

The Antinomian  
Controversy,  
1636-1638

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

Second Edition

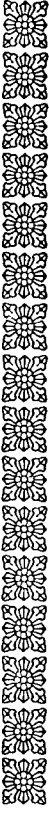
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## Introduction

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 *Sixteenth 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 upon 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 "errors" 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.<sup>3</sup>

Crude though it was, Adams's interpretation is partly borne out by some more recent investigations.<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> 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*, I, 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."<sup>6</sup> 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 evidence 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 evidence & 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 evidences of favour to persons called & sanctified; hence they sayd that a second evidence might be taken from hence but no first evidence.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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*, I, 390; 4 *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, I, 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.<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup>

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-

9. Alexander Young, *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1849), 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*, I, 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."<sup>11</sup> 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?"<sup>12</sup>

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."<sup>13</sup> 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."<sup>14</sup>

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*, I, 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 ways 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."<sup>15</sup>

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."<sup>16</sup> 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."<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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 ways, sometime in an absolute Promise, sometime in a conditionall."<sup>25</sup> 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 voluntarism 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 Plat- form (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.

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 witnessse from

<sup>25</sup> Cotton, *The Way . . . Cleared*, Pt. 1, 45.

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.<sup>26</sup>

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 privy. 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."<sup>27</sup> 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

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

<sup>27</sup>. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, 1855), I, 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup>. The Bibliographical Note at the end of this volume refers to this literature.