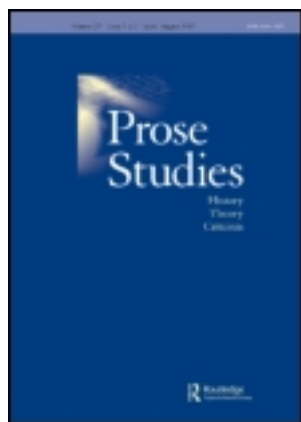


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Ariel Hessayon

WINSTANLEY AND BAPTIST THOUGHT

Of all the enigmas about Gerrard Winstanley, perhaps the greatest is how did a man of unremarkable origins come to articulate one of the most penetrating and damning critiques of his own society in such powerful and crafted prose? The answer to this question has as much to do with Winstanley's spiritual progress and broadening intellectual horizons as with his increased engagement in local and national politics, which became more pronounced after the establishment of the Digger plantation. Accordingly, this essay focuses on an aspect of Winstanley's development, namely his interpretation, adaptation, and articulation of teachings characteristically – albeit not always exclusively – maintained by certain prominent Baptists and their followers. I have suggested elsewhere that the outlines, if not the precise moments, of Winstanley's spiritual journey can be reconstructed with confidence. Beginning in either childhood, adolescence, or some point in adulthood, he was a puritan; then perhaps a separatist; then, it can be inferred, a General Baptist; then he dispensed with the outward observance of gospel ordinances (analogous to a “Seeker”) before falling into a trance. Here, I want to build on my own work together with John Gurney's important recent studies by locating Winstanley within a milieu that makes his beliefs and subsequent practices explicable. For it appears that despite his undoubted gift for original thought, Winstanley did not always give credit where it was due.

Keywords Gerrard Winstanley; Diggers; Baptists; Thomas Lambe

Introduction

Of all the enigmas about Gerrard Winstanley, perhaps the greatest is how did a man of unremarkable origins come to articulate one of the most penetrating and damning critiques of his own society in such powerful and crafted prose? The answer to this question has as much to do with Winstanley's spiritual progress and broadening intellectual horizons as with his increased engagement in local and national politics, which became more pronounced after the establishment of the Digger plantation. Accordingly, I want to focus here on an aspect of Winstanley's development, namely his interpretation, adaptation, and articulation of teachings characteristically – albeit not always exclusively – maintained by certain prominent Baptists and their followers.

It is well known that Winstanley had once been a believer in adult baptism. He says so himself in *Truth Lifting Up Its Head above Scandals* (1649), and there seems little reason to doubt his word: “for Baptism, I have gon through the ordinance of dipping, which the letter of the Scripture doth warrant, yet I doe not presse any one thereunto” (*CWGW* I: 449).¹ Yet until recently the significance of Winstanley's statement had not been given sufficient attention. John Gurney, however, has noted the presence of

Baptist emissaries in Surrey during the mid-1640s (Gurney, *Brave Community* 41, 95–6). Thus, about the beginning of September 1645 and accompanied by the Norwich weaver Samuel Oates, the Colchester soapboiler Thomas Lambe reportedly preached in a church at Guildford; apparently, he would have done the same a few days later at Godalming on a Sunday had the minister not denied him the use of his pulpit. Murray Tolmie has deservedly called Lambe’s church, which then met at a house in Bell Alley, Coleman Street but would shortly relocate to Spitalfields, the “most notorious sectarian church in London during the English civil war.” Lambe himself was an energetic emissary who traveled extensively through several counties during the war. He and Oates were heading to Portsmouth and if they followed the road from London would have first passed *en route* through Kingston-upon-Thames, Esher, and Cobham, where Winstanley had been living since autumn 1643 (Edwards I: 92–5, 146; Tolmie, “Thomas Lambe, soapboiler” 7).

Another itinerant Baptist evangelist active in Surrey was Thomas Collier. The Presbyterian heresiographer and author of *Gangraena*, Thomas Edwards, called him a “great Sectary,” relating how about the beginning of April 1646 this “mechanicall fellow” preached in the meeting place at Guildford to an Independent congregation swelled by people thronging from nearby towns come to hear this “rare man.” Described as a husbandman or carter (possibly because, like his fellow Baptist Henry Denne, he subscribed to the belief that ministers should work with their hands), Collier was banished from Guernsey and afterwards imprisoned at Portsmouth for sowing the seeds of “Anabaptism, Anti-sabbatarianism, and some Arminianisme” (Edwards, II: 148; III: 27, 41, 51–2). Important research by Gurney has now drawn attention to “distinct echoes” of Collier’s works in Winstanley’s earliest texts, and even allowing for important theological differences Gurney thinks it “hard to believe that Winstanley never read Collier or heard him preach, or that Collier was wholly unfamiliar with Winstanley’s writings” (Gurney, *Gerrard Winstanley* 22, 24–26, 27–28, 29, 39–40, 42–43).

While Guildford lay about 11 miles southwest of Cobham on the London-Portsmouth road, Kingston was roughly 8 miles to the northeast. Chamberlains’ accounts for 1643–1644 together with a warrant made out on 15 August 1644 indicate that “Anabaptists” were probably arrested here, taken to Westminster, and possibly brought before the Parliamentary Committee of Examinations for questioning. Further evidence comes from a pamphlet dated 7 April 1645 based on two sermons delivered at Kingston in February that year by Richard Byfield, rector of Long Ditton, Surrey. Condemning the denial of infant baptism as an infection that had led to the “diseasednesse of the Congregation of Kingston,” Byfield censured the heretical beliefs of antinomians, anti-Sabbatarians, Anabaptists, Arminians, Socinians, and Papists as pollutants that defiled the English church and Temple of God (Gurney, *Brave Community* 41–2; Byfield, “Epistle Dedicatory,” 20–1).

It is conceivable that Byfield’s “Temple-vermine,” the “new disturbers” that allegedly boasted of “fals[e]” gifts such as scriptural interpretation and revelation (1 Corinthians 14: 26), but significantly not glossolalia (Acts 2: 4), referred to a conventicle whose dozen or so members were seized with Bibles in their hands at the house of John Fielder, a Kingston miller, one January Sunday 1645 (Byfield 33–4). Briefly imprisoned, upon their release they resumed meeting privately after Sabbath day divine service and were apprehended again in March. Fielder was additionally

charged with Sabbath breaking and recusancy. Protracted legal proceedings ensued during which Fielder was advised by his solicitor Edward Barber, a London cloth-drawer whose Baptist church sometimes met at a “great house” in Bishopsgate Street. Barber’s own experience at the hands of the Court of High Commission for denying infant baptism and payment of tithes followed by 11 months imprisonment in Newgate and dealings with the Court of King’s Bench well-equipped him to make the defendant’s case (Edwards, I: 96–7, 104–5; Barber, *Certain Queries* 14; Wright, “Edward Barber” 355–70). Suggestively, Winstanley and the future Digger Henry Bickerstaffe were to represent Fielder in arbitration in February 1649, with the Leveller leader John Lilburne serving as part of Fielder’s legal team (Fielder 2, 4–6; Gurney, *Brave Community* 42, 76–8, 131, 132–3, 134).

I have suggested elsewhere that the outlines, if not the precise moments, of Winstanley’s spiritual journey can be reconstructed with confidence. Beginning in either childhood, adolescence, or some point in adulthood, he was a puritan; then perhaps a separatist; then, it can be inferred, a General Baptist; then he dispensed with the outward observance of gospel ordinances (analogous to a “Seeker”) before falling into a trance sometime between 16 October 1648 and 26 January 1649. Although Winstanley’s puritan and Baptist phases can only be gleaned from reminiscences, they still provide a valuable insight into the evolution of his thought. While we can only speculate when, where, and by whom Winstanley was baptized – probably between autumn 1644 and spring 1648, perhaps in the River Thames at Kingston, or the River Neckinger at Rotherhithe, or the Tower of London moat, possibly by a member of Lambe’s or Barber’s church – the imprint of distinctive General Baptist tenets, especially in his first five publications, is both unmistakable and crucial for understanding the development of his ideas. The influence of Baptist precedents can be seen, for example, in Winstanley’s understanding of apostolic practice and implementation of the doctrine of community of goods (Acts 4: 32), with its striking resemblance to sixteenth-century Hutterite practice in Moravia (Hessayon, “Early Modern Communism” 1–50). It is present in the Diggers’ use of emissaries to spread the good news that they had begun laying the foundations of universal freedom (Matthew 28: 19). And it can also be seen in Winstanley’s beliefs about universal redemption and particular election, not to mention his attitude toward Scripture, divine gifts, Jewish law, ordinances, the Saturday and Sunday Sabbath, tithes, ministers, magistrates, religious toleration, and nonresistance. Taken as a whole it largely positions his early teachings as budding forth from fertile General Baptist soil. Indeed, it is fruitful in some respects to consider the Diggers as an offshoot from the main branch of the General Baptists, with roots going back to the Radical Reformation (Hessayon, “Gerrard Winstanley, Radical Reformer” 87–112).

In this essay I want to build on Gurney’s work as well as my own by locating Winstanley within a milieu that makes his beliefs and subsequent practices explicable. Much of the evidence is circumstantial and necessarily selective. Thus, Winstanley’s onetime companion and fellow Digger William Everard had been a Baptist. Like Winstanley, Everard eventually moved beyond this doctrinal position when he rejected believer’s baptism, gospel ordinances, and the efficacy of prayer. In mid-October 1648 Winstanley defended him in print from accusations of blasphemy following Everard’s imprisonment by the bailiffs of Kingston. Moreover, just before digging began on St George’s Hill, Everard was charged with interrupting a church service at Staines, Middlesex, in a threatening manner, shaking an agricultural tool at the minister and calling

him a son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2: 3; Hessayon, “Everard, William”). Everard may also have been involved in a dramatic incident at Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, about mid-February 1649 when six soldiers reportedly entered the church after evening service, one claiming to have received a divine command to deliver God’s message. This consisted of five points: that the Sabbath was abolished as an unnecessary Jewish ceremonial law; that tithes were abolished for the same reason; that ministers were abolished as “*Antichristian*” and now replaced by Christ’s Saints whom he enlightened with “*Revelations, and Inspirations*”; that magistrates were abolished, being redundant now that Christ had “*erected the Kingdom of Saints upon earth*”; and that the Old and New Testaments were abolished because Christ had now arrived in glory. At this point he set fire to a little Bible (Walker II: 152–3). Significantly, abolition of the Sabbath, tithes, and ministers together with antiscripturism were all theological positions characteristically if not exclusively maintained, with varying degrees of sophistication, by several General Baptists – notably members of Lambe’s and Barber’s churches.

Then there is Winstanley’s indirect association with Barber through Fielder. It may be noteworthy that Barber, Everard, and Winstanley, along with the Baptist Edmund Chillenden and the Leveller printer William Larnier, had all been apprenticed into the Merchant Taylors – although each to different masters over a period of 20 years in what was a very large London livery company.² Another indirect connection worth mentioning may have been with the physician Peter Chamberlen, who had adopted believer’s baptism about 1648 and was acquainted with Barber (Chamberlen, *Master Bakewells Sea of Absurdities* 3). Chamberlen was also author of *The Poore Mans Advocate* (prefaced 3 April 1649), a work acquired by the London bookseller George Thomason the day before he dated his copy of the Diggers’ first published manifesto, *The True Levellers Standard Advanced: Or, the State of Community Opened, and Presented to the Sons of Men* (prefaced 20 April 1649). Chamberlen’s proposals, which were to be discussed by a committee appointed by the Council of State, included – once the State had been satisfactorily recompensed for its losses from Crown and Church estates – granting the poor cultivation and usage of the commons, wasteland, forests, chases, heaths, and moors. Mario Caricchio has discovered that Chamberlen’s scheme was publicized through a broadsheet intended as a petition to be read in parish churches and public places. Signatures were to be deposited with the bookseller Giles Calvert, who was also Chamberlen’s and Winstanley’s publisher. They would be collected by Richard Maidley – assumed, although the evidence is not conclusive, to be the Surrey Digger of that name (Chamberlen, *The Poore Mans Advocate* 47–9; *The Humble Petition of Officers and Souldiers*, brs; Caricchio, “*News from New Jerusalem*” 69–70; CWGW II: 450).

Chamberlen’s solution to England and Wales’ critical agrarian problem somewhat resembles another petition, circulated in London and its surroundings in mid-February 1649 and subsequently presented to the House of Commons, calling for opening up common land to the poor that had been “wrongfully enclosed.”³ It has also been compared with John Jubbes’ scheme of December 1648 to prevent famine and provide for the poor by enclosing marshes, fens, and common pastures, apportioning a quarter to the indigent of those parishes in which such land was situated (Jubbes, *Several Proposals* 9; Jubbes, *An Apology* 13; *The Moderate* 42 (24 April–1 May 1649): 481; Brailsford 433–4). A Norfolk-bred Parliamentarian army officer influenced by the preaching of John Saltmarsh (Sir Thomas Fairfax’s recently deceased chaplain), Jubbes’ proposal formed part of a modified version of the *Agreement of the People* issued with the support of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen,

and Common Council of London and later summarized in *The Moderate*. Although not a Leveller himself, Jubbes had spoken at the Putney debates (28 October–11 November 1647) (Jubbes, *An Apology* 2, 7, 19; Brailsford 304, 357–8; Baker and Vernon, *Agreements of the People* 6–7.). So too did some soldiers who were already or subsequently became Baptists – William Allen, Chillenden, Richard Deane, Robert Everard, and perhaps also John Rede,⁴ while Collier had preached a sermon taken from Isaiah 65: 17 on *A Discovery of the New Creation* at army headquarters, Putney, on 29 September 1647. Indeed, historians have rightly emphasized support among Baptists and future Baptists – mainly General rather than Particular Baptists – for various versions of the *Agreement of the People* with its demands for religious toleration and the abolition of tithes; notably by Barber, Collier, Henry Danvers, Robert Everard, Jeremiah Ives, Lambe, Oates, Richard Overton, and John Vernon (Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints* 170–1; Wright, *The Early English Baptists* 203, 204, 207, 210–1). In addition, Denne was associated with the army mutiny of May 1649 (considered a Leveller revolt by several contemporaries), infamously renouncing his former principles to save his life, while Rede was likewise charged with assisting the Levellers' cause at this dangerous time (Denne, *The Levellers Designe*; Bayley 344–5). Given this widespread Baptist involvement in political agitation it would be interesting to speculate on the role played by individual Baptists in promoting the published declarations circulated on behalf of the “well-affected” of London, Southwark, and several counties – especially in light of the well-known affinities between three pamphlets emanating from Buckinghamshire and the Diggers' declaration of April 1649.

Besides Winstanley's social network and the Baptist background more generally, the Diggers imitated the Baptist churches in March 1650 through their use of authorized emissaries. As well as encouraging people to cultivate common land, these messengers solicited donations for a common treasury from among the “well-affected” of the southern and midland counties. Although evidence survives for only one journey undertaken by two men encompassing 34 named stopping-places (the majority in Buckinghamshire), it appears that despite their meandering route, the Digger agents traveled through areas where they expected to be well received. These included at least nine towns and villages with either an existing Baptist presence or else Baptist churches that would be established during the 1650s.⁵ Among them were Bedford, where about 1650 an open membership separatist congregation was formed, and Fenstanton and Warboys, where Denne had founded General Baptist churches. The Warboys church book even records the Diggers' activities on the “commons and heath-grounds” together with Winstanley's prophecy that “Israel must go free,” recalling that in 1650 the Baptist churches began listening too much to the “errors” of “Diggers, Levellers, and Ranters ... insomuch that several churches were so shaken that most of our Christian assemblies were neglected or broken up” (Underhill 269–70).

Perhaps even more compelling than this circumstantial evidence, however, are the marked similarities between a number of Winstanley's ideas and corresponding features of Baptist thought. It is to these we now turn.

Community of goods

Communal ownership of property and belongings was a controversial if ancient doctrine that subsequently became a distinguishing feature of some early and medieval Christian

heresies as well as specific Protestant sects, who envisaged themselves as communities imitating apostolic practice. Yet once Anabaptists seized the town of Münster in 1534, proclaiming it the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21: 2), abolishing private ownership of money, forcefully establishing community of goods and then polygamy, that place became synonymous with community of all things – not to mention sectarian anarchy. In consequence, having all things common was condemned by sixteenth-century Protestant reformers like Heinrich Bullinger, Jean Calvin, and John Ponet as a foul doctrinal error maintained by fantastical spirits who perverted scripture to serve their madness. Consequently, the principle of community of goods, despite scriptural sanction (Acts 2:44–45, 4:32), was condemned by the 38th of the 39 articles of the Church of England (1563) as a false boast of certain Anabaptists – notwithstanding that every Christian man ought to give alms liberally according to his ability. Indeed, among the intolerable Baptist doctrinal errors consistently enumerated by heresiographers were the notions that a Christian man could not in good conscience have possessions but must make “all things common,” and that he was permitted to have “*many wives*” (Pagitt 13, 24).

Rather than fading from collective memory the stigma of Münster lingered, revived through print as a cautionary atrocity story. Published as warnings against introducing religious toleration in England, these pamphlets paralleled the infamous exploits of Thomas Müntzer and Jan of Leiden with contemporary events to highlight the threat to Church and State from Anabaptism, which was compared to a contagion, canker, or gangrene that had infected several limbs of the body politic and was spreading to its heart. The danger of guilt by association was not lost on the General Baptist Richard Overton who recognized the calumny that awaited if the struggle for liberty of conscience failed: “*for who writ the Histories of the Anabaptists but their Enemies?*” (Overton, *Araignment of Mr. Persecution* 20). Furthermore, following the linkage made by heresiographers between having all things common, polygamy and the abolition of both private property and personal possessions, the Leveller leadership was forced to issue conciliatory public statements that communism had no place in their political program.

Perhaps aware of this dark history and the danger of guilt by association Winstanley envisaged his little group as both a spiritual and temporal community of love and righteousness; members of Christ’s mystical body living in the last days before the destruction of Babylon and coming of the Lord, The King of Righteousness, who would remove the curse placed upon the Creation and make the earth a common treasury. Indeed, while the Diggers welcomed newcomers that would willingly submit to their communal precepts, Winstanley thought that only those who had undergone an illuminating spiritual transformation could willingly dispense with their possessions and have all things common. Yet Winstanley was also careful to stress that his notion of community did not extend to sharing women. Accordingly, he distanced himself from the perceived sexual excesses of the Ranters, condemning their conduct as carnal rather than spiritual. This emphasis on morality links the Diggers with other religious groups who emerged during the English Revolution, notably the Behmenists and Quakers.

Universal redemption and particular election

While Baptists agreed that there was no scriptural justification for infant baptism, they remained divided on several important theological questions – especially the

schismatic issue of whether Christ died for the sins of all mankind or whether only the elect were to be saved by God's free grace and mercy (Romans 9: 11–13). Although denominational alignments did not harden until arguably autumn 1644, there were on the one hand followers of Calvinist doctrine who believed in the "particular Election and Reprobation" of individuals (Particular Baptists), and on the other essentially maintainers of core Arminian or Remonstrant tenets who, while usually accepting particular election and denying free will, nonetheless taught the "Universal Love of God to all" and thus the possibility of universal redemption (General Baptists) (Howard, *A Looking-Glass for Baptists* 5–6; Crosby, *History of English Baptists* I: 173–4).

If Winstanley was referred to at all by the beginning of the eighteenth century then it was not only as a claimed forerunner of Quakerism, but also as a believer in universal salvation. Accordingly, Winstanley's *The Myserie of God, Concerning the Whole Creation, Mankinde* (1648) was cited by Richard Roach, rector of St Augustine, Hackney, as an example of a Universalist tradition that stretched back to Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa (Roach, "Preface"; Apetrei 228). The London bookseller John Denis the elder, whose son and namesake owned a copy of Winstanley's *Law of Freedom*, added works by Theaurau John Tany, Richard Coppin, and William Erbery to this catalogue of authors who had written in apparent support of the doctrine of universal restoration (Denis's catalogue 36, no. 885; Denis, "Preface" to *Restoration of All Things xxxiii–iv*). Even so, Winstanley's views were more complex than posthumous inclusion in this list suggested. For in *The Myserie of God* he actually advocated a heterodox marriage of universal redemption with particular election. Acknowledging potential contradictions with this seemingly irreconcilable combination, Winstanley explained that sinners would endure a finite period of punishment – but certainly not Purgatory as taught by the Catholic Church – before their ultimate salvation (CWGW I: 266, 269–70, 286–8, 289; cf. Rabisha 30).

Winstanley's belief in universal redemption, it must be emphasized, was considered a doctrinal error, one that from 2 May 1648 was punishable by imprisonment if disseminated – which may explain why the first edition of *The Myserie of God* has an undated preface and bears no publisher's imprint (Firth and Rait I: 1135). Furthermore, and crucially, Winstanley was not unique in simultaneously maintaining universal redemption and particular election. On the contrary, as the eighteenth-century Baptist historian Thomas Crosby was to observe, Lambe had previously endeavored at "the reconciling of particular election, with universal redemption" in *A Treatise of Particular Predestination* (1642) (Crosby III: 56–7). Here, Lambe declared that "Christ's dying for all, and particular Election" stood together; "there is no contradiction betwixt these two, but a sweet concord". Beginning with a defense of particular predestination, he proceeded with a response to several objections by suggesting that election was an additional means of making some believe in Christ besides redemption (Lambe, *A Treatise of Particular Predestination* A2v, Bv-B2, B2v). Lambe returned to this subject about three years later in a defense of his London church entitled *The Fountaine of Free Grace opened* (1645; 2nd ed., 1648), denying that the "doctrine of Christ's dying for all" was contradicted by God's election of "some persons before the world began" (Lambe, *The Fountaine* 21–2).⁶ This published vindication of his congregation from the "scandalous aspersions of holding free-will, and denying a free Election by Grace" was issued shortly after Lambe had reportedly preached the "Arminian" doctrine of "universal Grace" before a "mighty great" audience at St Benet Gracechurch. It did not, however, prevent

Edwards from subsequently attacking Lambe's church. (Lambe, *The Fountain* title page; Edwards I: 92).

In *Gangraena* (1646) Edwards raged that all members of Lambe's congregation preached "universal Redemption" (Edwards I: 92). Denne, a "great Antinomian" and "desperate Arminian," allegedly often preached the doctrine that the everlasting Gospel (Revelation 14: 6) was to believe that Christ died for all, for Judas as well as for Peter, even for Muslims and pagans; "and that all the sins of men committed against the Moral law, were actually forgiven and pardoned when Jesus Christ shed his blood" (Edwards I: 26, 49 [mispaginated], 76–7, 181–2). Similarly, Oates preached against the doctrine of "Gods eternal Election and Predestination" and was later charged with perverting Scripture to support his contention that "Christ dyed for all and ev^ry man" (Edwards I: 92–4; II: 10; Betteridge 208).

Then there was Mrs Attaway, said to be a lace woman. She too reportedly preached "many dangerous and false" doctrines, including that because God was good he would not damn his own creatures eternally, that "there shall be a generall Restauration, wherein all men shall be reconciled and saved," and that "Christ died for all." Moreover, even through Edwards's hostile filter there is a striking anticipation of Winstanley in Attaway's apparent belief that "there was *Esaus* world and *Jacobs* world; this was *Esaus* world, but *Jacobs* world was comming shortly, wherein all creatures shall be saved." For Winstanley envisaged Jacob and Esau as types. Esau's dominion was supported by university-trained clergymen and public preachers, "false Teachers" and betrayers of Christ. Conversely, Jacob would sweep away "all the refuge of lies, and all oppressions" to "make the earth a common treasury." Indeed, Attaway again preceded Winstanley in declaring that a prophet would:

come forth to preach this new Doctrine of generall Restauration and Salvation of all; and though all should be saved, yet there should be degrees of glory between those that have been Saints (they should be more glorious) and those who were the wicked, though now restored. (Edwards I: 87; III: 26–7; cf. *CWGW* I: 501–2, 511–2, 550, 564)

Given the physical proximity before mid-February 1646 of Lambe's church to John Goodwin's gathered congregation (the former was then located in Bell Alley, off Coleman Street, the latter in nearby St Stephen's church on Coleman Street), it is unsurprising to learn of a member of Goodwin's church attending out of curiosity a Sunday evening meeting at Lambe's where he "reasoned the possibility of men to be saved who are not Elected." Meanwhile at Bishopsgate Street, the question of "whether Christ died for all men" was hotly debated late into the night on 12 November 1645 by about 80 Baptists including members of Barber's church (Edwards I: 94, 104). Mention should also be made here of William Erbery pleading for "universall Redemption," as well as two treatises which may no longer be extant: Timothy Batte's *A True Vindication of the Generall Redemption of the Second Adam* (1645) and Jubbes's *The Water of Life or the True Way to General Salvation* (1652) (Edwards I: 35; III: 90; *Bibliotheca Uffenbachiana* I: 861, no. 51(4)).

While it is possible, of course, that Winstanley's heterodox conjunction of universal redemption with particular election had been developed independently, it is far more likely that it evolved through a process of listening to a member of Lambe's

church (perhaps Lambe himself when evangelizing in Guildford or elsewhere in Surrey on the London-Portsmouth road), reflection, discussion, and literary expression. And since Winstanley only cited scripture in support of this doctrine (as was his usual practice), this reinforces the impression of hearing rather than reading.

Scripture

In an address to the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge and all those calling themselves ministers of the Gospel at the front of *Truth Lifting Up Its Head above Scandals* Winstanley declared that regardless of their ability to render Hebrew and Greek into English, scholars and clergymen did not possess the original Scriptures as written by the Prophets and Apostles – merely copies of questionable accuracy. Consequently, their contradictory translations, inferences, conjectures, and doctrines were akin to a savage beast ripping asunder the Gospel, whose inner truth could not be apprehended through corrupt flesh but be judged only by the Spirit of the risen Christ, which was now spreading through his sons and daughters (*CWGW* I: 409-10). Within the main text Winstanley adopted a catechetical format, explaining that the Gospel was God the Father himself whereas the Scriptures contained only testimonies of his appearance to comfort believers. And in these “latter” days when God was manifesting himself to rule in the flesh of his saints, the writings of the Prophets and Apostles would cease, their validity being superseded by the everlasting Gospel: the Lord himself (*CWGW* I: 429-36).

I argue in a forthcoming essay that during the English Revolution initial objections to an unquestioning adherence to the outward letter of Scripture together with doubts about its salvific potential were, on the whole, reinforced by several interlinked doctrinal positions: the supremacy of the interior spirit over exterior flesh; the supersession of ordinances such as Baptism; seeking and awaiting a return to the primitive Christianity of the Apostles; and belief in the imminent second coming of Christ (*Hessayon*, “Not the Word of God”). It is also significant for our purposes that all the individuals named by Edwards in *Gangraena* whose publicly expressed beliefs included notions consonant with antiscriturism had, with the important exception of William Erbery, voluntarily undergone believer’s baptism.

Thus, many members of Lambe’s congregation were accused of slighting the Scriptures (*Edwards* I: 94). Oates, for instance, was charged with asserting that “y^e old Testam[en]^t is nul’d, and they y^t preach it or alleadg it, are Moses disciples, not Ch[ris]ts” (*LJ*, ix: 571; *Betteridge* 208). Collier, who had likewise been active in Surrey, maintained that the Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible was undoubtedly corrupt since Papists had preserved and transmitted copies of the original. Given that the Papacy had probably perverted the earliest version and that several Greek copies contradicted each other in particular places, he advised his fellow self-regarding saints to place their faith in God, through whom Scripture’s glorious inner truth would be revealed to their spirit (*Collier*, *A General Epistle* 30–9). Then there was Thomas Webbe, who reportedly said that the Scriptures were the “golden-Calf and brazen-Serpent” that had set the King and Parliament at variance. Only when these idolatrous objects had been dashed to pieces would the divisions that had rent the kingdom asunder be healed. Furthermore, Webbe allegedly claimed that the Scriptures were nothing but a man-made tradition, whose authority was purposefully sustained by a parasitic clergy that derived their livelihood

from the monopoly they exercised over its interpretation. (*LJ*, vii: 71, 80–1; *Edwards I*: 54, 74–5; *II*: 138).

Equally heinous were the teachings disseminated in print by Lawrence Clarkson. His first pamphlet, *The Pilgrimage of Saints* (1646), contained several inflammatory passages “highly derogatory to the Scriptures.” These included Clarkson’s apparent assertion that the Bible was not the word of God but a human invention. Accordingly, regardless of the authenticity or otherwise of the original manuscript or indeed the English translation’s accuracy, the Scriptures had no authority as a guide to Christian conduct (*Edwards I*: 18, 19, 29, 73, 127; *II*: 7, 165–6). In the same vein, surgeon John Boggis was accused of wishing “he had not known so much of the Bible” which was only paper (*Edwards II*: “To the Christian Reader,” 161–3). A final example is Clement Wrighter, whom Edwards denounced as an arch heretic, fearful apostate, antiscripturist, skeptic, and atheist. Wrighter had been an Independent, General Baptist and associate of Lambe. According to Edwards, he asserted that there was no Gospel, no ministry, nor faith unless anyone could demonstrate that they had been called to the ministry in the manner of the Apostles. Wrighter, moreover, was said to have affirmed in conversation that:

the Scriptures are not the Word of God, neither in the Translation, not yet in the Original tongues, so as to be an infallible foundation of Faith; that the Scriptures are writings only probably to be believed as the Story of *Henry* the Eighth. (*Edwards I*: 81–3; *III*: 136)

The Saturday and Sunday Sabbath

Profanation of the Sabbath was a serious matter during the English Revolution. Indeed, the “Book of Sports” – a royal initiative encouraging traditional Sunday pastimes outside the hours of divine service – was publicly burned on 10 May 1643 at Cheapside. What is more, according to the provisions of an Ordinance of 8 April 1644 traveling and laboring on the Sabbath were punishable by 10 and 5 shilling fines, respectively (*Firth and Rait I*: 420–2).

Unlike some prominent separatist and Baptist Judaizers (Christians who adopted selected Jewish customs and religious rites), and despite himself exhibiting Judaizing tendencies, Winstanley was no defender of the Saturday Sabbath. But whereas he regarded the Jewish Sabbath as a type, as an outward observance practiced one day in seven by Jews that prefigured what Christians would “perform in the substance,” he insisted that keeping Sunday holy had not been achieved by force. Rather, it was a “voluntary act of love” among the Apostles who had tasted the “day of Christ.” Consequently, Winstanley rebuked ministers for enforcing observance of the Sunday Sabbath with the magistrates’ power, endeavoring to compel people “to keep that day after the manner of the Jewish tipe.” With this context in mind, the actions of five Diggers who began cultivating the earth on St George’s Hill one April Sunday takes on extra significance since this appears to have been a confrontational gesture. Certainly, this unashamed Sabbath breach echoes Jesus’ teaching that it was lawful to do good on Sabbath days (Luke 6: 5–10), and chimes with Winstanley’s conviction that Saints

filled with the indwelling Christ were not bound by outmoded forms of Jewish worship but liberated from weekly Sabbath observance (*CWGW* I: 161, 288–89, 449, 451). Moreover, there are suggestive antecedents and parallels.

Thus, in 1627 the supposed Familist and one-time Putney resident John Etherington was publicly humiliated and pressured to recant certain blasphemous opinions, including that the Sabbath day “was of no force” since the Apostles’ time and that every day “is a Sabbath as much as that which we call the Sabbath day” ([Denison 33–4](#)). More recently Byfield had denounced anti-Sabbatarians from a Kingston pulpit, accusing them of perverting the fourth commandment by teaching the Sabbath to be a ceremonial rather than moral law ([Byfield 20](#)). Similarly, one of the numerous doctrinal errors enumerated by Edwards was anti-Sabbatarian, namely that all days “are alike to Christians under the new Testament, and they are bound no more to the observation of the Lords day, or first day of the week then to any other” ([Edwards I: 30](#)). Among Lambe’s church were three women who worked as “gold and silver wyre drawers” who regularly practiced their craft on Sundays, reportedly claiming they recognized no Sabbath since “every day was alike to them” ([Edwards I: appendix, 124](#)). Oates too was charged with maintaining that “there is no Saboath to be observed, but all dayes are alike,” while Collier went so far as to deny the “Morality of the Sabbath” in conference with Edwards ([LJ, ix: 572](#); [Betteridge 208](#); [Edwards III: 29, 41](#)). In the same vein, on New Year’s Day 1645 an unidentified army surgeon – perhaps Timothy Batte – preaching on Colossians 2: 16–17 in the West Country declared the Sabbath was “not to be observed.” Privately he allegedly asserted in conference with a minister that “there is no Sabbath to be kept since Christs fulfilling the Law, since no command for it in the Gospel” ([Edwards II: 152–3](#)).

Tithes and anticlericalism

With the outbreak of Civil War in England, removal of church courts and sequestrations, resistance to the collection of tithes, hitherto sporadic, became widespread. On 8 November 1644, Parliament issued an Ordinance authorizing Justices of the Peace in certain circumstances to commit defaulters to goal. Opposition to the forced maintenance of ministers, however, grew fiercer. Thus, Lilburne, then a member of Edmund Rozier’s Independent congregation, asserted that tithes were a Jewish ceremonial law that had been abolished with Christ’s death on the cross ([Lilburne, *Englands Birth Right Justified* 13](#)). At the same time Overton denounced ministers as a covetous, “ravening greedy generation,” contrasting them unfavorably with primitive Christians who provided for the poor. Accordingly, he publicized the “abundance of Poore, Fatherlesse, Widdowes, & c.” starving in every parish, urging voluntary contributions as an alternative ([\[Overton\], *Ordinance for Tythes* 22](#)). Overton’s *Ordinance for Tythes Dismounted* (1645) was shortly denounced by Edwards together with other works fulminating against tithes as “Antichristian, Jewish, Diabolical, the root and support of Popery.” Indeed, Edwards counted as doctrinal errors the beliefs that tithes were “unlawfull, Jewish and Antichristian” and that ministers of the gospel “ought to work with their hands.” He also provided several examples of those preaching against tithes, including Denne, William Dell, and a famous but unnamed Baptist of Coventry ([Edwards I: 30, 76](#); [II: 12, 22](#); [III: 21, 32, 38, 46, 69, 81, 96, 98, 175, 219](#)). To these can be added William Walwyn, Clarkson, Oates, Collier, Chamberlen, and Barber

(Walwyn 178–9; Clarkson, *A Generall Charge* 9; *LJ*, ix: 573; Betteridge 209; Collier, *A Brief Discovery* 4–9; Chamberlen, *The Poore Mans Advocate* 6; Barber, *The Storming and Totall Routing of Tithes*). Against this backdrop, petitions were organized and presented to the Lord Mayor of London and House of Commons urging the removal of burdensome tithes, arguing they were a Jewish ceremonial law abrogated with the coming of Christ.

Winstanley too reproved the clergy for enforcing the collection of tithes through the magistrates' power, despite lacking justification in either "Reason" or "Scripture." (*CWGW*I: 161, 176, 438, 451; II: 195). Condemning the "selfish tyth-taking" preachers and all others that preached for hire, he compared their covetousness to Judas, betrayer of Christ (*CWGW*I: 517, 528, 557). This hostility to tithes was, moreover, of a piece with the anticlericalism that pervades Winstanley's writings. Criticizing the clergy's unwarranted monopoly on preaching together with those proud scholars who were preventing humble fishermen, shepherds, husbandmen, and tradesmen – latter-day Apostles – from speaking about their spiritual experiences and revealing divine truths, Winstanley denounced preaching as a trade (*CWGW*I: 174–75, 180, 183–84, 317–18, 324–5). Subsequently, he condemned 10 outward ordinances whose observation he considered unwarranted, including preaching not from inward experience but knowledge gained through hearing, reading, and studying; expounding Scripture for financial gain; compelling people to attend church services through misusing the magistrates' power; and persecuting the "Spirit within" that had made Moses (a shepherd), Amos (a fruit gatherer), the Apostles (fishermen), and Christ (a carpenter) preachers (*CWGW*I: 437–38, 446, 449–52).

Once again there are significant antecedents and parallels. For example, in the wake of a Parliamentary Ordinance against lay preaching (26 April 1645), Clarkson justified the practice by highlighting the lowly occupations of Christ and his disciples, comparing a carpenter, fishermen, and tentmakers with humble tradesmen (*Firth and Rait* I: 677; Clarkson, *Truth Released from Prison* B4^{r-2}, B4^{r-3}). Similarly, in a justification of *Preaching without Ordination*, prefaced at Kingston on 20 August 1647, Chillenden declared that God was no respecter of rank. He disposed the free gift of his spirit to whom he pleased, upon a cobbler, tinker, chimneysweep, ploughman, or any other tradesman as much as "to the greatest learnedst Doctors in the world" (*Chillenden* 6). Collier too invoked the carpenter, fisherman, and tentmaker, excoriating those clergymen who arrogantly dismissed the scriptural interpretations of laborers as men of no breeding and little learning; "when poor tradesmen, Cobblers, Taylers, Tinkers, Plow men, Carpenters, all sorts of men shall preach the everlasting Gospel, with so much light, life, and power," who then would buy the wares of clergymen? (*Collier, A Brief Discovery* 11, 19). For Wrighter there was no ministry because the clergy could not demonstrate their calling, as had the Apostles. Consequently, ministers laid false claim to authority and orthodoxy, publicly charging those that dissented from them "in doctrine or practice to be Heterodox, erroneous persons, Sectaries, Schismaticks, Blasphemers, or Hereticks" (*Edwards* I: 82; *Wrighter* 27–9). Oates went further: ministers were "Anti Christian Preists, periured p[er]sons" (*Betteridge* 208).

Nonresistance

During the sixteenth century certain Anabaptist individuals and groups (notably Menno Simons, some Swiss Brethren, and Hutterites), along with the Polish Brethren and

English Familists, became notorious as advocates of nonresistance. Accordingly, nonresistance was implicitly rejected by the 37th of the 39 Articles and denounced as a foolish Anabaptist misinterpretation of scripture. English heresiographers and controversialists, moreover, long sustained the association between Anabaptism, pacifism, and nonresistance – although these same critics admittedly gave greater attention to Anabaptist acts of violence. Indeed, for all their doctrinal disputes the majority of English Baptists were not pacifists, a number serving as soldiers and chaplains in Parliament’s armies during the Civil Wars.

Against this backdrop Winstanley’s feelings about using violence – it is noteworthy that he did not fight in the Civil War – stand out. Disapproving of weapons which would destroy yet “never build up” and peacefully expecting the fulfillment of the prophecy that “*swords shall be beaten into plough irons*” and “*spears into pruning hooks*” (Micah 4: 3), he informed readers of *The New Law of Righteousnes* that “all these wars,” “killing one another,” and “destroying Armies” were but “the rising up of the curse” under whose burden the Creation groaned (Romans 8: 22) (CWGW I: 505, 526–27, 545).

Afterwards, in *The True Levellers Standard Advanced*, the Diggers lamented the maintenance of tyrannical oppression by death and destruction. Instead, they declared their willingness to accept martyrdom, to offer their blood, and, unarmed, sacrifice their lives to promote “universal Liberty,” trusting the Lord of Hosts to deliver them from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 6: 5–6), “*not by Sword or Weapon*” but by his “*Spirit*.” (CWGW II: 2, 6, 9–10, 20). Accounts of their activities confirm that these were not hypocritical empty words since the Diggers would neither fight nor defend themselves by force of arms, submitting meekly to authority. Furthermore, there were several instances when they responded to violence with nonresistance. Indeed, despite enduring “*Remarkable Sufferings*” brought about by the “*great red Dragons power*” (Revelation 12: 3), Winstanley remained unbowed (CWGW II: 146–47). Victories obtained by the sword were victories of the murderer, of the kind one slave got over another. But now there was striving in England against “the Lamb, the Dove, the meek Spirit” and “the power of love.” And though his enemies still fought with weapons like the “Sword of Iron,” Winstanley warned that they would perish with them. For armed with the “Sword of the Spirit which is love,” he regarded himself as a soldier of Christ engaged in a spiritual battle: “Dragon against the Lamb,” “the power of love against the power of covetousnesse” (CWGW II: 61–62, 91, 97–98, 132–33).

This examination of the Baptist context is not meant to provide a universal explanation. By focusing on the Baptist aspects of Winstanley’s social network, on Baptist forerunners and analogues, as well as the distinctive hallmark of Baptist thought in his writings and activities, it necessarily excludes other personalities and influences. Moreover, appreciating the Baptist background alone does not account for Winstanley’s subsequent trajectory. But if it does not enable us to predict where he was heading, it at least affords us a glimpse of where he was coming from.

Some unanswered questions remain. First, why is there so little surviving evidence concerning Winstanley’s Baptist phase; second, why does he refer only fleetingly to having been a Baptist; third, why does he not quote from, or apparently allude to, the writings of his former coreligionists? The first may simply be chance. Had Edwards written a fourth part of *Gangraena*, had he more Surrey-based informants, then a few

more fragments might have been added. The second is perhaps because Winstanley had moved beyond observance of outward ordinances when he began writing, so may have considered it unnecessary to dwell on his past beliefs. The third, however, requires some discussion.

In *The New Law of Righteousnes* Winstanley declared that what he had spoken of had not been “received from books, nor study” but had instead been “freely” received. At first glance it might be tempting to take Winstanley’s meaning as an artless assertion that everything he had proclaimed thus far had been by direction of the Holy Spirit. Yet that would be a mistake. For in the same work he relates how during a trance he had heard the words “*Worke together. Eat bread together.*” The impression that he was referring here specifically to digging as a divinely inspired venture is reinforced by his powerful preface to *Several pieces gathered into one volume* (20 December 1649), where he insisted “all that I have writ concerning the matter of digging, I never read it in any book, nor received it from any mouth.” Indeed, in *The Breaking of the Day of God* (1648) Winstanley stated that his scriptural exegesis derived from reading books, notably John Foxe’s widely circulated Protestant history of the English Church, *Actes and Monuments of matters most special and memorable* (popularly known as *The Book of Martyrs*). Elsewhere he cited the legal commentaries of Sir Edward Coke, adopted and developed the notion of a “Norman Yoke” in his Digger writings, used the phrase Machiavellian cheats, quoted proverbs, and perhaps invented some of his own. Winstanley may also have been familiar with an edition of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, with Francis Bacon or popularizations of his philosophy, and with Anthony Ascham’s *Of the Confusions and Revolutions of Government* (1649). In addition, Winstanley may have had some medical knowledge, perhaps derived from conversations with his mistress and father-in-law, or by consulting their anatomical, herbal, physic, surgery, and natural history books. There are even a few unacknowledged quotations in his writings; one ultimately indebted to a passage in the Essex clergyman John Smith’s posthumously published *An Exposition of the Creed* (1632); another from the second part of Coke’s *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1642) (CWGW I: 98–99, 104, 137, 185, 513, 567; II: 80; [Hessayon](#), “Gerrard Winstanley and Jacob Boehme” 8, 17–18, 28). All of which suggests that, despite his undoubted gift for original thought, Winstanley did not always give credit where it was due.

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Notes

1. All references to Winstanley’s works follow *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, eds. T.N. Corns, A. Hughes, and D. Loewenstein, cited in the text as *CWGW*.
2. [Barber](#) was apprenticed to Thomas Rephall or Rephald of St Benet Fink on 1 July 1611 (freed 16 August 1620); Everard to Robert Miller of Barbican on 14 August 1616;

- Larner in February 1630 (freed October 1637); Winstanley to Sarah Gater of St Michael, Cornhill, on 25 March 1630 (freed 21 February 1638); and Chillenden to George Kendall, button seller of Canon Street on 6 February 1631 (freed 7 March 1637).
3. Subscriptions were to be sent to William Wallis, a hosier dwelling at “The Gun” in Aldgate. See *To the Commons of England*, brs; *The Humble Petition of divers Inhabitants of London*.
 4. “Lieutenant-Colonel Reade” is usually identified as Thomas Reade but Lieutenant-Colonel John Rede was commissioned governor of Poole by Fairfax on 11 November 1647, the concluding day of the debates.
 5. The Digger agents’ itinerary arranged alphabetically by county, with locations of Baptist churches during the 1650s highlighted in bold: **Bedford**, Cranfield, Dunstable, **Dunton**, Kempston (Bedfordshire); Wickham, Windsor (Berkshire); Barton, Colnbrook, North Crawley, Mursley, **Newport Pagnell**, **Stony Stratford**, Wendover, Weedon, **Winslow** (Buckinghamshire); Redbourn, **Royston**, **Watford**, Welwyn (Hertfordshire); **Fenstanton**, Godmanchester, Kimbolton, St Neots, **Warboys** (Huntingdonshire); London; Hanworth, Harrow, Hounslow, Whetstone (Middlesex); Wellingborough (Northamptonshire); Cobham, Putney (Surrey); and “Mine,” possibly a mining camp in Hertfordshire. See Whitley, “Baptist Churches till 1660” 236–54; Gurney, *Brave Community*, 184–5.
 6. This work was attributed to Lambe by Crosby, whose source was one of Lambe’s descendants.

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