Quaker Studies

Canela, E., 'Sarah Apetrei, *The Reformation of the Heart: Gender and Radical Theology in the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024). ISBN 9780198836001. Hardback, £80', *Quaker Studies*, 31/1 (2026): pp. 1–4. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/qs.29848

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Sarah Apetrei, *The Reformation of the Heart: Gender and Radical Theology in the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024). ISBN 9780198836001. Hardback, £80

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A review of Sarah Apetrei, *The Reformation of the Heart: Gender and Radical Theology in the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

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Sarah Apetrei's *The Reformation of the Heart* is an ambitious and important contribution to the study of gender, theology, and radical religion in the mid-seventeenth century, more specifically the years between 1646 and 1654.

Apetrei argues that the English Revolution was more radical in its theology and more united in its promotion of female activists than has been fully recognised (p4). Before Quakerism really burst onto the scene in the early 1650s, women were not only preachers – they were leaders and integral to their respective faith communities. This was a diverse group of women participating in inward, affective, mystical transformation. She asks the reader to rethink the historical understanding of women's religious activism in this period and also examine how we understand radicalism in this time. *The Reformation of the Heart* is a work that is theologically sophisticated and historically provocative that will surely be of interest to scholars of early Quakerism.

The book is split into six chapters and the introduction immediately informs the reader of the meaning behind the title. A phrase used by army chaplain William Dell during a sermon before the House of Commons in November 1646, the reformation of the heart was meant to be 'an inward reformation' that 'layes hold upon the heart, and soul, and inner man, and changes, alters, and renews and reforms that; and when the heart is reformed, all is reformed' (p2). This proclamation in 1646 very much sets the scene for what is to come.

Apetrei's arguments unfold through a series of rich case studies. Within the chapters entitled: Incarnation, Salvation, Revelation, Grace and Sin, Song, and Church we come across familiar names and are also introduced to other individuals important and influential to the Quaker origin story. Apetrei successfully argues that the English Revolution can be seen as a profound disruption to a symbolic order and the openness of this period brought fresh theological insights to the forefront. A constant throughout *The Reformation of the Heart* is child prophet Sarah Wight, a teenager who gained a wide and influential following in 1647. She was referred to as the 'girl-king' who declared that 'the throne of God is not only in the highest heavens but the poorest contemptible hearts' – what is extraordinary is that she was making statements like this during a time of incredible political turmoil in England (p21).

This work puts familiar names into the context of the time, including Julian of Norwich, Giles Calvert, Anna Trapnel, Lady Eleanor Davies, John Saltmarsh, Thomas Edwards (author of *Gangrena*), and Lady Anne Conway.

For Quaker scholars, the short biography of Dorcas Erbury in Chapter 1 (Incarnation) is welcomed. While her profile drastically fades after James Nayler's trial, we are reminded that this infamous Quaker is the daughter of the radical Independent

theologian William Erbury. William, like Sarah Wight mentioned above, is another constant thread throughout the book. His voluminous written work, often acknowledged as deeply influential to the development of early Quakerism, was also theologically and politically radical when it came to issues of gender and women's ministry in a way that influenced those who came before the first Friends.

Apetrei also explores James Nayler's infamous 1656 trial in Chapter 3 (Revelation) while looking at the female prophets, including Dorcas Erbury, who surrounded Nayler. While historians often look at the adoration expressed by the women at Nayler's trial, Apetrei also reminds the reader that another person was ridiculed for their actions after Nayler's punishment – Robert Rich. Rich published *Copies of some few of the papers given into the House of Parliament in the time of James Nayler's trial* in 1657 and it was reported that he tended to the badly beaten Nayler, 'singing and weeping at Nayler's feet, stroking his hair, and licking his wounds' (p93).

Other early Friends mentioned include Richard Farnworth, Katharine Evans, and Sarah Cheevers, Robert Barclay, George Keith, Ambrose Rigg, and Mary Pennington.

Meticulously researched with an impressive list of primary literature and archival sources, its absolute strength is Apetrei's engagement with manuscript culture. By bringing to light texts that may have been overlooked or under-analysed, this book sets itself apart by showing the reader that there was a vast cauldron of ideas swirling in the 1640s and 1650s and women, not just Quaker women, were very much engaged and taking control of their own salvation and future. *The Reformation of the Heart* is an excellent contribution to recent research on radicalism, women, and gender in the mid-seventeenth century, while also setting itself apart by the depth of its arguments. It deserves to be widely read.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.