.<sup>108</sup> This question is clearly too large for a conclusion and would require its own analysis. However, a possible answer might be found in the different confessional dynamics of continental Europe, in particular the presence of pre-existing, well-established but largely separatist baptist communities in the Reformed territories where covenant theology was influential, such as the Netherlands. In Catholic-majority countries, the lack of anabaptist proliferation is less surprising: certainly in Cameron's adopted country of France, the perpetually-threatened minority status of the Huguenots might well have acted as ballast against such serious schism. Comparative studies of continental European and Anglophone antipaedobaptist argumentation and covenant theology would doubtless illuminate further factors that caused Cameron's ideas to have such unexpected consequences in England and America in particular.

However, it was not at all obvious at the time that the continental Reformed Churches would not face the same problem as the Anglophone ones, and it is only by appreciating this sense of possibility that we can find a much richer explanation for why antipaedobaptism so threatened the early modern social and political *status quo* than if it had been a phenomenon self-evidently confined to lay, Anglophone congregationalists. Antipaedobaptism was a threat precisely because it crossed socio-political boundaries: developed out of unimpeachably Reformed theology, anchored in a pan-European tradition, finding support in the treatises of elite continental universities, and appealing to a worrying coalition of learned, establishment figures and the people to whom they preached. Far from the quixotic heresy of one sect, antipaedobaptism was alarming

<sup>107</sup> John Coffey, 'From marginal to mainstream: how Anabaptists became Baptists', in C. Douglas Weaver (ed.), *Mirrors and microscopes: historical perceptions of Baptists*, Colorado Springs 2015, 5–10; J. F. McGregor, 'The Baptists: font of all heresy', in J. McGregor and B. Reay (eds), *Radical religion in the English Revolution*, New York 1984, 26; Andrew Bradstock, *Radical religion in Cromwell's England: a concise history from the English Civil War to the end of the Commonwealth*, London 2010, 4; Gura, *A glimpse of Zion's glory*, 94.

<sup>108</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous peer-reviewer for raising this important issue and suggesting lines of inquiry.

because it was more theologically conventional, proximate to orthodoxy and diffuse than this. To scholars like Stephen Marshall or the magistrates of Massachusetts General Court, it might have looked as though a newly perilous crossroads in Reformed hermeneutics had been reached.

In this respect, the danger of antipaedobaptism is perhaps best represented by the experience of the young Cambridge minister Jonathan Mitchell, who tried to re-convert Dunster in December 1653. Instead of Dunster returning to the fold, their conversation left Mitchell filled with a ‘strange confusion and sickliness’, his mind overrun with ‘hurrying and pressing suggestions against Paedo-baptism’.<sup>109</sup> Mitchell eventually rejected such thoughts as satanic emanations, but the experience left him profoundly aware of the fineness of the line between heterodoxy and orthodoxy. Antipaedobaptism at once exploited and highlighted the fineness—even the blurriness—of this line, and this was why it had the power to persuade men like Dunster, to tempt men like Mitchell, and the potential to proliferate across the whole transatlantic Reformed community.

<sup>109</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The ecclesiastical history of New-England*, London 1702, iv. 175.

## APPENDIX

*Edward Holyoke's Letter to Henry Dunster.*<sup>1</sup>

When I had written these meditations,<sup>2</sup> after some tyme I know not how long:<sup>3</sup> my minde was somewhat affected through the mercy of the Lord, with the good word of God, meethought it might be expedient to write a letter to a speciall man in New England hoping it might be of ~~vse~~ good vse: & because it is from the meditations of these things formerly written, I thought it best to transcribe it heere: and thus it is.

Worthy & Reuerend Sir having some occasion to view some vncomfortable opinions that are stirring to eradicate the Churches of God I thought it duty to present a few lines vnto you, for you may be I hope an helpe vnto mee in the thing. I read lately Esaias chap. 54 *which* did greatly enlighten some meditations as I was th[e]n in hand w<sup>th</sup>hall; and among the rest the opinion of the Anabaptists came in minde: & their opinion mee thought was much derogatory to the mercy and goodnesse of God in his revealed counsells *which* I will transcribe as I directed it vnto them.

As all the doctrine of the couenant of God in Christ is against your vnsound & vncomfortable opinion of denying the covenant & seale of the couenant to the infants of the Church of God, so marke *what* this scripture of Esai chap. 54 sayth: but obserue two or 3 words before I cite the text. Noës families were excommunicated father and child from being of the houshold of God by the confusion of tongues for 2000.y.<sup>4</sup> and were all that tyme as a widow divorced, & as a wife of youth refused, (they were a wife when all the earth was of one language) but when the word of the kingdom of God in Christ was to be sett vp as an ensigne among the nations of Noahs families to gather Churches then the Lord Jehouah the Eternall Trinitie, the father Son & holy Ghost promised this great & gracious promise; *For thy makers are thy husbands, the Lord of hosts is his name, & thy Rediemer the holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called.*<sup>5</sup> As the holy Trinitie were the makers of the Church, so the same holy One of Israel would bee our husbands, & would receiue vs into matrimoniall conuenant [*sic*] that had beene divorced & refused, & make vs his spouse, his Church. Marke it well, the holy One of Israel that was an husband to Israels parents & children, the same he is to the Gentiles

<sup>1</sup> This edition follows the conventions of semi-diplomatic transcription.

<sup>2</sup> These mediations consist of (a) a paraphrase of Isa. liv. and (b) the address 'To the Anabaptists', on which the letter is based.

<sup>3</sup> The meditations were written between about 1637 and autumn 1653.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the curse of Ham's family in Genesis ix.20–7 and building of the tower of Babel, the latter of which according to Broughton and Holyoke occurred around 1936 *annus mundi*, approximately 2,000 years before Christ's life (3928–60 *annus mundi*), after which Ham's descendants were allowed into the Church along with Gentiles, as promised in Isaiah liv, according to Holyoke's reading.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. liv.5.



called, to them & their children Act.2.<sup>6</sup> And therefore all the called Gentiles they & their children were baptized into the name of the father, Sonn, & H. Spirit to be one body in Christ: for you see the Lord Jehouah he is their Makers & their husbands: you will not be Atheists to deny he is the Makers of the infants of the Church: you may as well deny the holy One ^of Israel^ made the infants of Israel to be of his Church, as deny the father, Sonn & H Ghost to be the husbands of the Infants of the Church of the Gentiles, as the one would be atheisme so the other is as godlesse. And may not the Church the spouse of Christ oure barron, plead with her most gracious & tender husband.

O then shepherd of Israel (Joh. 10) wilt not thou gather my lambs with thine arme & carry them in thy bosom as for Israel of old?<sup>7</sup> hast not thou made vs thy Israel, & the seed of Abraham thy friend? & of Lord God my husbands ~~which of barren~~ *which* of barron hast made mee fruitfull, & biddest mee sing and breakforth into joy: but how can I sing or be joyfull, I shall still mourne if thou wilt not be a father to my infants.

Againe, O Jehouah thou holy One as thou hast sayd thou art the Makers of my infants, art not thou, & wilt not thou bee husbands to my infants, as to my branches so to my budds? Wilt thou O gracious husbands deny thy promise & couenant? O my blessed & gracious husbands thou hast also sayd thou art my Rediemer. I am most vnworthy of such honor & glory: I was dead in my bloud of all filthinesse, & it was of thine owne goodnesse to make such a match with mee, I am confounded in my self when I meditate thy compassions, but seeing thou hast stricken a couenant with me, & I haue borne many infants, sons & daughters to thee, wilt not thou redeem them as me a wretched mother? wilt thou reject them, my little ones? O my blessed husbands, O our father *which* art in heauen do not reject them for thy mercies sake in thy deere Sonn; O do not cast them off: can I thinke, O giue leaue to mee a poore woman to speake to thee my heauenly husbands: I will lay my mouth in the dust to speake to haue hope for this: oh can I thinke else thy loue is so deepe & high, so long & broad as thy word speaks, if thou wilt dash the heads of myne infants against the stones of thine eternall judgments.<sup>8</sup> O my deere husbands I beeleeue thy reveiled will, for thou tellest me twice, that my infants, I haue borne to thee Ezek. 16.20. & 23.37.<sup>9</sup> Lord I beeleeue helpe thou myne vnbeliefe: Lord my God I know the king is done. Even so Amen.

No no: beloued for so I estieme many of you: the Lord God he hath never repealed his promise or couenant nor ever will. When any of you take a spouse dare any of you deny to bee a father to her infants? how would your

<sup>6</sup> Acts ii.38–9; note that earlier in Acts ii.1–12, a polyglot crowd miraculously understood each other, following the prophecy of Joel ii.28–32 (cited in Acts ii.17–22), and inverting the confusion of tongues at Babel that, in Holyoke's reading, marked the excommunication of certain families of Noah.

<sup>7</sup> John x.1–21. Holyoke echoes the language of Isa. xl.11.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians iii.18; Psalm cxxxvii.8–9.

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel xvi.20 and xxiii.37, following the theme of Jerusalem as a sinful bride to God, describe how the bride sacrificed God's children to idols. Holyoke's point is that these verses demonstrate God's care for children born in his Church.

spouses most justly exclaim against you; so shall all the Churches of God exclaim & cry out against you to the Lord Iehouah our husbands, for your vnchristian opinions: for you denying this record of God you would make God a liar, in that you deny the promise & couenant, & seale of the initiation of the Couenant to the infants of the Churches. And therefore marke what the husbands of the spouse, & the father of her infants, hath sayd, euery tongue that riseth in judgment against you, thou shalt condemne:<sup>10</sup> blessed be his holy name for this promise: this speach conteyns both a promise and a command. Therefore the Lord hath builded in his Church polished Carbuncles to be the windowes of it,<sup>11</sup> & they haue condemned vnanswereably your vngodlinesse: & the holy husbands of the infants mother the Jerusalem from heauen will not suffer your blasphemies against himselfe, his spouse, & infants (their right is the controversie) but will make his holy servants writings to be fire to consume your buildings of stubble, hay, and rotten wood.<sup>12</sup> And if you invent evils against the Churches by any hostilitie, wee do beleue the gracious promise of our blessed husbands, that no armes or weapons formed by you against ye righteous cause of the spouse of her holy husbands, Jehouah of hosts shall prosper, as your predecessors haue found, who though they pretended a denyall of the vse of materiall weapons, yet it proued otherwise to their shame & the great trouble of the Church of God:<sup>13</sup> know you therfore assuredly that the Churches of Christ will still pray for wisdome & strength from their husbands the Lord of hostes who will make good that inheritance, he hath giuen that all your weapons shalbe blunted & your tongues confounded.<sup>14</sup> Amen.

When the Jewes are converted to the faith they will abhor & detest your opinions, meere opinions, no doctrine of faith, of denying couenant & seal to be for the infants of the Church. The Jewes will not trifle with you, assure yourselues, but take vp stones against you.

The holy Eternall Lord God was an husband to Israel for their State of 1500.y. & moe,<sup>15</sup> but they did so carry themselues very treacherously against him that he

<sup>10</sup> Isa. liv.17.

<sup>11</sup> Isa. liv.12 uses the metaphor of exalted Jerusalem to represent the value of God's covenant. Holyoke interprets *shaar*, normally 'gate', as window: compare AHTL, 343 B875co 1590, fo. <31>r.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians iii.12–13 contrasts buildings made of wood, hay and stubble with those of gold, silver and precious stone, with the quality of the building revealed by fire. The buildings represent different Churches and the fire represents God's final judgement.

<sup>13</sup> Holyoke is thinking of the Münster rebellion, in which anabaptists took control of the German city Münster for a year: Sigrun Haude, *In the shadow of 'savage wolves': anabaptist Münster and the German Reformation during the 1530s*, Leiden 2000, 146–54.

<sup>14</sup> Isa liv.16–17.

<sup>15</sup> Following Broughton's chronology, the covenant with Abraham that created the nation of Israel occurred at 2108 *annus mundi*, which was over 1,500 years before the 'divorce' of that bond with the New Testament covenant of Jesus (c. 3928–60 *annus mundi*).

divorced them as Moses foretold Deut. 32. *They haue mooued me to Jealousie with that which is not God, they haue provoked me to anger with their vanities (of denying Christ and his righteousnesse &c) and I will moue them to Jealousie with them which are no-people, Lo-amim. And I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.*<sup>16</sup> So Christ by Moses prophced that the gentiles shalbee brought into matrimoniall loue as much as euer Israel as aboue, Esai. 54. This doctrine of Christ by Moses & Esaias is a Bulwarke against bad opinions. The Apostle citeth Moses & Esaias for the comfort of the faithfull Rom. 10: Gal. 4.<sup>17</sup> If the Lord God haue taken us gentiles into matrimoniall communion with himself equally as with Israel of old; for so it is sayd, Is God the Jewe's only, & not the Gentile's also, yes euen the Gentile's also: for God doth equally justifie the vncircumcision as the Circumcision: we cannot so comfortably say (as the Jewes might) God is the God of the Gentiles if his matrimoniall couenant be not to their infants: for we know Gods Couenant in Christ did involve the infants of Abrahams seed in Israel of old:<sup>18</sup> and as God did justifie & sanctifie by his couenant the Circumcised infants, so God by the same couenant doth justifie & sanctifie the vncircumcised infants of the gentiles that are in couenant: for the gracious Lord God doth couenant & promise with his Bride that he wilbee the husband of her infants (as aboue)<sup>19</sup> and to sanctifie & justifie ym by his couenant.

The tyme was when the Gentiles were aliens from the Common Weale of Israel & strangers from the couenants of promise, having no hope, & were without God in the world: but now sayth the Apostle, in Christ Jesus yee that sometye were farr off are made nigh, by yong men & maydens, old men & children, (as nigh as euer Israel was, Psal. 148)<sup>20</sup> by the blood of Christ, who brake downe the partition Wall betweene Jew & Gentile, & sent his Apostles to preach peace & hope (what, not to Infants) as to the Jewes nigh so to the Gentiles farr off. Whence it is that the Gentiles are no more strangers & forreiners but fellow Citizens with the Saints (them of Israel) and of the household of God.

So this our faith hath not sandy foundations, or Combustible stuff, but is built vpon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles doctrine, Jesus Christ himselfe being the chiefe Corner Stone.<sup>21</sup> Let not Anabaptists therefore any more snarle at our alleading the prophets for to be the foundation of our faith for Gods couenant to our infants. And the Apostles neuer contradicted the holy Prophets. Let vs confess Exo. 29.45 Leuit. 26.15. with 2. Cor. 6.15. Apoc 21.3. 1 Pet.2.5. &c &c.<sup>22</sup>

What promises are made to Israel of old the same are to Iapheths persuaded-Corinthians, & all families Gen 12.3. yea all Israels holy prerogatiues are transacted

<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy xxxii.21.

<sup>17</sup> Romans x.19, citing Deuteronomy xxxii.21, and Galatians iv.27, citing Isa. xlv.1.

<sup>18</sup> Gen. xvii.17–21. <sup>19</sup> Isa. liv.13; Ezekiel lvi.20, xxiii.37. <sup>20</sup> Psalm cxlviii.12.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. iii.12–13.

<sup>22</sup> Exodus xxix.45–6 and Leviticus xxvi.15 refer to God forming a covenant with the Israelites and agreeing to be their God; 1 Cor. vi.15, Revelation xxi.3 and 1 Peter ii.5 are similar promises but between Jesus Christ and his followers, echoing the language of the earlier Old Testament promises (as, for example, Rev. xxi.3 echoes Lev. xxvi. 15).

to the Gentiles.<sup>23</sup> This observation (of a learned man) of like revolutions to Iaphets sonns & all families is [tres.]remarkable:<sup>24</sup> see also how the Apostle doth prosecute this to Iaphets-persuaded Romans. Rom. 11. we are grafted into the Jewes Oliue tree & are partakers of their roote & their fatnesse, & if there branches were holy so are our branches holy 1 Cor. 7.<sup>25</sup> this is magnified to vs from Gods infinite goodnesse & bountifullnesse: Iapheths dwelling in Sems Tents,<sup>26</sup> & the Gentiles to be grafted into their Oliue tree; are all one in sense. And if Gods goodnesse & bountifullnesse be not extended to our infants by couenant as to the Lewes, he is not so good & bountifull to vs as to the Jewes. Do not evill spirits of error therefore debase this goodnesse of God in his couenant to our branches. The Lord will reprove, may not wee say, that accursed doctrine of the anabaptists. ≈ ≈ ≈

And what if Gods providence did not so direct that ecclesiasticall writings do not shew so anciently about Infants ^this hath been well answered^:<sup>27</sup> no great losse: it were but humane testimonies, & shall humane testimonies be of more validitie then the promiss & couenant of God in Christ is his memoriall to all generations that are of the same holy faith of Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob. ≈ ≈

Louing S̄r these meditations the Lord hath put into my heart, & I thought it duty to commend them vnto your serious consideration. I hope the Serpent hath not so bitten, that there is no roome for any inchantments. I beesech you in the Lord Jesus call to minde his goodnesse & marry to yourself and yours: It is sayd, beleue his prophets & yee shall prosper.<sup>28</sup> for me to write largely it is not convenient: or to name the holy servants of Christ, who haue written on this argument is not so pertinent they cannot be vnknownen vnto you: wherefore I humbly pray you take in good part these few lines. O Lord God haue mercy. Much may be sayd concerning your calling, place estieme in N. England: and the great offense to Christ his spouse that you will lay in his peoples wayes a stumbling blocke. *Wo be to the world because of Offenses.*<sup>29</sup> But my prayer shalbe to the Sonn of God the Lord Jesus for you worthy S̄r that you may beleue his promise & couenant. And so I remaine your Cordiall wellwisher in the Gospell.

<sup>23</sup> Gen. xii.3.

<sup>24</sup> The learned man is Hugh Broughton: the 'like revolutions' are the recurrence of numerical patterns throughout history. See Broughton, *Concent*, sig. Aiiiir. Holyoke described these revolutions as 'for ease of our memory, & pleasure of considering old & late matters' in his copy of Broughton's *Concent*, HL, \*AC6 H7482 Zz590b, fo. 10r.

<sup>25</sup> Romans xi.11–16 and 1 Cor. vii.14 were commonly used to argue that the offspring of believers were members of the visible church and had a 'covenant-holiness' that enabled them to receive baptism from birth. See, for example, Baxter, *Plain scripture proof*, 43–9, 80–100, or Theodore Beza, *Novum testamentum*, Geneva 1598, fos 130v–131r. <sup>26</sup> Gen. ix.27.

<sup>27</sup> Holyoke's anxiety over whether infant baptism was in the earliest ecclesiastical writings is common: cf. Tombes, *An apology or plea*, 7. Holyoke's insertion could refer to any number of writers from Marshall, *A defence of infant-baptism*, 1–61 to Henry Savage, *Quaestiones tres in novissimorum comitorum vesperis Oxon. discussae*, Oxford 1653 (Wing S.761A), 5–9. <sup>28</sup> 2 Chronicles xx.20. <sup>29</sup> Matthew xviii.7.

10.12.1653. Ed: H.

προκοψουσιν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον. Caueamus.<sup>30</sup>

They shall wax worse & worse.<sup>31</sup>

\*Jesus Christ yesterday, & to day is the same, & also for ever. The Infants of Israel were vnder Gods couenant in Christ yesterday: and what blasphemy do they run into to say he is not the same to day.

<sup>30</sup> 'Let us take heed.'

<sup>31</sup> The Greek is 2 Timothy iii.13, which the English translates.