

Chapter 2

Suffer Little Children

Baptism, Heresy, and the Debates over the Nature of the Child



The sources for a history of medieval childhood are largely fragmentary and indirect, leading too often to kaleidoscopic, "archeological" studies on the subject, studies that collapse time, space, texts, and contexts in order to create a homogenous medieval idea of childhood.¹ Except for the previously studied medical literature, few sources extensively and directly address the issue of the child in twelfth- and thirteenth-century society. But medieval medical writings were focused predominantly on the physical aspects of perinatal care. Such material treated the child literally—that is, as a corporeal entity in desperate need of nourishment. We must look elsewhere, at other, scattered sources to understand the child's moral and metaphoric significances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

One genre in particular offers extensive material concerning the child's moral worth: the antiheresy polemic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These texts first appeared as part of the Catholic reaction to the rise of many new, vocal, and increasingly influential heretical movements from the eleventh century onward. The polemics sometimes purported to document actual dialogues between orthodox and heretical speakers on a variety of contested topics, including the contemporary Catholic practice of infant baptism. In these discussions, we discover an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of medieval childhood: a direct and extensive debate over the child's spiritual and moral characteristics. What began as a dispute over Church ritual quickly became a detailed discussion of the nature of the child, especially his flaws and virtues. The high-medieval Church viewed baptism as the only sacrament available to infants and as the one truly necessary sacrament.² In response to a variety of criticisms, orthodox polemicists were forced to defend both the doctrine of original sin and the legitimacy of the baptizing of infants.

While the practice of infant baptism long predated the late fourth century, it became the most common form of baptism only following the acceptance of Saint Augustine's belief in each person's involvement in original sin. Augustine argued forcefully that infants inherited a fundamentally flawed human nature and that

only through the purifying water of baptism could the stain of original sin be removed. Most importantly, the bishop of Hippo stated that children who die without baptism die in an unclean and sinful state and therefore are not saved. From the fifth century onward, while Augustine's views were gradually being accepted as the theological norm, baptism performed a dual role. It enabled both an entry into the Christian faith and a healing of the spiritual wound of original sin, both actions being necessary for access to heaven.³ However, the baptism of children effected major changes in baptismal practice and theology. That the child could not mentally or physically profess faith necessitated the involvement of a third party in the ritual: the sponsor. The doctrine of the "faith of another," *fides aliena*, underwent frequent attacks in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as it had in the patristic period. Heretics most often cited the infant's inability to profess faith—and their refusal to accept the doctrine of *fides aliena*—as the primary argument against infant baptism. At issue were the nature of childhood ignorance and the problem of acceptable adult involvement in the spiritual life of children.

The polemical literature allows us to reconstruct the medieval concept—actually, concepts—of the child and to locate precisely how and why these concepts mattered. The context of a fight against heresy allows us to explore the ideological purposes behind the effort to examine of the child's nature. In this literature, the child was perceived as radically distinct from the adult, and throughout their texts orthodox polemicists sought to maintain the difference between the two in order to argue all the more forcefully for the necessity of adult involvement in the lives and fates of children. Catholic writers attempted to reconcile two fundamentally opposed views, one positive and the other negative, of the nature of the infant. The child was the model of innocence and humility, and the child was a sinful creature in need of cleansing. The child came to personify weakness, since the newborn was mentally, physically, and morally weak and undeveloped, an incomplete human in danger of being lost forever if allowed to go unbaptized. In fact, the reality of the child's physical fragility often intrudes into the debate over his spiritual well-being. Discussions of, first, his physical weakness and sinful spiritual state and, second, his moral worthiness led to a renewed understanding of the family's role in religion and of religion's role in the family and to a heightened awareness of God's mercy, particularly toward the child in his plan of salvation.

Contexts and Sources: The Rise of Heresies and Catholic Responses

From the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, there arose dozens of heretical groups in western Europe, all of which advocated views that differed

considerably from one another and from orthodox doctrine. Of greatest interest here are the "popular" heresies, so called because they appealed to a considerable number of the laity (and some clergy) eager for reform. In contrast to the more obtuse, learned "academic" heresies of, for example, Peter Abelard or the Porretans, popular heresies tended to apply a highly literal interpretation to Scripture, primarily the Gospels. Accordingly, the heresiarchs and their followers rejected worldly possessions or power and chose to lead lives of apostolic poverty. In this sense, the early heresies reflected the renewed evangelical piety and revival in spirituality among clergy and laity of the twelfth century.⁴

Two primary heretical arguments developed in opposition to infant baptism. The first, advocated by the early twelfth-century heretics, denied original sin and claimed that the infant was innocent and not in need of baptism. This doctrine was based on the Pelagian beliefs that Augustine had opposed in the 410s, and it reflected a positive view of the child's nature. In contrast, the second argument against infant baptism agreed with Catholic theology that the child was sinful—owing not to original sin but to an evil inherent to the material world—and therefore in need of baptism but that he could be baptized only after his own profession of faith. In this, a dualist doctrine based on Manichaean traditions that saw an irresolvable conflict between the pure spiritual realm and the corrupt world of the flesh, the focus was on negative images of the child and of human nature. Orthodox writers were forced to navigate between the two heretical frameworks—neo-Pelagian and neo-Manichaean—and the paradoxical imagery of childhood they evoked.

The advocates of popular heresies of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries tended to be concerned with issues of symbolic or pragmatic intent, such as clerical sinfulness, iconoclasm, and Church ritual. When popular heretics discussed issues that were more abstract, they generally did so in relation to practical matters, as the baptism debates will illustrate. In fact, even in the earliest cases of popular heresy, such as the events surrounding the Council of Arras in 1025,⁵ infant baptism became an important point of controversy between its Catholic defenders and its heretical opponents.

As heretical movements began to increase in number and variety in the 1130s and 1140s, they tended to focus on individual charismatic leaders with localized followings. Itinerant preachers wandered throughout northern and central France and gathered adherents. Followers of Peter of Bruys and Henry of Lausanne, for example, were known respectively as the Petrobrusians and Henricians, after their leaders. Such figures advanced Pelagian arguments against the baptism of children, claiming that it was unnecessary, that children could be saved without it.

Though usually small, the movements attracted attention from several defenders of orthodoxy, who wrote highly rhetorical and ad hominem responses to the heretical leaders.

In the mid-twelfth century, there emerged a new form of heresy, a sect that quickly developed into a well-organized institution opposed to Rome and that was soon to be known as the Cathars. In the modern mind the Cathars, first identified in the West at Cologne in the 1140s, are associated primarily with the south of France, particularly Albi (a town near Toulouse), whence their most common name, the Albigenses. The Cathars were perceived as a highly ascetic and dualist sect that rejected the material world and claimed to represent the true Church. The Cathars of Languedoc were prominent enough to enter into public debates (for example, at Lombers in 1165), to receive censure (by the Third Lateran Council in 1179), and, most famously, to warrant a military campaign that in 1209 received the status of a crusade.

At the same time, other heretical movements arose throughout France and Italy in the later twelfth century. In southern France, there were the Poor of Lyons, known as the Waldenses, after their leader Peter Waldo, who, advocating a renunciation of material goods, promoted reform without resorting to dualist thought. In Italy several groups of heretics appeared. Some (the followers of Hugo Speroni), in Piacenza, preached predestination. Others, in Lombardy, advocated a strict observance of Mosaic law.

In response to these different heterodox movements, advocates of Catholic orthodoxy reacted strongly and created a new genre, the antiheresy polemic, which will form the basis of this chapter. Early examples of the genre often depicted real or imagined debates between a heretic and a Catholic and originated primarily in monastic communities, from the pens of such prestigious abbots as Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable. All of the polemics we possess were Catholic responses to heretical views, of which only a few written sources remain.

The years around 1200 were active ones for heretics and Catholics alike; antiheresy polemics appeared with greater frequency and became highly systematized. Thirteenth-century polemics provided a point-by-point refutation of the heretics' controversial beliefs and took on clear characteristics of scholastic disputation. The turn of the century brought with it a strong awareness of the need for a Catholic response, and Parisian masters, including Alan of Lille and Prepositinus of Cremona, gathered and refuted different heretical views. Even Innocent III entered the fray in his writings and in the decisions that he endorsed during the Fourth Lateran Council. As the thirteenth century progressed,

especially after the Albigensian Crusade, the polemics became increasingly practical, designed for pastoral use, to be employed by Dominican friars after Gregory IX established the Inquisition in the 1230s. The mendicants brought a more coherent Catholic response, and accordingly the polemics became more standardized and programmatic, clearly organized, on the whole, and meant for reference during actual debates or inquisitorial procedures. Despite differences in content, style, and purpose, each of the polemics, from the most passionate diatribes to the most rational and analytical *questiones*, contains a considerable amount of material on infant baptism and, subsequently, helps to define the nature of the child.

For a more detailed discussion of the sources of specific heresies, as well as fuller references, see the [appendix](#)

Negative Views of Childhood: Sin and its Consequences

By the fifth century, the custom of baptizing children, particularly infants, had become the predominant form of the baptismal ritual. Baptism had been transformed from an event performed by the local bishop on Easter, when all catechumens were initiated into the faith, to something more routine, a ceremony performed by the local priest in the weeks after the birth of each child of Christian parents or by a secular Christian (usually the midwife or a parent) at any moment of threat to the newborn's life. The transition of the rite from being one that fell under central episcopal control to one that was a priestly and popular custom occurred slowly over the centuries. That it occurred at all owed mainly to an important shift in the understanding of baptism's primary purposes, a shift heavily influenced by Augustine's theology of sin and redemption.⁶ Always seen as the crucial moment of rebirth and of entry into the Christian faith and community, baptism became inextricably linked to another process of renewal by bringing about a cleansing of original sin. Augustine was far from being the first thinker to discuss the nature of Adam and Eve's transgression and the inheritance of culpability from the first parents, but he was the most articulate. In his anti-Pelagian writings, he invoked the primal sin as his leading argument for the practice of infant baptism.

Seven centuries later, high-medieval Western Christians, living in a society in which almost all were Christian from infancy, had come to associate baptism predominantly with infants and only rarely with adult converts. Consequently, the subjects of the twelfth and thirteenth century debates on baptism were exclusively children and particularly infants. The terminology used to describe them in the sources indicates the primary characteristics that the polemicists

associated with childhood. First, the texts speak of a generic, universal, and theoretical "child" more often than they speak of "children" or "childhood." Baptism was seen as available to all of humanity, old and young, rich and poor, male and female, but, as in the medical literature, the child was generally assumed to be male.⁷

Mind and Body

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century rituals of baptism reflected the Augustinian viewpoint that all humans were inherently sinful. In fact, almost every aspect of the orthodox ceremonies referred to and reinforced a view of the child as intellectually, physically, and morally deficient. All three of these incapacities were, as we shall see, understood to be closely interconnected as consequences of original sin.⁸ The ceremony acknowledged and sought to redress problems that all humans faced as well as problems specific to the child. Exorcism, catechism, chrism, and the vows recited during baptism were all performed as antidotes to—and a recognition of—the child's sinfulness. It was precisely these aspects of the ceremony that, according to the polemicists, were ridiculed by a variety of heretics.

The most common heretical argument against infant baptism concerned an aspect of childhood readily acknowledged by Catholic writers, the child's mental incapacities. Both sides in the debate recognized that infancy posed a unique problem, as the infant was unable to reason. Heretics claimed, and forced orthodox authors to concede, that "infants ... are not able to believe, since their age stands in the way."⁹ A distinction was drawn between infants, who from "an impossibility of nature" (Bernard of Clairvaux) were unable to have faith, and adults, who had attained the "age of believing" (Peter the Venerable). The image of the unknowing child appeared consistently in this literature and was used by heretics and Catholics for diametrically opposed purposes.

In the polemics, the infant's inability to believe constituted only part of a broader incapacity, an intellectual weakness intrinsic to that stage of life. The infant was depicted as entirely ignorant of faith, the sacraments, penance, salvation, and his own culpability in Adam's sin. To dualist heretics, this signified that he was unworthy and unable to receive any sacrament, because an unbeliever, no matter what the reason for his lack of belief, could not be considered a Christian. Fundamental to both Cathar and nondualist heretical arguments against infant baptism was the biblical statement "he who believes and is baptized is saved; he who does not believe is condemned" (*Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit; qui vero non crediderit condemnabitur* [Mark

16:16]). Heretics generally interpreted this strictly and demanded not only the physical-spiritual act of baptism but also a declaration of faith from each candidate. And so the child's inability to believe negated the positive effects of baptism: "Other heretics say that little children have sin, but baptism does nothing for them before the years of discretion, because they do not have faith."¹⁰

Catholic writers agreed with heretics that children were mentally incapable of belief or even of understanding the idea of belief. However, the biblical injunction *Qui crediderit* led orthodox polemicists to one of two arguments: Either children were excluded from the statement or a different concept of belief was to be applied to them. Either way, Catholic writers readily admitted that children presented a unique problem since they were exceptions to the (adult) rule. Alan of Lille suggested that it would be unjust to hold children to the same requirements as adults, and he cited secular legal practices as a parallel: "In civil law, commands are not given to little children and those incapable of discretion (*indiscretis*), but [only] to adults and those capable of discretion."¹¹ Alan looked outside the realm of religious doctrine to rationalize what he saw as a necessary double standard.

In arguing that it was improper to baptize infants, heretics stressed not simply the infant's ignorance but also his inability to learn. They quoted the words of Jesus: "Go out into the world and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Euntes in mundum, Docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sanctus* [Matthew 28:19], hereafter referred to as *Docete*). Again, Cathars interpreted these words narrowly and focused their attention on the primary verb, the imperative *Docete*, "teach." At issue here was the nature of catechism (religious instruction before baptism), the rudiments of which orthodox Catholics taught to the infant novitiate. Heretics ridiculed this practice, asking, "How can they be baptized...who cannot be instructed?"¹² More emphatic yet was the comment of the heretical Passagians, quoted in the *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus, that little children could not be taught "since they do not have the principle of understanding, and so they should not be baptized below the years of discretion."¹³

Orthodox writers responded to these attacks by using as validation of the practice of infant baptism the same mental weakness that the heretics had used to condemn children. Moneta of Cremona in his massive polemic argued that both injunctions, *Qui crediderit* and *Docete*, applied only to those capable of instruction

and to those who could comprehend and "believe the preaching that [they] hear."¹⁴ But this agreement between dualist heretics and Catholics concerning infants' mental incapacities became confrontation when both sides reached precisely the opposite conclusions—the former that children were damned, the latter that children could be saved. As represented in the polemics, heretics sought to include infants in the biblical injunctions and thus to exclude them from heaven, while orthodox writers qualified the injunctions, hoping to show thereby that infants were admitted to heaven.

At the heart of this debate lay the recognition that infants were unable to use reason, one of the basic characteristics that differentiated humans from animals in the divinely created order of things. References to the "years of discretion" or "rational years" indicated a distinction, common in canon and civil law, between adults and those who could not reason: children or fools (the mad and the mentally retarded). The difficulty came in defining precisely the moment when "discretion" developed, some writers arguing for the age of seven, others for the age of puberty, which was generally considered to be twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. Polemicists ignored this debate, mostly because their primary interest was with newborns and infants, well before the age of discretion. In the debate over infant baptism, all agreed that the infant did not have the ability to distinguish right from wrong, to choose to believe, or to desire to be baptized.

Such a recognition left Catholic defenders open to attack on the crucial question of consent: Did the infant want to receive faith through baptism? If humans inherited free will from Adam, then the opportunity to choose to be baptized should be available to everyone, but heretics argued that it was not available to infants because they could neither understand baptism nor express any willingness to be baptized. Orthodox writers responded to this, as they did to many other heretical arguments, by invoking the godparent as mediator. The child's inability to signal his consent did not damn his soul but, on the contrary, demanded the intercession of a human sponsor to procure salvation via baptism.¹⁵ One important argument posited a symmetry between sin and redemption: Just as, owing to the parents' concupiscence, the impotent infant inherited sin (and therefore the possibility of eternal damnation) without his consent, so also without his consent might the infant gain remittance of original sin and win eternal life. The child "asks, wishes, and believes through another."¹⁶ The child's inadequacies were redeemed by the belief of adults; his lack—of faith, consent, and speech—was a void that, to Catholic polemicists, must be filled by others' actions.

In a passage replete with biblical references to childhood, Ebrard de Béthune reflected on this aspect of the child's dilemma by quoting a difficult passage from the Song of Songs: "Our sister is little and has no breasts. What shall we do with our sister on the day when she is addressed [i.e., courted]? If she is a wall, we will build on it a silver bulwark" (*Cantica* 8:8). Ebrard interpreted this passage as a defense of an infant's soul: "Behold, the soul of the nursling [lactantis] is called the sister; she has no breasts—that is, [the soul has no] understanding of either Testament or of either love. In this way we must summon [the nursling] to baptism and bring faith through the godparents—that is, to build a silver bulwark on the wall."¹⁷ In this passage, the girl's body as described in the Song of Songs was assumed to be the soul, and the concern for her future as a nubile young woman who would be courted was assumed to be concern over the fight for that soul. Ebrard's interpretation centered on the child's vulnerability, a weakness here described as simultaneously physical (the prepubescent sister in the *Cantica* quote becomes the nursling), intellectual (ignorance of the Bible), and spiritual (baptism became a defense for the infant's soul, which was otherwise defenseless). The child's incapacity for self-expression became one of the most controversial aspects of the debate.

Polemicists often blurred the distinctions between the infant's mental, physical, and spiritual inadequacies. His inability to speak took on a variety of significances, most obviously as an impediment to the profession of faith in baptism. In the highly influential formulation of Isidore of Seville, the term *infans* etymologically meant "unable to speak" (*fari non potest*). Hence, Moneta of Cremona claimed that Christ himself "calls those who were not able to speak infants."¹⁸ Sounding the theme of speechlessness as helplessness, Ebrard of Béthune quoted from Jeremiah (1:6): "Alas, alas, alas, Lord God, I do not know how to speak because I am a child." God had summoned and reassured the prophet "as a child" (*ut puerum*) in a passage that Ebrard uses to defend the baptism of infants despite their mute nature.¹⁹ Instead of being an impediment to the profession of faith, their inability to speak provided occasion for God to prove his magnanimity and desire to intervene on the newborn's behalf.

In contrast, heretics eagerly adduced the infant's muteness as proof that children should not be baptized. They argued that, since an inability to talk (*nondum loqui*) entailed an inability to answer the officiating priest's question "What do you seek"? (*Quid petis?*), the transaction was null and void. Once again, orthodox writers retorted that the infant's muteness demanded the involvement of a sponsor. Bernard of Clairvaux, in an important and highly emotional passage, suggested that the child at the font actually attempted to answer for himself:

What does it matter if the infant cannot speak for himself, for whom the voice of the blood of his brother—and such a brother—cries out to God from the earth? Notwithstanding, mother Church stands by and cries out. What about the infant? Does he not seem to you to gaze somehow with longing at the fonts of the Savior, to call out to the Lord and to cry out in his squallings, "Lord, I suffer violence; answer for me"? He demands the assistance of grace, because he suffers violence from nature. The innocence of the unhappy one cries out, the ignorance of the little one cries out, the weakness of the bound one [*addicti*] cries out. Thus all these things cry, the blood of the brother, the faith of the mother, the abandonment of the unhappy one, the unhappiness of the abandoned.²⁰

In an elaborate fantasy that evoked and interpreted the realities of contemporary baptism, the child's wailing was made to indicate acceptance of and even desire for the ceremony. Bernard combined the commonplace (a child crying when anointed) with an elaborate symbolism involving intertwining families, earthly and divine. To Bernard the infant's spiritual kin were not the godparents but the Church, in its maternal role, and a fraternal Christ, who in Bernard's antiheresy writings appeared as a young child explicitly compared to the infant at the font (see "Exceptions Prove the Rule: The Worthiness of Children" in section 3, below). The Christ Child and the baptized infant were represented as brothers through a reference to Cain and Abel (the voice of the blood, Genesis 4:10); Christ took on the role of the innocent brother and the infant took on that of the sinner, Cain. Bernard also argued that the child did consent to baptism, and the Cistercian abbot then attempted to support his case by interpreting the motives behind infantile behavior at the font. Bernard gave voice to the infant, turning the youngster's screams into Isaiah's plea (38:14) to God for help. The child here made himself understood without articulating any actual words. In Bernard's fanciful creation, the child was seemingly aware of his own ignorance, weakness, and lack of faith. In contrast to the other polemicists, Bernard claimed that the child knew what he wanted (faith through baptism) but could do nothing for himself. Bernard heavilyhandedly put into the child's mouth the very argument the writer wished to make. The inarticulate nature of the cry reinforced Bernard's (and every other polemicist's) main point: The reality of the child's helplessness should be *prima facie* evidence for the necessity of external assistance.

But orthodox writers for whom the infant's mental and physical inability to speak was essential to their arguments for infant baptism could expect to encounter obstacles and dangers. Some heretics, citing biblical precedents, argued that a minimum of cognitive maturity was crucial to the profession of faith. When Christ healed a blind man (John 9), the Pharisees investigated the

incident and interrogated the blind man's parents, who responded, "He is of age, ask him himself." Ebrard of Béthune claimed that the heretics identified a direct parallel between the blind man and the novitiate in baptism: Both ought to speak for themselves.²¹ Postponement of the ritual would allow the applicant to speak and choose for himself, and thus the Augustinian notion of free will would be reintroduced into the ceremony.

The child's linguistic inadequacies led some heretics to draw the Augustinian notion of free will into their refutation of infant baptism. Bernard's crying nursling notwithstanding, most polemicists admitted that the child did not choose to be baptized. Just as the infant could not understand or speak, so he also could not exercise free will in being baptized. Innocent III addressed precisely this issue in his letter to the archbishop of Arles (1202) when reciting the heretics' argument that little children would receive no benefit from baptism because they lacked three things: "They neither understand nor consent, and they do not have *caritas*, which is amply imparted in those who understand and consent."²² *Caritas*, which to Innocent was a crucial aspect of God's grace, referred to Christian love and the desire to do good works²³ and particularly to the motivation that allowed the pious to understand the difference between good and bad acts and to choose the former. Neither aspect of this dual process (discernment and choice) was possible in the infant, leading heretics, again, to conclude that the natural shortcomings dictated by his immaturity prevented him from escaping the eventual damnation to which he was born.

The skepticism that heretics expressed about the infant's ability to consent and about the quality of his faith led to a variety of orthodox responses. Some orthodox polemicists argued that the infant would later come to believe just as he would eventually learn to speak. Puzzling over the issue of the child's faith, Innocent III took this concept of the child's potential, or future, and incorporated that into a distinction between two types of faith, *fides in usum* and *fides in habitum*. The former applied to adults who have use of faith, the latter to children who have faith through baptism but could not yet exercise it. *Fides* (or *virtus*) *in habitum* referred to the possibility of personal faith in the future, to the potential for change from ignorance to knowledge or faith and from sinfulness to innocence. Like madmen or sleeping men, the child could not believe or choose to believe at the moment but at some future date he would believe, would speak, and would choose.

All the same, heretics criticized and even mocked the orthodox ritual of infant baptism for its failure to acknowledge each novitiate's free will. According to the

Synod of Arras in 1025, one of the earliest responses to the revival of heretical movements, dualist heretics rejected the idea that the faith of others could have any effect on "the little child, who neither wishes nor runs [to be baptized, but is] unaware of faith, ignorant of his salvation and service, in whom there can be no request for regeneration and no confession of faith."²⁴ In the beliefs condemned at Arras and elsewhere, the meager moral, physical, and mental capabilities of the child barred him from baptism. In response, several polemicists noted again that, just as the child did not sin by his own will, having inherited sin from Adam, so could he also have that sin remitted without his free will.

In defending infant baptism, Catholic writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could not ignore the long shadow of Augustine and his theological position on original sin.²⁵ By distinguishing between actual and original sin, Augustinian doctrine argued that every newborn (even every fetus), although unable to commit personal sins, nonetheless inherited the sin of Adam from the moment of conception. But the inheritance had more than merely moral implications; human nature as such was considerably weakened. In fact, original sin was often represented not just metaphorically but even literally as an "infirmity," leading to Eve's pains during childbirth and then to other human physical suffering in adults and children as well. In his public debate with the followers of Henry of Lausanne, the monk William explicitly cited Augustine—rare in this literature, as many heretics rejected the Church Fathers and sometimes the Old Testament—in noting that humanity's "entire constitution was weakened and corrupted in the punishments for his [Adam's] sin."²⁶ The most obvious and, for unbaptized children, the most critical physical consequence of Adam's transgression was thought to be death itself. Consequently the possible death of the child became one of the most emotional arguments for infant baptism.

Whatever its cause, the child's physical weakness underlay many, if not all, of the Catholic arguments for infant baptism. The infant embodied and dramatically magnified the notion of human fragility and physical incapacity. In his *Liber supra Stella* (1235), the secular writer Salvo Burci provided a powerful image of the infant's absolute impotence by drawing an analogy to the paralytic man cured by Christ. "That paralytic who lies on the bed consumed by a great paralysis can well be compared to children, because he likewise cries and laughs, can neither come nor go, is raised and carried like a child. He also can neither eat nor drink, and so food and drink are given to him as to a child."²⁷ We shall later return to the theological importance of Salvo's use of this parallel, but here note the extent to which he emphasized the utter helplessness of the infant/paralytic. Just as Innocent III compared the child (characterized by mental handicaps) to (adult)

madmen and sleepers, so now the child's physical weakness was compared to a mature person's absolute immobility. The infant in both instances was perceived to be anomalous, unfinished, and analogous to those adults who were atypically weak. The same focus on the infant's paralysis appeared in the quote from the early Synod of Arras, in which a parallel between the infant's powerlessness in exercising free will and in performing any physical movement was posited in the formula "[he] neither wishes nor runs." The child's body and his will (*voluntas*) both failed him.

The child's corporeal frailty implicitly and explicitly provided the backdrop for the sense of urgency in baptizing infants. It was fear of infant mortality, a highly dramatic example of human physical weakness, that ultimately argued most forcefully for infant baptism. Many writers mentioned infant mortality only in passing, as an abstract concept to prove a theological point. (See, for example, the most common phrases for it, such as "*si parvulus moritur sine baptismo.*") There was a very strong theological tradition that analyzed precisely this issue, and it predated Augustine. What distinguished certain polemics from the purely theological discussions of the period (Abelard, Peter Lombard, Peter the Chanter, Robert of Courson, Guido de Orchellis) was the occasional explicit acknowledgment of real anxiety over the potential death of the child.

In fact, the antiheresy polemics included several extremely revealing and seemingly heartfelt passages that addressed the issue of contemporary infant mortality. Several polemicists were eager to demonstrate that the theology of infant baptism had important consequences and relevance to twelfth- and thirteenth-century life. In one of his more exclamatory passages, Innocent III provided a brief glimpse of the reality of the child's fragility. In discussing the need to save children's souls, the pontiff remarked, "It is not fitting that all little children, of whom such a large number die daily, should [spiritually] perish."²⁸ The reference to actual infant mortality allowed Innocent to reinforce one of his ideological purposes: to assert the superiority of spiritual life over physical existence, while simultaneously noting that the latter, though fleeting, was necessary in order to obtain the former. The *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus provided a biblical defense of original sin by referring to the transience of the human condition. The polemicist quoted from Romans 6:23 ("the wages of sin are death; however, God's grace [offers] eternal life"), and noted that, "if death is the retribution of sin, then both the small and the great have sin, since no one can evade death, even the one-day-old child."²⁹ Similarly, one heretic, Ugo Speroni, claimed to have found Catholics who argued that God killed children: They argued that "it is necessary to take the greatest care, lest the Lord act before the father

and mother and kill the child before it is baptized."³⁰ Whether or not any Catholics ever actually wrote in such harsh terms, the motivation behind the unusual formulation echoed Innocent's far more orthodox fears that death was an ever present danger. In both cases, the rhetoric of urgency furthered the antiheretical argument.

In direct contrast to the striking idea that God killed and thereby damned unbaptized children, Eckbert of Schönau argued that God had consciously taken precautions to save children: "He commanded that the infant be circumcised on the eighth day, because he knew the fragility of the human body and because it can happen with swift misfortune that a man is destroyed before he arrives at the age of maturity."³¹ God was portrayed here as, instead of stealthily killing infants, creating a safeguard for their spiritual welfare. Throughout his text, Eckbert was preoccupied with the death of infants and even noted that Jewish children could be circumcised before the eighth day "if the danger of death seemed to threaten the little ones" (*si periculum mortis parvulis imminere videbatur*). Later, in perhaps the most surprising admission of the infant's extreme physical frailty, Eckbert cited a "statistic" of infant or at least child mortality: "Surely scarcely one half of [all] humans arrives alive at those days when they can know what to believe and what not [to believe]."³² It was impossible to know with any certainty whether Eckbert was correct in his estimate but, as we have seen in the introduction, recent scholars have suggested a similar number. Like Innocent, Eckbert adduced the frequency of death in childhood as further proof that external assistance—the substitutionary faith of another at baptism—was crucial to ensure the salvation of the souls of children, who were so susceptible to mortality. Whether accurate or hyperbolic, the claim that childhood death was common reflected a pervasive anxiety over the child's future and echoed the twelfth-century concern over the physical and spiritual safety of contemporary children.

The Sinful Child

The weaknesses of children were thought to be not simply intellectual and physical but, as the polemicists repeatedly insisted, also moral. The child's mental immaturity and the child's death were no longer perceived as individual misfortunes but as the site of an extensive soteriological tragedy, primarily because the child was viewed as unclean and therefore in danger of eternal damnation. The early Christian idea of baptism as an initiation ceremony had long since been overshadowed by the ritual's potential to free the child from original sin.

Some heretics, branded by the polemicists as neo-Pelagians, believed that children were not sinners—were not tainted by original sin—and therefore did not need remittance of sin through baptism. While extreme dualist heretics condemned the child, as they did all aspects of the material world, as inherently unclean but particularly unworthy of baptism because of his unbelief, other heretics assumed the Pelagian position against infant baptism, arguing that children were sinless and therefore were already counted among the saved. This forced orthodox writers into the position of defending the existence of original sin and led them to articulate a negative assessment of the moral world of children, an assessment based on an Augustinian view of human nature. For polemicists, childhood appeared to be morally lacking, and so the sinful dispositions of children would justify the practice of infant baptism. In the polemics, the child could not understand faith, choose the right path, or actively approach baptism, but he needed all of these things for salvation because his soul was unclean.

To demonstrate that children did indeed suffer from moral failings, orthodox writers turned once again to Scripture, using the New Testament to prove that all of humanity was iniquitous and using the Old Testament to provide evidence that children in particular were bound by sin. Peter the Venerable combined two of the more famous biblical passages dealing with the inheritance of sin:

Who are they who have not sinned? Does divine scripture not say, "There is no one on this earth who is without sin, not even the day-old child" [Job 14:4, Septuaginta]. Does it not flow from the mouth of that great man into the mouths of all Christians: "Behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins my mother conceived me" [Psalms 50:7]? What, is it necessary to fortify the obvious with many witnesses? Surely no one is without sin if not even the day-old infant nor the infant conceived in his mother's womb is without sin.³³

To Peter, the words of Job and David were patently clear. The child had become a test case for all humans. If the prophets and poets of the Old Testament said that the newly conceived fetus was filled with sin, then everyone must be filled with sin. More importantly, both quotations coincided neatly with Augustinian theology, in which conception was perceived as the moment of transmission, via the parents' concupiscence, of original sin to the child. In his impassioned statement, Peter implicitly noted that, while all were guilty of sin, the child was exceptional in that he could sin only through a passively obtained inheritance.

Orthodox theology of course maintained that infants were not capable of sinning on their own. The idea was echoed by Peter in his attack on the Petrobrusians.³⁴

Their lack of discretion, their inability to distinguish right from wrong, and their inability to deceive or defraud (*doli non capaces*) precluded infants from committing actual sins. Nevertheless, although the infant could not compound his sins, original sin had already tainted his soul. The *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus echoed Psalm 50:7 ("I was conceived in iniquity," cited above) to affirm that little children had iniquity, but it stipulated that the sin was *contractum, non actum*—that is, inherited rather than committed by the children themselves.³⁵ The image of the newborn's unclean soul undermined any notion of childhood innocence advocated by neo-Pelagian heretics. Alan of Lille noted that both the infant's body and soul were corrupted.

Some sources indicated that, if they were unclean, infants must therefore be considered "limbs of the devil" (*membra diaboli*). The practice of exorcism reflected this concern that the devil had possession of every child prior to baptism. The *insufflatio* (blowing in the child's face) and the command that the infant "renounce the devil and all his ceremonies" announced the child's impurity and at the same time were the very measures taken to remove it. In the *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus, the child who was cured of an "unclean spirit" by Christ (Mark 9:16–21) had suffered from the illness from infancy: "That is to say, the devil possessed him from infancy."³⁶ The writer used the Gospel incident to extrapolate from this one sick boy to children everywhere, who must all suffer from a moral sickness. Similarly, Vacarius stated that the "whole infant," not just his soul or body, "has been subjected to servitude to the devil."³⁷ The totality of the child's corruption of body and soul called for commensurate totality of his purification.

The polemicists occasionally discussed the infant's plight as inevitable unless the grace of baptism intervened to turn the limbs—or members—of the devil into the limbs of Christ. Quoting Peter Lombard and, through him, Saint Paul writing to the Ephesians, the *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus stated that "we were all by nature children of eternal punishment, children of vengeance, children of gehenna, children of wrath (*filiis ire*)." Another manuscript of the same *Summa* noted, "If [we are so] by nature, then [we are so] from birth—therefore, when we were little children."³⁸ The Augustinian view of humanity argued that, from the moment of conception, the state of each human's nature led toward damnation and required aid if it were to be wrested from the grip of the devil.

But in the polemics the anxiety over children often explicitly centered on the chance that the infant would not be baptized and therefore would fail to escape damnation. Interestingly, polemicists rarely elaborated on the fate of children who

died before receiving baptism. All of the polemicists were convinced, following Augustine, that unbaptized children would be damned owing to original sin. But at precisely the moment that theologians were beginning to discuss the specifics of that fate and to articulate the idea of the "limbo of children," most polemicists chose to refer to damnation only vaguely, though within the bounds of orthodoxy. It suited their purposes to announce simply and categorically that baptism was necessary to avoid hell.

In one of the most unusual moments in this literature, Vacarius responded to a scenario created by his opponent, the heretic Ugo Speroni: an impossible dialogue between God and a miscarried fetus (*abortivus*, meaning any fetus not brought to full term through intentional abortion or spontaneous miscarriage). Vacarius ridiculed Ugo's fantastic dialogue but gave an orthodox response to the question Ugo had placed in the mouth of the fetus. Although we do not know Ugo's original version of the tale, Vacarius seems to have retained the fetus's question to the Lord: "Why do you damn me? What evil did I do, or what did I fail to do that I should or could have done?" At issue here was the nature of God's justice, a topic we shall address at the end of this chapter. God's imagined response to the fetus emphasized the causes and consequences of Adam's transgression: "Because you are by nature a child of wrath and a child of death, for this I damn you, for you are unclean and therefore cannot be with me. And this is so not by reason of my guilt but by reason of yours, since you have made my agreement invalid through Adam."³⁹ The responsibility for the fetus's damnation was placed exclusively on humanity and did not reflect any injustice on the part of God. To distance responsibility from God, the polemicists focused on the negative view of childhood, on the child as the inheritor of adult moral corruption.

Some writers chose to provide more details about the sad fate of the unbaptized child, recognizing that, though he was lost to heaven, the punishment he would receive was comparatively mild.⁴⁰ It would be unjust, as some thought, that unbaptized children be made to suffer the harsh pains of hell. Among those who wrote about unbaptized children and sought to explain the amelioration of their lot in the afterlife was Peter the Venerable. As the abbot of Cluny saw it, the infant was held accountable only for original sin, which had not been compounded by actual sins, and from that it followed that infants were less culpable than those who had achieved the age of discretion. From the relativity of responsibility it followed that infants would receive preferential treatment. Although guilty of original sin, they could not otherwise offend God. In this taxonomy of transgression, original sin merited less punishment than did actual sins, as noted by the monk William in his debate with the heresiarch Henry of Lausanne (*minori*

pena teneantur).

What was this lesser punishment for unbaptized children? Orthodox writers agreed that they were eternally separated from the faithful and forced into the kingdom of death, as were all who earned damnation. Following Augustinian tradition, Innocent III carefully distinguished between the two categories of punishment: "The punishment for original sin is lack of vision of God; the punishment for actual sin is the suffering of perpetual gehenna."⁴¹ For the infant, punishment was not physical torment but rather reflected his state of incapacity while he was still so near birth; there was a parallel between his inability to speak, understand, act, or choose and his more serious (and eternal) fate, an inability to see what the righteous could—the Lord. Such punishment, a passive absence of the Beatific Vision (in contrast to the active presence of pain felt by the rest of the damned), matched the child's passive inheritance of the sin that doomed him.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, scholastic theology had begun to map out more precisely the landscape of the afterlife and increasingly elaborated the exceptional placement of unbaptized infants. Before Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas had definitively located them in the "limbo of children," Moneta of Cremona suggested that unbaptized infants did not easily fit into the traditional categories: "It is evident that, in judgment, unbaptized children were not among those of whom it is said, 'Come, blessed of my Father,' nor among those of whom it is said, 'Begone, cursed ones,' as the blessed Augustine says, who claims that there is a middle state, just as there is a middle state between doing good and doing evil."⁴² In fact, the bishop of Hippo had emphatically and repeatedly affirmed that infants who died before baptism were to be counted among the damned. Moneta's statement illustrated the shift away from a strict Augustinian view toward some recognition of a need for greater divine clemency. Moneta's belief in an intermediate state between salvation and damnation—a state entirely distinct from the temporary process of purgation—was founded on the understanding that children did not and could not themselves perform evil acts and that therefore they occupied a moral category entirely different from that occupied by adults. Polemicists noted that unbaptized infants, though not worthy of salvation, did not deserve to be placed among the damned.

Notwithstanding occasional differences in opinion concerning the exact fate of unbaptized infants, all the orthodox writers agreed that salvation and communion with God could be attained only through the removal of original sin and that the baptismal ritual was the means of such purification. In their attempts to demonstrate the necessity both of baptism for children and of external assistance

to baptize them, the polemicists created an extensive profile of the infant as morally, physically, and mentally deficient. He was both entirely helpless and desperately endangered. Mute, dumb, sinful, and prone to illness, the infant as identified in this literature became the personification and magnification of human vulnerability.

While the polemicists focused on the impotence of infants in their present state, their concern was always based on future considerations. In the negative view, baptism was a means of averting the danger of future damnation for those children who die before the age of discretion. In the positive view of the ritual, by contrast, the child's future positive achievements were also acknowledged and anticipated. Inherent in the baptismal ceremony was the clearly articulated expectation that the child, once able to speak for himself, would believe and do good works. Baptism was only the beginning of a long process, just as the catechism for infants and the pledge of faith by the sponsor both implied that, in the future, the child would begin to understand and believe on his own. In the negative images of the infant, he was simultaneously subhuman—he could not yet walk, reason, or believe—and quintessentially human in that he was sinful and so needed redemption. The child here became the vehicle for a dramatic representation of the extreme vulnerability of human nature. All humans sinned and were weak, but the child was critically, helplessly fragile. Such a recognition of the child's extreme situation reinforced the orthodox demand for infant baptism and thereby served as testimony that, just as sin was universal, being shared by all humans, so also was the possibility of redemption universal—that is, applicable to all, young and old alike.

Positive Images of Childhood: The Infant as Metaphor

In the midst of the arguments for the child's inherent moral, mental, and physical inadequacies, heretical and orthodox thinkers alike described a radically different view of the child, one that emphasized his moral worthiness. For orthodox writers, a focus on the infant's potential for good became further justification for advocating the baptism of infants: The removal of original sin allowed for the infant's return to a prelapsarian state of innocence and purity. In contrast, for neo-Pelagian heretics, the invocation of childhood purity and virtue in several key Gospel passages proved that the child never inherited original sin, that he was unblemished from birth, and that therefore infant baptism was unnecessary. While only a few heretical sects argued for this point, its articulation forced orthodox writers to argue precisely not only for the existence of original sin (as we have seen above) but also that there was an exact moment—namely, the sponsor's profession of faith—when the child could be considered purified. Most

neo-Manichaeen heretics stated that, since the child was the product of inherently corrupt flesh, he could not be considered pure until he willingly and knowingly chose to renounce the material world. Although radically different in content, both the neo-Pelagian and the dualist belief concerning children led to the same outcome: the tenet that the baptism of infants was invalid. It was once again between these two heretical poles that the polemicists had to position themselves when advocating the moral worth of the child. The infant was both corrupt and innocent, but the distinction of where, how, and why this was possible became a priority for polemical writers.

Although damaged by original sin, the infant occasionally received validation as particularly deserving of divine and pious human intervention. In the orthodox redemptive plan, all sinners were considered worthy of God's attention. From this it followed that children as much as adults were candidates for redemption. To counter the belief of dualist heretics that offspring were inherently part of and tainted by the evil of the material world, orthodox writers attempted to demonstrate that there was goodness in the child. To that end, polemicists often turned to the Bible, looking in two particular areas: the infancy narratives in the Gospels as well as quotations by Jesus and others concerning the nature of the child.

Exceptions Prove the Rule: The Worthiness of Children

For evidence of God's dedication to childhood, polemicists looked to the lives of several Old and New Testament figures as well as to some postbiblical Church authorities. Responding to the dualist view of childhood as unclean, polemicists argued that God's decision to single out anyone during (or before) childhood implied that He did not consider that phase of life to be inherently and inescapably evil. Polemicists took Jeremiah, Samuel, Saint Nicholas, and Ambrose as evidence of God's approval of some children throughout history. Nicholas's self-imposed fasting before and after weaning and the tale of the toddler Ambrose surviving unscathed after an attack by a swarm of bees testified to God's endorsement of these pious men even when they were very young.

But the orthodox defense of childhood as worthy of pious intervention found more-secure footing in the New Testament. The case of John the Baptist revealed that there could be interaction between God and children. John was chosen by God while in the womb, according to one tradition, or even earlier, according to another: "Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew you."⁴³ This passage, from the book of Jeremiah, described the prophet's unique intimacy with God, whose words these were purported to be. Later the same quote was commonly used in

the liturgy for John the Baptist, and it attested to the divine approval of these two prophetic predecessors of Christ. Ebrard of Béthune noted that the unborn John reciprocated the gesture by leaping in his mother's womb, an attempt to greet Jesus during the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. To underline the exceptional nature of this interaction, Ebrard commented on the impediment imposed on John by his age: His greeting was performed "at least by his movement, if not by his voice." After praising these children who had been deemed worthy of God's attention, Ebrard reminded the reader of his primary purpose in writing his chapter. He desired to focus the reader's thoughts on God's benevolence toward children: "Behold, the Lord also inspires children. He breathes his spirit where he wills. Who, then, prohibits them from being baptized?"⁴⁴ Here the apparent exceptions, Jeremiah and John, proved to be the rule: God favored children.

The most important exception did more than simply prove that God was fond of children. To some writers, the example of the Christ Child sanctified childhood and served to prove the worthiness of the first stage of life. Hugh of Amiens, archbishop of Rouen, commented that Christ "became small for us."⁴⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux about the same time (1145–46) made an even stronger statement: "What, I ask, what? Does this man [Henry of Lausanne] begrudge to little children the little child Savior, who was born for them? This is diabolical envy. Death entered the world through this envy. Does he think that little children do not need a Savior because they are little children?"⁴⁶ To Bernard, Christ singled out infants by choosing to become one of them—a claim reinforced by Bernard's use of the word *parvulus* for both the average child and the Christ Child. The humanity of Jesus was made all the more tangible through his taking on the burdensome first age of man. His decision to burden himself with the difficulties of childhood served to validate it and to dignify and even to sanctify characteristics of childhood that theretofore had been viewed only as weaknesses or vices. Of equal importance, Jesus as a child received the sacrament of circumcision, seen as the Old Testament parallel to baptism (see below), and that he did so was seen as evidence that all children were worthy of certain sacraments. For Hugh of Amiens, the Christ Child had no need of any sacraments, and so his circumcision was viewed (as was his baptism as an adult) as an action that sanctified the sacraments for his followers.⁴⁷ After Moneta of Cremona reminded his readers that God sought to save all humans (*homines*), he then asked, "Is the little child not a human?" Continuing, he discussed Mary's joy at the birth of Christ.⁴⁸ To Moneta, the Christ Child's existence not only valorized all children but also pointed the way to their salvation.

Many polemicists argued that, if Christ chose to become a child and if several prophets and saints were chosen by God when they were children, then childhood must be inherently worthy. One of the positive characteristics that polemicists most commonly associated with children was inextricably connected with a group of children invoked numerous times in the polemics: the Holy Innocents. Inevitably, the children who, at King Herod's command, were killed in place of the Son of God were closely associated with the Christ Child. For Ebrard of Béthune, it was not simply God the Father who chose these children for slaughter and ultimately for a special reward in heaven: "When he showed to his Father the children whom Herod had killed, still at the breast, as the firstfruits, [Jesus], still an infant, offered the infants to his Father in place of himself."⁴⁹ Ebrard emphasized that at this point the Christ Child was about the same age as the children whose Savior he was: A child had chosen his fellow children.

The polemicists drew a comparison between Christ and his protomartyrs, and some noted the resemblance also between the Innocents and contemporary (twelfth- and thirteenth-century) children. Once again, Saint Bernard linked all three groups through the word *parvulus*: "He who was born a little child and chose the first pinnacle of little children (I speak of the Innocents)—today he also does not exclude little children from grace."⁵⁰ The historical reality of Christ's childhood and of the Innocents' martyrdom validated contemporary baptismal ceremonies. In his antiheresy sermon on the Song of Songs, Bernard again noted the similarities between the Innocents and twelfth-century children, this time through a comparison between the little saints' crowns of martyrdom and the salvation bestowed by baptism on any child who died before the age of discretion. Like the Christ Child, John the Baptist, and the others, the Innocents appeared as proof that God was solicitous in the matter of children's salvation. But unlike the prophets, the saints, and the Savior, who all went on to achieve great things, the Innocents were exceptional only in their passive participation in the first act of violence against (proto-)Christians. For polemicists looking to address the status of contemporary infants, who could participate in baptism only passively, it was more effective to cite the children killed by Herod.

The infant protomartyrs were so closely identified with the moral state of innocence that, well before the twelfth century, it had literally become their defining characteristic. Innocence took on many different meanings, but most importantly it was connected with moral and particularly sexual purity. Ebrard of Béthune followed a well-established tradition in treating a quote on virginity as an allusion to the physical and hence spiritual virtues of the young martyrs ("They who have not been defiled with women," Revelation 14:4).⁵¹ The virginal status

of the Holy Innocents, combined with their martyrdom, enabled them to enter heaven, although some heretics questioned that opinion, as the infants still had original sin. Alan of Lille responded that, while circumcision removed original sin for most of the Innocents, the sin of those who were only one or two days old was remitted with a baptism of their own blood, in an event directly comparable to baptism by water.

Just as baptism of blood cleansed the Innocents from any taint of original sin, contemporary baptism, polemicists argued, performed the same purifying function for all. This meant the children returned to a prelapsarian state of immaculate guilelessness until, at the age of discretion, they would be held accountable for actual sins. We see here an unexplored tension, characteristic of contemporary discussions of childhood, over whether or not the child was an inherently innocent creature, needing only to be released from the yoke of original sin for his true moral excellence to be revealed. Eckbert of Schönau noted that God eagerly accepted into heaven recently baptized children, who were "innocent and pure from any blemish after their rebirth."⁵² Baptism cleansed all those who partook of it, but the polemicists suggested that such a purified state of grace lasted longer in children and was more often identified with childhood.

Although helpful for polemicists who sought to argue that infants deserved salvation, this common identification of children with innocence also proved to be problematic when dealing with heretical arguments. The dilemma for orthodox writers lay in the possibility that the child's innocence could be used to argue, as did neo-Pelagians, that original sin was not present in infants. We have seen that Alan of Lille and others responded by attempting to prove that the newborn was not innocent but rather bound by original sin since conception. In the *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus, the Passagian heretics cited several biblical passages that, in their view, indicated that the child was inherently good and innocent. Heretics and Catholics occasionally used the same passages, extolling the virtues of the child as worthy of the kingdom of heaven. According to the neo-Pelagian heretics, even the newborn was "clean" (*mundus*) or good from birth; according to the Catholics, only after original sin had been remitted.

Orthodox writers alternated between the innocence and the culpability of children, and the difficulty of maintaining the distinction between those two qualities led Innocent III to suggest the idea that the innocence of infants was relative. In opposing heretical interpretations of the command to baptize all (*Qui crediderit*), Innocent noted that "children do not have a multitude of sins" but only one, unlike adults who had committed many actual sins.⁵³ The etymologically based connotation of innocence as "harmless" (*in-noceo*) was used

by two thirteenth-century polemicists to counteract the heretical charge that children did not perform acts of charity. The Italian layman George and the Dominican professor Moneta of Cremona both provided an answer that echoed (but contradicted) their opponents' questions. "Why are baptized children, who have done nothing good, to be saved?" At that, they turned the inquiry back on the questioner: "Why are they to be condemned, when they have done nothing evil?"⁵⁴ Moneta continued with the familiar argument that one should not hold infants' moral, mental, and physical incapacities against them. After all, it was the child's very inactivity and incapacity that, while not virtues, had precluded him from committing actual sins.

However, several orthodox authors expressed the belief that the infant was capable of goodness, and they linked this with other evidence of divine favor toward him. Eckbert of Schönau emphasized the innocence and goodness of the infant through references to the devil and particularly his envy. "[The devil] envies their innocence; he is envious that their blessedness is thus hastened; he is envious also that from a mouth of this sort, of infants and nurslings, his [God's] praise will be made perfect."⁵⁵ Here Satan desired what he could not have: the blamelessness and the soul of the baptized child. The reference to the devil also reinforced the claim that the child no longer belonged to Satan, that the child had been transformed from an inheritor of evil to a source of good.

The phrase "from the mouths of infants and nurslings" (*ex ore infantium et lactentium*) derived from two biblical moments, one from Psalms (8:2) and one from Matthew (21:14–16), in which Jesus berated the chief priests of Jerusalem who had been angered by his healings and by the voices of children crying out in the Temple. In the New Testament account, the children (*pueri*) literally sang praises to Jesus. Eckbert, however, only implied that infants could do so. Like others who quoted the same passage, he gave some sense of agency to children. Children, we learn, were at least in part capable of expressing their piety. Ebrard of Béthune also singled out the same passage and personalized it: He turned the heretics into the indignant and unbelieving Jewish priests who opposed not only Christ's miracles but also the children's praise. He added, "Do you hear what he said—babes at the breast? He bears witness that not only little children but even those still at the breast have made perfect the praise of God."⁵⁶ In making a semantic distinction between (older) children and nurslings, *lactantes*, Ebrard invoked the words of Christ himself to demonstrate—dangerously, given the Pelagian arguments that children were inherently pure and pious—that even the youngest infants were able to express some form of piety.

Further evidence for the blessings bestowed by God on children came from the words of Jesus and Isaiah about angelic guardians. Ebrard and the layman known as George both defended a belief in guardian angels for children by referring to a passage from Matthew (18:10): "See to it that you do not treat one of these little ones with contempt. I say to you that their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."⁵⁷ In the midst of what is almost a laundry list of biblical references to children, Ebrard combined the idea of protective angels with Isaiah's claim that children were given to parents by God: "What was given by God is good. Even if they are less intelligent, they must not be rejected. Truly they have their angels, as the Lord attests... . He who rejects them also rejects their angels."⁵⁸

Biblical authority could be mobilized to show that children had a close connection with piety and purity, and the citation of biblical passages by polemicists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could reveal the metaphoric value that their contemporaries placed on children. Through such passages we can perceive something of the positive characteristics attributed to children in that period. Many polemicists cited a discussion in Matthew devoted specifically to the nature of the child and elaborated its significance for Christian believers. When the disciples asked their leader who was greater in heaven, Jesus replied by calling a child (*parvulus*), placing him in their midst, and saying "Unless you turn and become like this little child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁹ The passage was chosen primarily because it illustrated a moment when the child was literally the center of attention for Christ, his disciples, and the Gospels' readers.⁶⁰ The polemicists noted that Jesus' comparison was not meant to refer to children's foolishness or corruption due to original sin. Here both the heretic and the Catholic agreed on the child's innocence, but the neo-Pelagian heretics took the child to stand as well for the newborn, and the effect of that was to contradict the notion of original sin. The orthodox writer felt it necessary to acknowledge the negative aspects of childhood, suggesting that Jesus had simply provided only part of the picture and stressed the positive. The Catholic reading differed from the heretical interpretation only in the former's caveat that the child's innocence pertained to the child only in a purified state after circumcision, which, like baptism, brought not only salvation but a return to Edenic innocence.

The child's positive characteristics—simplicity, humility, innocence, and absence of malice—were introduced as ideals to which all Christians should have aspired. Ebrard of Béthune referred to an *imitatio infantium*, an idea that further served to valorize the child as a role model, in strong contrast to the ignorant, impotent, paralyzed newborn envisioned by the critics of childhood. Ebrard quoted the

words of Paul ("Be babes in malice," 1 Corinthians 14:20) and Peter in a passage that returned to and validated some of the incapacities discussed above: "Thus Peter in his first Epistle [1 Peter 2:1–2] invites us to imitate infants, saying, 'Put aside all evil and all deceit and simulation, envy, and all slander; like newborn infants, long for milk rationally and without deceit.'"⁶¹ The infant's inability to act immorally, an inability due to incompetence rather than to choice, had become an ideal for all true believers.

"Sinite parvulos": A Divine Invitation

One biblical passage shedding light on the nature of the child appears with such frequency in the antiheresy literature that it deserves a separate discussion, and all the more so as Catholics and heretics alike seem to have considered it crucial. The story of Jesus allowing the little children to approach him and be blessed by him was quoted or clearly alluded to in almost every polemic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. All of the main elements—Christ's rebuking of the disciples who opposed the parents' offering of their children, his blessing of the children, and his announcement that "the kingdom of heaven is of such as these" (*talium est regnum celorum*)—contained rich material for medieval discussions of childhood and its merits, but they also provided an extraordinary dramatic potential, an opportunity that few polemicists wasted. Some of the most emotion-laden testimony in the debate over infant baptism was focused on this passage (Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17) and particularly on Christ's command "Let [or suffer] the little children come unto me" (*Sinite parvulos venire ad me*).⁶²

One interpretation, advocated by both Catholics and heretics, focused on the metaphoric significance of children in this passage (at Luke 18:17, the man who does not accept the kingdom of heaven like a little child, will never enter it). In the *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus, the phrase "of such is the kingdom of heaven" was seen as once more referring to the child's "cleanness of life and innocence of age." (That is almost exactly the same interpretation as for Matthew 18:3.) The *Summa* criticized the heretical tendency to claim that the innocence and purity of children was proof of inherent sinlessness: "But the kingdom of heaven is only for the clean. Therefore little children are clean, therefore they have no sin before baptism, for which reason they need no atonement."⁶³ Both the heretic and the Catholic here agreed that Jesus welcomed and accepted little children, but again the orthodox view required confirmation of the existence of original sin in children.

The passage was often seen as ultimate proof of God's valorization of children.

Ermengaud emphatically stated this: "Again, concerning infants and little children, we find in the Gospels that our Lord Jesus Christ so greatly approved of the period of childhood that he said to his disciples, who prohibited those who offered the little children to him, 'Allow the little children to come to me.'"⁶⁴ Like many of the biblical passages discussed above, this struck a chord because it was believed to be the very words of Christ, not simply the report of a prophet, apostle, or Church Father, and so was accepted by heretic and Catholic alike. From the specific children in the biblical narrative, however, the nondualist heretic and the Catholic both extrapolated that Christ desired all children to approach him.

Polemicists even transformed the *Sinite* passage into a ceremony—performed by Jesus, no less—comparable to the contemporary ritual of infant baptism. Salvo Burci in his polemic considered the idea of God's benevolence toward children and combined it with divine endorsement of infant baptism. In linking these ideas to a broader critique of dualist views of the family, he singled out the belief, common in many extreme-dualist heresies, that children were the offspring of carnal marriage and therefore inherently evil. Salvo, whose entire discussion of infant baptism was built around the *Sinite* passage, interpreted Jesus' actions as a protosacrament, one centered on children:

The Catholic responds, You have heard above that the fruit of marriage, that is, children, were offered to Christ and [that] Jesus freely received that fruit, rebuking the Apostles who prohibited the above-mentioned little children from being offered to himself, Christ, and saying, "The kingdom of heaven is of such"—that is, of little children. With this fruit [of marriage] three things that Christ did should be noted. First, that he embraced them; second, that he placed his hands on them; third, that he blessed them. In these three sacraments, the perfection of the complete justice [concerning] children is clearly obvious, which occurred to them [the children] through the faith of those who offered them. O wicked heretics, if the fruit of marriage were evil and [came] from an evil god, Christ would not have performed these three sacraments. Therefore marriage is good and [comes] from a good God.⁶⁵

To Salvo and other polemicists, Jesus himself provided proof that infant baptism was acceptable and was virtually documented in the Gospels. Divine approval of children was linked by Salvo to a defense of marriage; dualist heretics condemned both as unclean. Other writers directly equated the *Sinite* passage with baptism. Ermengaud of Béziers saw the passage as offering a biblical precedent for contemporary custom: "Whoever does not believe that the baptism of little children and infants is strong enough [to bring about] the salvation of eternal life

believes contrary to the Gospel; he is like the one who prevents little children from coming to Christ."⁶⁶

The biblical passage was perceived to have many correlations to infant baptism: the offering of children by parents, the acceptance of the children by a religious figure, and the imposition of hands on infants so as to bless them. But there was one further connection that several polemicists exploited: The presentation of children to God was opposed by Jesus' disciples in the biblical passage and then by heretics in the case of infant baptism. And so polemicists were able to reconceptualize the contemporary debate between Catholics and heretics as a reenactment of the conflict between the welcoming Christ and his intolerant disciples. Peter the Venerable declared that we should heed both the words and the actions of Jesus: "And now, O Lord Jesus, and now, good master, teach by word, even, if I dare to add, show by example whether little children coming to you not by their own faith but offered to you by another's [faith] should be taken up, as your Church teaches, or repelled, as the temerity of the new men commands."⁶⁷ Peter could then argue that the heretics' actions offended and angered the Lord—and the abbot of Cluny—just as the disciples' exclusion of children had angered Jesus.

The command that children should approach Jesus (*venire ad me*) became a rallying cry for orthodox writers to defend the actions of godparents as they offered the infants at the baptismal font. Salvo Burci saw the offering of children in the Gospel passage and in his contemporary baptismal rituals as a "great mystery," one that the wise understood to be proof that "children should be offered to Christ so that they might receive the sacrament of Christ."⁶⁸ He then noted emphatically that these really were children, that they were not yet Christians, and that those who rejected the children were severely rebuked by none other than Christ. All of these elements precisely suited Salvo's own context of defending infant baptism against the heretics of Piacenza. Alan of Lille attempted to historicize the idea of infants approaching God, by noting that now children "cannot come to Christ except through baptism."⁶⁹

The *Sinite* passage encapsulated the dilemma polemicists faced concerning the child. If he were truly good and worthy of heaven, then there was no need for baptism. Salvo, for example, had his heretic ask, "Why would the Lord have said, 'Of such as these is the kingdom of heaven,' if they were not perfect?"⁷⁰ He solved the problem with the argument that Christ placed his hands over the children immediately, blessing them as he spoke his words. Salvo also noted that, if the children were perfect, "they would not have been offered to Christ."⁷¹ Salvo

seemed conscious of the apparent contradiction, and he went to great lengths to demonstrate that the timing of the actions and words in the *Sinite* passage allowed both for the admission of original sin and for validation of the child's merit, but most orthodox writers ignored the potential paradox involved in the purifying of those who, by Christ's own admission, were already pure. In their discussions of the *Sinite* passage, most polemicists viewed the child's goodness as crucial to Jesus' command to allow the children to approach him. Polemicists more often explained these children's purity as resulting from an earlier ritual (circumcision) that prefigured baptism.

God's Mercy: The Divine Plan of Salvation and Justice for the Child

Both virtuous innocence and impotent sinfulness, the opposing natures of the child, provided orthodox writers with reasons to defend what since the fifth century had become the traditional custom of baptizing infants shortly after they were born. Tensions between the two views notwithstanding, each proved that the child deserved religious supervision—one because he was thought to be the ideal of innocence and moral virtue, the other one because he was immoral owing to original sin (and therefore in mortal need of baptism). With respect to infant baptism, both views functioned as justification for positions taken on many issues, including the existence of original sin, the validity of employing the faith of others, and the historical substitution of baptism for circumcision.

The antiheresy polemics attempted to articulate a divine plan of salvation devoted specifically to the infant. They suggested that God himself was acutely aware of the unique status of infancy, which demanded unusual actions to enable the infant to be saved. The Catholic strategy to save the infant's soul was able to address many issues made difficult by his nature, most importantly the problem of his inability to consent to baptism. In their defense of infant baptism, the polemicists also produced a history of childhood whereby they attempted to historicize Church initiatory practices while at the same time demonstrating that God had always devoted particular attention to the fate of children. Finally, at issue here was the very nature of divine justice and mercy, a subject whose frequent appearance in the polemics betrays an anxiety over the efficacy of that justice and the extent of that mercy for children.

Fides aliena

We have already encountered the problem of the infant's entirely passive role in the baptismal service. Lacking the physical power to approach the font on his own and the intellectual power to speak or to choose to be baptized, the infant as conceptualized by orthodox polemicists was utterly helpless, crippled by the sin

that he had inherited, passively via his parents, from Adam. Polemicists mentioned his passivity in order to justify the introduction of outside forces to assist him. Throughout discussions of the doctrine of *fides aliena*, we see the negative view of childhood—and especially the consequences and problems that view created—applied to a particular theological issue, the spread of heretical opposition to infant baptism.

Since the child could not have faith on his own, a variety of solutions were proposed to solve the crucial problem that posed. From whom or from what source did his faith come? The less common explanation involved a rather nebulous allusion to "the faith of the Church."⁷² Though theologically sound, this claim did not address the heretical criticism of Catholic use of the faith of the parents or, more often, the godparents. Bernard of Clairvaux blurred the distinction between divine and human sources of faith when he introduced the image of the maternal Church: "No one may tell me that he does not have faith, he to whom his mother imparts her own, wrapping him in the sacrament, until he is made capable of perceiving his own complete and pure [faith], if not by his own understanding, then by his assent. Is it such a short garment that it cannot cover both of them? Great is the faith of the Church."⁷³ For Bernard, the faith of a parent, male or female, sufficed to save the child through baptism, and so certainly in his mind the faith of the entire (mother) Church could work greater wonders.

Sources of faith for the child that were far more common were the sponsor or sponsors who brought him to the font. This "faith of another" was given or pledged during the ceremony, allowing the sponsor to speak and choose for the child. The sponsor or godparent was sometimes referred to as the *offerens*, "one who offers" (or represents) the child. Whatever his role, the use of a sponsor to act in place of the child was precisely what the dualist heretical sects most strongly opposed. To the Cathars, there could be no substitute or intermediary for the supplicant, who should answer for himself when asked, "Do you believe in God?" Even the Catholic claim that the sponsor merely pledged faith for the infant until the time when the infant could respond for himself was unacceptable to the Albigenses and Italian dualists, since for them the issue was not the origin of faith but the demand that faith be voluntarily professed.

Such arguments sent the polemicists back to the Gospels yet again to search for evidence that the faith of one person could save another. The most common sources were the New Testament stories of miraculous healing by Christ himself. Importantly, the miracle tales often involved precisely the elements at issue here. Many dealt with the cure of a child through the prayers and belief of a parent who

had begged Jesus for assistance. The Canaanite woman's prayers for her daughter, the centurion's concern for his child, the priest's anxiety over his daughter, even Mary and Martha's desire to see their brother Lazarus alive—all of these were used as ammunition in the fight to justify the use of godparents in contemporary infant baptisms.

Similarly, the *Sinite* passage opened with the attempt by unnamed admirers to offer their children to Jesus, an attempt momentarily blocked by the disciples. There, Jesus himself clearly stated that the desire of people to offer their children for blessing was acceptable and should not be hindered, and of course he articulated the positive image of childhood as a justification ("Of such as this [child] is the kingdom of heaven").

In each of the miracle narratives, as the orthodox writers never ceased to note, it was Christ himself who chose to allow the healing of one person through the supplication and faith of another. Eckbert of Schönau suggested a continuity between the Gospel miracle tales and contemporary infant baptismal ceremonies, noting that, in the latter, Christ himself "is invisibly present to them there and he himself invisibly baptizes everyone."⁷⁴ The marvelous invisibility of Christ's presence in baptism echoed the inherent mystery of the sacrament, in which a spiritual cleansing was brought about invisibly through a visible washing with water. However, heretical critics of the biblical precedents for *fides aliena* opposed precisely this conflation of the physical and the spiritual, a distinction of extreme importance to the Cathars and other dualists. They argued that the miracles dealt only with fevers, paralysis, and other physical ailments and not with such spiritual issues as the salvation of the soul. Orthodox writers responded by noting that Christ himself said to the Canaanite widow, "O woman, your faith is great. Let it be done as you have asked."⁷⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux quoted this passage immediately after invoking the image of the Church as a maternal figure protecting herself and her child with her garment, and he sarcastically asked if the Church's faith could be less than the great faith of the Canaanite.

The primary defense for *fides aliena* drew on the miraculous cure of the paralytic man lowered from above into the hall where Jesus stayed. We have already encountered Salvo Burci's interpretation of the paralytic as comparable to the infant because of his corporeal incapacity. Other writers singled out the healing of the paralytic and did so because of one crucial moment, Christ's declaration upon witnessing the faith of the sick man's bearers: "Son, your sins are forgiven you... . Rise and walk" (Mark 2:3–12, Matthew 9:2–8, Luke 5:18–26).⁷⁶ This blending of spiritual and physical healing provided polemicists

with a strong defense of *fides aliena* and opened the way for the inclusion of the other miracle narratives. Eckbert of Schönau wholly identified the child at baptism with the paralytic in the synoptic Gospels: "Indeed, we even carry the paralytic in his bed and place him before Jesus when we bear the little child to baptism, asking that he [Jesus] baptize and save him. With his rational soul still bound by original sin and as yet no natural strength capable of working in the puerile body, to whom is he [the child] better compared than to that man bound internally by sin and destroyed externally by paralysis in his limbs as he lies in his bed?"⁷⁷ Once more, a writer closely associated the New Testament paralytic and the contemporary child, this time to justify the intervention of others to heal them.

Like the madman who could not reason, the paralytic served to soften the distinction between adult and child and to remind the reader of the plight of children, which was comparable to that of an adult who was entirely incapacitated. Eckbert commented that the demand by contemporary Christians for purely spiritual healing for the infant—whom he again called "our paralytic"—must be greater than the request that those bearing the paralytic made for physical healing. Defending infant baptism through the example of the paralytic proved to be popular among the polemicists mainly because the Gospel passage allowed writers to admit the child's physical and, occasionally, moral failings. The child received sin from another, and so polemicists found it fitting that the child receive faith from another. Vacarius noted that "you can understand from all this that, when necessity requires it, aid is brought to the age [childhood] by another."⁷⁸ Necessity here took on two meanings: The child did not have the physical, intellectual, and moral abilities necessary to make a profession of faith, and the profession of faith was necessary if the child was to avoid the dangers of hell should he die before baptism. Turning now to this second issue, the redemptive plan to save the child from hell, we will consider what the polemicists conceived of as a divine concern throughout human history.

Historicizing God's Plan for Children

The attempt to defend the idea of *fides aliena* led orthodox writers to the New Testament to seek evidence that Christ sanctioned the substitution of one person's faith for another's. The search for biblical precedents led polemicists also to the Old Testament, where they found not simply evidence of analogies but also proof that God had advocated the use of *fides aliena* in every period of history. This allowed some polemicists to create a flowing narrative that represented God as mindful of the fate of children from the earliest stages of human existence. Out of the effort to historicize infant baptism and *fides aliena* there began to emerge a world history of God's plan for the salvation of children, a history that stressed

that God's solicitude toward the young had been continuous.

To divide that history into two categories, the period before and the period after Christ, might have seemed logical, but it was made problematic by the theological tradition wherein baptism was viewed as the successor to and supplanter of the ritual of circumcision. If circumcision was the Lord's means of saving the children of Israel, what was His plan in the period before Abraham's covenant? The attempt to anchor infant baptism in ritual circumcision led orthodox writers ever further back in time, searching for proof that God had always taken care to provide for children. As a result, we encounter in the polemics as in contemporary theology a tripartite division of the history of the world, each period corresponding to one of three types of divine justice: natural law, the Old Law, or the New Law.

The division of history into these three phases of salvation for the child allowed polemicists to bolster the argument, refuted by neo-Pelagians, that all humans after Adam and Eve were born with original sin. The monk William inferred the existence of original sin from God's plan of remedies: "This [the child's culpability] is clearly shown in the remedies that have been imposed against original sin in the natural, the New, and the Old Law. For we understand the remedies [under] natural law to be offerings and gifts, since it is said, 'On Abel and on his offerings God looked with favor'" (Genesis 4:4).⁷⁹ In the first phase of human history, sacrificial offerings sufficed to bring about remission of sin and hence salvation for infants, according to Eckbert of Schönau, who provided by far the most detailed account of this world history as seen through the prism of the child's salvation. Such salvation was possible only for those who worshipped the true God, of course, but Eckbert stressed that God always provided for the faithful, from the beginning of humanity onward:

Before the time of circumcision, from Adam through Abraham ... offerings used to be made to God by those who had the cult of God. Through such [offerings] original sin could be destroyed, and also the other sins of human frailty in God's elect, both small [*pusillis*] and great, so that their souls were saved, since God's mercy has never abandoned humankind. Behold, such was God's care for infants in earlier centuries, that their souls should be guarded from perdition.⁸⁰

Eckbert sought to demonstrate the totality and continuity of God's mercy even in the period before the covenant between Abraham and the Lord. Sacrifices and gifts served to remit not just original sin in children of both sexes but actual sins in adults as well.

In the second phase of history, the Old Law, the cornerstone of Abraham's covenant was the ritual of circumcision on the eighth day after the infant's birth. From the time of Abraham, polemicists argued, the removal of the foreskin brought about forgiveness of the male child's original sin. Catholic writers superimposed the Augustinian notion of original sin onto the narrative of the covenant. They justified this move by directly turning to the words of God himself. Eckbert stated this in his usual unequivocal style: "That the command had been given for the salvation of souls can be clearly understood from the words that the Lord spoke to Abraham when he gave the order to circumcise, saying: 'Every infant among you will be circumcised on the eighth day. In every generation, every male child, even your domestic slaves and those you have bought, shall be circumcised. As for the male child, the flesh of whose foreskin has not been circumcised, his soul will be removed [*delebitur*] from his people.'" (Genesis 17:9–14)⁸¹ For other polemicists, the more common reading of this last phrase involved some variant of the verb *perire*—the uncircumcised child's soul perishes or is lost from its people—although Vacarius has *tolletur* (the soul is removed) and Ebrard reads it more dramatically as *exterminabitur* (the soul is destroyed or banished). All of these verbs have in common a sense of loss, separation, and, sometimes, violent removal.

In Genesis, the fate of all uncircumcised boys was punishment for not upholding the covenant. But the passage referred to children, who cannot sin on their own, and so for the polemicists the punishment could only be for a sin that was a preexisting offense, Adam's transgression. In fact, God's injunction to circumcise ends with an explanatory phrase: The boy's soul will be lost to his people "because he has made my pact invalid." The reference to the broken pact was to the covenant just established between the Lord and Abraham, but Vacarius interpreted it as a reference to the initial agreement between God and humanity, to the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and later extended Abraham's covenant to Adam's pact. Addressing the argument that the pact must refer to Abraham, Vacarius asked, "How could the infant have made this pact invalid, since he did not yet exist—that is, at the time of the pact—nor is it understood that he did exist? Thus these things refer to the pact made with Adam concerning the apple."⁸² Vacarius, then, found in the words of God the idea that all children were culpable in the crime of the first man.

But original sin affected every child, not just boys. The exclusion of girls from the ritual of circumcision may not have excluded them from the covenant with God, but it did present a problem for polemicists trying to create a seamless narrative of redemption for all children throughout history. On this and other

issues, Catholic writers improvised solutions that allowed them to retain their belief in God's eternal vigilance toward children. Eckbert and others reintroduced the precovenant idea of offerings to obtain remission of sins for girls under the Old Law.⁸³

Also raising the polemicists' anxiety about Old Law customs of purifying children was concern over the child's fragile health. This became an issue of intense interest because the timing of the circumcision meant that the male child could die before the ritual. As we have already noted, God commanded that it be performed on the eighth day, in recognition that the child's life was precarious. But what if the eighth day was already too late? As usual, Eckbert addressed the issue and compared the contemporary practice of emergency baptisms to the possibility that the descendants of Abraham might have chosen to circumcise the male child immediately upon recognizing signs of danger and ill health.⁸⁴

In conjunction with this interest in historicizing infant salvation and damnation, polemicists even noted the circumcision—or lack thereof—of crucial historical figures at the moment of transition from the Old to the New Law. Some polemicists voiced concern over the fate of those youngsters killed by Herod who were less than eight days old. The boys' uncircumcised state presented a problem that Alan of Lille considered worthy of discussion. He cited the orthodox theological position that the Innocents achieved salvation owing to their baptism of blood.⁸⁵ Also of concern was the purity of the souls of Jewish children in the days before the New Law. Discussing the meaning of the *Sinite* passage, neo-Pelagian heretics claimed that Christ would not have embraced and praised the children had they been unclean, and so, they argued, children are inherently pure and unstained by original sin. But the *Summa* argued that, because the children were Jewish, they would have been circumcised (if male) and therefore cleansed of original sin and returned to a state of innocence.⁸⁶

In these ways circumcision became a crucial link in the historical chain of God's protection of little children. Circumcision as a means of spiritual improvement became a direct antecedent to baptism as a means of preparing the child to enter the kingdom of heaven. Nonetheless, Catholic polemicists perceived circumcision to be the inferior predecessor to the more perfect sacrament of baptism. There the physical act of removing the foreskin from a newborn male child, here the ritual of washing or sprinkling the infant's body at the baptismal font—while most polemicists acknowledged that both of these acts led to salvation for the child who died young, a few made an important distinction between the fate of the Jewish child and that of the Christian child. Innocent III argued that the wording

of the phrases "the child's soul will not be lost to his people" and "the child will enter the kingdom of heaven" already presented important evidence that baptism was the superior rite. He noted that, "although the original fault has been forgiven through the mystery of circumcision and the danger of damnation avoided, [the boy's soul] will not have been brought to the kingdom of heaven, which was closed to all until the death of Christ."⁸⁷ Only baptism could lead the infant's soul to full salvation, through remission of original sin and entrance into the Church and Christian community. Still, despite the putative limitations of its effect, the Old Law ritual of circumcision could be valorized and used as a historical defense for the polemicists' advocacy of infant baptism. Vacarius noted that, "if circumcision were necessary for infants, lest they be lost from their people because of the pact they have made invalid, for the same reason baptism is even more necessary for them today."⁸⁸ History was invoked in order simultaneously to denigrate the Jewish ritual and to defend the validity of the Christian plan of redemption for infants. For the polemicists, the history of divine mercy toward children here proved that Catholic infant baptism was superior to all other forms (whether Jewish or heretical) of religious assistance to children.

With the coming of the New Law, circumcision was no longer effective in saving the child's soul; now God chose to save it through the new, more universal ritual of baptism, which superseded circumcision. The polemicists stressed that the nature of baptism was "more perfect," as it could be performed on people of all ages and both sexes. The connections drawn between circumcision and baptism were manifold,⁸⁹ based mainly on the Christian belief that circumcision led to a remission of sins and served as evidence of inclusion in the community of God's chosen people. However, the Augustinian emphasis on—and the subsequent universal Catholic custom of—infant baptism allowed later writers to note a further correlation to circumcision, one not possible in the early Church: Both rituals were performed predominantly on children.

One polemicist expressed an awareness that, among the early Christians, baptism was certainly not devoted exclusively to children. Salvo Burci noted that in the early Church whole households were baptized, including adults and children. De Ghellinck has shown that, in the mid-ninth century, Walafrid Strabo recognized that the early Church only gradually extended baptism to newborns, that originally the sacrament was focused on adult converts.⁹⁰ No polemicists of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries mentioned this development. If anything, the very notion of it was contradicted by Salvo's comment. The assumption that infant baptism immediately supplanted circumcision was useful for high-medieval polemicists in their endeavor to articulate the narrative of continuous salvation for

children.

While polemicists may not have been willing to admit—if they were even aware—that infant baptism developed slightly later than adult baptism, they did express a strong understanding that the historical roots of infant baptism were still deep. Peter the Venerable pointed to the ancient tradition of baptizing infants when he ridiculed the Petrobrusian claim that only adult baptism was legitimate. In a bitterly ironic statement addressed to "you learned men" (i.e., the heretics), the abbot of Cluny suggested that the foolish and uneducated had been informed that "they have brought an illusory baptism to so many thousands of little children for more than a thousand years, and that from the times of Christ up to our time they have created not true but imaginary Christians."⁹¹ He continued the irony, asking how so many Church Fathers, martyrs, and popes could have been so blind for so long. He noted that, "since almost all in our time and memory were baptized in infancy," the heretics' proscription of infant baptism would make infidels out of thousands of people who considered themselves Christians.

Peter exhibited a strong interest in the historical practice of infant baptism, wanting to prove the irrationality of his opponents' view. He distinguished a moment when adult baptism no longer played a serious part in the ceremonies of a Christianized Europe: "Since all of Gaul, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the whole of Europe has held no baptism except in infancy for three or almost five hundred years, it [Europe] has no Christians." This *reductio ad absurdum* pointed to the disastrous effect that, if proven valid, the rejection of infant baptism would have. "All our fathers would have been lost, since they would not have been able to be baptized in infancy... . We also who are still living shall be lost ... Innumerable saints, baptized in infancy, would be pulled down from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell."⁹² In the midst of his fulminating, Peter the Venerable skillfully used his version of the history of infant baptism to mock his opponents and raise confidence in the validity of the practice, stressing not only its antiquity but also the merits of the saintly individuals in the past who were baptized in infancy.

The polemicists' historical arguments served to bolster the belief not just in infant baptism but also in God's continuous commitment to safeguard the souls of children. Later in his treatise Peter the Venerable again directly attacked the heretics' refusal to accept infant baptism. There he mentioned the tension between circumcision and infant baptism and rhetorically asked whether the former was more efficacious, reversing what in the orthodox understanding was the order of their respective ranks: "Where are you, who damn Christian children? Are the Jews' little children saved by the sacrament of circumcision while the

Christians' little children will not be saved by the sacrament of baptism?"⁹³ Inverting the relation between Ecclesia and Synagoga, Peter knew he spoke words no Christian could accept. The situations he envisioned were parallel. Neither the Jewish nor the Christian child had any faith; it must be supplied by someone else in the ritual designated for each.

Eckbert of Schönau drew further connections between Jewish and Christian rituals. In his writing, the period of the Old Law was so closely associated with the definition of the Jews as the "children of wrath" (*fili i ire*) that he generally referred to the period as the "time of wrath" (*tempus ire*). In contrast, Eckbert's contemporary world was the "time of grace." His belief in Christian superiority led him, as it did Peter the Venerable, to argue that the dualists have inverted the true relationship and historical periodization.

If it is necessary that all of these [the half of humanity who die before adulthood] should perish, the sadness should rightly be intolerable for the whole Church, because God brought about a change in which he forbade circumcision and in place of it established baptism and permitted to go into perdition so many thousands of souls, who believed that baptism was effective. But as your heresy teaches, it was not effective for them. What else should Rachel do, except cry without end for her sons and not be consoled, because they are no more? How can this time rightly be called the time of grace and not the time of wrath? On the contrary, O children of wrath, O Cathars, pernicious children, now is the time of grace and not the time of wrath.⁹⁴

As Eckbert saw it, the heretics had turned the world upside-down with their views, so that Christians mourning their infants were transformed into the Old Testament image of parental grief, the inconsolably sorrowful Rachel (Jeremiah 31:15; quoted also in the account of massacre of the Innocents, Matthew 2:18). Eckbert rejected the idea that life after Christ could be anything but the time of grace, and he turned the phrase "children of wrath" back on the heretics. It was now the Cathars who were cast as Jews, "children of wrath," blind to the truth of God's plan to provide for the infant. For Eckbert and other polemicists, what was at stake was not just the historical salvation of children but the very nature of divine justice.

The Mercy of the Good Father

Both the positive and the negative natures of the child, as we have seen, provided ample justification for Catholic and, more importantly, divine intervention in the spiritual life of the child. Arguments that the infant was corrupt owing to original sin but that he could also be virtuous (as a paragon of simplicity,

humility, and innocence) allowed polemicists to discuss the metaphoric potential for family imagery in depictions of God's mercy. The theology of *fides aliena* and the historical succession of offerings, circumcision, and baptism were interpreted as signs of God's comprehensive benevolence and love for his children.

Orthodox writers attempted to dispel any idea that God was severe or unjust and to replace it with the idea that God was a good paternal figure. As for the child charged with original sin, they replied that the injustice derived from humanity, not God. He would not punish people with death, Adam's punishment, if all were not guilty in Adam's sin.⁹⁵ Or, more often, orthodox writers answered simply that the problem of original sin had as its solution infant baptism, which was God's justice. References to God's justice reappeared in discussions of the inability of children to seek baptism on their own.⁹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux noted that "the Lord does not abandon his people,"⁹⁷ alluding to the familiar concept of the abandonment of children. On the contrary, the entirety of God's plan as described above was focused on God's desire to rescue children from damnation. Bernard himself suggested the image of Mother Church pulling her garment around her child. Familial imagery abounded in this literature, in both positive representations of God and negative depictions of heretics or the devil.

Orthodox writers were careful to note that it was the heretics who, by denying infants purification through baptism, condemned them to hell. Discussions of infant baptism easily furthered the process of demonizing heretics. According to Eckbert, the devil envied children their innocence and "sought some means by which he could obstruct all the souls of infants, ... and he found the most capable instruments for this duty [to be] the tongues of Cathars," who spread the word that infant baptism was of no use.⁹⁸ In the final moment of his discussion of infant baptism, Eckbert demonized his opponents by stating that those who condone heresy risked not only their own souls but those of infants as well. Underlying the concept of demonic envy was the fear of infant mortality: "Thus he could drag to his side and distance from the kingdom of God all the souls that during the years of infancy migrated from this life."⁹⁹ On the other hand, orthodox writers asserted, God sought to avoid the separation of souls from heaven. In what Eckbert sees as a cosmic battle, the power of evil and the power of good both eagerly sought the infant's soul, one out of envy and the other out of love.

In contrast to Satan's darker plans, the motivation behind God's interest in the infant's soul always appeared to be positive and loving. It suggested the image of the good father. Again, Eckbert provided a passage that best indicated the

positive familial imagery associated with divine intervention:

God's mercy never abandoned humankind at all. Behold, such was God's care for infants in earlier centuries that he preserved their souls from perdition. And do you maintain, impious people, that God would forget his same mercy in this time, which is called the time of grace and the year of kindness? Do you think that he loves the sons and daughters of Christians less than [he does] the infants of Jews, for whom he established circumcision, that their souls would not be lost to their people?¹⁰⁰

We have already encountered part of this passage earlier and have explored the historicizing impulse behind it. But equally important is the language of divine love and concern for children. If the period before the New Law was the "time of wrath," to Eckbert that signified that the present era must be the period of greater *benignitas* (kindness), a word that appears often in the polemics. If the Lord loved the "children of wrath," the Jews and their children who lived before Christ, then it followed that he must love the "children of grace" all the more.

Closely connected to the encompassing nature of divine kindness was God's protective desire to comfort the young, a desire summed up in the image of God collecting infants' souls in his bosom or lap. Although it was common to speak of the bosom of Abraham, here the role of the paternal shepherd gathering his flock was assigned to God himself. Peter the Venerable discussed God's "most ample bosom of mercy," which could hold even the worst of sinners. Eckbert echoed this but focused on children's sin: "If you concede that all little children are fettered by sin, it is necessary that you concede that God's mercy pertains to them and that he also invites them with the others into his wide lap of kindness."¹⁰¹ God had mercy on little children and, in order to protect them, demanded that they undergo baptism. Final proof for the validity of the doctrine of *fides aliena* derived from this assumption: All of the mysterious aspects of infant baptism ultimately depended on the quality of God's mercy. Evidence of it was adduced by Ermengaud of Béziers when he commented that Jesus, having encountered a widow burying her son, was "moved to mercy by the crying and wailing of the mother" and "revived [the son] and returned him to his mother."¹⁰² Paternal mercy was here inspired by maternal grief over a child.

The concept of God's love and compassion for children made its most dramatic appearance in several interpretations of the *Sinite* passage. Conveniently, the scenario in which Jesus asked to receive the little children also involved a struggle between two groups, one of whom sought to offer the children to Christ while the other attempted to hinder their approach. Again, Eckbert of Schönau and Peter

the Venerable took full advantage of the possibilities inherent in this conflict. Eckbert exposed the harshness of the heretics' view of God when he asked, "How did that sweet voice, which said, 'Allow the children to come to me, of such as these is the kingdom of heaven,' change into a bitter voice, which says, 'Lead the children away from me, the kingdom of heaven is not of such as these'? For according to the tenor of your teaching, he says as much—although the voice is not present, the deed is, if he permits all those who die before the age of discretion to perish in the original sin with which they were born."¹⁰³ Eckbert argued that the heretics' beliefs stood in direct contrast not only to the words of Christ but also to the very nature of merciful divinity.

In an equally emotive passage, Peter the Venerable concluded his discussion of infant baptism with Christ's plea to allow the children to have access to him.

And how great a difference there is between kindness and malice, between piety and impiety, between Christ kindly receiving the little children and the heretics impiously rejecting the children... . Once, the disciples of Christ did not the same thing but something similar, by repelling the children from Christ; but, so that they would not do so, they were reproached by their teacher... . What do you say to these things, cruel expellers of children? Behold, because the children were repelled from him, Jesus grew angry; he ordered that the children be allowed to come to him and not be kept back... . Do you, against Christ's will, tear them away from Christ as he embraces the children, away from Christ as he places his hands over the children, and away from Christ as he blesses the children? Let the Church see, let the world judge which of you should be shut out of the kingdom of heaven—you, who contradict the words of heaven, or the children, about whom the king himself said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."¹⁰⁴

Peter saw Christ himself coming directly to the aid of the children, both when he walked the earth and even now from heaven. The passage expertly conflated past and present. The disciples became the heretics, and the Jewish children became Christian children. Only Christ himself remained the same, and he continued to perform the ritual. Peter suggested that the issue of children's salvation transcended the distance between Christ's life on Earth and the twelfth century, just as Eckbert viewed this as an even larger picture, one with panhistorical implications. Peter also hinted at hope, not only that the children would be saved through baptism but also that the heretics might change their views. The reference, early in the quotation, to the disciples being corrected by their teacher implied that they might have learned their lesson; so too could the Petrobrusians learn not to ensure the consignment of children to hell.¹⁰⁵ In the end, the

heretics must learn, as Peter's and Eckbert's readers do, that to oppose infant baptism is to oppose the kindness, the *pietas*, the very words and actions of Christ.

The *Sinite* passage supplied one part of the larger message behind the orthodox arguments for infant baptism. The conduct of Christ and his Father toward infants, their spiritual children, was invoked to provide a model for the conduct of earthly parents and godparents. Ebrard of Béthune merged images of human, animal, and divine parenting:

The raven denies food to its chicks until the chicks grow black [plumage] and are made similar to the parents [in appearance]. Similarly, you wish to deny the food of life to children until they can understand. But the Lord is merciful and devoted [*pius*], like the dove, who feeds not only the ravens but also the ravens' chicks, as is said, "who gives their food to the beasts of burden and to the ravens' chicks calling out to him." He has led the chicks to food.¹⁰⁶

Between the animal and human world, Ebrard created an analogy whereby heretical doctrine was likened to the raven's cruel treatment of its young, while God's (and the Catholics') plan corresponded to the magnanimous dove who was willing to feed anyone. God, Ebrard informed his readers, acted the part of the good parent; why should humans not emulate him and baptize their children?

The importance of the family in infant baptism appeared frequently in the polemics, mostly in references to the parents' faith or to their consenting to their child's baptism. Salvo Burci uncovered the only references in the New Testament that most likely described the baptism of infants: "Also, it is found in various parts of the Acts of the Apostles that a *paterfamilias* was baptized [together] with his entire *familia*; if the whole *familia* was baptized, so were children, since children are from the *familia* and in the *familia*."¹⁰⁷ In early Christianity, Ebrard tells us, the household was centered around its male head, the father who chose to have all who lived in the house, including children, baptized in the new faith. The child here was perceived as both a product and a constituent part of the family household. Salvo implies that, from the very beginning of Christianity, parents took an active role in the baptism of their children.

In several polemics the nature of that role came under discussion, where it centered on the question of parental obligation. The *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus asked pointedly "whether children are bound to be baptized by some law, whether parents are bound to do the service of having [their children] baptized."¹⁰⁸ In response to the question, the *Summa* first noted that there was

an obligation for children to be baptized, since baptism was necessary for salvation. Their parents were obligated to have them baptized as an act of faith: "We say also: Just as parents are bound to feed their children and provide the necessities for their bodies, so much more are they bound to provide for those spiritual things that concern the salvation of the soul; according to the words of the Apostle in 1 Timothy [5:8]: 'If anyone does not take care of those nearest him, above all his own household, he has denied his faith ... and is worse than an infidel.'"¹⁰⁹ Like Salvo Burci, the author of the *Summa* placed children at the center of the household, glossing the reference to "members of the household" (*domesticorum*). He asked, "Who are as intimate (*domestici*) as parents with their children or children with their parents?" And he answers, "No one." For these writers, the domestic sphere should be filled with loving commitment comparable to God's loving commitment to mankind and particularly to children. In the end, polemicists knew, it was the parents who must exercise their free choice, fill the voids of each child, and thereby obey God's wish to fulfill the divine mission of mercy to children. To the polemicists, God, in his role as benevolent parent, has asked for the children; it was the parent's responsibility to emulate the Lord's paternal concern and to bring the infant to baptism. Any other action was not simply heretical but threatened the soul of the fragile child with—and abandoned it to—eternal damnation.

The debates between Catholics and various heretical groups during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries placed children at the center of attention, as Christ was seen to do in the synoptic Gospels. The child was viewed as the focus of a conflict not simply between humans but also between good and evil, God and the devil. Catholics accepted infant baptism, the heretics refused it, and Catholics saw the disagreement as parallel to an equally real spiritual battle over the final resting place of the infant's soul, a battle fought by God in his effort to rescue the soul from the grips of envious Satan. Moreover, to reject infant baptism would do more than effectively damn the souls of contemporary and future children; it revoked the possibility of salvation for countless people baptized in infancy before the twelfth century and so would demand a complete rewriting of history. In contrast, support of the orthodox ritual and doctrine of infant baptism validated childhood as a phase of life worthy of God's attention and the attention of humans. Even the image of the devil yearning to obtain permanent possession of the infant's soul served to valorize the idea of childhood. The debate over the nature of the child played an important role in the doctrinal battle waged by Catholic polemicists, and it helped to demonize heretics as guilty of the spiritual abandonment of children past and present.

The focus on the historical significance of infant baptism—and on the consequences of its rejection—allowed polemicists to write a world history of children's salvation. But the concern with a diachronic narrative appeared not simply in the depiction of a continuous divine mercy for children but also in the narrative of each child's life. Catholic justification of infant baptism took into account the newborn's past (his inheritance of original sin) his present sinful state as a result of the original sin, and also his future. Pessimism and optimism both played roles in the decision to baptize infants: fear of the child's sudden death and the hope that, if the child managed to survive, he would renew his profession of faith.

The polemicists maintained a strong distinction between child and adult throughout the literature. It was imperative that the child remain different and separate from the adult world, which acted for him and debated his fate. The absolute passivity of the newborn, helplessly bound by sin and unable to think or move, set him apart from adults and served to justify God's decision to single out the child for particular merciful assistance. Whether depicted positively or negatively, as innocent or as defenseless and sinful, the child could be and was used for his metaphoric value. He could be a miniature image of humanity's culpability, with a magnified sense of the danger involved, or he could be a model for any number of virtues, from simplicity to humility.

Working from an Augustinian perspective and therefore basing their defense on the doctrine of original sin, the polemicists inevitably focused their attention most often on the negative view of the infant. Beyond being morally corrupt, the child's primary negative characteristic was one of incompleteness. The infant could not yet speak, walk, understand, believe, or fully exercise his free will. Discussions of infant baptism tended to magnify these incapacities, leading polemicists to view the child as incomplete, his lack of faith being a void that must be filled. Orthodox writers focused on the infant's incompetence in order to argue all the more forcefully that he needed external assistance. It was necessary for others to give consent for the child, to complete the child's faith and thereby release him from the bonds of original sin and allow him access to Christianity. This "completion" through the faith of another allowed the child to return—though only temporarily—to a state of Edenic innocence. If he died after baptism and before the age of discretion, his soul's journey was completed through entry into heaven.

This awareness of the possibility of death underlay the practice of infant baptism and was sometimes explicitly expressed but often simply implied. These debates reveal a heightened awareness of the child's physical and spiritual fragility. The social reality of infant mortality was adduced at times to stress the importance of

baptism; the physical may guide but must always be subservient to the spiritual. Yet the child's physical death could lead to his eternal spiritual damnation, a fear that the polemicists used to their advantage. Baptism thus became a spiritual precaution against the vagaries of human, and especially children's, physical existence.

But for the orthodox writers, baptism was far more than insurance. It was proof of God's mercy and concern for children. Infant baptism therefore did more than complete the child's incomplete faith. It completed God's plan of salvation for the most helpless members of society. In his role as paternal protector, God has offered to assist the defenseless and most needy, those Children of God who were children literally. Infant baptism was thus a sign of and testimony to divine compassion, the love of a father for his children. The Father's benevolence could also be seen in the location of unbaptized children in the least harsh part of hell. Polemicists used familial imagery to rationalize a religious practice, the ritual of baptizing infants: To Christians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, how could a father be just if he abandoned his children? The same imagery could then be deflected back to the family itself. If God demonstrated his love of children through the establishment of infant baptism, parents should do their part and emulate God by bringing their children to the font. In this way, Catholic polemicists created between religion and family an interplay in which love of God and love of children were unified. Infant baptism became a christianization of Abraham's covenant with the Lord, a ritual signifying the contact and contract between God and humanity, centering on the element of society depicted as the most vulnerable and virtuous of humankind.

Notes:

Note 1: The most problematic examples of this type of work are the synthetic overviews, such as Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1990) and Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London, 2001). [back](#)

Note 2: See, among others, Pierre le Chantre, *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis*, ed. J.-A. Dugauquier, *Analecta mediaevalia namurcensia*, no. 4 (Louvain; Lille, 1954), 56: "Instantia, plures saluantur uel possunt saluari per baptismum quam per eucharistiam, ergo, dignior est baptismus quam eucharistia." [back](#)

Note 3: The best and most extensive discussion of the high-medieval theology of infant baptism is still Arthur Landgraf's "Kindertaufe und Glaube in der Frühscholastik," *Gregorianum* 9 (1928): 337–73, 497–543; revised in Landgraf's *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, vol. 3.1 (Regensburg, 1954). [back](#)

Note 4: Marie-Dominique Chenu's essay, "Le réveil évangélique," in *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris, 1957), 252–73, remains the best work on this issue; see the translation in Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, tr. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago, 1968), 239–69. [back](#)

Note 5: For the eleventh-century heretical movements and their views on baptism, see the brief references in Jean Musy, "Mouvements populaires et hérésies au XIe siècle en France," *Revue historique* 253 (1975): 62–63. [back](#)

Note 6: The literature on Augustine's views of sin and baptism is immense. The *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* contains a solid overview under "baptême des enfants." See also Joh. Nep. Espenberger, *Die Elemente der Erbsünde nach Augustin und der Frühscholastik* (Mainz, 1905) and the works of J.-Ch. Didier, esp. "Saint Augustin et le baptême des enfants," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 2 (1956): 109–29, and, more recently, Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993), chap. 3. [back](#)

Note 7: Some useful collections of the patristic and medieval theology of infant baptism are: Albert Michel, *Enfants morts sans baptême: Etude doctrinale et documentaire, certitudes et hypothèses* (Paris, 1954), J.-Ch. Didier, *Faut-il baptiser les enfants? La réponse de la tradition* (Paris, 1967), and Heinrich Kraft, *Texte zur Geschichte der Taufe, besonders der Kindertaufe in der alten Kirche* (Berlin, 1969). The terms employed to describe this "child" tended to blur any distinctions in age within the category *childhood*. The term *puer* was used interchangeably with *infans*, *lactans*, *parvus*, and *parvulus*. While all denote someone who had not yet attained adolescence, the most common terms, *infans* and *parvulus*, both imply a newborn or very young child. The latter technically means "little little one," a diminutive of the word *parvus*, while the former, as we shall see, refers to the inability to speak. The evidence suggests that the authors generally discussed newborns and infants, but they may have included only those under the age of discretion (around age seven) or even all prepubescents. [back](#)

Note 8: In a startling passage, Augustine suggests that childhood itself was a sad consequence of Adam and Eve's sin and that in Paradise humans would have been born fully grown, from the side of their parents, just as Eve had been. See *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 38.68, *CSEL* 60, pp. 68–69. [back](#)

Note 9: Petr. Ven., 4: "Vnde infantes, licet a uobis baptizentur, quia tamen credere obstante etate non possunt, nequaquam saluantur." [back](#)

Note 10: Alan, col. 546: "Alii haereticorum dicunt, quod parvuli peccatum habent, sed eis non prodest baptismus ante discretionis annos, quia fidem non habent." [back](#)

Note 11: Alan, col. 547: "Praecepta enim in iure civili non dantur parvulis et *indiscretis*, sed adultis et discretis." [back](#)

Note 12: Alan, col. 547: "Item qui baptizantur, prius catechizantur et instruuntur; quomodo ergo baptizari possunt, qui nec instrui possunt?" [back](#)

Note 13: Prep., 12.5: "Aliqui prius docendi quam baptizandi. Sed parvuli non sunt docendi [non possunt doceri] cum intellectum percipiendi doctrinam non habeant; quare nec infra discretionis annos baptizandi." [back](#)

Note 14: Moneta, 4.1.4: "Ad hoc dico quod in illis verbis *Qui crediderit* &c. intelligitur de illo, qui potest credere praedicationi quam audit: & quod ita sit patet per hoc quod praecedit v. 15. Praedicate Evangelium omni Creaturae. Numquid Creaturae nomine quaelibet creatura intelligitur? Non: sed tantum homo: & numquid quilibet Homo tam Adultus quam Parvulus? Non: quia per creaturam intelligitur homo Adultus tantum, qui capax est disciplinae." [back](#)

Note 15: See the much more extensive defense of *fides aliena* (the faith of another) below, in the discussion of God's redemptive plan for children; my concern in the present section is to establish the parameters of the negative side of infancy. [back](#)

Note 16: Moneta, 4.1.3: "Sicut enim per alium peccavit, idest per Adam, ut habetur Rom. 5. ita etiam per alium petit, & vult, & credit." [back](#)

Note 17: Ebrard, p. 1543F: "Vnde in Canticis Canticorum: Soror nostra parua est, & vbera non habet. Quid faciemus sorori nostrae in die, quando alloquenda est? si murus est, aedificemus super eum propugnacula argentea. Ecce, animam lactantis vocat sororem: quae vbera non habet, hoc est, intellectum vtriusque Testamenti, siue vtriusque dilectionis. Huiusmodi autem debemus ad baptismum inuitare: Et per paternos fidem iniungere, hoc est enim propugnacula super murum aedificare argentea." [back](#)

Note 18: Moneta, 4.1.5: "Item appellat eos infantes qui nondum loqui poterant." [back](#)

Note 19: Ebrard, p. 1543H: "Vocauit autem Dominus Hieremiam, vt puerum; qui dixit ad Dominum: a, a, a, Domine Deus, ecce nescio loqui; quia puer sum. Cui Dominus ait;

Noli dicere, puer sum: quonam [sic] ad omnia, ad quae mittam te, ibis. Per hoc autem nobis innuitur, quod & paruulos vocare debemus ad fidem per baptismum." [back](#)

Note 20: Bernard, *Sermo* 66.9, p. 184: "Quid enim si infans pro se loqui non potest, pro quo vox sanguinis fratris sui, et talis fratris, clamat ad Deum de terra? Astat et clamat nihilominus mater Ecclesia. Quid tamen infans? Nonne et ipse videtur tibi inhiare quodammodo fontibus Salvatoris, vociferari ad Deum, suisque vagitibus clamitare: Domine vim patior, responde pro me [Isaiah 38:14]? Flagitat auxilium gratiae, quia vim patitur a natura. Clamat innocentia miseri, clamat ignorantia parvuli, clamat addicti infirmitas. Ita ergo clamant haec omnia, sanguis fratris, fides matris, destitutio miseri, et miseria destituti." [back](#)

Note 21: Ebrard, p. 1543A: "Ergo & puer, qui non credit, nec credendi habet intellectum, baptizari non debet, quousque rationem habeat. Sicut caecus a natiuitate, de quo dixerunt parentes ad scribas; Aetatem habet; pro se loquatur. Pro se ergo loqui debet, qui vult baptizari." [back](#)

Note 22: Innocent III to Arles, col. 644: "Non nisi per caritatem et in caritate crimina dimittantur, parvulis, qui nec sentiunt, nec consentiunt, et caritatem non habent, quae sentientibus et consentientibus tantum infunditur, peccatum non dimittitur in baptismo." [back](#)

Note 23: The present-day usage of *caritas*'s homonym, charity, does not fully include all of the senses of the thirteenth-century Latin, which focuses more on the motive behind acts of good will, the selfless benevolence that precedes any good works. [back](#)

Note 24: Arras, col. 425E: "Tertia, quia ad parvulum non volentem neque currentem, fidei nescium, suaeque salutis atque utilitatis ignarum, in quem nulla regenerationis petitio, nulla fidei potest inesse confessio, aliena voluntas, aliena fides, aliena confessio, nequaquam pertinere videtur." [back](#)

Note 25: Augustine's theology of original sin is not simply a tenet but an entire worldview. While the idea of original sin predates Augustine by centuries (St. Paul was thought to hint at it), the extensive system explaining evil in the world and differentiating original from actual sins is primarily the work of Augustine. [back](#)

Note 26: William, pp. 47–48: "Ex transgressione enim Ade complexio tota fuit debilitata et corrupta in pena peccati." [back](#)

Note 27: Salvo Burci, fol. 106rb: "Ille paraliticus qui iacet in lectulo plenus magna paralipsi bene potest pueris assimilari quia plorat simul et ridet et non potest ire nec venire et levatur et portatur sicut puer etiam nec comedere nec bibere potest et datur ei esa et potus sicut puero." [back](#)

Note 28: Innocent III to Arles, col. 645: "Absit enim, ut universi parvuli pereant, quorum quotidie tanta multitudo moritur." In a text he wrote before ascending the papal throne, Innocent wrote extensively and passionately on the dangers this world posed to the infant and child. See *Lotharii cardinalis (Innocentii III) De miseria humane conditionis*, ed. Michele Maccarone (Lugano, 1955) 1.1-7, pp. 7-14. [back](#)

Note 29: Prep., 12.B.9: "Item in eodem [Rom. 6.23]: Stipendia enim peccati mors, gratia autem Dei vita eterna. Si mors est retributio peccati ergo tam parvi quam magni peccatum habent, cum nullus mortem evadere possit, etiam puer unius diei." [back](#)

Note 30: Vacarius, 15.2: "Sed responsos quos quesisti et invenisti, in hoc, ut dicis, respondent quod maximam curam oportet eos habere ne patrem et matrem Dominus preveniat et puerum, antequam baptizetur, occidet." [back](#)

Note 31: Eckbert, col. 44B: "Sed die octavo iussit circumcidi infantem, quia sciebat fragilitatem corporis humani, et quod levi infortunio contingere potest, ut exstinguatur homo, antequam ad annos maturitatis perveniat." See below for Eckbert's discussion of circumcision as a parallel to baptism. [back](#)

Note 32: Eckbert, col. 45C: "Vix certe media pars hominum vivendo pervenit ad dies suos, in quibus scire possint quid credere debeant, aut quid non." [back](#)

Note 33: Petr. Ven., 85, p. 53: "Qui sunt, qui non peccauerunt? Nonne de ipsis paruulis ait sermo diuinus: Non est super terram sine peccato, nec infans unius diei? Nonne et ab

ore magni illius hominis in ora omnium Christianorum diriuatum est: Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum, et in peccatis concepit me mater mea? Et quid necesse est rem patentem multis testimoniis cingere? Vtique nullus absque peccato, si nec infans unius diei absque peccato, nec in ipso matris utero conceptus infans absque peccato." [back](#)

Note 34: Petr. Ven., p. 53: "Ergo cum nullus absque peccato esse possit, actuale autem peccatum in paruulis inuenire non possit, quoniam omnis quicumque peccat aut originaliter aut actualiter peccat; paruuli, qui actualiter peccare non potuerunt, utique originaliter peccauerunt." Peter here uses the claim that infants cannot actively sin in his logical argument defending the existence of original sin. [back](#)

Note 35: Prep., 12.1, p. 171: "Dicimus enim quod parvuli iniquitatem habent, non actam sed contractam, et peccatum, non actum sed contractum." [back](#)

Note 36: Prep., 12.7: "[Mark 9:16] attuli tibi filium meum habentem spiritum inmundum ... Quantum temporis est ex quo ei hoc accidit? At ille ait: Ab infantia. Ecce hic dicitur quod ab infantia possederat eum diabolus; quare aliquid suum in eo habebat; non nisi peccatum; ergo pueri habent peccatum." [back](#)

Note 37: Vacarius, 15.1.1: "Cum sit manifestum quod non anima per se neque corpus infantis, sed totus ipse infans servituti diaboli ante baptismum subiectus est per primum peccat[um] primi hominis." [back](#)

Note 38: Prep., 12.B.14: "Item in epistola ad Ephesios [2:3]: 'Eramus natura eterne pene filii vindicte, filii gehenne, filii ire.'" The more common manuscript tradition reads: "Si natura, ergo a nativitate; ergo cum parvuli eramus." [back](#)

Note 39: Vacarius, 15.3.3: "Illud etiam quod de abortivo dicis vanum et frivolum est. Nam si, ut ais, abortivus a Domino querat: Cur me condempnas? quid mali feci, vel quid omisi quod facere debui vel potui? Respondebit Dominus: Quoniam ire filius es natura et filius mortis; idcirco te condempno; immundus enim es et ideo mecum esse non potes. Et hoc non est ex mea culpa, sed ex tua, quia in Adam pactum meum irritum fecisti." [back](#)

Note 40: For further discussion of the anxiety over God's mercy, see the end of sect. 4. [back](#)

Note 41: Innocent III to Arles, col. 646: "Praeterea poena originalis peccati est carentia visionis Dei; actualis vero poena peccati est gehennae perpetuae cruciatus." [back](#)

Note 42: Moneta, 4.1.4: "Ex praedictis patet, quod pueri non baptizati non erunt in iudicio ex parte illorum, quibus dicitur: Venite benedicti Patris mei, nec ex parte aliorum, quibus dicitur: discedite maledicti, ut dicit B. Augustinus, qui ait statum medium fore, sicut etiam status medius est inter facere bonum, & facere malum." I have not yet located the source for this quote. On the development of the notion of the limbo of children, see the overview in *DTC*, under "Limbes." [back](#)

Note 43: Ebrard, p. 1543B: "Lucas enim attestatur, quod Ioannes Baptista adhuc ex vtero matris suae Spiritu sancto repletus est, Angelo teste, qui ait: Erit magnus coram Domino, vinum & siceram non bibet, & Spiritu sancto replebitur adhuc ex vtero matris suae. Vnde illud: Priusquam te formarem ex vtero, noui te, &. Et illud idem de Hieremia legimus." [back](#)

Note 44: Ebrard, p. 1543C: "Ecce, & pueros inspirat Dominus. Spiritus enim vbi vult, spirat. Quis ergo prohibet eos baptizari?" [back](#)

Note 45: Hugh of Amiens, col. 1267D: "Quod autem iste major omnibus, sed parvus pro nobis factus, sacramenta suscipit, agendo nobis innuit parvulos sacramentis non debere privari." [back](#)

Note 46: Bern., Ep. 241, col. 434C-D: "Quid, quaeso, quid invidet parvulis Salvatorem parvulum, qui natus est eis! Invidia haec diabolica est: invidia hac mors intravit in orbem terrarum. an putat parvulos Salvatore non egere, quia parvuli sunt?" My translation is based in part on Wakefield and Evans, p. 123. [back](#)

Note 47: Hugh of Amiens, col. 1267D. On the problematic issue of Christ's baptism at age thirty (long after infancy), see the discussion (in section 4) on the historical development of God's plan of salvation for children. [back](#)

Note 48: Moneta, 4.1.5: "Sed nonne Parvulus est homo? utique; unde venit hora ejus, cum autem peperit puerum, jam non meminit pressurae propter gaudium, quia natus est homo in Mundo." [back](#)

Note 49: Ebrard, p. 1543D-E: "Pullos enim ad pastum duxit; cum pueros adhuc lactentes ab Herode interfectos, tanquam primitias frugum, genitori exhibuit, adhuc infans infantes pro se patri obtulit, tanquam noua Xenia." For the reference to chicks at the beginning of this quote, see section 4, on God's mercy. I have not yet been able to decipher the Xenia reference. [back](#)

Note 50: Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermo I in dominica Palmarum, *PL* 183.255: "qui parvulus natus est, et primam parvulorum elegit aciem (Innocentes loquor), hodie quoque parvulos a gratia non excludit." [back](#)

Note 51: Ebrard, p. 1543E. The Glossa ordinaria is perhaps the most influential source to connect this passage from Revelations with the Innocents. [back](#)

Note 52: Eckbert, col. 50D: "Ita innocentes et puros ab omni macula post regenerationem suam." [back](#)

Note 53: Innocent III, Sermo VII, dominica III in adventu Domini, *PL* 217. 341: "Patet ex eo quod parvuli non habent multitudinem peccatorum." [back](#)

Note 54: Moneta, 4.1.4: "Dicunt etiam de Parvulis, quare salvabuntur Pueri baptizati, cum nihil boni agant? Dico ego, quare condemnabuntur, cum nihil mali agant?" George, writing a year or two earlier, has the question asked of an abstract child in the singular (*Parvulus salvabitur*). Moneta may have used George's brief *Disputatio* or, more likely, both are based on a third, earlier source. [back](#)

Note 55: Eckbert, col. 50D: "... invidet innocentiae eorum; invidet quod ita festinaretur beatitudo eorum; invidet, quod etiam ex ore hujusmodi infantium et lactentium perfecturus esset laudem suam." [back](#)

Note 56: Ebrard, p. 1543F: "Vos autem haeretici, ex illis estis, qui videntes pueros clamantes in templo, & dicentes: Osanna filio David, indignati sunt: quibus ait Iesus per Mattheum: Non legistis? Ex ore infantium & lactentium perfecisti laudem. Audistis, quia dixit: lactentium. Non solum enim parvulos, sed & lactantes laudem Dei perficere attestatur." [back](#)

Note 57: George, col. 1727A: "Ipse enim praecepit Matth. 18. Videte ne contemnatis unum de pusillis istis. Et contra, Dico autem vobis quia angeli eorum semper vident faciem Patris mei qui in caelis est." [back](#)

Note 58: Ebrard, p. 1543G: "Vnde Isaias. Ecce ego, & pueri, quos mihi dedit Deus. Si ergo eos dat Deus; recipi debent. Bonum est enim Dei datum. Si autem minus intelligentes sunt, non ideo reiciendi sunt. Suos enim habent angelos, Domino teste, qui ait: Angeli eorum semper vident faciem patris. Qui ergo eos abiicit, & angelos eorum abiicit." [back](#)

Note 59: George, col. 1727C: "De pusillis autem in tertia persona loquitur; de discipulis vero in secunda, Matthaei 18. Amen dico vobis, nisi conversi fueritis, & efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum coelorum." See also Ebrard, p. 1543G. True to his pedantic nature, Ebrard notes that a different term was used in each of the synoptic gospels (in Mt. 18:3, *parvulum*; Mk. 9:35; *puerum*; and Lk. 9:46, *infantes*, according to Ebrard), implying that children of varying or undefined ages were meant. [back](#)

Note 60: The *Summa* attributed to Prepositinus provides both heretical and orthodox interpretations of the passage, which exhibit some surprising similarities. "The Lord would never have said this unless little children were innocent and good. Thus they are guilty of no mortal sin. Solution: We [Catholics] say that this 'like' [*sicut*] is not 'just like' and has this meaning: Unless you become like little children, that is, with respect to [their] innocence and simplicity and humility, you will not enter [heaven]." Prep. 12 [A] 2: [Heretical interpretation:] "Hoc nequaquam dixisset Dominus nisi parvuli innocentes essent et boni. Quare nullo peccato mortali rei sunt. Solutio [orthodox interpretation]. Dicimus quod istud 'sicut' non est 'sicutissima' et est sensus: nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli, id est quantum ad innocentiam et simplicitatem et humilitatem, non intrabitis, etc. Non dico 'omnino sicut' ut ita sint insipientes vel cum originali si non sunt baptizati, sed sint secundum predicta." This final sentence, though crucial, is extremely awkward to

translate; I have paraphrased it. [back](#)

Note 61: Ebrard, p. 1543F: "Vnde & Petrus in prima Epistola ad infantium imitationem nos inuitat dicens: deponentes igitur omnem malitiam, & omnem dolum, & simulationes, & inuidias, & omnes detractiones; sicut modo geniti infantes, rationabile, sine dolo, lac concupiscite, &c." [back](#)

Note 62: I shall refer to the citation in its entirety as the *Sinite* passage. The title of this chapter is based on one possible translation of this passage, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." The use of the word *suffer* to mean "permit" or "allow" is of course highly archaic now. However, the phrase "suffer the children" will still occasionally reappear today. I freely admit that the pun in the title (in which "suffer little children" refers both to the child's spiritual plight and to the present biblical passage) exists only in the (archaic) English translation. [back](#)

Note 63: Prep. 12.A.3, p. 173: "Item in Matheo: Tunc oblato sunt parvuli ut manus eis imponeret et oraret. Discipuli autem infirma fide timentes Dominum importunitate offerentium lassari increpabant eos. Ihesus vero ait eis: Sinite parvulos et nolite prohibere eos venire ad me; talium enim est regnum celorum. Sed regnum celorum non est nisi mundorum. Ergo parvuli mundi sunt, ergo peccatum nullum habent ante baptismum; quare nulla indigent expiatione." [back](#)

Note 64: Ermengaud, col. 1258D: "Item de infantibus et parvulis in Evangelii invenimus, quia Dominus noster Jesus Christus talem parvulorum aetatem probavit, ut dicit discipulis, offerentes ad se parvulos prohibentibus: 'Sinite parvulos venire ad me....'" [back](#)

Note 65: Salvo Burci, fols. 106vb—107ra: "Respondit catholicus, Audistis supra quod <107ra> fructus matrimonium [sic], id est, pueri xpisto offerebantur et Yhesus illum fructum libenter recepit reprehendendo apostolos prohibentes dictos paruulos ipsi xpisto offerri dicens talium enim est regnum celorum, scilicet paruulorum et in isto fructu notate tria que fecit Christus. primum est quia eos fuit amplexatus. secundum est quia illis manus imposuit. Tercium est quia benedixit illis. In istis tribus sacramentis manifeste ostenditur perfectio totius iusticie paruulorum que eis contingebat ex fide offerencium ut in mat[theum] et mar[cum]. O Erretici maligni si fructus matrimonium esset malus et a malo deo christo [sic] non fecisset eis hec tria sacramenta, ergo matrimonium bonum et a bono deo." I read *fructus matrimonii* for *matrimonium* (earlier in the manuscript, the phrase appears with *matrimonii*, the genitive) and in the final sentence, *Christus* for *Christo*. [back](#)

Note 66: Ermengaud, col. 1258D—259A: "Quicumque ergo non crediderit parvulorum baptismum atque infantium ad salutem vitae aeternae valere, contra Evangelium credit, et est quasi qui contradicit, parvulos ad Christum venire." [back](#)

Note 67: Petr. Ven., 88, p. 55: "Nunc iam, Domine Iesu, nunc iam, bone magister, doce uerbo, immo, ut plus audeam, ostende exemplo, utrum paruuli non propria fide ad te uenientes sed aliena tibi oblato a te sint suscipiendi, ut ecclesia tua docet, an repellendi, ut nouorum hominum temeritas iubet." [back](#)

Note 68: Salvo Burci, fol. 106ra: "statim representatus fuit fructus matrimonii, scilicet, pueri, igitur possunt cognoscere sapientes quod istud importat magnum misterium in Ecclesia dei. Modo videamus sensum istarum uerborum, ita intelligendum est, Natis pueris, pueri debent offerri xpisto ad hoc ut xpisti recipiant sacramenta." [back](#)

Note 69: Alan, cap. 42, col. 548C: "Sed non possunt venire ad Christum, nisi per baptismum, quia sine hoc saluari non possunt. Sunt ergo baptizandi ut ad Deum veniant, et saluentur." [back](#)

Note 70: Salvo Burci, fol. 106vb: "Forte dicent Erretici Quare dixit dominus talium est regnum celorum si non erant perfecti. Respondit catholicus, ita debes intellegere, christus enim sic intellexit talium est regnum et cetera recipiendo scilicet manus impositionem quia Christus statim fecit manus impositionem ipsis presentibus, igitur intelligendum est de ipsis parvulis sicut predixi." [back](#)

Note 71: Salvo Burci, fol. 106va: "Forte dicent Erretici O Catholice tu male exposuisti super facto puerorum. Nota quod dicit dominus, talium enim est regnum celorum. Si talium erat regnum celorum ergo erant perfecti igitur erant de illis de quibus dicit

dominus, Beati pauperes spiritum et cetera, ergo non sunt tales pueri sicut exposuisti, igitur bestia obmutesce. Respondit Catholicus contra, si esset sicut tu dicis non essent oblata Christo sed potius offerrent alios." [back](#)

Note 72: Petr. Ven., par. 69, p. 44; William, p. 50; Bern., Cant. 66.9, p. 184; Lombers; Moneta, 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 contain only the more extensive references to *fides ecclesie*. [back](#)

Note 73: Bern., Sermo 66.10, p. 185: "Nemo mihi dicat quia non habet fidem, cui mater impertit suam, involvens illi in sacramento, quousque idoneus fiat proprio, non tantum sensu, sed assensu, evolutam puramque percipere. Nunquid breve pallium est, ut non possit ambos cooperire? Magna est Ecclesiae fides." [back](#)

Note 74: Eckbert, 11, col. 48B—C: "Credimus inquam, hoc, et fideliter ab ipso postulamus, si quando ei parvulos baptizandos offerimus; ipse enim invisibiliter illis praesens est illic, et ipse invisibiliter baptizat omnes." [back](#)

Note 75: Bern., Sermo 66.10, p. 184: "Numquid minor fide Chananae mulieris, quam constat et filiae sufficere potuisse, et sibi? Ideo audivit: O mulier, magna est fides tua! fiat tibi sicut petisti." [back](#)

Note 76: Hugh of Amiens, cap. 12, col. 1269A: "Sic sic ille paralyticus ante Dominum Jesum a tecto demissus non fide sua, sed aliena salvatur: Ut vidit, inquit, fidem illorum, dixit: Fili, remittuntur tibi peccata tua; et: Surge, et ambula." [back](#)

Note 77: Eckbert, 11, col. 48A: "Portamus siquidem et nos paralyticum in lecto et ponimus ante Jesum, quando parvulum bajulamus ad baptismum, petentes ut baptizet eum et salvet. Anima quippe rationalis adhuc originali peccato constricta, et nihil adhuc naturalium virium exercere valens in corpore puerili; cui melius comparatur quam homini intus per peccatum constricto, et foris per paralytim in membris dissoluto jacentique in lecto?" [back](#)

Note 78: Vacarius, 13.3.3: "Ex his omnibus intelligere potes quod, ubi necessitas exigit, per alium etati succurritur. Immo etiam maiori aliena fides et affectio ex causa prodeat, sicut paralitico qui per tegulas ante Dominum depositus fuit, quem Dominus curavit, secutus fidem eorum qui eum portabant." [back](#)

Note 79: William, p. 48: "Hoc etiam aperte demonstrant remedia que circa originale peccatum iniuncta sunt in naturali et nova et vetere lege. Nam remedia naturalis legis oblationes esse et munera intelligimus, unde dictum est: 'Respexit Deus ad Abel et ad munera eius.'" [back](#)

Note 80: Eckbert, 6, col. 44C: "Ante tempus autem circumcisionis ab Adam usque ad Abraham, qui primus suscepit circumcisionis mandatum, fieri solebant oblationes Deo, ab his qui Dei cultum habebant, per quas deleri potuit originale peccatum, atque alia peccata fragilitatis humanae in electis Dei tam pusillis quam magnis, ut salvae fierent animae eorum, quoniam nunquam misericordia Dei humanum genus omnino dereliquit. Ecce talis erat Deo de infantibus cura prioribus saeculis ut conservarentur animae eorum a perditione." [back](#)

Note 81: Eckbert, 5, col. 43D—44A. "Quia autem pro animarum salvatione datum fuerit illud mandatum, aperte cognosci potest ex verbis Domini, quae ad Abraham locutus est, quando ei circumcisionis praeceptum dabat, dicens: infans octo dierum circumcidetur in vobis. Omne masculinum in generationibus vestris, tam vernaculus quam emptitius circumcidetur. Masculus cujus praepitii caro circumcisa non fuerit, delebitur anima illius de populo suo." [back](#)

Note 82: Vacarius, 18: "Sed infans, qui nondum erat, id est tempore pacti, nec fuisse intelligebatur, quomodo hoc pactum irritum fecit? Ideo quidam ad pactum cum Adam factum de pomo hec referunt. Quia in Adam omnes peccaverunt et omnes pactum illud cum Adam factum irritum fecerunt, secundum Dominicam rationem, etiam si velis eam referre ad pactum circumcisionis, quia nichilominus, immo magis ad pactum prohibitionis pertinet, cum Adam factum, cum specialiter dicatur quod omnes infantes in Adam peccaverunt, et non similiter dicatur de Habraam." [back](#)

Note 83: Eckbert, 5, col. 44B: "Sicut autem parvuli masculini sexus ab originali culpa, per circumcisionem expiabantur, ita et feminei sexus infantes per legales oblationes ab ea purgabantur ut et ipsarum animae non perirent a populo suo." [back](#)

Note 84: Eckbert, 5, col. 44B: "Potuit etiam nimirum eadem circumcisio fieri ante diem octavum, si periculum mortis parvulis imminere videbatur. Sicut et nos pro eadem causa ante tempus nonnunquam parvulos baptizamus, cum tamen sit constitutum ab apostolicis patribus, ut vel in Pascha, vel in Pentecoste baptizemus." See below on God's mercy and emergency baptism. [back](#)

Note 85: Alan, cap. 42, col. 548A: "Item, quidam inter innocentes ab Herode occisos, fuerunt unius vel duorum dierum: eis autem est remissum peccatum originale, quia salvati sunt. Sed non est remissum per circumcisionem, quia haec non fiebat citra diem octavam. Qua ergo virtute dimissum est, nisi baptismo sanguinis, qui aequivalet baptismo fluminis?" Note that Alan contradicts Eckbert's claim that Jews may have circumcised children prior to the eighth day. [back](#)

Note 86: Prep., 12.A.4: "Solutio. Dicimus quod parvuli illi Iudeorum erant, octava die circumcisi secundum legem, et ita nullum peccatum habebant quia per circumcisionem remissa erant eis originalia vel, si aliqui qui circumcisi adhuc non erant tunc obliti sunt ad Dominum, et imposito complexu et contractu dominico mundati sunt." [back](#)

Note 87: Innocent III to Arles, p. 645: "etsi originalis culpa remittebatur per circumcisionis mysterium, et damnationis periculum vitabatur, non tamen perveniebatur ad regnum coelorum, quod usque ad mortem Christi fuit omnibus obseratum; sed per sacramentum baptismi Christi sanguine rubricati culpa remittitur, vitatur periculum, et ad regnum coelorum etiam pervenitur, cuius ianuam Christi sanguis fidelibus suis misericorditer reseravit." Note that Innocent does not elaborate on precisely where the souls of circumcized Jewish boys ended up in the days prior to the New Law. [back](#)

Note 88: Vacarius, 13.3.3: "Ergo si necessaria fuit circumcisio infantibus, ne de populo suo perirent propter pactum quod fecerunt irritum, eadem ratione et baptismus hodie est necessarius eis." [back](#)

Note 89: And ancient. The letters of Paul already draw the comparison between Jewish circumcision and Christian baptism. The topic is immense, and so I limit myself here only to those items (mentioned in the polemics) that are relevant to children. [back](#)

Note 90: J. de Ghellinck, "Le développement du dogme d'après Walafrid Strabo à propos du baptême des enfants," *Recherches de science religieuse* 29 (1939): 481–86. The passage, which de Ghellinck considers extraordinary for the period, appeared in Walafrid's *Libellus de exordiis et incrementis ... ecclesiasticis* (c. 840–42). [back](#)

Note 91: Petr. Ven., 11, p. 13: "Et, o docti homines, insipientibus et indoctis nunc tandem quod intellegere hactenus non potuerant exponentes, itane desipuerunt preterita secula, ut tot milibus paruulorum per mille et eo amplius annos illusorium baptismata tribuerent, et a Christi temporibus usque ad uos non ueros ei christianos sed phantasticos crearent?" [back](#)

Note 92: Petr. Ven., 66, p. 41: "Cum enim tota Gallia, Hispania, Germania, Italia ac uniuersa Europa a trecentis uel quingentis fere annis nullum nisi in infantia baptismum habuerit, nullum Christianum habuit... . Si Christum non habuit, certum est quia periit. Perierunt igitur omnes patres nostri, quia in infantia non potuerunt Christi baptismate baptizari. Peribimus et nos qui uiuimus, qui residui sumus, nisi post Christi etiam Henrici baptismate baptizemur. Detrahentur de supernis celorum usque ad ima inferorum innumerabiles sancti, quos in infantia baptizatos, et uita sanctitate, et mundus testimonio, et diuinitas miraculis commendarat." Vacarius (13.1) makes similar comments, also noting that, if infant baptism is false, then priests would have been lying (knowingly or in ignorance) for hundreds of years. [back](#)

Note 93: Petr. Ven., 80, p. 50: "Vbi estis, qui paruulos Christianos dampnatis? Saluantur paruuli Iudeorum sacramento circumcisionis et non saluabuntur paruuli Christianorum sacramento baptismatis? Credit Iudeus et a peccato mundatur filius eius? Nulla est fides in paruulis Christianorum, sed nec est aliqua fides in paruulis Iudeorum." [back](#)

Note 94: Eckbert, 7–8, col. 43C: "Si ergo omnes tales necesse est perire, merito debet intolerabilis esse tristitia toti Ecclesiae, pro ea mutatione, quam in ea fecit Deus, in hoc quod interdixit circumcisionem et pro ea baptismum constituit, et tanta millia animarum in perditionem ire permittit, quibus putatur prodesse baptismus, et non eis prodest, ut docet haeresis uestra. VIII. Quid ergo aliud faciet Rachel, nisi ut sine intermissione ploret filios

suos, et non velit consolari, quia non sunt? Quomodo ergo tempus istud recte dici potest tempus gratiae, et non magis tempus irae? Imo, o filii irae, o Cathari semen aequam, filii scelerati; nunc est tempus gratiae, et non irae." I have not been able to decipher the phrase *semen aequam*. [back](#)

Note 95: Moneta, 4.1.4 and Prep., 12.B.13. [back](#)

Note 96: Alan, cap. 42, col. 349A: "Alias injuste ageretur cum parvulis, cum non habeant liberum velle vel nolle, si baptismi sacramentum in fide aliorum eis prodesse non posset." [back](#)

Note 97: Bern., Cant. 66.9, p. 184: "Non relinquit Dominus plebem suam." [back](#)

Note 98: Eckbert, 15, col. 51A: "Quaesivit igitur artem qua impediret omnes infantium animas, ne gratiae, quae in baptismo tribuitur a Deo, participes fierent, et invenit sibi aptissima instrumenta ad officium hoc, videlicet linguas Catharorum, quae sunt pharetrae pessimarum sagittarum ejus, quibus sagittant in obscuro rectos corde. In quibus posuit et hoc verbum iniquum, quod dicunt, nihil prodesse parvulis ad salutem lavacrum baptismi, et debere eos reservari usque dum perveniant ad annos discretionis." [back](#)

Note 99: Eckbert, 15, col. 51A: "Sicque in partem suam attraheret omnes animas, quae in infantilibus annis ab hac vita migrant, atque a regno Dei eas elongaret." [back](#)

Note 100: Eckbert, 6, col. 44C: "Nunquam misericordia Dei humanum genus omnino dereliquit. Ecce talis erat Deo de infantibus cura prioribus saeculis ut conservarentur animae eorum a perditione; et nunquid aestimatis, impia gens, quod oblitus sit ejusdem misericordiae suae Deus in tempore isto, quod gratiae tempus et annus benignitatis vocatur? An putatis quoniam minus amet filios et filias Christianorum, quam infantes Judaeorum, quibus constituit circumcisionem, ut non perirent animae eorum a populo suo?" [back](#)

Note 101: Eckbert, 13, col. 49C: "Si ergo conceditis et parvulos omnes conclusos esse sub peccato, necesse est ut concedatis ad eos pertinere misericordiam Dei, et ipsos quoque ad latum gremium benignitatis ejus [!] cum caeteris invitare." [back](#)

Note 102: Ermengaud, col. 1253A: "Item filius cujusdam mulieris viduae, dum extra portam civitatis ad sepeliendum deferretur, fletu et ululatu matris Dominus misericordia motus, eum suscitavit, et matri suae reddidit." In the following chapter (on the earliest accusation of ritual murder) we shall discuss the trope of maternal anguish. [back](#)

Note 103: Eckbert, 14, col. 50A-B: "Quomodo dulcem illam vocem, qua dicit: Sinite parvulos venire ad me, talium est enim regnum coelorum, mutavit in amaram vocem, ut dicat: auferte parvulos a me, talium enim non est regnum coelorum? Nam secundum tenorem disciplinae vestrae, hoc, etsi non manifesta voce, ipso tamen opere dicit; si omnes qui ante annos discretionis moriuntur, perire permittit in originali peccato cum quo nati sunt." [back](#)

Note 104: Petr. Ven., 88, pp. 54–55: "Et o quanta diuersitas inter benignitatem et maliciam, inter pietatem et impietatem, inter Christum benigne paruulos susipientem et hereticos impie paruulos repellentes. Fecerunt olim non quidem tale quid sed simile quid paruulos a Christo repellendo Christi discipuli, sed, ne facerent, sunt a magistro correpti ... Quid uos ad ista crudeles paruulorum expulsores dicetis? Ecce quia a se repellebantur paruuli, indigne tulit Iesus; ut sinerentur paruuli uenire ad se et non prohiberentur, precipit Iesus; talium esse regnum celorum dixit Iesus. Complexabat eos Iesus, imponebat manus suas super eos Iesus, bendicebat eos Iesus. Nunquid ab amplexante paruulos Christo, ab imponente super paruulos manus Christo, a benedicente paruulis Christo, inuito ipso Christo, paruulos auelletis? Videat ecclesia, iudicet orbis terrarum quibus magis obserandum sit regnum celorum, uobis, qui contradicitis uerbis celorum, an paruulis, de quibus ipse rex ait: talium est enim regnum celorum." [back](#)

Note 105: I am also reminded of Paul's statement about the need for heresy: It provides a contrast to the truth of orthodox voices (1 Cor. 11.19: "Oportet et haereses esse"). [back](#)

Note 106: Ebrard, p. 1543D: "Corui enim pullis suis pastum negant, quousque nigrescant, &parentibus similes fiant, similiter &pueris pastum vitae negare vultis quousque intelligant. Sed Dominus misericors est, &pius, vt columba: qui non solum coruos, imo &pullos coruorum pascit iuxta illud: qui dat iumentis escam ipsorum, &pullis

coruorum inuocantibus eum. Pullos enim ad pastum duxit." [back](#)

Note 107: Salvo Burci, fol. 106va: "Item invenitur in pluribus partibus in actibus apostolorum quod pater familias cum tota familia sua baptizabatur. si tota familia baptizabatur, ergo et pueri quia pueri sunt de familia et in familia." [back](#)

Note 108: Prep., 12.A.8: "Hec in fine queritur utrum pueri teneantur baptizari aliquo precepto, utrum parentes teneantur dare operam ut ipsi baptizentur. [back](#) Ad hoc dicimus quod pueri tenentur baptizari, id est necessarium est eis ut baptizentur ad hoc ut salventur, sed non tenentur baptizari sub nota transgressionis."

Note 109: Prep., 12.A.8: "Dicimus etiam: cum parentes teneantur alere filios et necessitati corporum subvenire, multo magis in spiritualibus que spectant ad animarum salutem ipsis subvenire tenentur, iuxta verbum Apostoli in prima epistola ad Timotheum dicentis: Si quis suorum et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, fidem negavit operibus, etsi non verbis, quia proximo non consentiunt, et infideli deterior est. Nota quod ait domesticorum; qui enim tam domestici ut parentes filiis vel parentibus filii? Quasi <diceret>: nulli." [back](#)
