

legacies for European memory will be of great value to any Counter-Reformation scholar. Further, Smith's findings about the inherent complexities and dynamism of the exile experience make this monograph interesting to early modern scholars of religious dislocation and confessionalisation more broadly.

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*Hans de Ries. A study in second generation Dutch Anabaptism.* By Cornelius J. Dyck (intro. Mary S. Sprunger). (Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, n.s. 2.) Pp. xxvi + 344 incl. 1 ill. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2023. \$39.95 (paper). 978 1 77873 003 0

*Anabaptist oath refusal. Basel, Bern and Strasbourg, 1525–1538.* By Edmund Pries. (Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, n.s. 3.) Pp. xvi + 460 incl. 1 ill. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2023. \$45.50 (paper). 978 1 926599 76 2

*JEH* (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924000496

Publishing academic books in niche fields has never been easy, so the success of presses catering to such scholarship is critical. For the books under review here, the field is Anabaptist history, and Pandora Press, a small Canadian publisher now directed by Max Kennel, is disseminating works on the subject through its *Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies* series. The books under review are the second and third in the series, while, in full disclosure, the first volume, I am honoured to say, was one of my own.

Both of these studies were originally PhD dissertations: Cornelius J. Dyck's 1962 University of Chicago thesis on the important Dutch Mennonite leader Hans de Ries (1553–1638), and Edmund Pries's 1995 University of Waterloo analysis of Anabaptist oath refusal. In both cases the authors did not immediately revise their theses for publication due to various life challenges. Even so, these works deserve a wider readership, as there has been no monograph produced on De Ries subsequent to Dyck's dissertation, despite the significant scholarship produced on Dutch Anabaptism and Mennonites in the intervening decades. Furthermore, no study on Anabaptists and the oath has supplanted Pries's study, which the founder of Pandora Press, C. Arnold Snyder, describes as 'the definitive and authoritative study' of the subject (back cover blurb).

Both books are therefore valuable on two levels: first, as groundbreaking works of scholarship; and second, as historiographical period pieces. When, for example, Dyck (d. 2014) was completing his dissertation, he was, as Mary S. Sprunger notes in her informative and engaging introduction, pushing against the standard Mennonite interpretation of Anabaptist history that sidelined the dramatic events at Münster in favour of a 'normative' vision of 'pure' Anabaptism as founded by Conrad Grebel in Zurich. Instead, Dyck reintegrated Münsterite Anabaptism into the narrative, as well as the Spiritualism that developed in the wake of Münster's fall in June 1535. In this way, Dyck was a pioneer in the major historiographical shifts to come. His analysis also clearly reveals the creative tension within the Dutch Anabaptist movement between literal fulfillment of scripture prophecy – whether in Münster's short-lived apocalyptic kingdom or in Menno Simons's insistence on a 'church without spot or wrinkle' – and a more creative, flexible

reading that emphasised inner spirituality and love of neighbour. As Dyck reveals, one of De Ries's most important friends was the Spiritualist Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert (1522–90), a prominent voice for religious tolerance whose affirmation of the possibility of spiritual perfection was shared, in muted form, by De Ries. De Ries and his circle of spiritualistic Mennonites preferred to be called *Doopsgezinden* or baptism-minded, since they opposed Menno Simons's severe practice of discipline as well as a few points of doctrine. Dyck argues that De Ries's goal was to promote and procure unity among the 'Baptist' factions, including even English Separatists like John Smyth, although few of his efforts bore long-term fruit. Even so, current research is revealing how the attitude, promoted by De Ries, of focusing on the inner and personal rather than dogma and ritual allowed the *Doopsgezinden* to engage with other nonconformists, such as the Remonstrants, Collegiants and Socinians, and to become incredibly important agents in the development of new approaches to human relations, the arts, philosophy and science. Dyck's study of one of the most important second-generation Dutch Anabaptists who helped in these developments thus (re)appears at a particularly propitious moment.

While Dyck, author of other influential books, never took up his skilled editor's pen to revise his dissertation, Pries has finally done so for his thesis, nearly thirty years after its defence. He has updated some of the arguments, but the work still reflects debates underway in the late 1980s and 1990s about the nature of early Swiss and South German Anabaptism. Reading his book has, in fact, taken me back to when both Edmund and I were doctoral students of Werner O. Packull (d. 2018) at Waterloo, and I have been reminded of the vitality of those debates, and how much remains to be done. Pries's study is, moreover, a remarkable window into the beliefs and attitudes of the Anabaptists who were faced with arrest, interrogation, exile and sometimes execution for their refusal to swear an oath of allegiance to their communities. The book also illuminates the attitude of magistrates and Reformed preachers who vigorously believed that the swearing of such oaths was the glue holding their polities together. To them, refusal of the oath was a betrayal of citizenry.

Pries has organised his impressive study around three regional case studies: Basel, Bern and Strasbourg, each revealing subtle differences in attitude and approach toward Anabaptists by these governments. Here we see Anabaptists under pressure to swear the oath, or at least the *Urfehde* which committed them to obey the command to stay away from the city during their exile. Some of the magistrates allowed Anabaptists to affirm, rather than swear an oath. But the number of cases when Anabaptists broke even those promises and returned to the city revealed the magistrates' central problem: could they trust these Anabaptists, who while committed to obeying Jesus' proscription against swearing of Matthew v.33–7, could not be relied upon to follow even a simple promise to stay away, arguing that the Holy Spirit was directing them in unanticipated directions.

These case studies are preceded by an introductory chapter on the central place of the oath in late medieval German/Swiss society, followed by an exhaustive, and sometimes exhausting, eighty-page treatment of the various arguments made about the oath by Lutheran, Reformed, Humanist and 'Radical Reformer' writers. Since much of the variation among Protestant authors was often miniscule,

this chapter could have benefitted from pruning. That said, the insights that Pries provides into the mentality of urban leaders and preachers in these preliminary chapters, along with his incredibly detailed study of the three city states, reveals much about the dynamics unleashed by the Reformation. Readers can sense the anxiety of civic leaders faced with individuals who refused to perform a hitherto universally accepted ritual of allegiance. At the same time, none of the leaders of Basel, Bern and Strasbourg wanted severely to prosecute these dissenters, and tried over and over to persuade them to see reason. Pries's detailed account helps us to empathise with numerous otherwise unknown Anabaptists confronted with a momentous choice over the oath, since it was a central element of their adherence to following the Jesus of the Gospels. As they debated with learned Reformed preachers, some Anabaptists were convinced by their opponents' logic that the issue boiled down to whether or not the Old Testament was of equal weight to the New. The Reformed said yes, undercutting the Anabaptist argument privileging Jesus' statements over other scripture passages. After debating with Bern's Reformed preachers, the Anabaptist leader Hans Pfistermeyer was convinced by their arguments, becoming a critical agent in the city's efforts to win over the other Anabaptists. Such success, however, was rare.

Following a strong concluding chapter, Pries has included appendices of primary sources from Strasbourg and Basel, along with a 'Prospectus for future research' (which could readily have been merged with the conclusion). Pries's suggestions link his book with Dyck's, for Pries recommends further research into the subject of the oath among North German/Dutch Anabaptists. For example, was the act of baptism in Anabaptist Münster, with its expectations of complete loyalty to the kingdom, not the equivalent of swearing an oath? What about after its fall? Pries observes that with his desire for a fellowship 'without spot or wrinkle', Menno too taught that Jesus' proscription was to be followed to the letter, even if that meant death. He however also requested that the authorities allow his followers to simply affirm, trusting that Anabaptists would keep their word as Jesus commanded; if the Dutch Reformed leaders communicated with their coreligionists in the south on this matter, they may have become sceptical. What Pries does not examine here is the strength of Spiritualism among the *Doopsgezinden* led by De Ries. While conservative Dutch Mennonites maintained Menno's command not to swear oaths in confessions of faith like Pieter Jansz Twisck's 1617 'Thirty-Three Articles', those confessions composed by De Ries took an entirely different tack: in the 1577 Waterlander Confession (translated by Dyck), De Ries condemned 'false oaths' and those using the name of God and the saints, but permitted calling 'upon God as witness to the truth'. This position was quite close to that of their Reformed neighbours, helping to explain why the *Doopsgezinden* integrated so well into their society.

Publishing these volumes has performed an enormous service to scholarship in the field of Anabaptist studies. Doing so using a 'flexible print-on-demand' service means that the typos produced by the scanning software that this reviewer spotted in the Dyck volume have already been corrected by the editor. Given the innovative spirit of Dutch *Doopsgezinden*, this is a fitting technological advance.

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