Mark Jones/Michael A.G. Haykin (eds.)

A New Divinity

Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates during the Long Eighteenth Century

V&R

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

Reformed Historical Theology

Edited by
Herman J. Selderhuis

in Co-operation with
Emidio Campi, Irene Dingel, Elsie Anne McKee,
Richard Muller, Risto Saarinen, and Carl Trueman

Volume 49

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

Mark Jones / Michael A.G. Haykin (eds.)

A New Divinity

Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates during the Long Eighteenth Century

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

To Chester Chummie: With Appreciation
For Edwin Ewart, a lover of Truth and teacher of theology

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data available online: http://dnb.de.

Typesetting: 3w+p, Rimpar
Printed and bound: Hubert & Co. KG BuchPartner, Göttingen
Printed in the EU
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2197-1137
ISBN 978-3-647-55285-9

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

Contents

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

Editors' Introduction

This is a book on theological debates during the "Long" Eighteenth Century. By "Long" we have in view a period that goes beyond 1700–1799. But quite how far that period extends has not been agreed upon. English literature scholars might go as far back as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and take the "century" forward as far as the deaths of Keats, Shelley, and Byron (1820s). Political historians might choose to begin the "century" with the Restoration (1660), but certainly by the Glorious Revolution (1688) all the way to the Reform Act (1832), though perhaps stopping at the Battle of Waterloo (1815). Whatever the case, clearly there is no established clearly defined period that makes up the Long Eighteenth Century.

For historical theologians, the problem may be even more acute. Our own "period" in this volume is arbitrary in many respects. This depends in part on when we choose to date the end of Puritanism. The Act of Uniformity (1662) may be the beginning of nonconformity. At this point, Puritanism effectively ended, though many have argued that the transition from Puritanism to Protestant Dissent came after 1689 with the Act of Toleration. With the Act of Toleration all parties who had hitherto been in conflict began to lay down their weapons and peacefully coexist. But there were still many theological debates that would emerge or gain momentum based upon past (somewhat) unresolved debates among broadly Reformed theologians. This volume does not really move into the nineteenth century. So it is very much an eighteenth century book. But we do begin earlier than 1700, which means our "century" is longer than 100 years.

What were some of these theological debates that we have chosen to highlight in this volume?

After the Act of Toleration, Protestants in England and New England did manage to co-exist without some of the incredible persecutions that marked the seventeenth century. But the history of the church teaches us that theological controversies never go away. This book is evidence of that during the Long Eighteenth Century. We have decided to begin this century with the Neonomian-Antinomian debates that took place towards the latter part of the seventeenth

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

century. Even here, this particular debate has a rich history, going back to the 1620s–30 s both in England and New England.

Martin Luther coined the word "antinomian" in 1539, which had a much different meaning when it was used in the debate highlighted in the first chapter of this volume. As Jones and Ramsey show, the term "neonomian" was coined by Isaac Chauncy in his debates during the 1690s against Daniel Williams. Historically speaking, "neonomianism" is simply the pejorative term for the perceived Arminianism of the moderate Presbyterians. The chapter by Jones and Ramsey describes not only the rise of Antinomianism, as a way to understand the broader context of the Antinomian-Neonomian debates in the 1690s, but also the theological nature of the debates (e.g., conditionality, justification, etc.) between the Congregationalists (e.g., Isaac Chauncy & Richard Davis) and moderate Presbyterians (e.g., Daniel Williams, William Bates, & John Howe).

The Antinomian-Neonomian debates in the 1690s provide a natural gateway into the Marrow controversy in Scotland. Many of the theological issues that arose during the Marrow controversy (1718–1726) were already discussed before in the seventeenth century among leading Reformed theologians. In fact, as William VanDoodewaard notes, it was particularly due to the somewhat forgotten work, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* by Edward Fisher, which first appeared in print during the summer of 1645. Fisher's *Marrow* has an intriguing seventeenth-century context, which deserves more scholarly attention. This work was eventually republished in 1718 in Scotland, two years after the famous Auchterarder controversy, which led to the Church of Scotland in 1717 rejecting certain theological propositions that highlighted what VanDoodewaard and other scholars believe to be certain legalistic and hyper-Calvinistic tendencies in the Church of Scotland at that time. Eventually, in 1720, Fisher's *Marrow* came under a sort of ban by an Act of the General Assembly. A new edition of *The Marrow* appeared in 1726, which included extensive explanatory notes by Thomas Boston, who was one of the "Marrow Men."

VanDoodewaard highlights the various theological debates that took place during the Marrow controversy, such as preparationism versus preparatory grace, the relationship of saving faith and repentance, and the gospel offer. Among other things, VanDoodewaard's chapter shows the inter-relationship of theology over the centuries. The Marrow controversy was, in part, a question over who was being more faithful to the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Ian Hugh Clary looks at a debate on the nature of revival between George Whitefield and the Erskine brothers. Controversy often followed the itinerant ministry of the transatlantic revivalist George Whitefield. Whether it involved his dispute with Wesleyan Methodists over predestination, or his challenges to what he termed "unconverted ministers," Whitefield, especially in his youth, courted

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

controversy and even welcomed it. However, after his first preaching trip to Scotland Whitefield found himself on the receiving end of serious criticism by ministers of the Associate Presbytery, many of whom, like the brothers Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, he once counted as friends. As their dispute over ecclesiology grew more heated, Whitefield himself cooled in his taste for debate – it was at this time that he began to negotiate a truce with John Wesley, and softened in his critiques of Anglican clergy. Clary's chapter outlines the nature of Whitefield's relationship to the Associate Presbytery, his own developing ecclesiological convictions, and the resulting controversy that ensued upon his refusal to limit his preaching to their churches only, in neglect of Church of Scotland pulpits.

Moving over to New England, HyunKwan Kim offers us insight into whether Jonathan Edwards's view on the will is a departure from classical Reformed thinking. His essay identifies the apparent chasm between the Westminster Confession and Edwards's view on the subject of free choice. To the surprise of some, Edwards has a philosophical position that is consistent with materialistic determinism. As HyunKwan Kim notes, in this respect, Edwards diverges from the classic Reformed orthodox position. Aristotelian faculty psychology and medieval modal logic enabled Reformed authors to preserve room for contingency in human actions (so the Westminster Confession). For Edwards, however, Lockean faculty psychology enables him to try to develop his own theological compatibilism against Arminian libertarianism. So we have evidence of the Reformed theological tradition diversifying even more so with the contributions of Jonathan Edwards.

In some respects, Edwards remains in focus in the following chapter by Daniel Cooley and Douglas Sweeney. In this chapter the authors consider the "Edwardseans" and their preference for the so-called "moral government" theory of the atonement over against the substitutionary theory that was most dominant in Reformed circles. The moral government theory of the atonement was part of what became derisively known as the "New Divinity" theology. This theology was birthed in the revivals of the 1730s and 1740s in New England. In this chapter Cooley and Sweeney highlight some of the distinctive marks of the "New Divinity" school of thought, particularly in the areas natural ability and moral inability, immediate repentance, and the imputation of Adam's sin in order to provide the context for analyzing the relationship between Jonathan Edwards and his followers. Some have argued that Edwards was not responsible for the later "deviations" from Reformed orthodoxy, but this chapter shows that the story is not quite so simple. In the end, by comparing Jonathan Ewards with his son's theology of the atonement, the authors show that the heirs of Edwards were building off a platform that Edwards had developed. In other words, there is a degree of strong continuity – while admitting some dissimilarity – between Edwards and the Edwardseans. According to the authors, the latter group, fol-

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

lowing from Edwards, adapted Calvinistic atonement theology into a "Edwardsean moral government theory" that proved to be controversial but necessary in light of the challenges from those who held to a "universalist" understanding of the atonement.

Paul Helm looks at the thorny historical-theological phenomenon known as Hyper-Calvinism, which Helm notes was variegated. He looks at two of the major players in the debate, John Gill and Andrew Fuller. These two figures allow Helm to look at the Hyper-Calvinism dispute in terms of the manner of the communication and reception of the gospel. He highlights the differences in how the message of the gospel was communicated in order to show how this affected the hearers and their understanding of what the message is. In other words, the "how" and the "what" of offering the gospel are interconnected. This was, as Helm shows, a debate with real consequences for the life of the church in England during the eighteenth century.

Mark Herzer's essay on eschatology shows the acute differences in John Gill's and Jonathan Edwards's conception of the millennium. Though anachronistic millennial labels may not perfectly represent their positions, Gill can easily be categorized as a premillennialist while Edwards would represent the new and emerging postmillennial position that began to dominate the eighteenth century. Herzer also charts their remarkable similarities and deep attachment and dependence on seventeenth-century thought. Both embraced the historicist method of interpreting the Apocalypse which was rife in the previous century. Like almost all Reformed theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, they worked through the Apocalypse with at least one thing certain, namely, that the Pope was the Antichrist. Surprisingly, their disparate millennial expectations still led both of them to expect a very hopeful future in world history (*spes meliorum temporum*). For all their homogeneity, each theologian differed greatly as they speculated on the details of the fulfillment of the Apocalypse. Though Gill's millenarianism had its genesis in many of the Puritans of the previous generation (Joseph Mede, Thomas Goodwin, William Twisse, John Cotton, Increase Mather, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughs, etc.), his unique and eccentric eschatological speculations had little historical roots. Edwards unwaveringly sought to read contemporary events recorded in newspapers in terms of his eschatological timetable. Both expected a millennium but they differed as to what that would look like. What can be seen from these two representatives of the eighteenth century is that Reformed reflections on eschatology was not moribund but was instead vibrant, diverse, and yet tethered to the seventeenth century. Even though Gill was more in line with the latter part of seventeenth-century millenarians and Edwards more engaged with eighteenth-century scholarship (cf. Moses Lowman), they both strongly adhered to Reformed orthodoxy.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

Nathan Finn considers the Sandemanian controversy, which was a debate that took place among Baptist theologians and pastors. The Sandemanian movement offered a restorationist critique of mainstream evangelicalism. The most controversial Sandemanian view was its advocacy of "bare faith" in the facts of the gospel, which constituted a denial that repentance is an element of saving faith. When some Calvinistic Baptists in Scotland and Wales became attracted to Sandemanian views, the Baptist theologian Andrew Fuller wrote an influential treatise against Sandemanianism in general and the doctrine of bare faith in particular. As Finn shows, when the Sandemanian influence began to wane among the British Baptists, many observers agreed that Fuller's polemic had played the decisive role in the controversy.

Michael Haykin examines one of the most significant challenges faced by Reformed orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century, namely, the undermining of confidence in the Triunity of God. Beginning in the 1690s and drawing ammunition from the fledgling Enlightenment's supreme confidence in human reason, critics of the classical Christian understanding of God ignited a debate that dominated much of the century. It resulted in the loss of one entire Reformed community, that of the English Presbyterians, to heterodoxy and notable conflict within the ranks of the Congregationalists and Particular Baptists. Haykin looks at one slice of the dispute within the Particular Baptist ranks, that involving the defection of Edward Sharman, a founder of the Baptist Missionary Society, and his spirited attack on the Trinitarianism of Andrew Fuller, the leading Particular Baptist theologian in the latter decades of the Long Eighteenth Century. Though Fuller did not reply specifically to Sharman, the details of his Trinitarian thought are well enough documented to delineate the shape of what he would have said to his former colleague. This chapter thus helps to demonstrate that the Eighteenth Century must be given due weight in histories of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Scott Sealy's essay on ecclesiological debates shows that when Presbyterians in the American colonies began organizing their church courts in the early Eighteenth Century, they did so in the midst of an international debate on the authority of these institutions, particularly in the question of confessional subscription. Sealy's chapter examines the events related to subscription that preceded the schism between "Old Side" and "New Side" in 1741 within the context of the greater discussion, especially in the General Synod of Ulster. His chapter also shows that the ecclessiology and views of polity of the Irish Non-Subscribers was adopted by the New Side contributing to the division as well as the limits of authority incorporated into the church's constitution in the reunion of 1758.

Paul K. Helseth's essay explores the tension within what Mark Noll refers to as the "Princeton circle" that led to the founding of Princeton Seminary in 1812. It is generally assumed that Princeton Seminary was founded because more conservative members of the College Board of Trustees were troubled by the quality

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

and general direction of the education the College was providing at the end of the Long Eighteenth Century. But why were they troubled? Were they troubled because the College's President, Samuel Stanhope Smith, was carrying out Witherspoon's vision of enlightened education in a faithful fashion, as Smith maintained and as the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe? Or, were they troubled because Smith had abandoned Witherspoon's vision due to his accommodation of the more anthropocentric assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism, as Ashbel Green and his more conservative associates believed? Helseth argues that the founding of the Seminary was not an attempt to advance the more moderate interests of the Scottish intellectual tradition, but to recover an approach to enlightened education that was thought to have been compromised by Smith's more wide-ranging appropriation of Enlightenment thought. In short, Helseth rightly challenges the consensus of critical opinion by arguing that the tension that was the immediate impetus for the founding of the Seminary is best explained by pointing to the religious and educational entailments of the philosophical psychologies of Samuel Stanhope Smith and Ashbel Green. It suggests that Smith was conceiving of the educational mission of the College in a more robustly Scottish sense because he had accommodated a philosophical psychology that made it impossible for him to embrace precisely what Green and his more conservative colleagues were eager to recover, namely an understanding of enlightened education that was grounded generally in Witherspoon's more Augustinian theology, and specifically in the religious and educational entailments of his more Augustinian understanding of the unitary operation of the soul.

In the final essay, Robert Smart gives detailed attention to a rather well-known debate in the eighteenth century between two leading Congregational ministers, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy. The debate focussed on the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to what has been called the Great Awakening. Edwards believed that the Great Awakening was, in the main, a work of the Spirit, but Chauncy had more reservations. Chauncy conceded that the Spirit might work in revival, but he held to certain theological views that kept him from accepting that the Great Awakening was a legitimate work of the Holy Spirit. He could not accept, like Edwards did, that revival was a mixed work, which included both biblical and unbiblical elements. Nonetheless, as Smart shows, Edwards did in fact acknowledge the validity of Chauncy's criticisms regarding certain aspects of the Great Awakening.

Calvinistic Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists all had their internal theological disagreements. Sometimes, of course, these disagreements crossed ecclesiological boundaries, as in the Antinomian-Neonomian debate. These debates were also transatlantic. Whether in books or people travelling across the Atlantic, there were new theological ideas emerging constantly

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

throughout the eighteenth century. Many of these ideas, especially if they were new, were not received well. This volume attempts to give scholars a look at the nature and content of theological debate in the eighteenth century and what appears also to be an ever-widening Calvinistic tradition.

In his introductory chapter to our previously edited work, *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, Richard Muller claimed that "the eras of the Reformation and of Reformed orthodoxy were times of intense polemic and debate, initially over issues of confessional identity and confessional boundaries. There were also a large number of debates, varying in intensity, which took place over theological and philosophical issues not immediately related to confessional definition."[1] Instead of a single theological tradition (e.g., Presbyterianism), we have chosen rather deliberately to provide a wider picture of confessional and non-confessional debates in a few theological traditions, in the hope of offering readers a glance at the theological terrain of the eighteenth century in broadly Calvinist circles both in Britain and New England. Like all the previous centuries in the history of the church, debates among Christian pastors and theologians was a fact of Eighteenth century ecclesiological life.

"New Divinities" emerged, competing with "Old Divinities" and sometimes there were battles over which side was in fact "New" and what side was "Old." These battles sometimes get resolved; sometimes they did not. But if scholars, churchmen, theologians, and laypeople wish to understand present-day theological debates, they should look through the annals of church history and consider whether there is, indeed, anything new under the sun. To the degree that this volume can give us an accurate look at the past, with the goal of helping those in the present, we, the editors, consider ourselves to have provided a valuable service, along with these fine essays by the authors, in the service of theology and church history.

1 Ed. Michael A.G. Haykin & Mark Jones, Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 17.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

Mark Jones / D. Patrick Ramsey

1. The Antinomian-Neonomian Controversy in Nonconforming England (c. 1690)

1.1 Introduction

Most theological controversies become nasty, otherwise they would not be controversies. The polemical abilities of those involved, coupled with all sorts of rhetorical tricks, partly explain why the parties rarely end up agreeing. One particularly nasty controversy that lasted nearly a decade occurred among the English Dissenters in London at the end of the seventeenth century. Focusing primarily on soteriological issues, this controversy disrupted the newly formed union between English Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The Presbyterians accused the Congregationalists of Antinomianism, while the Congregationalists fired back with the charge of Neonomianism. Consequently, this chapter in history has been variously referred to as the Antinomian or the Neonomian controversy.

In the interests of neutrality, this debate will be referred to in this essay as the Antinomian-Neonomian debate. This late seventeenth-century debate involves various theological terms and concepts that have a fascinating Reformation and Post-Reformation background. The coining of the word "antinomian" dates back to the Reformation period, whereas the word "neonomian" was actually coined in the 1690s by Isaac Chauncy. A brief history of antinomianism will help set the context for the debate under consideration in this essay.

1.2 Martin Luther's Contribution

Not long after Martin Luther (1483–1546) gained notoriety for his teaching on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, one of his zealous disciples, Johann Agricola (c. 1494–1566), began to quarrel during the late 1520s with another one of Luther's disciples, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), over questions relating to

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

the law and the gospel.[1] In short, at first the principal issue between Melanchthon and Agricola was over whether the preaching of the law was required for repentance and salvation. Agricola believed that the preaching of the gospel (and not the law) produced repentance, and that Melanchthon held to an essentially Roman Catholic view. Luther would himself become embroiled in the controversy with Agricola, which resulted in Luther's work, *Against the Antinomians* (1539).[2]

Thus he coined the term "antinomian" in response to the excessively anti-legal rhetoric coming from those who allegedly belonged in his camp. Of course, the "softly singing Antinomians" (to use Luther's words) were a little bemused by his response to them. After all, Luther could be guilty of antinomian-like rhetoric himself. In fact, the hero of the English antinomian theologians in the seventeenth century was not Calvin, though he was cited by them, but Luther. The seventeenth-century Scottish theologian, Samuel Rutherford, noted "how vainly Antinomians of our time boast that Luther is for them."[3]

David Como makes a telling statement in connection with this: "Luther confessed that some of his early writings had indeed stressed the notion that believers were free from the Law, but claimed that such excessive rhetoric had been necessary to deliver men from the bondage of papal works righteousness. "Now, however, when the times are very dissimilar from those under the pope," such rhetoric was no longer necessary, and if misunderstood, could lead men to an amoral, fleshly security that threatened [...] moral and social order."[4] Luther's negative statements on the law must be understood in relation to his sixteenth-century opponents. Plus, his writings must be historically located.[5] Context, in the case of studies on Luther, is half the interpretation!

Interestingly, it seems Luther would not have been surprised by his heroic status among later antinomian theologians. Even in his treatise *Against the Antinomians* Luther makes the comment that if he had died at Smalcald, he would have "forever been called the patron saints of such spirits [i.e., the antinomians], since they appeal to my books."[6] But Luther was no "Antinomian",

1 See Timothy Wengert, Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over poenitentia (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997).
2 On Luther's debate with Agricola, see M.U. Edwards, Luther and the False Brethren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 156–79.
3 A survey of *the* spirituall antichrist (London, 1647) 1:69.
4 Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 113.
5 Interestingly, in his work on the moral law against the antinomians, the Puritan theologian Anthony Burgess draws attention to the differing emphases in Luther's earlier works versus his later works. See Vindiciæ Legis: or, A Vindication of the Moral Law (1646), 19–20.
6 Luther's Works, American Edition (55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86), 47:108.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

that is, not in the sense that he was against God's law – specifically, the Ten Commandments. Luther expounded the Ten Commandments in various places, sang the Ten Commandments, and prayed them as well. In fact, he writes: "I know of no manner in which we do not use them, unless it be that we unfortunately do not practice and paint them with our deeds and our life as we should. I myself, as old and as learned as I am, recite the commandments daily word for word like a child."[7] As David Steinmetz acutely observes, Luther "does not reject good works except as the basis for justification. On the contrary, Luther wishes to stress as much as possible the importance of good works in the life of faith."[8] Likewise, Mark Edwards captures well Luther's objection to the antinomian preachers of his day who were "fine Easter preachers but disgraceful Pentecost preachers, for they taught only redemption through Christ and not the sanctification through the Holy Spirit."[9] This particular criticism would resurface again roughly a century later in Puritan England.

Antinomian debates among Lutheran theologians did not end with Luther's death in 1546. The latter half of the sixteenth century reveals a number of tensions among Lutheran theologians over questions relating to the law and the gospel.[10] Melanchthon had in fact changed his view on repentance and agreed that the gospel was alone able to produce evangelical repentance. Perhaps even more controversially, Melanchthon held to a "Reformed" view of the gospel, which included the whole doctrine of Christ, which included repentance. The Gnesio-Lutherans disagreed with Melanchthon's view (i. e., the "Philippist" position) and defined the gospel narrowly as pure promise, and excluded repentance from the gospel message. Because he supposedly confused "law " and "gospel" categories, and argued that the gospel produced repentance, Melanchthon was accused of antinomianism. These debates evince that among Lutheran theologians there were competing views on the law and the gospel, particularly in relation to the doctrine of repentance. In the midst of these debates, including the Majoristic controversy, the charges of antinomianism and "popery " were not infrequently used in order to get the upper hand.

7 LW, 47:109.
8 Luther in Context (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2nd edition, 2002), 119.
9 Luther and the False Brethren, 170.
10 On this, see Martin Foord, "A new embassy": John Calvin's 'gospel' in Michael Parsons (ed.), Aspects of Reforming. Theology and Practice in Sixteenth Century Europe (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), chapter 10. Incidentally, in this chapter, I think that Foord has provided the most reliable essay on Calvin's view of the law-gospel distinction.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

1.3 Antinomianism in Puritan England

The antinomian movement in England during the seventeenth century was in part a rebellion against Puritan piety and practice. It was also a theological movement that lacked the sophistication found in the writings of the more accomplished Reformed theologians. This lack of sophistication was a great cause of consternation among some Reformed divines who frequently had to defend themselves against the charge of antinomianism from their Roman Catholic opponents. A further complication was the rising Arminian movement within Protestantism. The antinomians may have lacked the precision required to stay clear of various errors, and at the same time maintain historic Reformed truths about *sola gratia*, but they were experts with their rhetoric – for *they* were the true defenders of free grace![11]

Studies on antinomianism in England during the seventeenth century have not always been kind to Puritan Reformed theologians. Como's impressively detailed study on antinomianism during this period suffers from some basic misunderstandings of Reformed theology and indeed the Bible itself, which is a fairly common trait among social historians who make theological assessments. For example, he suggests that Puritanism "was a movement that attempted to preserve and reconcile the antinomian and the moralizing elements of the Pauline epistles."[12] John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim make a valid claim about Puritan theology in relation to Luther's law-gospel schema, but they incorrectly accuse the Puritans of legalism: "And like the Reformed, they typically qualified Luther's antithesis between law and gospel, emphasizing the role of God's law within the Christian life and the local community, and trying […] to recreate godly Genevas in England and America. This legalism provoked an 'antinomian backlash' from within, but even when radical Puritans rejected orthodox Reformed ideas about the moral law or predestination or infant baptism, they still defined themselves in relation to the Reformed tradition."[13] Incidentally, noteworthy is the claim that the antinomians often viewed themselves as part of the Reformed theological tradition, not in opposition to it.

Scholars today who accuse the Puritans of legalism are simply echoing a pattern well established in the seventeenth century by antinomian theologians, who hurled the "legalist" epithet – as well as "crypto-papist" and the like – towards those who were thoroughly Reformed in their theology. This was often a reaction against Reformed theologians who had used the word "antinomian" to

11 Note Saltmarsh's book, titled Free Grace (London, 1645); and Robert Towne's work, The Assertion of Grace (London, 1645).
12 Blown by the Spirit, 130.
13 John Coffey and Paul Chang-Ha Lim, The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

describe the theology of men like John Eaton (1574/5–1630/31), Tobias Crisp (1600–1643), John Saltmarsh (*d.* 1647), John Traske (*c.*1585–1636), and Robert Towne (1592/3?-1664). The aforementioned theologians all had different emphases and did not agree entirely with each other.

Therefore, to refer to the "antinomians" is not to refer to a monolithic group of theologians, but certainly a group of theologians who were in error – sometimes serious – according to many orthodox divines.[14] Of course, the antinomian divines rejected the label that was imposed upon them. John Saltmarsh, for example, makes use of what would be typically powerful rhetoric in the whole debate: "Can the Free-grace of Jesus Christ tempt any one to sin of itself? Can a good tree bring forth evil fruit? And shall we call every one Antinomian that speaks Free-grace, or a little more freely than we do?"[15] In other words, Saltmarsh and his friends essentially claimed that if to speak of "free-grace" makes them "antinomian," then they were guilty as charged. If the antinomian theologians evinced clever rhetoric in justifying themselves, the Reformed orthodox divines had a few tricks up their own sleeves too. Anthony Burgess (*d.* 1664), a prominent Puritan theologian, strongly asserted that the law cannot justify, which means that "we are all Antinomians in this sense."[16] But that was the only sense in which the orthodox could be "antinomian," namely when it came to the matter of law-keeping for justification.

Like Burgess, those who criticised the antinomians were not fringe theologians who had been seduced by Arminian or Roman Catholic theology. No, they included the Westminster divines. A close reading of the Westminster documents reveal how anti-antinomian they are. Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and Socinianism were major theological threats in England during the 1640s. But so too was antinomianism. Perhaps this was the case because of what antinomian theology might possibly lead to, rather than what in fact was the case. Even so, stalwart Reformed theologians such as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), Samuel Rutherford (*c.*1600–1661), Thomas Shepard (1605–1649), and John Flavel (*bap.* 1630, *d.* 1691), some of whom had international reputations, wrote copiously on the errors of antinomians. Their polemical works

14 There are typically problems when an "ism" is attached to a word, even in the case of "Puritanism". The Puritans were not a monolithic movement in terms of their theology. There were a number of Puritans who were not Reformed, for example. Equally, one has to affirm "shared characteristics" (see Como, Blown by the Spirit, 33–38) in order to speak of "antinomianism." There are dangers involved in this approach, but "lumping" as opposed to "splitting" does have its advantages. Scholars, to this point, have used "antinomian" and "antinomianism" to describe the theology of a group of certain individuals in England and New England during the seventeenth century, and so I will continue in that trend, even though I acknowledge there can be problems with such an approach.

15 Free Grace, "An Occasional Word".

16 Vindiciae Legis, 151.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

on the subject reveal that the debate was a little more complicated than whether the moral law is still binding for Christians in the New Covenant. The various debates can be sketched by the following questions:

1. Are there any conditions for salvation?
2. Is the moral law still binding for Christians?
3. What is the precise nature of and relationship between the law and the gospel?
4. Are good works necessary for salvation?
5. Does God love all Christians the same, irrespective of their obedience or lack thereof?
6. Who is the subject of spiritual activity, the believer or Christ?
7. May our assurance of justification be discerned by our sanctification?
8. Does God see sin in believers?
9. When is a person justified? At birth or upon believing?[17]

These are some examples of the issues that were debated during the seventeenth-century in England. The question over the abiding nature of the moral law was indeed central to the debate, but the aforementioned questions are all in some way related to that question. Yet debates of this nature were taking place not only in England. New England had to contend with many of the same issues.

1.4 Antinomianism in New England

While antinomian debates were raging in England during the 1630s–1650s, the same quarrels were very much alive in New England where another antinomian controversy was taking place: involving (among others) a theologian (John Cotton), a politician (Henry Vane), and a laywoman (Anne Hutchinson). Michael P. Winship has shown that John Cotton (1585–1652) affirmed: "the dispute revolved around how to best magnify the free grace of God."[18] To call the dispute that happened in Massachusetts Bay colony from 1636–1638 the "free grace controversy," because it "seems both descriptively accurate and prejudicial to none of the actors,"[19] is perhaps useful for this reason: antinomian debates have invariably been driven by the question of what it means to preach and teach the "free grace" of God.

Anne Hutchinson (*bap.* 1591, *d.* 1643) eventually came to the conclusion that only a few ministers were gospel preachers. The others, such as Thomas Shepard

17 This is my own list. Readers of Dutch may consult the sketch provided by G.A. van den Brink in his book, Herman Witsius en het antinomianisme: met tekst en vertaling van de Animadversiones Irenicae (Apledoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2008), 51, n. 12.

18 Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.

19 Making Heretics, 1.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

and Thomas Hooker (1586?-1647), were basically legalists. One minister whom Hutchinson approved of was the well-known Congregationalist, John Cotton. Hutchinson's approval of Cotton only complicated matters for him. But as Theodore Bozeman has noted, without Cotton's role the "famed Antinomian Controversy of 1636–1638 is difficult to imagine."[20] In fact, the controversy involved theologians from across the Atlantic as well. Cotton ended up writing a response to the Scottish commissioner at the Westminster Assembly, Robert Baillie (1602–1662), who had accused him, among other things, of being antinomian.[21] Cotton staunchly denied the charge, but Hutchinson's approval of his ministry was enough evidence for those who were already suspicious of Cotton's theology. In his response to Baillie, the questions he answers, particularly on the relation of faith to union with Christ and justification, reveal the complexity of the debate. Cotton's view on faith in relation to justification and union with Christ is highly technical. In short, he claimed that union with Christ takes place before the act of faith. Regeneration and union are roughly synonymous in his schema. As a result, because union precedes faith, so too does justification. However, this is essentially an antinomian view, not the typical Reformed view that faith precedes justification.[22] Cotton was, however, fully aware when he departed from orthodox Reformed views, such as his rejection of faith as an instrumental cause in justification.

These types of questions were related to other theological issues that were being discussed at the time. With a clear eye on antinomian theology, in 1637 the Synod of Elders, where Cotton was present, declared that certain theological views were "unsafe". The "unsafe" propositions included the following epithets from antinomian theologians:

1. To say we are justified by faith is an unsafe speech; we must say we are justified by Christ.
2. To evidence justification by sanctification or graces savours of Rome.
3. If I be holy, I am never the better accepted by God; if I be unholy, I am never the worse […]
4. If Christ will let me sin, let him look to it; upon his honour be it.
5. Here is a great stir about graces and looking to hearts; but give me Christ; I seek not for graces, but for Christ […] I seek not for sanctification, but for Christ; tell me not of meditation and duties, but tell me of Christ […].

20 Theodore Dwight Bozeman, The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638 (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 241.

21 The way of Congregational churches cleared (1648).

22 Cotton supposedly retracted his "antinomian" position after debate with the New England elders. See David D. Hall, The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1638: A Documentary History (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 411.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

6. I may know I am Christ's, not because I do crucify the lusts of the flesh, but because I do not crucify them, but believe in Christ that crucified my lusts for me.
7. If Christ be my sanctification, what need I looks to anything in myself, to evidence my justification?[23]

The above statements get to the heart of the issues involved in the antinomian debates during the 1630s in New England, and indeed in England. They reveal that a century onwards from Agricola's debates with Melanchthon and Luther the term had taken on a new meaning.

1.5 Nonconforming England

Even after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the antinomian debates did not go away in England, though there were particular decades in the seventeenth century when the rhetoric was fiercer than usual. In the 1690s the controversy erupted once again. This time, the highly respected Dutch theologian, Herman Witsius (1636–1708), played a role in this English nonconformist debate between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.[24] One of the factors that set off the debate was the reprinting of Tobias Crisp's controversial sermons, *Christ Alone Exalted.* In the early 1640s these sermons caused a firestorm of controversy, and they would do so again decades later by bringing Richard Baxter into the debate. Baxter's involvement was a little unfortunate for those who claimed to be orthodox in their view of justification by faith alone, and also against "Crispianism," because Baxter's doctrine of justification was not orthodox. In fact, the term "neonomian" was coined by Isaac Chauncy (1632–1712) during these debates. After Baxter died (1691) his friend Daniel Williams (*c.*1643–1716) became the leading spokesman against antinomian theology. Scholars have generally not been kind to Williams, but their negative assessments of his theology pale in comparison to the rhetoric that emanated from Isaac Chauncy's pen. Chauncy repeatedly referred to Williams as a "neonomian " because of Williams's insistence on speaking of the duties of the gospel as well as conditions for salvation. The specific point about "conditions" for salvation shows how complex the debates in the seventeenth century were.

As noted above, Baxter's involvement in the debate was not entirely helpful, particularly since he had been not only the most vociferous enemy of the anti-

23 Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England. Volume 1 (Boston, 1855), "Detrimental Speeches", 318.

24 See Herman Witsius, Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the unhappy names of Antinomians and Neonomians. Translated by Thomas Bell (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807).

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

nomians during his illustrious theological career, but also because his peculiar theological beliefs – he was *sui generis* – meant he was also an enemy of a perfectly orthodox theologian called John Owen (1616–1683). Like Baxter and Williams, Owen was anti-antinomian; but unlike Baxter, he was not a neonomian. Owen affirmed conditions for salvation, which was what got Williams into trouble with Chauncy. But Owen was able to affirm conditions for salvation in a manner that was more precise and theologically sophisticated than Williams.[25] Thus the antinomian debates in the latter part of the seventeenth century reveal that just as there is a spectrum of antinomian theology (Saltmarsh vs. Crisp), there is also a spectrum of neonomian theology (Baxter vs. Williams), as well as orthodox theologians who had slight differences of expressing certain points of Reformed theology (Goodwin vs. Owen).

It is far too simplistic and historically naïve to suggest that someone is only antinomian if they reject the place of the moral law in the life of a believer. And it is likewise wrongheaded to suggest that "neonomians " are those who speak only of imperatives without the indicatives. Instead, the seventeenth century reveals that both antinomians and neonomians were typically reactionary theologians. Their reactions to the perceived excesses of certain groups were not always helpful or clearly articulated. For every John Owen or Thomas Manton, there was a Richard Baxter or a Tobias Crisp. The application for us today is really no different. In our zeal against errors and heresies we are perhaps the ones most vulnerable to infelicitous statements and hyperbolic rhetoric that often only creates more heat than light.

1.6 Daniel Williams and the Antinomian-Neonomian Debate

Due to the influence of the new edition of Tobias' Crisp's sermons, and the preaching of men like Richard Davis, the Presbyterians became concerned about antinomianism among the Congregationalists. Even some Congregationalists shared their concern.[26]John Flavel, whose own teachings were accused of having "a tang of Antinomianism," felt compelled to take up his pen because he believed Antinomianism was again on the rise, "to the hazard of God's truth, and the church's peace."[27] Flavel's writings against Antinomianism, however, did not

25 On Owen's anti-antinomianism and his scholastic distinctions used in the debate, see Gert van den Brink, "Impetration and Application and John Owen's Theology" in ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

26 Michael Watts, Dissenters, 292–293.

27 John Flavel, The Works of John Flavel (1820; repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 3:551, 420.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

create controversy. That honor belonged to the Presbyterian Daniel Williams who wrote a book refuting the errors of Tobias Crisp, entitled *Gospel-Truth: Stated and Vindicated.* Several Congregational ministers were troubled by this book, believing that Williams went beyond refuting Crisp, adding his own doctrines "which have been reckoned contrary to the Received and Approved Doctrine of the *Reformed Churches.*"[28] The fact that the majority of Presbyterians in the Union, including several notable ministers, lent their names to "such palpable Deviations from the Truth,"[29] led the Congregationalists to believe that the Presbyterians as a whole were infected with Arminianism[30] or Neonomianism, the label Isaac Chauncy coined to described the views of Daniel Williams.[31] The stage for the antinomian-neonomian controversy among the United Ministers was thus set.

Although the issues surrounding Antinomianism and Neonomianism were the most obvious causes for this debate, personalities and party spirit were also major contributory factors. Richard Davis and Daniel Williams were some of the divisive figures. Davis, a strict Congregationalist, irritated the Presbyterians with his ministry methods and his preaching, being accused of Antinomianism. He became such a controversial figure that on January 4, 1692, the managers of the Common Fund ceased supporting his ministry.[32] Eventually, on December 26, 1692, the United Ministers, after a number of Congregationalists had already left the Union, publicly declared their opposition to Davis' practice and teaching, noting "That he never was, nor is by us esteemed, of the number of the United Brethren."[33]

Williams created a similar reaction from the Congregationalists with his aggressive stance against anything that smelled of antinomianism, along with his own teaching on the covenants, justification and the atonement. His book, *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated*, produced a virulent response. In a vendetta-like fashion, Isaac Chauncy published a caustic and protracted critique with his three-part *Neonomianism Unmask'd* in 1692–1693.[34] Robert Traill added his

28 [Taylor], History, 9.
29 Ibid, 9.
30 Traill, Works, 1:252–3, 280;
31 Isaac Chauncy, "The Epistle Dedicatory," in Neonomianism Unmask'd (London: J. Harris, 1692–3). See also Edmund Calamy, An Abridgment of Mr. Baxter's History of his Life and Times, 2nd ed. (London: John Lawrence, 1713), 515; David Bogue and James Bennett, History of Dissenters (London: 1808), 1:404; J. Hay Colligan, Eighteenth Century Nonconformity (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915), 15–16.
32 Gordon, Freedom after Ejection, 185–186.
33 The Sense of the United Nonconforming Ministers, In and about London, Concerning some of the Erroneous Doctrines, and Irregular Practices, of Mr. Richard Davis (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1693), 6.
34 The full title: Neonomianism Unmask'd: or, the Ancient Gospel Pleaded Against the Other

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859

response when he published anonymously *A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification, and of its Preachers and Professors from the unjust charge of Antinomianism* in 1692. Although Traill's work was shorter and less sharp than Chauncy's, it still packed a punch. Edmund Calamy described it as "an angry letter,"[35] commentating that with its appearance "the hopes of a free brotherly Correspondence vanish'd away."[36] In addition to these written responses to Williams' book, Congregationalists started to leave the Union. Even though Williams was by no means alone in his views, the Congregationalists would not consider reunion unless the Presbyterians threw him overboard.[37]

A party-spirit also helped to enflame the controversy. The Presbyterians circled the wagons around Daniel Williams. Sixteen of them, including William Bates and John Howe, endorsed the first edition of *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated*, while the second edition contained forty-nine signatures. A group of ministers that regularly met at Dr. Upton's home prevailed upon William Lorimer to pen a lengthy vindication of Williams and those who had attached their name to his book entitled, *An Apology for the Ministers Who Subsribed only unto the Stating of The Truths and Errours in Mr. Williams' Book*.[38] Several other books and pamphlets were published in defense of Williams.[39] After Williams was ousted from Pinner's Hall, the remaining Presbyterian lecturers walked out with Williams and started a rival lectureship at Salters' Hall even though they were "Intreated and Courted, with great Importunity to stay at Pinners-Hall."[40] There they were joined by Samuel Annesley and Richard Mayo.[41]It is noteworthy that Annesley was willing to partner with Williams at Salters' Hall because he had not signed *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated*, and was considered to be a high Calvinist.

Called A New Law or Gospel. Subtitle: A Theological Debate, occasioned by a Book lately Wrote by Mr. Dan. Williams, Entituled, Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated: Unwarily Commended and Subscribed by some Divines. Of Chauncy's book, Williams writes that in all his years he had never met "a Tract parallel to his [Chauncy], for abusive Language, violent Rage, and uncharitable Censures," "To the Reader," in Defense.

35 Calamy, Historical Account, 1:324.

36 Calamy, An Abridgment of Mr. Baxter's History of his Life and Times, 516. Of all the heated writing produced by this controversy, and there was a lot of it, J.I. Packer has observed that Traill's pamphlet was the best and the coolest (A Quest for Godliness, 158). The Presbyterians, however, considered it to be one of the fiercest because they understood Traill to be accusing them of rationalism, Arminianism, Pelagianism, Popery, and of corrupting the gospel.

37 The Congregational account of the history of the controversy makes it clear that Williams had to be sacrificed for reunion. See [Taylor's] A History of the Union.

38 Calamy, Historical Account, 1:325. The ministers were Calamy, Sylvester, Lorimer, Shower, N. Taylor, Kentish, Oldfield, Upton.

39 See Peter Toon, Puritans and Calvinism (Seoul: Westminster Publishing House, n.d.), 92.

40 [Taylor], History of the Union, 26.

41 Calamy, Historical Account, 1:351.

ISBN Print: 9783525552858 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647552859