The Antinomian Controversy

1636–1638 A Documentary History

Second Edition

DAVID D. HALL, EDITOR

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David D. Hall

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For Edmund S. Morgan

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Preface to the Second Edition

THE Antinomian controversy has come into its own. Three hundred and fifty years after the magistrates and ministers in early Massachusetts crushed a movement of protest, the events of 1636 to 1638 are regarded as crucial to an understanding of religion, society, and gender in early American history. The dispersal of the "Antinomians" and the reassertion of "orthodoxy" fixed the path that religion and society would follow for the next century, if not longer. And the harsh reaction to Anne Hutchinson, a lay religious leader who challenged the authority of the ministers, exposed the subordination of women in this culture—a subordination some, like Mrs. Hutchinson, tried to challenge.

We know more about the main actors in the controversy—Anne Hutchinson, her chief clerical supporter John Cotton, and the other ministers who confronted both of them—than we knew when this collection of documents was published in 1968. The progress of scholarship is amply evident in the bibliography of recent work appended to this preface. But let me comment briefly on a few crucial matters of interpretation.

Anne Hutchinson, her husband William, and their children arrived in Boston in 1634. The little that we know about her spiritual life before she emigrated to America is embedded in the report of her "examination" by the magistrates and ministers in 1637. During that examination Mrs. Hutchinson broke into the mode of spiritual autobiography, telling how, back in England, she had come to question the truthfulness of godly ministers in the Church of England who never seemed to act according to their principles. Separating from the established

church and ministry, Mrs. Hutchinson fell into an "Atheisme" that ended when she heard the voice of God: "at last he let me see how I did oppose Jesus Christ . . . and how I did turne in upon a Covenant of works . . . ; from which time the Lord did discover to me all sorts of Ministers, and how they taught, and to know what voyce I heard. . . ."[1] Thereafter, she depended on this clarifying voice for guidance.

Anne Hutchinson came to trust one minister, John Cotton. Before he left England for New England in 1633, Cotton preached in Boston (Lincolnshire) not far from the town of Alford where the Hutchinsons lived. It may have been from Cotton that Mrs. Hutchinson learned to question the significance of the "law" and the "covenant of works." He may also have encouraged her to conceive of the Holy Spirit as "indwelling" in the elect saint. Once they reached New England she and Cotton shared the same dissatisfaction with the spirituality of the colonists. Many of these people seemed to think that "affliction of Spirit" and "restraining from all known evil" were the signs of "saving Union, or Communion" with Christ. Together, the minister and the lay woman challenged this reasoning, reminding those who used it that the performance of moral duties was unrelated to divine mercy. To think otherwise, the two warned, was to proceed in the way of "works" and not of "free grace." Looking back on the moment when he and Mrs. Hutchinson were collaborators, Cotton remembered the good consequences of this message: "And many whose spirituall estates were not so safely layed, yet were hereby helped and awakened to discover their sandy foundations, and to seek for better establishment in Christ. . . ."[2]

Anne Hutchinson was representative of Puritan spirituality in placing so much "emphasis on the need for an inner experience of God's regenerating grace as a mark of election."[3] But

1. See below, pp. 271–73.
2. Ibid., p. 412.
3. Sydney Ahlstrom, *Theology in America* (New York, 1967), p. 27, quoted in Endy, *William Penn and Early Quakerism*, p. 16. Note: full bibliographical information for this and all subsequent references is provided in the bibliography.

she was also a "radical" critic of that movement, and her fuller message was similar to the apocalyptic spiritism of the left wing of the Protestant Reformation. No historian has connected her directly to sixteenth-century radicals or to the "familists" who existed on the margins of English society.[4] But like these radicals Anne Hutchinson devalued the outward material world and exalted the submersion of the self in the Holy Spirit. Like many of them, moreover, she espoused the doctrine of mortalism: when the body dies the soul dies also. James F. Maclear, the historian who has done the most to explicate her mortalism, is surely right to argue that "Anne forged a connecting link between the 'radical reformation' of the sixteenth century and the 'realized eschatology' of the Quakers" in the mid-seventeenth century.[5]

Anne Hutchinson was also radical in being a prophetess. If the testimony of her enemies may be trusted, she had prophesied in England—warning, just before she left, that God intended to destroy that country—and prophesied anew while crossing the Atlantic. At the climactic movement of the 1637 "examination" she likened herself to Daniel in the lion's den and foresaw her own deliverance.[6] As recent work has demonstrated, the popular religious culture of Elizabethan England sanctioned certain kinds of prophesying.[7] But the practice always made the authorities uneasy. It did so again in New England, for the woman who prophesied was openly defying the hierarchical authority that men derived from their gender, and from gender-restricted learning. (No women received the same level of academic training as the ministers.) We may therefore place Anne Hutchinson

4. At her church trial there was testimony that Anne Hutchinson admired the "Woman of Elis," a person of whom, unfortunately, almost nothing is known (see below, p. 380). Mrs. Hutchinson's allusion to separatist Puritans in her spiritual autobiography suggests, however, an awareness of the crosscurrents (some of them incipiently "radical") that pervaded English Puritanism in the 1620s and 1630s.

5. Maclear, "Anne Hutchinson and the Mortalist Heresy."

6. See below, pp. 273, 338, 339, and Hall, *Worlds of Wonder,* pp. 95–97.

7. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* ch. 5; Hall, *Worlds of Wonder,* ch. 2.

in the company of other saintly women who, throughout the history of the Christian church, have claimed the "authority of inspiration" as the one alternative left open to them. Anne Hutchinson proved able to match verse for verse when her interrogators accused her of defying Scripture. But in the end she rested her empowerment as teacher and prophet on the direct witness of the Holy Spirit.[8]

The magistrates and ministers rejected the authority of such inspiration. They feared its consequences for their own authority; in some congregations in New England, lay men and women were casting aside their customary deference and challenging the ministers on issues of faith and doctrine. Time and again in the "examination" of Anne Hutchinson, and throughout the introduction and conclusion that Thomas Weld added to the first edition of *A Short Story of the Rise, Reigne, and Ruine of the Antinomians,* the magistrates and ministers accused Anne Hutchinson and her followers of recklessly endangering civil and religious order. Accordingly, her enemies insinuated that she was an agent of the Devil,[9] and they compared "Antinomianism" to other discredited movements—the Familists, and the sixteenth-century Anabaptists who seized control of Münster, Germany—all of which were seen as turning "all things upside down among us."[10]

Three hundred and fifty years later, we discern in *A Short Story* a rhetoric of "heresy" that rested on assumptions about gender, learnedness, and order. This rhetoric entailed a sharply dualistic understanding of the good and the bad: orthodoxy and heresy, the forces of God on the one side, the forces of Satan on the other. Once this rhetoric was unleashed, the flow of abuse was almost unstoppable. As Stephen Foster has cogently argued, we must not confuse the hysteria about heresy with what "really" happened; the heresy hunters always painted with a broad brush and were quick to accuse their enemies of holding

8. Huber, *Women and the Authority of Inspiration.*

9. The magistrates associated Mrs. Hutchinson and one of her followers, Jane Hawkins, a healer, with witchcraft, a crime that was closely linked with gender. See Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman.*

10. See below, p. 253.

every kind of bad idea. When we peel away the excess, it is clear that Mrs. Hutchinson was not a "libertine" who advocated sexual license.[11] Yet in another sense the rhetoric of the controversy *is* the reality, for it explains why the magistrates and ministers retaliated so vigorously against the "Antinomians." Moreover, Anne Hutchinson and her other clerical ally, John Wheelwright, relied on the same rhetorical pattern: in his fast-day sermon of January 1637, Wheelwright invoked the image of a holy war between the true followers of Christ and their enemies who taught a covenant of works.

John Cotton ran afoul of his fellow ministers for different reasons. Not until the "Elders Reply" and Cotton's "Rejoynder" were published for the first time in this documentary collection was it possible for historians to understand the quarrel between the most prominent minister in New England and most of his colleagues.[12] As several historians have established, this quarrel had to do with the order of salvation, or the ways in which God accomplished the "work of grace." All of the ministers agreed that this work of grace was the doing of God. Christ's death on the cross had satisfied God's justice, and the risen Christ proclaimed the gospel. Even so, these ministers reasoned (in keeping with Christian tradition) that there must be repentance on man's part. Redemption involved the willing, active self and the struggle to achieve repentance. Repeatedly in their sermons the Puritan ministers in England and New England urged people to "reach out for the promises," "close with Christ," perform certain duties. To give force to these commands, the clergy cited such verses as 2 Peter 1:10: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall"—a verse they would cite again in debating John Cotton.[13]

11. Foster, "New England and the Challenge of Heresy."

12. One scholar, misled by my naming of the documents, has said that I omitted to include Cotton's "Revisall," the final text in the manuscript at the Massachusetts Historical Society. This document appeared in print in 1646 as *A Conference Mr. John Cotton Held at Boston,* and I reprinted it (corrected against the manuscript text) under that title.

13. See p. 72; and for John Cotton's own interpretation, see pp. 93, 124–25, 406.

But where did this activity fit within the sequence of "justification" and "sanctification"? The first of these terms refers to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner; without this righteousness there is no way of escaping condemnation. The second of these terms refers to the godliness that elect saints manifest after being justified. In the debates that took place in 1636 and 1637, most of the ministers in New England argued that justification was consequent upon "faith." They defined faith, accordingly, as an "active instrument." In making faith "active," and in placing it before justification, they relied on distinctions in logic among several kinds of causes (formal, efficient, material, final), and on a concept of divinely instituted "order." William Stoever has shown that, from their point of view, God worked through an "ordained" sequence and a "means of grace" (the church and ministry) he himself had constituted and controlled.[14] The ministers' answer to Error 43 ("The Spirit acts most in the Saints, when they indevour least") contains their thinking about means and order:

> Reserving the special seasons of God's preventing grace to his own pleasure, In the *ordinary constant course of his dispensation,* the more we indevour, the more assistance and help we find from him . . . by indevour be meant the *use of lawfull meanes and ordinances commanded by God, to seeke and find him in.* . . .[15]

The Aristotelian language in the "Elders Reply" was an additional way of explaining how the sovereignty of God encompassed and made room for man's activity in the process of salvation.

This language may seem abstract to us. But not to these ministers, who in their everyday experience as pastors had to advise people on assurance of salvation. I argued in 1968, and would argue again, that assurance of salvation was the central issue in the controversy. It is important to recognize that most of the ministers regarded assurance as something that did not arrive all at once, but piecemeal, over time. This was a conclu-

14. Stoever, *"Faire and Easie Way."*
15. See below, p. 231; emphasis added.

sion they reached after long experience with the vicissitudes—the ups and downs—of the spiritual life. Assurance seemed to wax and wane. When uncertainty prevailed, the ministers counseled the remedy of "practical reasoning," or in theological language, the "practical syllogism": "he that repenteth and believeth the Gospel shall be saved/But I repent and believe the Gospel/ Therefore I shall be saved."[16]

The great historian of Puritanism, Perry Miller, interpreted the issue in the controversy otherwise: it was "preparation for salvation" that the ministers were insisting on. Miller regarded "preparation" as making inroads on the Calvinist doctrines of free grace and unconditional election. But in point of fact there was almost nothing said about preparation in the controversy. More recently, a number of historians have insisted that the ministers never proposed that actions taken prior to justification were "meritorious" in regard to grace. Others disagree, and interpret Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, and Peter Bulkeley as tending toward a "works righteousness."[17]

The task of understanding John Cotton seems more daunting—and to yield a greater variety of interpretations—than the task of interpreting his fellow clergy.[18] We can safely say that Cotton never passed over into "radical" religion. He accepted the performance of "prayer and other holy duties, whereby we may after come to the sight of our Sanctification," and, in contrast to Anne Hutchinson, he regarded the Bible as the sole basis of truth, though he emphasized the priority of "Spirit" over

16. See below, pp. 75, 148.

17. See the citations in Hall, "On Common Ground," pp. 207–8. These differences of opinion have much to do with different understandings of the meaning and significance of "preparation." Stoever has carefully distinguished four meanings of the term: "Appendix: Preparation for Salvation," *'Faire and Easie Way,'* pp. 192–99. It may help to note that the ministers, in debating Cotton, argued the priority of grace: "For it is grace that works the Condition, it is grace that reveals the condition, it is grace that makes the promise . . . and what danger is there hereby, to a well instructed Christian of derogating from free grace?" (see below, p. 67).

18. See Hall, "On Common Ground," p. 212. Literary historians have essayed to contrast Cotton's understanding of language and the sermon with the practice of his colleagues. See the work by Delamotte, Habegger, Knight, and Toulouse listed in the bibliography.

form. He had his own perspective on the "sad doubts of their own estates" that perplexed so many of the colonists. Assurance of salvation could and should arrive with "fullness," he argued, and not bit by bit.[19] Disagreeing with his fellow ministers on the nature of "sanctification," he regarded it as "the fruit of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in true Believers," and accordingly minimized the significance of "duties." When he wondered aloud whether lay people and the ministers were falling into a "covenant of works," he was warning about a possible *tendency:* should people reason that "first Assurance" stems from moral behavior, "it will unavoidably follow that our works are the grounds and causes of our first Assurance," a conclusion which would violate "Protestant doctrine."[20]

Reading through these documents anew, I am struck by the rhetorical quality of the charge that so-and-so was preaching a "covenant of works." Like its twin, the charge of "familism" and "antinomianism," it conveyed a broad uneasiness that we cannot always translate into issues of doctrine. The elasticity of the phrase enabled lay men and women to use it against clergy they distrusted, though we know from other evidence that these clergy were orthodox on the relationship between works and grace.

Throughout these documents we must beware of rhetorical excess—and perhaps of distortion. Stephen Foster has argued that the eighty-two errors pulled together by the synod of 1637 are a classic example of excess; he interprets them as deriving more from the tradition of heresy-hunting than from real-life "Antinomians" in New England.[21] (Indeed, the members of the Boston Church complained of being credited with opinions that they did not hold.) At her church trial Anne Hutchinson was initially charged with sixteen mistakes in theology, a number Thomas Weld inflated to twenty-nine in his preface to *A Short Story*. Every reader should compare two of the documents in

19. See below, pp. 121, 129.

20. See below, pp. 56, 133; John Cotton, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1671), pp. 177–79.

21. Foster, "New England and the Challenge of Heresy," pp. 647–50.

this collection, the unedited transcript of Mrs. Hutchinson's "Examination" and the highly edited version published in *A Short Story*. But the most intriguing text is one that is not included here, John Winthrop's journal history of New England. Partisan of one side in the controversy, Winthrop may have shaped his narrative accordingly.[22]

The war of words lasted well beyond the formal ending of the Antinomian controversy in 1638. Philip Gura has reminded us that "radical" Puritans of several kinds moved in and out of New England throughout the early decades.[23] John Cotton and certain other ministers may have continued to emphasize "free grace." A year after the controversy had ended, Thomas Shepard wrote in his "autobiography" that

> Mr. Cotton repents not, but is hid only. (1) When Mistress Hutchinson was convented he commended her for all that she did before her confinement and so gave her a light to escape through the crowd with honor. (2) Being asked whether all revelations were lost because all revelations were either to complete Scripture or for the infancy of the weak church, he answered that they were all ceased about particular events, unless to weak Christians, and seemed to confirm it now; whereas in the sermon it was to the weak church under the old testament, he did extend it to weak Christians also under the new. (3) He doth stiffly hold the revelation of our good estate still, without any sight of word or work.[24]

In Rhode Island Anne Hutchinson remained intransigent. And in the colony she had left, other women continued to defy the rules about gender, and to suffer for their independence.[25]

How far in American history may we trace the echoes of the Antinomian controversy? As the seventeenth century came to an end, a nonconformist (Puritan) minister in England, disputing

22. Lewis, "Sweet Sacrifice."

23. Gura, *Glimpse of Sions Glory*, ch. 9.

24. *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety Being the Autobiography & Journall of Thomas Shepard*, ed. Michael McGiffert, p. 74.

25. Koehler, *Search for Power;* Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman.*

"free grace" with another writer, quoted the synod of 1637 against his opponent.[26] When the Great Awakening broke out in New England in the 1740s, a minister who viewed the revival as a manifestation of "enthusiasm" and not as a work of grace, cited in his favor the findings of the synod.[27] Nathaniel Hawthorne was more sympathetic; in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), he likened Hester Prynne, a rebel for the sake of "heart," to Anne Hutchinson.[28] And in our day Anne Hutchinson has become emblematic of the possibilities—long thwarted, though never wholly suppressed—for women to assert spiritual leadership.[29]

Preparing these texts for publication many years ago, I had the skillful assistance of Avi Soifer. This time around, I want to thank Michael McGiffert for aid of many kinds over the years, and in particular for reviewing this new preface. I am grateful to Janice Knight for other comments, and to Stanley Fish and Jane Tompkins for recommending a new edition of this book. A few errors crept into the first edition, and these have been corrected. I have provided some additional commentary in the form of new footnotes. These notes, introduced into this edition of *The Antinomian Controversy,* appear on the pages listed below. Each note is indicated by an asterisk at the bottom of its respective page.

Notes to the Second Edition

P. 51: The theological and philosophical language in Question IX is explicated in two useful articles: "habit" in Norman Fiering, "Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue" and "The Image of God in Adam" in Jesper Rosenmeier, "New England's Perfection."

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26. Daniel Williams, *Gospel-truth Stated and Defended* (London, 1692).

27. Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion* (Boston, 1743).

28. Colacurcio, "Footsteps of Anne Hutchinson."

29. Two words of caution are in order. Anne Hutchinson was probably not a practicing midwife, since that name is never used in connection with her in the records. And while she opposed the authority of the ministers, she may not have been an egalitarian. Her theology seems to involve the distinction between the few gathered saints, and the hypocritical worldly.

"Habit" or "habitual grace" signifies the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit and is an aspect of sanctification. See pp. 40, 45, 103, 143, 195–96, 401, 411.

P. 58: The Latin phrase *proxima potentia* was translated by John Cotton as "nearest power" (see p. 158).

P. 58: Question XV has to do with the validity of the "practical syllogism," for which see also pp. 76, 182, 237. From Calvin onward, the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition debated the proper uses of the "practical syllogism." See Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," p. 345 n. 17; Stoever, *'Faire and Easie Way,'* pp. 126–29.

P. 63: See pp. 74 and 107 for other references to 1 John 5.

P. 65: Compare John Cotton's rearrangement of the sequence "word, work, and object" to (p. 86) "object (ground, or justification), word, work."

P. 117 n. 17: John Cotton translated the Latin (p. 183) as "a latter, or secondary proof."

P. 142: When John Cotton wrote that "I have the gift of faith . . . in order of nature before I be justified," he was using a Scholastic term that Stoever explicates in *'Faire and Easie Way,'* p. 125. The term is used elsewhere in these documents. See also pp. 194, 401.

P. 165: The Puritans (like most other Christians in this period) reckoned that the conversion of Jews to Christianity was foretold in the Book of Revelation and would occur shortly before the Second Coming. See also pp. 155, 308, 380.

P. 174: Francis Cornwell was "a Kentish vicar who became a leader among the Baptists and a considerable author," as Geoffrey Nuttall pointed out in his review of the first edition. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969), p. 358.

P. 197 n. 44: John Cotton translated this same passage from Chamier (see below, p. 410) as "Chamier . . . denyeth Faith to bee a cause of Justification; 'For if it were (saith hee) Justification should not be of Grace, but of us.' "

P. 200: The 1692 reprinting of *A Short Story* was occasioned by a theological controversy, the so-called "Crispian" or "Neonomian" dispute, that broke out within English nonconformity in that year. The various polemical contributions to this debate by Daniel Williams, Isaac Chauncy (a Harvard College graduate), and others throw an interesting and largely unexplored light on the debates of the 1630s.

P. 214: Anne Hutchinson was either pregnant (as contemporaries assumed) or suffering from a hydatidiform mole, as modern medical opinion holds. Her physical weakness during the church trial (see p. 351) arose from this condition.

P. 219: An independent manuscript copy of the Synod of 1637's deliberations was consulted by Charles Chauncy as he prepared *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston, 1743), his onslaught against the Great Awakening. He quoted a passage (p. vi) on "the Reasons given for the meeting of the Synod" that was not carried over into *A Short Story:* "the Opinionists pre-

tended such a New Light as condemned all the Churches, as in a Way of Damnation; and the Difference to be in Fundamental Points, even as wide as between Heaven and Hell: And hence it was conceived, that all the Churches should consider of this Matter, that if it were a Truth, it should be universally embraced; but if it were an Error of Heresy it might be universally suppressed, so far as such a Meeting could reach.' "

P. 226: Error 24 can be connected to the accusation against Mrs. Hutchinson (p. 308) that she boasted of being able to know "infallibly . . . the election of others." Wheelwright's fast-day sermon, John Cotton's *Sermon Preached at . . . Salem,* and Error 22 (restricting the scope of the minister's sermons to the elect) are relevant to an understanding of the ecclesiastical implications of spiritism.

P. 247: "All the Churches unanimously consented to the Condemnation of them [these errors], except diverse of Boston, one or two at Charlestown, one at Salem, one at Plymouth, one at Duxbury, two at Watertown: And although Mr. Cotton set not down his Hand as the rest of the Elders did; yet he thus expressed himself, in Disrelish of them, *that some were blasphemous and heretical, many erroneous, and all incongruous.*" Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts,* p. vii.

P. 255: According to Samuel Groom, John Cotton protested that "Brother Wheelwright's Doctrine was according to God, in the Points Controverted, and wholly, and altogether; and nothing did I hear alleged against the Doctrine proved by the Word of God." *A Glass for the People of New England,* repr. in *The Magazine of History* 37 (1929), pp. 10–11.

P. 268: Mrs. Hutchinson was quoting Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my Spirit. . . ."

P. 280: The publicizing of Mrs. Dyer's "monster birth" is described in Hall, *Worlds of Wonder,* pp. 100–102. See also Anne Schutte, " 'Such Monstrous Births': A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 85–106.

P. 350: I would eliminate all of the italicization in the transcript of the church trial; I now think that the apparent underlinings in the manuscript were not meant to be transcribed as italics.

P. 378: Geoffrey Nuttall has suggested that the reference is to the English "free grace" Puritan Joshua Sprigges; but Stephen Foster has pointed out that Sprigges matriculated at Oxford in 1634, which makes him too young. Nuttall, review of this book, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969): 358; Foster, "New England and the Challenge of Heresy," p. 646 n. 47.

P. 398: Robert Baillie renewed the charge of "Montanism" in *The Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time, Vindicated from the Exceptions of Mr. Cotton and Mr. Tombes* (London, 1655), alleging (pp. 22–24) that Cotton was known to have expressed "Montanist" ideas at Cambridge, specifically the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

P. 398 note 3: Samuel Gorton's theology is described in Gura, *Glimpse of Sions Glory,* ch. 10.

P. 410: Baillie, who believed that it is "one of the grosse errors" that "the union of Christ with the soul is compleat before and without all acts of faith," questioned Cotton's interpretation of Chamier and Pemble (*Dissuasive . . . Vindicated,* pp. 26, 29).

P. 413: "My information was that Mrs. Hutcheson [*sic*] did visite M. Cotton in his house much oftner then by any other of his whole flock was wont to be done. . . ." Baillie, *Dissuasive . . . Vindicated,* p. 29.

THE ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY, 1636–1638

Introduction

THE purpose of this volume is to bring together the essential documents of the Antinomian Controversy that took place in Massachusetts between 1636 and 1638. Antinomianism in its root sense means "against or opposed to the law." In theology it is the opinion that "the moral law is not binding upon Christians, who are under the law of grace." In New England it denoted the opposition between man's obedience to the law, or his works, and the saving grace communicated by the Holy Spirit. But the colonists in Massachusetts who stood for "free grace" against the "legall" preachers did not call themselves Antinomians since to them, as to most seventeenth-century Protestants, the term implied licentious behavior and religious heterodoxy. Together with those other common terms of abuse, "Anabaptist" and "Familist," it was used, rather, by the opponents of the "Antinomians" to discredit them. *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New-England* was John Winthrop's way of linking the proponents of "free grace" in Massachusetts with these disreputable movements. Such language suggests how deeply the interests and feelings of the colonists were engaged in the Controversy. To them its significance was plain. It was a struggle for control of Massachusetts, and when control was assured the victors showed little mercy to the vanquished. In truth, the Antinomian Controversy is one of those events historians speak of as crises or turning points. Coming at a time when the new society was still taking shape, it had a decisive effect upon the future of New England.

Most of the documents of the Controversy were brought together in a single volume by the New England historian Charles

Francis Adams in 1894.[1] Others have remained uncollected, and a few are published here for the first time. This volume contains all of the documents in Adams's collection as well as most of the remaining published materials. Those reprinted here, but not in Adams, include the *Sixteene Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence,* John Cotton's *A Conference . . . at Boston,* and John Wheelwright's fast-day sermon. Five other documents are drawn from unpublished manuscripts: the letters between Thomas Shepard, John Cotton, and Peter Bulkeley, the ministers' "Reply," and a major statement by Cotton of his theology, here entitled his "Rejoynder." The sum total of new material nearly equals the size of Adams's original collection. The significance of these new materials, though less easy to measure, seems just as great. In the traditional view of the Antinomian Controversy, Anne Hutchinson assumes the leading role as the chief antagonist of the orthodox party. But in the new documents, the major figure is John Cotton. Strictly speaking, he was not an Antinomian, yet the evidence gathered here clearly indicates that his differences of opinion with the other ministers in Massachusetts were at the heart of the Controversy.

The remainder of this introduction falls into three sections. The first contains a brief history of the Antinomian Controversy. The second pursues a few of the theological issues involved, and the last summarizes the principles followed in the editing of the documents.

I

THOUGH the documents cover a period of nearly three years, the Antinomian Controversy took place essentially in the seventeen months between October, 1636, and March, 1638.[2] The story of

1. *Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1636–1638* (Boston, The Prince Society, 1894).

2. The dates in the introduction and headnotes are Old Style, following the Puritans' calendar, with the exception that the beginning of the new year has been changed to January 1. This narrative of the Controversy is based on the account of John Winthrop, whose *History of New England* is the essential source of information about what happened, and when. The edition prepared by James Savage (Boston, 1853) has been followed. The *Records of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay,* ed. N. B. Shurtleff, *1* (Boston, 1853), is the source of other details.

what occurred during those months must begin with a woman, Anne Hutchinson. She was a Puritan, like most of the other emigrants to Massachusetts, but because her Puritanism took a different turn she was eventually banished from the colony as a heretic. For her, as for the founders of New England, Puritanism meant an insistence upon an evangelical ministry preaching the Word of God. Anne's father, Francis Marbury, was such a minister in the Church of England. When she was born in 1591 he was preaching in the town of Alford, Lincolnshire. Later the Marburys moved to London, but in 1612 Anne returned to Alford as the wife of a local merchant, William Hutchinson. That same year the Reverend John Cotton left Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he had been a tutor, to become the minister of Boston, Lincolnshire, a town some twenty miles from Alford. Cotton was just twenty-seven years old, but his vigorous and incessant preaching soon established him as one of the leading Puritans in England. Among his admirers was Mrs. Hutchinson. When Cotton, to avoid imprisonment for his nonconformity, fled to New England in 1633, "it was a great trouble unto" her. Like hundreds of other English Puritans in the same predicament, she felt she "could not be at rest" until she followed her beloved minister across the sea. For this reason the Hutchinson family sailed from England in May, 1634.

In the two years between their arrival and the outbreak of the Antinomian Controversy, the Hutchinsons established themselves as leaders in the new Boston where Cotton was now preaching. In November, 1634, William Hutchinson was elected a deputy from Boston to the Massachusetts General Court, the highest political authority in the colony. Anne took on the role of spiritual adviser to others of her sex. At first she visited around, usually to women in childbirth. Then, at some unknown date, she began to hold meetings in her home for the purpose of repeating and discussing the previous week's sermons. These meetings became so popular that she had to organize another series for men. In all, some sixty or more persons crowded into the Hutchinson home each week to hear Anne comment on the sermons not only of Cotton, but also of the other ministers who were preaching in nearby towns.

Much of what Mrs. Hutchinson heard from those other min-

isters was not to her liking, and she said so to the people gathered in her house. She complained that, with the exception of Cotton, the ministers were "legalists" who argued for some necessary connection between man's own works and his redemption by Christ. They took the outward evidence of "sanctification" — leading a righteous life — to mean that Christ had redeemed, or justified, a person's soul. Needless to say, the ministers did not agree with Anne's interpretation of their preaching. Nor did they like the other ideas she was spreading among her listeners. As early as September, 1634, the Reverend Zechariah Symmes, who came to New England with the Hutchinsons, had questioned her orthodoxy; but it was not until the spring of 1636 that the other ministers in the colony warned Cotton of the strange opinions circulating among his parishioners. At the same time Cotton's colleagues were having doubts about his preaching. Was he the source of Mrs. Hutchinson's ideas?

In October, 1636, the ministers confronted this question directly. That month they gathered in Boston for a "conference in private" with Cotton, Mrs. Hutchinson, and her brother-in-law, the Reverend John Wheelwright, who had just arrived in the colony. The results of the conference were encouraging, for Cotton "gave satisfaction to them, so as he agreed with them all in the point of sanctification, and so did Mr. Wheelwright; so as they all did hold, that sanctification did help to evidence justification." But in the Boston Church differences of opinion were still unresolved, and when a majority of the members, "being of the opinion of Mrs. Hutchinson," proposed that Wheelwright join the Church's ministry, these differences erupted into a public quarrel. Boston already had a second minister, the Reverend John Wilson, who was unsympathetic to Anne Hutchinson. By nominating Wheelwright, her supporters clearly meant to insult — and replace — Wilson. This was too much for John Winthrop, the leading layman in the church and a friend of Wilson. Taking advantage of a rule requiring unanimity in a church vote, he was able to thwart Wheelwright's election, though he did so at the price of increasing the bitterness in the church.

Two months later the ministers again met in Boston with Cotton and Mrs. Hutchinson. This time their conference failed to

produce agreement. Answering a question about sanctification, Cotton warned that if taken wrongly as evidence of justification it amounted to a "Covenant of Works." Mrs. Hutchinson was more blunt; she told the ministers directly that many of them were preaching "works," not "grace." In the meantime the Controversy had entered the General Court. On December 7 the governor of Massachusetts, Henry Vane, announced his resignation to a special session of the deputies. Vane was an admirer of Mrs. Hutchinson, and the reason he gave for wanting to leave the colony — his fear that "God's judgments" would "come upon us for these differences and dissensions" — contained the implication that her indictment of the ministers was correct. After Vane withdrew his resignation at the request of the Boston Church (the members knew the value of a friend in power), the Court began debating who was to blame for the colony's troubles. Vane pointed to the ministers, but they, in turn, accused him of provoking the Controversy. In a "very sad speech of the condition of our churches," John Wilson spoke for his colleagues in laying "the blame upon these new opinions risen up amongst us, which all the magistrates, except the governour and two others, did confirm, and all the ministers but two." Finding itself divided like the colony, the Court concluded its session with a call for a general fast on January 19. There was still the hope that repentance would restore peace.

But the fast-day served only to deepen the lines of division. That it failed to bring peace was largely the doing of John Wheelwright. Attending services at the Boston Church, he was called up out of the congregation by Cotton and invited to preach. Wheelwright responded with a sermon in which (to quote Winthrop's summary) he "inveighed against all that walked in a covenant of works, as he described it to be, viz., such as maintain sanctification as an evidence of justification etc. and called them antichrists, and stirred up the people against them with much bitterness and vehemency." Encouraged in this fashion, the Antinomians intensified their crusade against the "legalists" among the clergy. During lectures and church services, they asked "public questions" of ministers who preached "doctrines, which did any way disagree from their opinions; and it began to be as common here to distinguish

between men, by being under a covenant of grace or a covenant of works, as in other countries between Protestants and Papists."

This was the situation when the General Court met again on March 9. To his great relief, Winthrop could report that "the greater number far [of the deputies and magistrates] were sound," and the actions of the Court bear him out. One of the Antinomians, a man named Steven Greensmyth, was fined £40 and ordered to "acknowledge his fault in every church" for saying that "all the ministers (except Mr. Cotton, Mr. Wheelwright, and hee thought Mr. Hooker) did teach a covenant of works." After voting its approval of the speech John Wilson had made in December, the Court called upon Wheelwright to answer for his sermon. When he "justified it, and confessed he did mean all that walk in such a way," the Court asked the other ministers what this meant, and learned that "such a way" referred to the message they were preaching. Wheelwright was promptly judged guilty of "contempt & sedition" for having "purposely set himself to kindle and increase" bitterness in the colony. Wheelwright's friends did not let this vote pass without a fight: "much heat of contention . . . between the opposite parties," was Winthrop's laconic reference to the ensuing struggle. The minority within the Court protested formally, and the Boston Church, which had petitioned for procedural changes favorable to Wheelwright at the beginning of the session, now "tendered a petition in his behalf, justifying Mr. Wheelwright's sermon." None of these protests was accepted, nor was Henry Vane able to prevent the Court from deciding it would hold its next session in Newtown (Cambridge). That session would be a "general court of elections," and the orthodox party knew it stood a better chance of winning if the elections for governor and magistrates were held in a town other than Boston.

The excitement of election day, May 17, still lives in Winthrop's narrative. No sooner had the session begun than a clash occurred over a petition presented in defense of Wheelwright.

> The governour [Henry Vane] would have read it, but the deputy [John Winthrop] said it was out of order; it was a court for elections, and those must first be despatched, and then their petitions should be heard . . . but yet the governour and those of that party would not proceed to election, except the petition was read. Much

> time was already spent about this debate, and the people crying out for election, it was moved by the deputy, that the people should divide themselves, and the greater number must carry it. And so it was done, and the greater number by many were for election. But the governour and that side kept their place still, and would not proceed.

A majority of the freemen then went with Winthrop to one side of the Newtown common and elected him governor in place of Vane.

Other measures against the Antinomians followed. In the election of magistrates, the two incumbents who had supported Wheelwright were left out, and when one of them, together with Henry Vane, reappeared in the Court as one of two deputies from Boston, the majority "found a means to send them home again." On a second try the two gained admission, but their presence failed to deter the Court from ordering that no "strangers" could be received in the colony for longer than three weeks without the permission of the Court. This law was necessary, Winthrop declared, in order to prevent the Antinomians from adding new immigrants to their number.

Meanwhile the ministers were trying to settle the theological aspects of the Controversy. About the time of the election, they emerged from a new round of conferences bearing an agreement with Cotton on the issue of sanctification. But the list of other doctrines in dispute was now so long that they decided to hold a special "synod." Meeting at Cambridge on August 30, the synod took up the business of identifying and refuting some ninety "errours" of the Antinomians. Another of its tasks was to deal with various problems of church order that the Controversy had exposed. Because the Antinomians had abused two of the privileges of church members, the liberty to question the minister and that to hold "private" meetings, the synod warned against their continuance. With tighter control of doctrines and church order assured, the ministers adjourned on September 22.

If the synod was a demonstration that the ministers had closed ranks, the colony as a whole still suffered from the aggressive challenges of the Antinomians. Many of their acts were petty. After Winthrop replaced Vane as governor, the honor guard that Boston provided the office-holder refused to escort him. In July, Vane

turned down an invitation from Winthrop to attend a state dinner on the grounds "that his conscience withheld him." More serious was the fact that "though Mr. Wheelwright and those of his party had been clearly confuted and confounded" by the synod, "they persisted in their opinions, and were as busy in nourishing contentions . . . as before." Realizing, finally, that "two so opposite parties could not contain in the same body, without apparent hazard of ruin to the whole," Winthrop and a majority of the colonists determined to adopt a sterner policy. At the next General Court session, which began on November 2, the leaders of the Antinomian party were disfranchised and banished from the colony. A variety of lesser penalties was imposed upon the other signers of the petition presented to the Court in March, and the Court concluded by ordering that all "guns, pistols, swords, powder, shot, and match" be collected from Mrs. Hutchinson's sympathizers.

Then it was Anne Hutchinson's turn. Since she had not engaged in any of the political protests, the Court had to find some other basis on which to punish her. Her trial by the Court was nearly a disaster, for Mrs. Hutchinson made the various charges brought against her seem ridiculous. Not until she spoke of receiving revelations from God did the Court find an issue on which she could be banished from the colony. With her proscription, the Controversy drew to its close. In the winter months, the churches were busy disciplining members who had taken part in the affair. Thus the last chapter of Mrs. Hutchinson's life in Massachusetts was her "trial" before the Boston Church, from which she was excommunicated on March 22, 1638. Six days later she left the colony. Like many of the other exiles, the Hutchinsons went to Rhode Island. A few years later, they moved near present-day Rye, New York, where in August, 1643, Anne Hutchinson and a dozen members of her family were killed in an Indian raid.

II

In the opinion of Charles Francis Adams, the Antinomian Controversy could not be properly appreciated if it were approached from a theological point of view. "As a rule," suggested Adams, "theological controversies are . . . among the most barren of the

many barren fields of historical research; and the literature of which they were so fruitful may, so far as the reader of to-day is concerned, best be described by the single word impossible." Such a statement may reflect Adams's urbane scepticism more than a realistic understanding of history, yet Adams found confirmation for his rule in the Antinomian Controversy. To him the theological language employed by the ministers was "a jargon which has become unintelligible." The "mis-called" controversy was, in any case, not about matters of doctrine but about power and freedom of conscience. Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright, declared Adams, were rebels against the dogmatic tyranny of the ministers. Their revolt was the first step toward the "emancipation" of Massachusetts from the heavy burden of Puritanism.[3]

Crude though it was, Adams's interpretation is partly borne out by some more recent investigations.[4] Leaving aside the social and political dimensions of the Controversy which are explored by these investigations, the following discussion addresses itself to the theological issues that Adams dismissed as "jargon." What were these issues? The most complete guide to them is the catalogue of "erroneous opinions" compiled at the synod of 1637. But this list is repetitious and indiscriminate; it also lumps together the opinions that emerged later on in the Controversy with those that circulated from the start. In searching for the root issues, this chronological distinction must be kept in mind, as well as the difference between the issues debated by the ministers and those injected into the Controversy by the more radical members of the Boston Church. In the beginning there were only two issues involved, according to Winthrop's reckoning: "1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2. That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification."[5] The second of these statements figured as the major issue in the debate between John Cotton and his fellow ministers. Replying to the sixteen questions, Cotton answered "more largely and distinctly" to

3. C. F. Adams, *Three Episodes of Massachusetts History* (Boston, 1892), 366–367; Brooks Adams, *The Emancipation of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1887).

4. The Bibliographical Note following the documents refers to these studies.

5. Winthrop, *History*, *1*, 239.

question thirteen, "Whether evidencing Justification by Sanctification, be a building my Justification on my Sanctification," it being, as he said, "exposed to greatest Agitation and Exception."[6] According to Thomas Shepard, the "principall opinion & seed" of all the "monstrous opinions" condemned by the synod of 1637 was

> that a Christian should not take any euidence of gods speciall grace & loue toward him by the sight of any graces or conditionall euangelicall promises to fayth or sanctification; in way of ratiocination; (for this was euidence & so a way of woorkes,) but it must be without the sight of any grace fayth holines or speciall change in himselfe. by immediat reuelation in an absolute promise. & because that the whole scriptures do giue such cleare plaine & notable euidences of favour to persons called & sanctifyed; hence they sayd that a second euidence might be taken from hence but no first euidence.[7]

To this same issue, finally, Winthrop referred most often in his running account of the Controversy.

If we accept this testimony, the problem is then to understand why the relationship between justification and sanctification became so debatable in the 1630s. Part of the explanation lies in the background of the colonists. Like other English Puritans, they assumed that everyone could know whether or not he was saved, or of the elect. The blunt question of the revivalist — "Brother, are you saved?" — had its analogue in the evangelical preaching of the spiritual brotherhood, the fraternity of Puritan preachers in England. To help their listeners answer that question, the preachers wrote scores of books describing the process of conversion in which the elect came to know "experimentally" of their salvation. But no one who listened to the "painfull" sermons of the ministers could take his salvation for granted. The conversion experience was too variable, the "heart" of the sinner too shifting, for assurance to be complete. The result of the ministers' preaching was thus to arouse an acute anxiety in many of those who lacked

6. *Sixteene Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence* (London, 1644), 14.

7. "The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 27, 385.

assurance. The preachers could not resolve the problem by declaring that anxiety was inevitable. They had to provide some objective measure of grace, some outward sign of inner holiness. One such sign was sanctification, the daily course of living a godly life. Though the Puritans recognized that a hypocrite could simulate the life of righteousness, they reasoned that only the person whose heart had been transformed could sustain his obedience to the will of God. Outward behavior could therefore be taken as a sign — albeit a confusing one — of justification.

The colonists brought the problem of achieving assurance with them to New England, and in the new world a special set of circumstances made it more intense. One of these circumstances was the religious excitement that prevailed in Massachusetts during the early 1630s. While the colonists remained in England, they lived in the fear that the government would deprive them of their spiritual "food," the preaching of the spiritual brotherhood. When Archbishop Laud made that fear a reality by driving the Puritan preachers out of the Church, Puritan laymen risked their lives to found a new society in which evangelical preaching would be unrestrained. For the first time in their lives, these Puritans could indulge themselves in sermons, and there is ample evidence to suggest that they did so.[8] It was not only a feeling of release that inspired indulgence of this kind; the colonists also turned to their ministers for comfort to make up for that denied them by the bleak New England wilderness. If the shock of their encounter with that landscape drove some colonists back to England, others responded by seeking consolation from the Holy Spirit.

Out of this heightened longing for grace came a revival, a period of exaggerated piety. According to Roger Clap, who placed the beginning of this revival in 1633, it served as a means of relieving the anguish of dislocation:

> God's holy spirit in those days was pleased to accompany the word with such efficacy upon the hearts of many, that our hearts were taken off from old England and set upon heaven. The discourse not only of the aged, but of the youth also, was not, "How shall we

8. Winthrop, *History, 1,* 390; 4 *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1,* 211.

> go to England?" . . . but "How shall we go to heaven? Have I true grace wrought in my heart? Have I Christ or no?" O how did men and women, young and old, pray for grace, beg for Christ in those days. And it was not in vain. Many were converted, and others established in believing.

The Boston Church Records bear Clap out on the number of conversions. In the six months following John Cotton's admission to membership in September, 1633, sixty-three persons — or nearly half the number of members acquired during the previous three years — joined the church.[9]

An increase in church membership was not the only consequence of the revival. At the time it occurred, the colonists were debating what standards of church membership they should adopt. The revival was to shape that debate in a crucial direction. The colonists wished to restrict the church to the godly, but they were not sure what terms to demand of prospective church members. By 1633, they had set up two requirements, soundness in doctrine and evidence of good behavior. Some of the ministers, among them John Cotton, wanted to go further by requiring candidates to testify before the church about their experience of conversion. Since the revival seemed to guarantee an abundance of conversions, the other ministers agreed, and in February, 1636, when Thomas Shepard formed a new church in Cambridge, the advice of the ministers present was "that such as were to join should make confession of their faith, and declare what work of grace the Lord had wrought in them; which accordingly they did."[10]

But by 1636 the revival itself was over. For the first time in America, the ministers learned the lesson that the tide of grace soon ebbs. The reasons seemed clear. As the hardships of life in the new world diminished, the colonists were turning to other interests. Piety declined as the lure of prosperity grew stronger. As early as 1635 the new mood had disheartened John Pratt of Water-

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9. Alexander Young, *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1846), 354–355; Boston Church Records, *Collections of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 39,* 12–18.

10. Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (New York, 1963), Ch. 3; Winthrop, *History, 1,* 215.

town. Haled before a court for complaining about the spiritual depression, Pratt explained that the "many folde occasions & businesses, which here att first wee meete withall" prevented the colonists from keeping their "hearts in that holy frame which some tymes they were in, where wee hadd lesse to doe in outward things."[11] Similarly the ministers were discovering that the feeling of release had a disappointing consequence. "Does not plenty of means make thy soul slight means?" Shepard asked his Cambridge congregation. "When you went many miles to hear, and had scarce bread at home, O, you thought, if once you had such liberties; but when they are made yours, now what fruit?"[12]

The collapse of the revival engendered a mood of acute religious anxiety. As Clap's account indicates, the revival and the new requirement for church membership were forcing everyone in the colony to ask himself, am I saved? In the aftermath of the revival many were not sure of the answer. How could they tell if they were saved or not? What evidence could they rely upon? How could they gain assurance of salvation and escape from anxiety about their spiritual estates? For one member of the Boston Church the answer to these questions was a desperate one. "A woman of Boston congregation, having been in much trouble of mind about her spiritual estate, at length grew into utter desperation, and could not endure to hear of any comfort, etc., so as one day she took her little infant and threw it into a well, and then came into the house and said, now she was sure she should be damned, for she had drowned her child."[13] Others, less desperate, found relief in cursing the ministers. Nowhere else in the world, remarked Shepard, had there been "such expectation to find the Lord," and for those who found Him not, the reaction against the ministers was intense: "They give in and therefore care not for . . . that food which they find nourisheth them not."[14]

Thus the spiritual depression of 1635–1636 gave rise to an an-

11. *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1630–1692* (Boston, 1904), 2, 111.

12. Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins Opened & Applied,* in *The Works of Thomas Shepard,* ed. J. A. Albro (Boston, 1853), 2, 92.

13. Winthrop, *History,* 1, 281–282.

14. Shepard, *Works,* 2, 170–171.

tiministerial attitude and an anxiety about the knowledge of God. All that was needed to turn these two ingredients into Antinomianism was the preaching of John Cotton. Cotton's sermons in Boston had touched off the revival of 1633, and in those he preached during the summer of 1636 he tried to get it going again. Piety had declined, declared Cotton, because the colonists had become too proud of New England's "Reformation" in manners. He reminded them that good behavior itself, or "walking in the wayes of God," as the various church covenants expressed it, was a "work" that any hypocrite could perform. Such "sanctification" could amount to no more than a "righteousness of ones own." In short, "Reformation is no assurance that God hath made an everlasting Covenant with us."

Against pride in "works" Cotton set the true measure of the saint. He was "Meek in Spirit & Merciful, and Mourning for Sin." He was overcome with a sense of his helplessness.

> Now then, doth the Lord draw you to Christ, when you are broken in the sense of your own Sins, and of your own Righteousness? When you look at duties you are not able to do them, not able to hear or pray aright.

Rather than counting upon "duties" for assurance, the sinner must look to God.

> If the Lord do thus draw you by his Everlasting Arm, He will put a Spirit into you, that will cause you to wait for Christ, and to wait for Him until He doth shew Mercy upon you.

The person who waited for Christ, whose heart was "emptied of every thing besides," could be judged one of the elect, and hence be eligible for church membership: "You may safely receive him into your Church fellowship."[15]

These themes reappeared in the conversation of Anne Hutchinson. Before the Controversy broke out, she had won Cotton's "loving and dear respect" for her efforts to overcome the spirit-

15. John Cotton, *A Sermon Preached . . . At Salem* (Boston, 1713), 30–33; John Cotton, *A Conference Mr. John Cotton Held at Boston with The Elders of New England* (London, 1646), 7.

ual deadness that he was also attacking. In her efforts to arouse the colonists "to seek for better establishment in Christ," Mrs. Hutchinson insisted that those who turned for comfort to the performance of "duties" were resting their assurance on "sandy foundations."[16] To this extent her message was useful and legitimate. Even John Winthrop admitted that "the Doctrine of free justification lately taught here took me in as drowsy a condition, as I had been in (to my remembrance) these twenty yeares."[17] But Anne Hutchinson did more than revive the colonists from their "drowsy" state. Taking up Cotton's warning against confidence in "works," she turned his denunciations of moralism into the specific charge that the other ministers in the colony were preaching a "Covenant of Works." By this term she meant that the ministers were letting people "thinke [themselves] to be saved, because they see some worke of Sanctification in them."[18] More broadly, the term she used referred to the covenant God had made with Adam. As a man without sin, Adam could ensure his salvation by fulfilling the condition of perfect obedience, but after the Fall man's "works" no longer earned him any merit with God. In the new "covenant of grace" that God established with Abraham, the sole reasons for salvation were the Gospel of Christ and the free gift of grace.

Mrs. Hutchinson based her attack upon the "legall" preachers on the difference between these covenants. Between free grace and man's own righteousness she saw no connection, and therefore insisted on treating sanctification as a "work." From the radical disjunction between grace and "duties" flowed the rhetoric of the Antinomians:

> Here is a great stirre about graces and looking to hearts, but give mee Christ, I seeke not for graces, but for Christ, I seeke not for promises, but for Christ, I seeke not for sanctification, but for

16. John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (London, 1648), Pt. 1, 51–52.

17. *Winthrop Papers* (Boston, 1943), *3*, 344; [John Winthrop], *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines* (London, 1644), 31.

18. *John Wheelwright*, ed. Charles Bell (Boston, 1876), 164.

> Christ, tell not mee of meditation and duties, but tell mee of Christ.[19]

On it was also based Anne Hutchinson's personal sense of communion with the Holy Spirit. Since her own piety rested upon an immediate awareness of the Spirit, she could deny that the ministry was needed as an intervening "means of grace" between God and man. And she could solve the problem of assurance by declaring that those who received the Spirit never had to doubt their estate again. In her system, any striving after "signs" of grace was a sure sign that grace had not been granted.[20]

Anne Hutchinson brought most of these beliefs with her to New England, but they owed their currency in the colony to the spiritual depression of 1635–1636. The "Antinomians" in Massachusetts were primarily those who sought relief from their religious anxiety and support for their anger at the ministers. Antinomianism provided them with both. Yet there was an alternative route to assurance and one that, in the end, the majority of the colonists chose to follow. As described by Thomas Shepard in a series of sermons he began to preach in the summer of 1636, this route involved a ceaseless striving after grace by the saints and the unregenerate alike. In Shepard's view, the spiritual journey of the saint on earth became a constant growth in grace as he struggled to fulfill the commands of God. Given this ceaseless struggle, the reason for the spiritual depression and the rise of Antinomianism was obvious. Antinomianism was simply a way for the "slothful" sinner to escape the demands of the law. Shepard had no patience with the argument that man was helpless; to the cry of the Antinomians, "We can do nothing, and why are we pressed to it?," he replied that God made room for man's own striving within the larger framework of the divine initiative. God and man worked together in the process of salvation: "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Colossians 1.29). Since the grace of God made possible the efforts of the saint, Shepard argued that sanctification could be used as a valid sign of justification, or election. The same reasoning led

19. Winthrop, *Short Story*, 19.
20. Cotton, *The Way . . . Cleared*, Pt. 1, 52; [Winthrop], *Short Story*, 6, 8.

him to his doctrine of assurance. Though anxiety was part of the "trial" of life in this world, the saint, said Shepard, could gain assurance from his own striving after righteousness. The answer to anxiety lay in constant activity.[21]

The Controversy touched on other issues besides the relationship between justification and sanctification. One was the significance of "preparation" as a stage in the process of conversion. Did God demand that man prepare himself to receive grace? Did man's response to the "Law" have any saving efficacy? Cotton did not think so, but most of the ministers were "preparationists" to one degree or another.[22] Another problem was determining the relationship between faith and grace. Like all Protestants, the colonists believed that salvation was the gift of a merciful God who only asked of man that he have faith. Could faith be considered the "condition" of the covenant of grace, the response man must make to the offer of the Gospel before God would grant him grace? Or was faith an aftereffect, a consequence of justification? Cotton held to the latter opinion, but his opponents believed that faith was the "active" instrument for receiving grace.[23] Other issues besides these were involved in the ministers' debate, but all of them came around eventually to the original question: How is the saint to know he is saved? The rhetoric and theology of the Antinomian Controversy were never far away from the immediate problem of providing assurance for the troubled souls of the colonists.[24]

The differences of opinion between the ministers were a serious threat to the unity of Massachusetts so long as Cotton stuck to his position. But at the synod of 1637 he agreed to recognize the

21. Shepard, *Works*, 2, 250–251.

22. Cf. Perry Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, 1967); Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared* (New Haven, 1966).

23. Cf. the exchange of views between John Cotton and Peter Bulkeley, below, and [Winthrop], *Short Story*, 6.

24. The Scriptural texts that figure most often in the Controversy were those dealing with the "witness" of man's salvation (1 John 5.10), with man's striving (2 Peter 1.9–10; Ephesians 1.13–14), with the opposition of grace and the law (Romans 8.14–16), and with the relationship between works and grace (Matthew 7.17; Romans 4.4–5).

validity of the other side; "The Spirit," he now affirmed, "doth Evidence our Justification in both wayes, sometime in an absolute Promise, sometime in a conditionall."[25] This was really a concession, not a compromise. Though his opponents may have agreed to tolerate Cotton's theology, it was their own synthesis of moralism, activism, and voluntaryism that came to prevail in New England.

In this sense the Antinomian Controversy was a turning point in the religious ideas of the colonists. But the Controversy was not the point at which New England left the mainstream of the Reformed tradition. The Antinomianism of Anne Hutchinson was the real departure, for it prefigured the radical stance of the Quakers. The New England ministers, on the other hand, remained officially faithful to the Westminster Confession for a hundred years. When the liberal movements of the eighteenth century reached New England, they had to do battle with Jonathan Edwards, the greatest champion orthodoxy was to have; and in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,* Edwards quoted more from Thomas Shepard than from any other writer.

The effects of the Antinomian Controversy were rather upon the elusive "temper" of the New England Puritans and the region's church history. In the aftermath of the Controversy, the standards of church membership seemed to need revision, and by the 1640s the ministers were easing the requirement that candidates testify about their conversion experiences. Equally important was the shift in the ministers' thinking about the nature of their authority. The Congregationalism of the thirties was radically experimental in the way it allowed the minister and church members to share authority. But the shock of the Controversy recalled the ministers to a more traditional assertion of their prerogatives. Thus the Congregationalism of the Cambridge Platform (1648) reflected the temper of the forties, just as the Antinomian Controversy had reflected the temper of the thirties. Gone was the spiritual enthusiasm that had prompted the revival and the experiments in church order. In its place was a formalism that the ministers in New England would lament for another century.

25. Cotton, *The Way . . . Cleared,* Pt. 1, 45.

III

THE editorial principles followed in this volume depart from Charles Francis Adams's practice in several respects. Within the limits of nineteenth-century typesetting, Adams tried to achieve a literal reproduction of the texts. This meant that he repeated obvious printers' errors and employed the long s, in addition to leaving contractions and abbreviations as they appeared in the manuscripts. Scholarship no longer rests upon such antiquarian exactness. In the texts based on printed copies, errors have been silently corrected and the long s has been changed to the modern form. All contractions, abbreviations, and ampersands in manuscripts have been written out. Superior letters have been brought down to the line of text. Spelling has been regularized for the interchangeable letters u, v, w, i, and j. Biblical citations all follow the same form, while book titles and Latin phrases have been italicized. In the manuscript of John Wheelwright's fast-day sermon, would, should, and could were spelled without the u; here the missing letter has been restored. The first words of sentences have been capitalized. When material is quoted in the documents, the form of quotation has been changed to conform to modern usage. One text, the report of Mrs. Hutchinson's church trial, required extensive editing of punctuation. Otherwise the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the originals, whether printed texts or manuscripts, have been followed exactly.

These documents pose the problem of what is an "original" text in the first place. For several of the texts we depend upon a book written by a colonist but printed in England without his supervision, perhaps even without his consent. In December, 1637, John Cotton wrote to an English minister complaining of an unauthorized printing:

> One thing, let me intreate further of you. I heare there is a written Booke goeth up and downe in England under my Name, as my Catechisme. I did indeede goe over the Principles of Religion in way of Catechisme here. . . . But what Notes [have] bene taken of it from my mouth, I know not: Sure I am I never perused any Copy to be sent for England. And therefore if you heare of such a writing, I pray you, doe me this Christian favor, to beare witnesse from

> me, I doe not owne it, as having never seene it: although [it] may be; sundry things in it, were delivered by me, which I doe Acknowledge.[26]

In the 1640s, Thomas Shepard disowned the first edition of *The Sincere Convert* on the grounds that "it was a collection of such notes in a dark town in England, which one procuring of me, published them without my will or my privity. I scarce know what it contains, nor do I like to see it, considering . . . the confession of him that published it, that it comes out much altered from what was first written."[27] Even the absence of such complaints does not mean that a given text is accurate. In the case of the Antinomian documents we should rather expect the opposite for the reason that their seventeenth-century printings were based on one of the many *copies* in circulation, not on the *originals.* Thanks to the existence of independent copies of two of the following documents, the problem of establishing the original text has been partly overcome. Besides the London printing of *A Conference . . . Held at Boston,* there exist two contemporary manuscript versions. And there are handwritten emendations, drawn from the "original MSS," in a printed copy of *Severall Questions of Serious and necessary Consequence.* Only with the first of these did collation of the different copies turn up much material missing from the printed version, but in both there are many changes that make opaque paragraphs and sentences intelligible once again.

The editorial annotation in this volume also varies from Adams's practice. He consistently commented upon the family backgrounds of the persons involved in the Controversy and upon what might be called its historical geography, the setting in terms of nineteenth-century Boston. His notes on both of these subjects are still worth consulting, since the information in them has not been carried over into these pages. The biographical sketches included in the notes to this volume may be located in the index.

Adams assumed, and no doubt correctly, that his antiquarian audience cared not a whit for theology, and that it could read

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26. John Cotton to John Dod, December (1637?), Cotton Papers, Prince Collection, Boston Public Library.

27. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, 1855), *1,* 389.

Latin. For modern readers these conditions exist in reverse. In the texts below, Latin passages have been translated unless a translation follows in the document itself or the phrase is a familiar one. I have identified as many as possible of the authors and books that were cited in the debates, using the editions available in the Yale University Library. The annotation of the theological "jargon" is selective. The principal aim has been to alert the reader to certain important terms, to interrelationships between the documents, to key passages of Scripture, and finally, to the vast literature of Puritanism that surrounds the Controversy.[28] Since the references to Scripture run into the hundreds, I have assumed that the serious student will often turn to a concordance and a King James Bible.

In the present volume, the pagination of seventeenth-century printings has been indicated, using numbers in brackets. The limited cross-referencing in the notes is supplemented by the index, which includes a number of theological categories.

The task of preparing these documents has been greatly eased by the assistance I have received from Mark Thomson, Gay Little, David Richards, and, most especially, my wife. I am grateful to Leo Curran for help in translating the Latin, and to Miss Marjorie G. Wynne for facilitating my use of the Stiles Papers, Yale University Library. The Massachusetts Historical Society has kindly granted permission to reproduce the documents in its possession.

28. The Bibliographical Note at the end of this volume refers to this literature.

CHAPTER I

Letters between Thomas Shepard and John Cotton

THE letters that Thomas Shepard[1] and John Cotton[2] exchanged sometime before June, 1636, are perhaps the earliest documents of the Antinomian Controversy. In the first of these letters, Shepard expressed his dismay at the themes of Cotton's sermons and asked him to explain his views more fully. Over the next several months Cotton's opponents were to learn that pinning him down was not an easy business. Shepard may have learned this lesson already, for he requested that Cotton "give us satisfaction by way of wrighting rather then speech." Though both men were confident that the differences between them could be resolved, the exchange served only to clarify their disagreement on three points: the relationship between the Word and the Spirit; the activity of a sinner before he received the Holy Spirit; and finally, the life of righteousness as evidence of redemption. All three became major issues in the Controversy.

The letters bear no dates, but the time of the exchange may be fixed approximately from other information. Shepard arrived in Massachusetts in October, 1635. Thomas Hooker,[3] to whom Cot-

1. Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) emigrated to New England in 1635 and spent the rest of his life as pastor of the church in Cambridge.

2. John Cotton (1584–1652) was vicar of St. Botolph's, Boston, Lincolnshire before coming to New England in 1633. He was the outstanding minister among the founding generation.

3. Thomas Hooker (1586–1647), minister at Newtown and subsequently at Hartford, Connecticut, was a distinguished preacher in England before emigrating to Massachusetts in 1633. His daughter Joanna married Thomas Shepard in 1637.

ton refers as if he were living with Shepard, left Newtown (Cambridge) at the beginning of June, 1636. These two dates would seem to fix the period within which the letters were written. Shepard would not have been prepared to comment on Cotton's preaching immediately after arriving from England; thus 1636 seems more likely than 1635. And the reference he makes to "our church" may place the exchange after February 1, when he and a group of friends formed themselves into a church in Newtown.[4]

The manuscripts of the two letters are in the Cotton Papers, Prince Collection, Boston Public Library. Their condition is such that a full text cannot be established. Words in brackets represent readings warranted by fragments of letters or by the sense.

Thomas Shepard to John Cotton

Dear Sir

It is the earnest desire not only of my selfe, but of diverse of our members, whose harts are much endeared to you, that for the farther clearing up of the truth, you would be pleased to give us satisfaction by way of wrighting rather then speech for this on time to these particulars

1: Whether the man Christ Jesus in suffring the death of the soule, did not only loose the life of Joy; but also (to his own feeling) the life of righteousnes, or of the first Adam, and so lived by faith in the Duity; and hence [he puts] out the life of legall righteousnes and extinguisheth Adams righteousnes in all his members, and causeth him to live by that faith of the son of god.

2: Whether A Christian finding a qualification of a promise saving [wrought] in him; can, or should lay hold or close with the Lord Jesus according to that promise; but rather to stay for a more full, and clearer Revelation of the spirit: for if he is thus to set that promise by, and so to wait for the spirit; [then] doth he not refuse to give present honour to gods truth and love revealed in the promise; and on the other side; if he is to stay and rest his soule upon the promise before the spirit comes, doth he not then build on somewhat in him selfe, and receives the promise before god

4. Winthrop, *History*, *1*, 202–203, 214–215, 223.