

**Puritan Responses to Antinomianism in  
the Context of Reformed Covenant**

**Theology: 1630 – 1696**

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**Declaration**

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## Summary

This thesis analyzes the way in which six seventeenth-century puritans from both sides of the Atlantic responded to antinomians—those accused of rejecting divine law—and the methods these six puritans used in their responses. In his book *Blown by the Spirit* (2004), David Como has divided seventeenth-century antinomians into two camps: “inherentists/perfectionists” and “imputationists.” The former were mystical and held esoteric beliefs, while the latter were more theological—even citing Martin Luther in their support. While this thesis does not focus on either group of antinomians, the six puritans whose microhistories are studied tended to focus their response on the imputationists.

T.D. Bozeman has argued in *The Precisianist Strain* (2004) that a strict moralism and rigorous pietism permeated the puritan community and provoked the imputationists to an “antinomian backlash.” This thesis will employ the microhistories of John Cotton, Edward Fisher, John Owen, John Bunyan, Samuel Petto and Herman Witsius in an analysis of the controversy surrounding the antinomian backlash. Part of what makes these six figures so helpful in this analysis is their liminal status within the puritan community. Cotton, Owen and Petto were Independents and Bunyan was a Baptist—all outside the communions which tended to be in powerful positions like the Presbyterians and the Anglicans. Fisher probably held membership, but not office, in a Presbyterian church. Finally, Witsius was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church and became an outside voice in the controversy only because a group of English puritans asked him to mediate their own conflict over antinomianism.

Though the majority report among puritan theologians was that the Mosaic covenant which God made with Israel was simply one of many administrations of the

one covenant of grace, this thesis has found that all six of the figures above believed that the Mosaic covenant was, in some sense, a covenant of works. The distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace was the way the Calvinist wing of the Reformation developed Luther's breakthrough regarding the sharp contrast between the law and the gospel. The law and the covenant of works were based upon the principle of justice so that curses were meted out for disobedience and rewards were bestowed for obedience. The gospel and the covenant of grace were based upon the principle of grace which meant that God freely gave believers salvific blessings on the basis of Jesus' perfectly obedient life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection.

The significance of these six figures' view of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works is that it provided them with a method to protect believers from the legalism, moralism and pietism that had provoked the antinomian backlash. Since the Ten Commandments had been imbedded in a covenant of works, those commandments could no longer threaten curses or promise rewards to believers who were no longer under the Mosaic covenant. Yet these six puritans also held that the substance of the Ten Commandments continued to bind all people—especially Christians—because they were the reflection of the character of the unchanging God and because they were written on the hearts of human creatures created in God's image. Thus, Cotton, Fisher, Owen, Bunyan, Petto and Witsius all had what they perceived to be correction to offer the imputationist antinomians.

# **Antinomianism in the Trans-Atlantic World: 1630-1696:**

**By Chris Caughey**

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## Introduction

A seventeenth century English clergyman named Thomas Edwards received many letters reporting the bad behavior of adherents of the many sects which had sprung up in the chaos of the civil wars. Two in particular stand out. In December 1645, a concerned person wrote with a report of a recent scandalous baptism. The sacrament had been administered by a minister associated with one of the recently established Baptist churches, and the baptismal candidate had been a naked woman. Feeling modest, the woman attempted to cover herself with her hands while waiting for the minister to finish his baptismal prayer before she entered the water. The minister told the woman that holding her hands downward was an “unseemly sight.” After all, this was an ordinance of Jesus Christ, and so she should put her hands where her heart was – lifted up to heaven. Six months later Edwards received a report about a different kind of baptismal incident. A company of soldiers, led by a Captain Beamant and quartered at Yakesly in Huntingdonshire, had seen a child being carried through the town to the church in order to be presented for baptism. The lieutenant of the company, an opponent of infant baptism, quickly ordered two of his men to impede the baptismal procession and guard the entrance to the church. Not yet content, some of the soldiers entered the church building and filled the baptismal font with urine. Then they went to a local stable, stole a horse and led it back into the church where they proceeded to baptize it, instead of the child.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena: Or a Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time, Vented and Acted in England in These Last Four Years: As Also, a Particular Narration of Divers Stories, Remarkable Passages, Letters; an Extract of Many Letters, All Concerning the Present Sects; Together With Some Observations Upon, and Corollaries From all the Fore-Named Premisses*, (London: 1645), pp. 54-57; *The third part of Gangraena. Or, A new and higher discovery of the errors, heresies and blasphemies, and insolent proceedings of the sectaries of these times*, (London: 1646), p. 68.

Such stories were understandably troubling to many devout seventeenth-century Christians. That is precisely why Thomas Edwards cataloged reports of these outrages in *Gangraena*, a book which began as an 800-page single volume and grew to a three-volume set that still failed to record everything that concerned him. Though Edwards was a Church of England curate, his goal had been to foment widespread, popular opposition to every church and sect outside of the Presbyterian system which he supported. But his project failed. Although *Gangraena* became a best-selling text, it did not have its intended effect. Presbyterian discipline never exercised effective social control in England, and the antinomian sects continued to spawn new leaders, books and followers.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most notable opponents of the spread of antinomianism was Richard Baxter. A contemporary of Edwards's, Baxter was not only consumed with the practice of Christianity, but was also a controversialist. Baxter regarded antinomianism as perhaps the worst of all possible belief systems, because he was sure that it produced the deleterious opposite of Christianity, namely, immorality. As Baxter saw it, the classical Protestant doctrine of justification was the necessary theological foundation for antinomianism, especially the forensic doctrine of imputation, which, if its increasing prominence in denominational confessions of faith is any indication, was growing in popularity throughout the seventeenth-century. The doctrine of forensic imputation argued for the imputation of Adam's sin to all subsequent humanity, the imputation of believers' sins to Christ on the cross, and the imputation of Christ's perfect obedience to believers. Baxter reasoned that the doctrine of imputation eliminated all incentives to obey God – as, ironically,

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<sup>2</sup> P. R. S. Baker, "Edwards, Thomas (c.1599–1648)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8556> (accessed February 12, 2011).



did the Council of Trent. His argument was simple: if Christ had done it all, Baxter could not see how there could be anything left for believers to do.

John Owen, Cromwell's vice-chancellor of Oxford University, was Baxter's perfect nemesis. Although, as Tim Cooper has argued, Baxter was deeply suspicious of Owen's support of Parliament's war effort and the regicide, the preponderance of criticisms of Owen that Baxter provides in print suggest that Owen's theology, rather than his politics, was at the heart of their differences.<sup>3</sup> In 1647 Owen published *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, a treatise on Christ's atoning work. In it, he defended the thesis that Christ died only for God's elect. That doctrine, in turn, he bound up with the Protestant doctrine of justification: that sinners are declared right with God by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of the perfect obedience of Christ alone, imputed to the believing sinner. Baxter was sure Owen was a latent antinomian and attacked him in print. The dispute was extended through several decades, and Baxter continued to write against Owen even after he died in 1683.

One of the struggles of the mid-century crisis was the struggle to define antinomianism. The moral panic involved individuals across the range of social classes. The lecherous minister, the sacrilegious army company and the vice-Chancellor of Oxford University were all considered antinomians in the context of seventeenth century Puritanism, yet none of them had much in common with their supposed co-heretics. Both Thomas Edwards and Richard Baxter were concerned about ethical antinomianism, but for very different reasons. Knowing that most of England's populace shared his fear of anarchy, Edwards wrote *Gangraena* in an attempt to stem the tide of disruption that he believed was the necessary product of

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Cooper, "Why Did Richard Baxter and John Owen Diverge? The Impact of the First Civil War," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61:3 (2010): 496-516. Cf. Cooper. *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001).

independent and sectarian (i.e., non-Presbyterian) churches. Richard Baxter was concerned about errors in Christian practice and thought he could lay his axe to the root of the antinomian tree by attacking the theology he was sure was the cause of it. Baxter was also a neonomian; that is, he believed that faith and repentance were good works that people must do in order to be right with God. So he wrote against John Owen, Tobias Crisp and others whom he feared had made the gospel so free that Christians would live comfortably in sin. These examples illustrate some important truths: that seventeenth-century Christians understood antinomianism as being more than simple opposition to God's law—though some antinomians flaunted that law; that antinomians were not merely the lunatic fringe (socially or theologically)—though some were that; and that antinomianism could not be equated with civil disorder and unrest—though it is not difficult to see why the actions of some antinomians caused the public to fear. What follows in this thesis will attempt to sketch out the contours of the complex relationship between mainstream puritanism and some members of its so-called antinomian fringe.

## **I. Puritanism and Antinomianism**

This thesis is about the seventeenth-century phenomenon of antinomianism and the manner in which a number of significant puritan divines responded to it. Of course, by the mid-seventeenth century, antinomianism had a long pedigree. Perhaps its most famous exponent had ministered in the previous century. In 1536, John Agricola arrived in Wittenberg, Germany, in order to be appointed as Martin Luther's successor in the university and the church while Luther attended the gathering at Smalcald. The two were already acquainted, as Agricola had graduated

from the university at Wittenberg in 1515. In fact, they were more than acquaintances; Agricola considered himself one of Luther's faithful disciples. Yet Luther was very concerned when he learned of three sermons Agricola had subsequently preached in Wittenberg, sermons which repudiated the need for the law in the Christian life.

This was not the first time Agricola had expressed views on the law which exceeded the boundaries of Lutheran orthodoxy. In the 1520s, he had objected to Melancthon's formulation of the relationship between faith and repentance, and argued that the gospel should be preached to the exclusion of the law. Luther and Melancthon had been able to bring Agricola to agreement with them, but Agricola had continued to ruminate on his vision of a theology devoid of law for Christians. Now, in Luther's absence, Agricola was not only preaching against the law, but had most likely become involved in the distribution of theses which cited specific errors in Luther's and Melancthon's writings about the law.

Luther gave a name to Agricola's position: it was "antinomianism" (from two Greek words: *anti*, meaning "against," and *nomos*, meaning "the law"). He railed against it in sermons of his own, and after one attempt at a public debate – it failed due to Agricola's absence – the two men finally met for two disputations in 1538. Luther also wielded control over Agricola's academic career, which proved to be a fulcrum inducing the antinomian to politick with the senior reformer. So concerned was Agricola to keep his job that he proposed that Luther write a letter recanting antinomianism and Agricola would sign it as his own. Luther took full advantage of this proposal, drafting a letter with which Agricola was quite uncomfortable. Agricola appealed to various university and civil authorities, claiming that he was being treated unfairly. But Luther was resolved to see antinomianism put out of the

university and the church, because he feared, as he said in his work *Against the Antinomians* (1539), that if he had died without decisively denouncing Agricola and his supporters, the world would forever have thought of Luther as the “patron” of antinomians.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, not only did Luther publish and preach against antinomianism, but in 1577 Lutherans codified the German reformer’s views in Article VI of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord: Of the Third Use of the Law.

In this article, the Lutherans affirmed six things. Firstly, even though those who trust Christ alone for salvation are freed and exempted from the curse of the law, yet based on the *imago Dei*, human beings have the Law written on their hearts and should meditate upon it and observe it. Secondly, not only unbelievers (as Agricola claimed), but true believers, too, were to have the demands of the Law preached to them. Thirdly, since true believers will struggle against inherent sin until they die, they need the Law in order to humble and subdue them. Fourthly, deeds done according to the Law are only “works of the Law” (in the negative, self-righteous sense) when they are “extorted” from people by threats of God’s punishment. Fifthly, the fruits of the Spirit (from Galatians 5:22-23) are the supernatural product of the Holy Spirit in true believers, and as such, have neither rewards nor punishments attached to them. Sixthly, there is only one Law which is the immutable will of God, and even if unbelievers do what the Law requires, they do so by a constrained unwillingness, while true believers obey out of an unconstrained willingness that could never be produced by fear of punishment or hope of reward. For clarity and emphasis, the Lutherans rejected “as a dogma and error injurious to, and conflicting with, Christian discipline and true godliness” the teaching that “the Law in the above-mentioned way and degree is not to be urged

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<sup>4</sup> Helmut T. Lehmann and Franklin Sherman. *Luther’s Works: The Christian in Society IV*, Volume 47. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 99-120.

upon Christians and true believers, but only upon unbelievers, non-Christians and the impenitent.”<sup>5</sup>

While Luther was no doubt correct in thinking that he needed to respond decisively to Agricola lest the world think that Luther himself was the source of antinomianism, he was not the first person to do so. Likewise, those Lutherans who composed the Epitome of the Formula of Concord were not the first authoritative ecclesiastical body to condemn antinomianism. More than a decade earlier, chapter twelve of the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) declared that believers “do not... contemptuously reject the law. For we remember the words of the Lord when he said: ‘I have not come to abolish the law the and prophets but to fulfill them’ (Matt. v. 17). We know that in the law is delivered to us the patterns of virtues and vices. We know that the written law when explained by the Gospel is useful to the Church, and that therefore its reading is not to be banished from the Church . . . We condemn everything that heretics old and new have taught against the law.” In the 1536 Genevan Catechism, Calvin himself had answered the question whether the good works of believers were useless: “No, for God has promised a reward to them, both in this world and in the life to come.” Of course, for Calvin, that reward was a gift of God’s grace after he had forgiven believers their sins. The Gallican Confession (1559), to which Calvin also contributed, affirmed in articles 21 and 22 that good works were the necessary result of true faith in Christ. Article 13 of the Scotch Confession of Faith (1560) also saw good works as the necessary result of faith, while Article 14 went on to define good works as only those which conform to God’s

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<sup>5</sup> *Triglot Concordia: The symbolic books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English. Published as a memorial of the Quadricentenary Jubilee of the Reformation anno Domini 1917 by resolution of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other states. 1921. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. See especially Section VI of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord.*

Law and are done in faith. Likewise, in Article 24, the Belgic Confession (1561, though the earliest extant manuscript is from 1581) states that it is impossible that true faith could be unfruitful: good works, which God sanctifies by his grace, are the necessary result of true faith. To the question of why good works were necessary, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) answered: “Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, renews us also by his holy Spirit after his own image, that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for his blessing, and that he may be glorified through us; then, also, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof, and by our godly walk may win our neighbors also to Christ.” The Church of England gave no room to antinomianism in Article 12 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1571), which stated that good works are “pleasing and acceptable to God in Christe, and do spring out necessarily of a true and liuely fayth...”<sup>6</sup>

For many years after the Lutheran Formula of Concord, therefore, ecclesiastical bodies continued to issue confessional documents that placed antinomianism beyond the pale of Protestant orthodoxy. Echoing many of the statements above about good works, the Irish Articles of Religion (1615) went on to state in Article 84 that while the ceremonies and rituals of the Mosaic Law had been abolished, “no Christian man whatsoever is freed from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.” In that same vein, the Westminster Assembly produced its Confession of Faith (1647) which said that after the fall, God’s law “continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness” (19:2), and that “the moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience

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<sup>6</sup> In the preceding paragraph, all quotations from and references to confessional documents come from Philip Schaff’s *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.html>.

thereof . . . Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation” (19:5). The Assembly even went out of its way to distinguish this obligation to the moral law on the part of true believers from a system of merit, stating that the moral law is “of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly...” (19:6).<sup>7</sup> Although there were many disagreements among these confessions on other matters, they expressed a universal, Protestant consensus regarding the need for good works in the Christian life. Different confessional, Protestant communions were motivated by different needs and concerns, but the point should not be missed: for an early modern Christian to mount a challenge to the necessity of good works that are informed by the moral will of God would be to mount a challenge to a veritably unanimous, international consensus.

Yet confessional statements from across the spectrum of mainstream Protestantism did not vanquish antinomianism. In the seventeenth century antinomian ideas were very much alive and well. Even as the Calvinist wing of the Reformation developed and refined its orthodoxy, there were among its ranks both antinomians and rumors of antinomians. While those identified by the mainstream as heterodox had sundry motivations, their visibility and potential influence were sufficient to provoke responses from their surrounding ecclesiastical communities on an international scale. The responses from other Puritans who were more zealous for the Law were swift and acrimonious, yet interesting in light of the bibliometric data compiled by Konkola, which indicate that only about 1.5 - 3.5% of literate,

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<sup>7</sup> Independents such as John Owen produced a substantially similar Savoy Declaration in 1658, and General or Particular Baptists did the same in the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith in 1677/1689.

seventeenth-century English households would have purchased books by or about contemporary antinomians.<sup>8</sup> Yet many Puritans felt the need to respond to the antinomians in their midst, because they perceived that the threat posed to the doctrine and piety of their churches, social mores and civil order was sufficient to warrant their attention. Hence, this study will analyze some Puritan responses to antinomianism in the English trans-Atlantic. But before proceeding with a discussion of the often chaotic and tumultuous world of seventeenth-century Protestant theology, perhaps it would be helpful to consider who exactly is being discussed. And before getting right into antinomianism, a broader badge of theological identity needs attention, namely that of “Puritan.”

There is anything but consensus among scholars of early modern Protestantism regarding even the existence of Puritanism. John Coffey sees scholars of the subject as belonging to either the nominalist or realist camps, and finds himself in the latter. Patrick Collinson, though he has spoken of the subject in different ways at different times, is the nominalist, *par excellence*. That is, he argues that we may use the name (*nomen*) “Puritan,” but it is simply a label that may or may not correspond to something that really existed.<sup>9</sup> There are not many other nominalists. Conrad Russell studiously avoids the term “Puritan,” but merely replaces it with “the godly.”<sup>10</sup> Michael Winship may mark some middle ground between the two camps with an essay entitled, “Were there any Puritans in New

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<sup>8</sup> Kari Konkola, “Meek Imperialists: Humility in 17th Century England,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 28, no. 1 (2007): 30-31.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Puritan Character: Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth-Century English Culture* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).



England?”<sup>11</sup> His answer to that question acknowledges that the term “Puritan” lacks both precision and objectivity, and should not be taken too seriously. But by far, most scholars of early modern English history believe that something usefully identified as Puritanism really existed. Peter Lake is probably the leading spokesperson of this position, and his argument has been followed by other scholars such as Jacqueline Eales, Christopher Durston, Ann Hughes, Neil Keeble, Mark Kishlansky, William Lamont, Anthony Milton, John Morrill, John Spurr, Nicholas Tyacke, David Underdown, Tom Webster, Blair Worden, Keith Wrightson and Diarmaid MacCulloch.<sup>12</sup>

Everyone admits that the term “puritan” was used by real people in the seventeenth century as a term by which to abuse other real people of the same period. This fact has at least two implications. First, real Puritans existed. To deny this

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Winship, “Were there any Puritans in New England?,” *New England Quarterly*, 74, no. 1 (2001): 118-138.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Peter Lake, “Introduction” in Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* (Glasgow: Hardinge Simpole, 2002); Durston and Eales, “Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700,” in Durston and Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), pp. 1-31; Ann Hughes, “Anglo-American Puritanisms,” *Journal of British Studies*, 39 (2000), pp. 1-7; Neil H. Keeble, “Milton and Puritanism,” in Thomas N. Corns (ed.), *A Companion to Milton* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007); Mark A. Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603-1714* (London: Penguin, 1996); William M. Lamont, *Puritanism and Historical Controversy* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996); Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John S. Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London: Longman, 1993); John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism, c. 1530-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Fontana Press, 1993); Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London: Penguin Press, 2001); Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

seems to contradict or at least ignore the primary sources which use the term, both from hostility and from self-identification. Second, however, a term which can apply to both Calvinists and Arminians, antinomians and neonomians, conformists and Quakers, Erastians, proto-theonomists and proto-libertarians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Independents, Quakers and in some cases, even Anglicans (at least, as long as the established church in England would tolerate them)—and, concretely, to theologians as diverse as Richard Baxter and John Owen—may not be all that helpful. After all, help was not really what those who hurled the term of abuse were trying to offer. In the spirit of this observation, Collinson has suggested placing Puritans within a theological and ecclesiastical spectrum with staunch Roman Catholics at one end and nonconforming Puritans at the other end, with various gradations in between—gradations of a more ecclesiastical than theological nature. But that may not provide any real solutions, since most of the incompatible binaries mentioned above could all be found in the category of “nonconforming Puritans.”

Thanks to the writings of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anti-puritans and a commonly held cultural meme epitomized by the twentieth century American literary and social critic, H. L. Mencken, Puritanism has been understood as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”<sup>13</sup> Others, like the Banner of Truth Trust, who since the 1950s have privileged certain Puritans by reprinting some of their works to the exclusion of others, made them out to be almost monolithically orthodox Calvinists. But recent research has painted the picture of a multiformity of Puritan ideologies. As a result, students of Puritanism seem given to either definitions so narrow that they are liable to exclude some real, Puritan

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<sup>13</sup> H. L. Mencken, *A New Dictionary of Quotations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p. 996.

specimen, or so broad that they are not helpful enough. Collinson has quoted an Elizabethan pamphlet which described Puritans as a “hotter sort of protestants.”<sup>14</sup> But that seems to beg the questions of what it was they were “hotter” than, and how exactly they were “hotter.” Collinson also attempts to answer that question when he explains that Puritanism was “only one half of a stressful relationship.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, Puritanism was being defined by another entity in seventeenth century English culture. This was because Puritans, despite all the potential differences mentioned above, were, in some sense, desiring a purer, more precise church than the one in which they found themselves. That is, they desired to continue the Protestant Reformation, whether in a Lutheran, Calvinist or Radical direction. Of necessity, this put them at odds with the cultural status quo around them, and it was this status quo that used the term of abuse, namely, “Puritan.” In other words, by believing the things they believed and doing the things they did in order to realize a purer and more precise church, these “hotter” Protestants were irritating the status quo of the culture around them and thereby drawing the insult: Puritan.

This suggests that a fruitful way forward for defining and better comprehending Puritanism would be to study—perhaps prosopographically—those persons (and the general environment which those persons inhabited) who accused others of being Puritans. Such a *via negativa* method may provide a fresh perspective for a scholarly community lacking consensus by revealing something of the backdrop against which Puritans were being defined.

Yet Puritanism is not the only phenomenon requiring definition. The other focus of this thesis—antinomianism—is equally contested, not least by seventeenth-

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., 1967), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 143.

century Puritans. However, while the term “antinomian” bears some analogy to the term “Puritan” in that both were terms of abuse (antinomianism used more by Puritans to accuse each other), the fact remains, as noted above, that the early Reformers of the previous century had already arrived at a consensus regarding the definition of antinomianism. Both Lutherans and Calvinists were agreed that there were three uses of the law: the first use being the pedagogical use which convicts people of their sin; the second use being the civil use which curbs people’s sin against each other in society; the third use being that use which is the pattern for the Christian life. Furthermore, they were agreed that antinomianism was a rejection of the third use.

However, the theological scene in England experienced an interesting development at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, which muddled the clear and unambiguous identification of antinomians. That development was an emerging pietism, which was an emphasis upon the internal versus the external; the individual and private versus the corporate and public; faith itself versus Christ himself; an individual’s good works versus Christ’s vicarious life, substitutionary death and victorious resurrection; sanctification versus justification; sincerity and earnestness versus creeds and confessions, and life versus doctrine. The earliest of the English Reformers -- men like William Tyndale, George Joye, Thomas Cranmer, John Bradford, John Hooper, Thomas Becon, John Bale, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley – while sounding clearly the note of justification by faith alone, tended to put sanctification in the foreground of their writings. To further complicate matters, some of those men not only conceived of the principle of simple justice found in the Mosaic Covenant’s blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience as informing the economy of God’s dealings with the Church, but they

also understood civic reform under the rubric of redemption. In terms of God's dealings with the Church, this meant that, in tension with the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*, a person's sin might be of such a nature as to affect his or her right standing before God. In contrast to both Luther and Calvin, who each believed that the Bible taught a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, some of these early English Protestants tended not to observe that distinction as much—especially since the thirty-seventh of the 39 Articles recognizes the English monarch as the “chief Government” of the Church. This allowed English theologians to exegete God's providence and conclude that national calamities were God's judgment for England's sin.

At the same time, economic conditions in England had deteriorated in the midst of a trade crisis. To combat the rampant poverty, many puritans organized relief agencies of various sorts, and even got themselves into positions of civil leadership. While they really were concerned about the poor and helping those in need, part of these puritans' social agenda involved moral reform. However, the poor who were being helped by churches and other societies, as well as the middle and upper class who occasionally found themselves under new puritan civil magistracy, were not terribly eager to be morally reformed. They enjoyed their alehouses, “seasonal customs” and “local revelries.”<sup>16</sup> But of course, these were some of the things from which many puritans abstained in their quest to live “godly” lives. Thus Collinson's definition of Puritanism, which was mentioned earlier, as “one half of a stressful relationship” can be seen from the social side.

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 54-55.

Yet in spite of that outward, neighbor-loving thrust of some puritan piety, the direction of that piety took a sharp turn inward in the ministry of Richard Greenham (d. 1594). Greenham was primarily interested in two things: greater progress in sanctification by an intense and constant introspection, and assurance of salvation. Some, like T. D. Bozeman, have noted close parallels between Greenham's piety and that of medieval Roman Catholicism.<sup>17</sup> As a minister in the Church of England, Greenham would have men come live in his house in order to participate in something like a seminary. One of those students was William Perkins, and Puritan pietism became more precisely and widely articulated in his writings. Laity who followed men like Greenham, Perkins and their students often struggled to have assurance of their salvation. And the prescription of help issued by Greenham and Perkins to these struggling believers was usually greater intensity of self-scrutiny.

Coupled with the relentlessness of the principle of justice from the Mosaic Law, the focus on self drove some in the 1620s and 1630s to the brink, unleashing what Bozeman calls "the antinomian backlash." Therefore, not every charge of antinomianism in the seventeenth century referred to someone who rejected the third use of the law; sometimes those leveling the charge were presupposing a legalism or neonomianism, and some of the antinomians began with good or otherwise orthodox intentions, but were confirmed in their views as they clashed with their opponents. Alleged antinomians like John Eaton, searching for spiritual and theological refuge, turned to Luther's writings.<sup>18</sup> And even though Eaton went beyond Luther in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>18</sup> John Eaton, *The honey-combe of free justification by Christ alone* (London, 1642), 179, 466-484. See also David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 185-186; T. D. Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 190-193.

claiming, for example, that God no longer sees sin in believers, Eaton did continue to advocate good works. For this reason, Bozeman observes that the term “antinomian” tended to be used in the sense of “antilegal.”

D. Patrick Ramsey chronicles the heated written exchange between one “legal” and another “antilegal” group in seventeenth century England.<sup>19</sup> Tobias Crisp, while allegedly advocating antinomianism in his posthumous book *Christ Alone Exalted* (1643), had attacked legalism and Richard Baxter’s hallmark, neonomianism. Baxter responded with his own book, *Scripture Gospel Defended* (1690), after a reprinting of Crisp’s text. Thus the two sides were identified by their respective labels: Crisp was called the antinomian, Baxter the neonomian. Soon, men came to the defense on each side, threatening the well-being of a collaborative effort of Congregationalists and Presbyterians called the Happy Union. Herman Witsius, a widely respected Dutch minister and theologian, was asked to mediate the dispute because he had become familiar with many of the persons involved while he served as the chaplain to the Netherlands Embassy in London in 1685. Furthermore, his theological acumen was well known to Puritans of all nationalities, being displayed especially in his *magnum opus*, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum omnibus libri quatuor* (1675).<sup>20</sup> Especially because of the role covenant theology plays in Puritan responses to antinomianism, Witsius will serve as the pinnacle of this study.

Of course, the term antinomianism is almost always a pejorative. It is usually a label applied by one individual or group that is critical of another. But one thing a study such as this must bear in mind is the positive view of the law presupposed by

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<sup>19</sup> D. Patrick Ramsey, “Meet Me in the Middle: Herman Witsius and the English Dissenters,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008): 143-164.

<sup>20</sup> Translated as *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man in four books* (Leovardiae: Hagenaar, 1675).

the term “antinomianism” itself. Therefore, this thesis will especially focus on Herman Witsius’ and certain English and New English Puritans’ views of the Decalogue, its context in the Mosaic covenant and its application in the new covenant. Covenant theology is a child of Reformed theology, and so the theological descendants of John Calvin can hardly be studied accurately without studying the history and system of the divine covenants as they understood them from the pages of the Old and New Testaments.

One of the features of the transatlantic antinomian controversies that is simultaneously so fascinating and frustrating is the apparent lack of authoritative consensus regarding the identification and prosecution of antinomians. Individuals often took upon themselves the role of ecclesiastical court judges, producing briefs in the forms of sermons or books so that their audiences could take the role of jury. No doubt such an environment was due in no small part to the ecclesiastical milieu of England and New England. The Reformed Church in the Netherlands was well established and enjoyed wide acceptance among the Dutch people, so that true ecclesiastical courts could adjudicate doctrinal disputes and discipline those who violated the shared confessional standards. Yet while Parliament had convened the Westminster Assembly, it had not achieved the goal of a theologically or ecclesiastically unified England. Though the population of England was predominantly Protestant, there was no simple way for a local congregation, a presbytery or a diocese to try the cases of people who were accused of antinomianism.

Yet another reason antinomianism was controversial was because it can appear that there was little if any prior agreement about the definition of the term. The Reformers had unanimously defined antinomianism as a rejection of the third



use of the law. Yet some Puritans were so zealous for the law, that anyone who appeared to them to be promoting the gospel more than the law, or offering God's grace too freely, was liable to be labeled as an antinomian.<sup>21</sup>

But perhaps Puritan ambivalence on this point finds its fundamental explanation in the development of the doctrine of the divine covenants. What was the relationship of the Mosaic covenant and its Decalogue to the rest of the covenant of grace? Is there any difference between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ? Or more broadly, what was the relationship of the Old and New Testaments? The variety of Puritan answers to these questions and the acrimony attending many of their intra-mural disputes demonstrates that the identification of antinomianism was not simple, formulaic or even monolithic. Therefore, if the standard that was used to measure antinomianism was understood differently at all, then disagreement over actual specimens of antinomianism was inevitable – a fact which has caused some scholars, like Michael Winship, to ask whether the Puritans were engaged in the “Antinomian controversy,” or the “legalism controversy.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “Puritan polemical divinity and doctrinal controversy” in John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 217; Michael Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Timothy Cooper, “The Antinomians Redeemed: Removing Some of the ‘Radical’ From Mid-Seventeenth Century English Religion,” *The Journal of Religious History* 24:3 (2000), pp. 247-262; Mark W. Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43:1 (1980), pp. 1-57; Mark W. Karlberg, “Moses and Christ--The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism,” *Trinity Journal* 10:1 (1989), pp. 11-32; J. Wayne Baker, “Sola Fide, Sola Gratia: The Battle for Luther in Seventeenth-Century England,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal: The Journal of Early Modern Studies* 16:1 (1985), pp. 115-133; Michael McGiffert, “From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19:2 (1988), pp. 131-155; Michael McGiffert, “Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75:4 (1982), pp. 463-502.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 1.

## II. Reformed Federal or Covenant Theology and the Mosaic Covenant

Mention has already been made of divine covenants and the Ten Commandments. What follows in each chapter will analyze how particular puritans understood the Mosaic covenant since it was the context in which the Ten Commandments were given. Therefore, a brief account of the rise and development of federal or covenant theology in the Reformed tradition is in order.

Any account of Reformed covenant theology must begin with Martin Luther's articulation of the distinction between the law and the gospel. For Luther, the law obligates human beings to obey God.<sup>23</sup> Yet because of original sin, every mere human being violates that obligation. Thus, the primary purpose of the law is to thunder to human beings the wrath of God against sin until they are terrified and desperate for rescue.<sup>24</sup> The gospel, on the other hand, requires nothing of human beings except that they believe the promise of God that for Christ's sake and by his death, the blessings of forgiveness of sins, righteousness and eternal life are freely given to them.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Luther summarized,

the law and the Gospell are two contrary doctrines. To put righteousness therefore in the law, is nothing else but to fight against the Gospell. For *Moses* with his law is a severe exactor, requireth of us that we should work, and that we should give; briefly, it requireth and exacteth. Contrariwise the Gospell giveth freely and requireth of us nothing else but to hold out our hands and to take that which is offered. Now, to exact and to give, to take and to offer are things contrary, and cannot stand together. For that which is given, I take: but that which I give, I do not take, but I offer it unto another.

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *A commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians* (London, 1644), Fol. 134.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Fol. 154.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Fol. 152, 154.

Therefore, if the Gospell be a gift, it requireth nothing. Contrariwise, the law giveth nothing, but it requireth and straightly exacteth of us, yea even impossible things.<sup>26</sup>

This distinction was not unique to the Lutheran wing of the Protestant Reformation, and it would form the theological basis for the analysis of divine covenants as well as the development of a system of covenant theology among the Reformed.<sup>27</sup>

Christian theologians had begun either using the covenant concept, or the idea of federalism as early as Irenaeus in his book *The Work Against Heresies* (189). Peter Lillback sees Augustine as a major influence on medieval thinking about political covenants, and has identified a nascent covenant theology in the writings of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Fol. 102.

<sup>27</sup> Many Reformed theologians maintained this sharp distinction between the law and the gospel. For a few examples, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.7.5; 2.7.7; 2.9.4; Théodore de Bèze, *A briefe and pithie summe of the Christian faith* (London, 1565), Fol. 50-54; Heinrich Bullinger, *Fiftie godly and learned sermons* (London, 1577), 21, 101-103, 402-403, 423, 429, 1045-1046; Zacharias Ursinus, *The summe of Christian religion* (Oxford, 1587), 2-24; Dudley Fenner, *A brief treatise upon the first table of the law* (Middelburg, 1588), A3; Henry Ainsworth, *A defence of the Holy Scriptures, worship and ministrie* (Amsterdam, 1609), 33-37; Robert Bolton, *Instructions for a right comforting afflicted consciences* (London, 1631), 131, 170, 212; Richard Sibbes, *The excellencie of the Gospel above the law* (London, 1639), 1-13, 45, 438-439; Edward Fisher, *The marrow of modern divinity* (London, 1646), 11-12, 77, 92, 251; Walter Cradock, *Glad tydings, from Heaven to the worst of sinners on earth* (London, 1648), 7-9, 52; Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel-conversation* (London, 1650), 4, 41-52, 142; Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae foederis* (London, 1658), 50, 55, 101, 218, 221, 311-312; Jeremiah Burroughs, *Christ inviting sinners to come to him for rest* (London, 1659), 44, 272-275; David Dickson, *An exposition of all St. Pauls epistles* (London, 1659), 75, 158, 187, 243-244; Samuel Petto, *The difference between the Old and New Covenant* (London, 1674), A6, 109, 142, 145; John Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (London, 1680), A6, 27-28, 44, 91, 108-109, 168, 176-177, 194-195, 200-201, 280, 182, 198, 290-291, 441, 455, 465, 3-4, 8, 33; Thomas Goodwin, *A discourse of the true nature of the Gospel demonstrating that it is no new law* (London, 1695), 28-75; Herman Witsius, *Animadversiones Irenicae Ad Controversias Qua, sub infaustis Antinomorum Et Neonomorum Nominibus, in Britannia nunc agitantur* (Utrecht, 1696), 1.1, 17.1, 17.8, 17.12, 17.15.

both Martin Luther and John Calvin.<sup>28</sup> Geerhardus Vos noted “Trelcatius, father and son, Junius, Gomarus and others” who had worked with the concept of covenant prior to the Reformation.<sup>29</sup> George Williams contends that Bullinger inaugurated covenant theology by suggesting the unity of the covenant of grace to Ulrich Zwingli when the former referred the latter to the writings of Tertullian and Lactantius.<sup>30</sup> However, most historical theologians tend to trace the earnest development of covenant theology in the Reformed tradition to Zwingli himself in his debates with Anabaptists about the sacrament of baptism.<sup>31</sup> Just as Luther had understood the gospel as being present in both the Old Testament and the New, so Zwingli and the Reformed saw the covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*) as running from Adam’s Fall to Christ’s return.<sup>32</sup> Like the gospel, the covenant of grace announced blessings of

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<sup>28</sup> Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 32-46, 58-141.

<sup>29</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in Richard B. Gaffin, ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1980), 235.

<sup>30</sup> George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster, 1962), 131.

<sup>31</sup> Emanuel Graf von Korff, *Die Anfänge der Föederaltheologie und ihre erste Ausgestaltung in Zurich und Holland* (Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms Universität, 1908); Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im alterern Protestantismus, vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Pietismus und der heilsgeschichtlichen Theologie* (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1923), 36; Jack W. Cottrell, “Covenant and Baptism in the Theology of Huldreich Zwingli,” (Th.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1971), 173, 243; Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 31-40; Robert Letham, “The Foedus Operum: Some Factors Accounting for its Development,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 14, no. 4 (Winter, 1983): 460-461.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther, *A commentarie vpon the fiftene Psalmes* (London, 1577), 247, 281; *A commentarie or exposition vppon the twoo Epistles general of Sainct Peter, and that of Sainct Jude* (London, 1581), 14-15, 40, 130; Ulrich Zwingli, *The rekenynge and declaration of the fayth and belefe of huldrike zwyngly byshoppe of ziiryk the chefe town of Heluitia* (London, 1548), L; Amandus Polanus a Polansdorf, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanover, 1624), VI, 52; Zacharias Ursinus, *Explicationum catecheticarum* (Neustadii in Palatinatu: Apud Viduam Wilhelmi Harnisij, 1598), 99; Johannes Wollebius, *Christianae Theologiae Compendium* (Basel, 1626), 23;

forgiven sin, an imputed alien righteousness and eternal life in heaven in spite of demeritorious sin—only by faith in Christ and his life, death and resurrection on one’s behalf. In this way, the Reformed tradition continued to develop Luther’s category of the gospel in terms of the continuity of the covenant of grace throughout the history of redemption.

However, just as in Lutheran theology law precedes gospel, so Reformed theologians began to analyze the covenant with Adam before the Fall in terms of the principle of justice. They came to call it the covenant of works (*foedus operum*) because it was informed by the principle of justice and conditional: obedience earned the covenant blessing and disobedience earned the covenant curse. Like the Lutheran category of law, the fact that Adam violated this covenant of works condemns all of subsequent humanity. In 1562, two years before Calvin’s death, Zacharias Ursinus had begun to analyze the created order prior to the fall in covenantal terms.<sup>33</sup> Caspar Olevianus followed his lead in 1585.<sup>34</sup> However, the puritan theologian Dudley Fenner appears to be the first to use the phrase “covenant

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Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), VII. 5-6; Johannes Cocceius, *Svmma Doctrinae De Foedere Et Testamento Dei* (Lugduni Batavorum: Elzevir, 1654), IV, 74; VI, 198; VIII, 245-256; X, 277-278; XI, 341; LIII, 5, 6; Herman Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus libri quatuor* (Leouardiae: Hagenaar, 1675), II.I.III; Leonardus Riisenius, *Francisci Turretini Compendium Theologiae didactico-elenticae ex thelogorum nostrorum Institutionibus auctum et illustratum* (Amsterdam, 1695), X, 10, 17, 24, 6; Franciscus Burmannus, *Synopsis Theologiae et speciatim oeconomiae foederum Dei ab Initio Saeculorum usque ad Consummationem eorum* (Amsterdam, 1699), III.I.VI; IV.I.VII, 588; Johannes Henricus Heideggerus, *Corpus Theologiae Christianae* (Zurich, 1700), XI, 47-49, 74-82, 91; XII, 2, 5, 7, 75, 78; XIII, 2, 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> So reports August Lang in his book *Der Heidelberger Katechismus und vier verwandte Katechismen* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1907), 153, 156-157, because the 1562 printing of Ursinus’s *Summa Theologiae* is no longer extant.

<sup>34</sup> Caspar Olevianus, *De substantia foederis gratuiti inter Deum et electos* (Geneva: Vignon, 1585), 9.

of works” with regard to the pre-fall state of affairs.<sup>35</sup> Before the turn of the century, Amandus Polanus, Johannes Piscator, Franciscus Gomarus, Franciscus Junius and Robert Rollock had also begun to write about God’s covenant of works with Adam.<sup>36</sup> By the seventeenth century, the covenant of works was well established in Reformed theology.<sup>37</sup> In fact, it became a measure of orthodoxy. Just as the good news of the

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<sup>35</sup> Dudley Fenner, *Sacra theologia, sive veritas quae est secundum pietatem* (Geneva, 1585), 88.

<sup>36</sup> Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf, *Amandi Polani a Polansdorf Partitiones theologicae iuxta naturalis methodi leges conformatae duobus libris* (Londini, 1591), 53-54; Johannes Piscator, *Aphorismi doctrinae christianae* (Herborn, 1592), 42-43; Franciscus Gomarus, *Oratio de foedere Dei* [1594] in *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam: Janssonius, 1664), 2, and *Locorum communium theologorum* (Amsterdam: Janssonius, 1653), 114-116; Franciscus Junius, *Theses theologicae Leydensis et Heydelbergenses* [1594] in Abraham Kuypers, ed., *Opuscula theologica selecta* (Amsterdam: Miller and Kruyt, 1882), 184; Robert Rollock, *Tractatus de vocatione efficaci* (Edinburgi, 1597), 1:34-36, 47, 52-54; I am indebted to Robert Letham in his essay, “The Foedus Operum,” 457-467; See also Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), 281-319.

<sup>37</sup> William Perkins, *A golden chaine* (Cambridge, 1600), 36-37 and *A commentarie or exposition, vpon the fiue first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge, 1604), 344-348, 569; Raphaelis Eglini Iconii Tigurini, *De Foedere Gratiae* (Marburg, 1614), II.10-12; William Ames, *The marrow of sacred divinity drawne out of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1642), 198-199; Edward Fisher, *The marrow of modern divinity touching both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace* (London, 1646), 6-10, 19, 22, 27, 38-50, 53, 62-68, 75-78, 83, 88, 90, 101-102, 115, 117-118, 126, 139, 144-149; Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), VII.2; John Owen, *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed, & vindicated* (London, 1677), 34, 54, 202, 344, 396-400; Anonymous, *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practiced in the Congregational Churches in England* (London, 1659), VI.1; VII.2; XIX.1, 6; XX.1; Samuelis Maresius, *Collegium theologicum sive Systema breve universae Theologiae comprehensum octodecim disputationibus* (Geneva, 1662), VIII.3; Johannes Cocceius, *Summa Theologiae ex Scriptura repetita* (Amsterdam, 1665), II.13; XXII.1, 17-18, 20-21, 27-28, 34, 39, 45 and *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (Amsterdam, 1673), I.2, 8, 9; II.10-12, 22; Samuel Petto, *The difference between the old and new covenants* (London, 1674), A3, 13-16, 21, 103, 109-110, 154-157, 160, 270-273; Herman Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* (Leouardiae: Hagenaar, 1675), I; II.1, 14; III.2; John Bunyan, *The doctrine of the law and grace unfolded* (London, 1685), 3-7, 14-18, 21, 25, 41, 43, 51-52, 56, 60, 64, 70, 73, 75, 78, 85, 87, 89, 100-105, 117, 188, 194-195, 213, 228, 240, 243-244, 246-247, 258-259, 328; Johannes Braunius, *Doctrina Foederum sive Systema Theologiae*

gospel did not make sense if divorced from the bad news of the law's condemnation of sinners in Lutheranism, the seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel said,

Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will readily deny that Christ by his active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect... Whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, by developing Luther's category of the law in terms of the covenant of works with Adam before the fall, and by developing Luther's category of the gospel in terms of the covenant of grace from the fall to Christ's return, the Reformed had applied covenant theology to all of human history and existence.

Still, there are discrete covenants in the biblical narrative, made between God and various individuals or groups. Most of these were easily identified with the one, continuous covenant of grace.<sup>39</sup> Yet one of them stood out as problematic, namely, the Mosaic covenant which God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Since it was made after the fall, many Reformed theologians argued that the Mosaic covenant was simply an administration of the covenant of grace. Such theologians reasoned that

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*didacticae et elencticae* (Amsterdam, 1688), I; III.2, 13; Anonymous, *Formula Consensus Helvetica* [1675] (Zurich, 1714), VII, VIII, IX, X, XXIII.

<sup>38</sup> Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Logike Latreia, dat is Redelijke Godsdienst in welken de goddelijke Waarheded van het Genade-Verbond worden verklaard* (Dordrecht, 1700), trans. as *The Christian's Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended Against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout (Ligonier, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992-), 1:355.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, what Herman Witsius does in this regard in *De oeconomia foederum*, III.II, III.

due to original sin, all covenants after the fall must be part of the covenant of grace. According to this school of thought, a covenant of works made with sinners would not only condemn them to hell, but would also conflict with the gospel by offering a competing means of obtaining eternal life in heaven—that is, by meritorious obedience. Certainly, this would have created a contradiction within Reformed theology.

However, other Reformed theologians observed the legal and conditional character of the Mosaic covenant with its blessing of long life in the land of Canaan offered for obedience, and its curse of captivity and slavery threatened for disobedience. Brenton C. Ferry has helpfully assembled the first taxonomy of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Reformed views of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>40</sup> He evaluates the views of some representatives of the Reformed tradition based on his analysis of what he calls “the problem of antithesis” (i.e., that the old and new covenants can be different in terms of a law-gospel contrast, and at the same time be coordinate parts of the covenant of grace), the principle of republication (i.e., a re-institution, in some sense, of the original covenant of works with Adam) and the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of grace. Even if he uncritically adopts some categories that may not be very helpful, and even if his summaries and classification of different views may be a bit facile at times, his taxonomy is still generally helpful. He concludes that there are some late medieval and early modern Reformed theologians who viewed the Mosaic covenant as simply an administration of the one covenant of grace, while others viewed it as a distinct covenant. Of the latter category, there were some who held that the Ten Commandments functioned as

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<sup>40</sup> Brenton C. Ferry, “Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy,” in Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, Pennsylvania: P&R Publishing, 2009), 76-105.



a covenant of works, others who held that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works for unbelievers, others who saw it as a means of driving people to Christ, yet others who saw it as distinct and typological, and still others who saw both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace as being given on Mt. Sinai. Some of these views will be represented in the figures who are studied in this thesis.

Mark Jones has also examined the controversies surrounding the views of the Mosaic covenant held by various seventeenth-century Reformed theologians.<sup>41</sup> He distinguishes between “dichotomist” (i.e., there is only the original covenant of works with Adam, and the one covenant of grace after the fall) and “trichotomist” (i.e., the Mosaic covenant is a third, distinct covenant from the original covenant of works and the subsequent covenant of grace) views of divine covenants. In the conclusion, he asserts that Presbyterians tended to emphasize the similarities between the old and new covenants, while the Congregationalists tended to emphasize the differences by way of the law-gospel antithesis. This is a remarkable claim, given the fact that when Congregationalists assembled at Savoy in 1658 to draft their own confession of faith, they voted to keep the formulation of the Westminster Confession (1647) regarding the relationship between the old and new covenants.<sup>42</sup> Still, Jones does the reader the service of letting representative Reformed theologians speak for themselves about the nature of the Mosaic covenant. This is important for any study of antinomianism, since the Ten Commandments—

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant” in Michael A.G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 183-203.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous, *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practiced in the Congregational Churches in England* (London, 1659), VII.5; Cp. Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a confession of faith* (London, 1647), VII.5-6.

which antinomians were charged with rejecting—were embedded in the Mosaic covenant.

### **III. Literature Review**

Many scholars of puritanism seem to write about *the* antinomian controversy as if there were one, isolated, if protracted, debate. Of course, they usually qualify their language with a certain range of dates. As it was, the entire history of Protestantism—even from its inception—involved a series of battles between legalism on the one hand, and antinomianism on the other. Even when careful theologians worked hard to craft precise, theological confessions that avoided those extremes, and even when churches adopted them, both the laity and the officers of the church seemed to be able to co-opt those confessions for either legalistic or antinomian purposes. Quite often, those officers and laity were suspicious of those around them, sure that they could detect an incipient extremism from the vantage point of their obvious orthodoxy.

Most of the scholarship on antinomianism deals with the period before the English Civil War. T. D. Bozeman has probably covered the widest swath of history—from the latter part of the sixteenth century until the mid seventeenth century—in an effort to explain the rise of what he calls the “antinomian backlash.”<sup>43</sup> On his account, it was frustration and despair in the face of an inflexibly rigorous pietism that forced some puritans to rebel against the mainstream by preaching grace as over against law. Beginning with English inheritors of the continental Reformation like Thomas Cranmer, Bozeman argues that English Reformed theology tended to put the law and sanctification in the foreground. By the time of Richard

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<sup>43</sup> Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*.

Greenham and William Perkins, near the turn of the century, the requirements for personal ethics in the Christian life were so exacting, that men like John Eaton and John Trask reacted by preaching free grace. Thus, “in their cry for relief there appeared what we have come to call the antinomian (that is, “antilegal”) movement.”<sup>44</sup> In his book *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England*, David R. Como analyzes some of the same figures as Bozeman, but with the conviction that instead of being a relatively homogenous pietism, seventeenth-century puritanism was a fractured community, which allowed antinomians to exist within it, if somewhat underground.<sup>45</sup> Covering the likes of John Traske, John Eaton, John Everarde, and the Grindletonians, Como helpfully distinguishes between two major antinomian camps: the perfectionist or inherentist, and the imputative. The former group tended towards mysticism, perfectionism, deification and other theological aberrations, while the latter group appears to have been more interested in identifying with the Reformed tradition with an emphasis on the free grace of justification by faith alone. He also takes the political milieu into account in a way that Bozeman doesn’t, observing that Archbishop Laud and the Court of High Commission were using the wildest tales about the inherentists/perfectionists such as the Familists to paint all nonconforming puritans as antinomians. This put mainstream puritans in a difficult position; even if they agreed with justification by faith alone like the imputationists, they still needed to condemn all alleged antinomians, including men like John Eaton, John Saltmarsh and Tobais Crisp, in order to win the hearts and minds of the English public.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>45</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*.

Others who have written about antinomianism prior to the Civil War have turned their attention to the other side of the Atlantic. The controversy that attended the puritan pilgrims in the New World seems to be of such interest to historians, that it is usually what is meant by *the* antinomian controversy. Noting that the linguistic label, namely, “antinomian controversy,” is “prejudicial” in the favor of Thomas Shepard and other like-minded heresy-hunters in New England—just as calling it “the legalism controversy” would favor Anne Hutchinson and others who believed that most puritans pastors preached a covenant of works—Michael Winship has chosen to call it “the free grace controversy,” since “free grace” is “a term that all parties in the conflict claimed for themselves.”<sup>46</sup> Desiring to listen carefully to both sides, he tells the story of the conflicts between John Cotton’s congregational church at Boston and pastor Thomas Shepard, including civil court proceedings involving John Wheelwright and Sir Henry Vane Jr., as well as ecclesiastical court cases involving Anne Hutchinson. David D. Hall tells a similar story in *The Antinomian Controversy: 1636-1638, a Documentary History* (1990), but he does it by way of publishing primary source correspondence between the major figures in the controversy, as well as other ecclesiastical and civil documents involved in the trial.<sup>47</sup> There are letters between Thomas Shepard and John Cotton, Peter Bulkeley and Cotton, and various other documents by Cotton, John Wheelwright, John Winthrop, the elders who presided over the church court, and the documentation of Anne Hutchinson’s trial.

A few scholars have written about antinomianism during the Civil War and the Interregnum, as well as the decades afterward. Nigel Smith has focused on the

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Winship, *Making Heretics*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy: 1636 – 1638, a Documentary History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

perfectionist and inherentist strain of antinomianism in *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (1989).<sup>48</sup> *Perfection Proclaimed* focuses on individuals like Hendrik Niclaes, Nicolas of Cusa, Sebastian Franck, Jacob Boehme and groups like the Seekers, the Ranters, the Fifth Monarchy men, Quakers and Familists. The primary contribution made by this work is its documentation of the print culture constructed by individuals and sects on the fringe of mainstream puritanism, who wanted to radically reinterpret biblical narratives in an internal and mystical way. Tim Cooper has taken an interesting approach that allows him to analyze antinomianism somewhat before, but certainly during and after the Civil War and Interregnum.<sup>49</sup> By studying Richard Baxter and his response to antinomianism—being careful to read the antinomian primary sources and acknowledge when Baxter was being fair or abusive—Cooper has shed new light on a contested and confusing subject. He makes a helpful distinction between, on the one hand, antinomians as a group of seventeenth-century puritans who claimed Luther and his doctrine of *sola fide* as their own on the one hand, and antinomians as a “polemical construct designed to discredit the opposition” on the other hand.<sup>50</sup> Too often, Baxter and other seventeenth-century puritans who were responding to unique and far-removed societal, political and ecclesiastical circumstances used the term antinomian in the latter sense in order to score rhetorical points with their lay audiences. Baxter, who was convinced that antinomianism in the former sense would produce immorality, wrote against John Saltmarsh in the 1640s, John Owen in the 1640s and 1690s, and Tobias Crisp, shortly before Baxter

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<sup>48</sup> Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemic*, p. 36.

himself died in 1691. Perhaps D. Patrick Ramsey had not taken to heart Cooper's caution that "historians should ... be wary of relying on the testimony of the doctrine's critics to ascertain its nature and growth," when he wrote his essay "Meet Me in the Middle: Herman Witsius and the English Dissenters" (2008).<sup>51</sup> There, Ramsey does not interact much with the primary sources of the alleged antinomians involved in the Happy Union of the 1690s, but proceeds to take Baxter's criticisms for granted and read his main subject—Herman Witsius—through an arguably Baxterian lens. That is to say, Ramsey does not adequately recognize the criticism that Witsius brought to bear against both sides of the debate, nor the substantial agreement Witsius had with the alleged antinomians on the legal nature of the Mosaic covenant.

This study will attempt to keep firmly in mind these distinctions—pietism/legalism versus free grace; inherentist/perfectionist versus imputationist; appreciators of Luther versus those promoting a rhetorical and polemical construct of antinomianism—as well as the cautions about avoiding prejudicial labels and relying on opponents to understand primary sources.

#### **IV. Methodology**

Most of the work that has been done on antinomianism has focused on those whom Como labels "inherentists" or "perfectionists." Indeed, in *Blown by the Spirit*, it is that end of the antinomian spectrum which receives the most attention, although John Eaton is a clear exception to this rule. But Como is not alone. Scholars like Michael Winship and David D. Hall have written about the antinomian controversy in New England, and the main figure in that story – Anne Hutchinson – had clearly

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37. For Ramsey, see D. Patrick Ramsey, "Meet Me in the Middle: Herman Witsius and the English Dissenters," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19 (2008).

identified herself with the mystical fringe by the time of her trial. While it is true that Tim Cooper covers the imputative antinomians in his treatment of Baxter, he is clear that Baxter's primary concern about antinomians was "the sudden looseness of their lives"—the kind of looseness that tended to characterize the perfectionists.<sup>52</sup> Baxter was concerned about the theology of imputation only insofar as he believed it was the cause of the real problem, namely, bad behavior. Bozeman gives most attention to imputationist antinomians like John Eaton, John Saltmarsh and Tobias Crisp, but only incidentally because of his quest to account for the "antinomian backlash."

This thesis will not focus on the inherentist/perfectionist antinomians. Instead, the imputationist antinomians prove interesting because of the kinds of arguments they offered regarding God's covenantal dealings with humanity. It now appears widely recognized that almost none of the antinomians—and certainly none of the imputationist antinomians—denied at least the need for good works, if not also a positive use for God's Law. In that sense, they were not comparable to Luther's John Agricola or Calvin's libertines. They were anti-legalists. They were reacting against the theological importation of the principle of simple justice from the Mosaic Law into the gracious new covenant. In other words, they seemed to believe that there was something unique about the Mosaic covenant that should remain unique. Hermeneutically speaking, description did not equal prescription for them; and so even though old covenant saints had the promise that material prosperity was the reward—and suffering and hardship were the curses—for obedience or disobedience

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Baxter, *Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience* in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Vol. II (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 912.

to God's law respectively, these imputationist antinomians wanted to keep God's grace toward sinners completely free of justice and works.

But even the imputationist antinomians *per se* will not be the focus of this thesis. Like Bozeman, the argument of this thesis is interested in the backlash, but has a more obvious focus on the backlash itself and the theological controversy surrounding it. Like Cooper, this thesis will focus on the response to the imputationist antinomians, but not simply the response of one man. This thesis will compare the responses of John Cotton, Edward Fisher, John Owen, John Bunyan, Samuel Petto and Herman Witsius to imputationist antinomians like John Saltmarsh and John Eaton in the first few decades of the seventeenth century, Anne Hutchinson in New England, and Tobias Crisp's legacy in the period after the Civil War.

John Cotton's microhistory is an essential element in the controversy for a few reasons. Firstly, he was the pastor of accused antinomian Anne Hutchinson for most of the time during the New England controversy. But Cotton himself was also scrutinized as a result of some of his theological idiosyncrasies, including his hesitancy about the weight sanctification ought to be given in assurance of salvation—a hesitancy common among alleged antinomians. Furthermore, Presbyterians like Robert Baillie accused him of at least aiding antinomianism, if not actually being an antinomian, for having an Independent ecclesiology.<sup>53</sup> Edward Fisher's microhistory is fascinating because he was such a polarizing figure. Presbyterian Richard Baxter denounced him as an antinomian, but three Independent members of the Westminster Assembly endorsed his key book on the subject.<sup>54</sup> John Owen is not only a monumental figure in his own right, but his own association with

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Baillie, *A dissuasive errours of the time* (London, 1645).

<sup>54</sup> Richard Baxter, *The saints everlasting rest* (London, 1650), 9; *Aphorismes of justification* (London, 1655), 211-212; Edward Fisher, *The marrow of Modern Divinity* (London, 1646), A3, A4.



the antinomian name by way of Richard Baxter's accusation makes him indispensable for this study. His commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (1668, 1674, 1680, 1684) is his most mature reflection on the Mosaic covenant and its relationship to the Ten Commandments. John Bunyan's microhistory is the largest in this entire study—not only because he wrote more than sixty books, but also because he embodied more ways of being an alleged antinomian than any other figure in this thesis. Many anti-antinomians like Samuel Rutherford, Anthony Burgess and Robert Baillie considered all Baptists—like Bunyan—to be antinomians;<sup>55</sup> Bunyan was accused of adultery with a parishioner; his association with an allegedly infamous antinomian damaged his reputation; and toward the end of his life, he also affirmed the doctrine of justification from eternity—a belief commonly articulated by accused antinomians. Samuel Petto has a fascinating microhistory as well. He articulated many of the same things that earned John Owen a reputation as an antinomian in Richard Baxter's eyes, and yet he went virtually unnoticed in the polemical literature of the seventeenth century. His book *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Explained* (1674) was an effective answer to both antinomianism and legalism. Finally, Herman Witsius is arguably the most interesting figure included in this thesis. Not only had Witsius written a comprehensive covenant theology (*De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus*) in 1675, but he had subsequently spent time in London as a chaplain for the Dutch government, where he became acquainted with many English pastors. When the controversy broke out over Tobias Crisp's republished sermons in the 1690s, the

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<sup>55</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall antichrist* (London, 1648); Anthony Burgess, *The doctrine of original sin asserted & vindicated against the old and new adversaries thereof* (London, 1658); Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisme, and the most of the other errors* (London, 1647).

English ministers who were involved sought Witsius's skills in mediation. His response to the controversy was one of his last books, *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain Under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians* (1696).

## **V. Conclusion**

This thesis builds upon previous scholarship by focusing its attention on the theological debates over antinomianism that took place in the seventeenth century trans-Atlantic world. However, instead of telling the stories of particular theologians, or tracing the history of antinomianism through the seventeenth century, it will focus upon the doctrine at the heart of some of these debates. It will focus on the theological locus of the Mosaic covenant as John Owen, Edward Fisher, John Owen, John Bunyan, Samuel Petto and Herman Witsius understood it terms of exegetical, systematic, historical and practical theology. Various sources confirm that these debates took place in the real world, not just in the minds of sophisticated theologians: personal and government correspondence, the records of the Court of High Commission, and of course, the writings of the theologians themselves. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the documents considered will be largely restricted to published material. Antinomianism had significant social and ecclesiastical consequences. But that was due largely to the significant consequences of the conservative protestant use of the Mosaic covenant, not only ecclesiastically, but also socially. Antinomianism was, in many respects, a reaction against those uses of the Mosaic covenant. Doctrines have often developed out of controversy, and the seventeenth-century antinomian controversies are no different in that they

contributed to the refinement of federal theology. By focusing on the Mosaic covenant, this thesis documents the rationale involved in the development of the doctrine. By focusing on the debates, the thesis takes note of both the intramural disputes among the godly, and the difficulty even early modern protestants had in identifying the limits of their own movement. As it gives attention to the Baxter-Owen debate, the kinds of affirmations and repudiations made in Witsius's *Animadversions* (1696), and the view of the Mosaic covenant held by Cotton, Fisher, Bunyan and Petto which some of their contemporaries may have viewed as having affinities with antinomianism, the thesis will make its own unique contribution to the ongoing debate over the definition of "Puritanism." It will make this contribution as it explores who was recognized as having the right to define orthodoxy and why. This thesis situates seventeenth century deliberations about the Mosaic covenant in the trans-Atlantic world as it traverses the intellectual and theological domains of puritanism and antinomianism.

Right in the middle of the seventeenth century (1643 – 1652), the Westminster Assembly met in deliberation and debate and it was part of the Assembly's concern to respond to antinomianism. John Cotton is the only figure in this thesis who was invited to join the Assembly, but he declined. Shortly after the Westminster Assembly, in 1658, the Savoy Assembly of independent and congregational ministers met, with similar results as Westminster. Certainly it was no softer on antinomianism – in fact it intensified the language concerning the double imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience to believers.<sup>56</sup> John

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<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, October 12. 1658* (London, 1658), 20-21, XI.I.

Owen was a significant participant in this body, even though he was under suspicion and attack from the prominent puritan voice of Richard Baxter. Yet as Baxter declared that the protestant doctrine of imputation was the theological foundation for antinomianism, as Owen defended himself against charges that he held to eternal justification – a view both assemblies condemned in light of views of antinomians like Eaton, Saltmarsh and Crisp – and as Witsius rebuffed both Baxter’s and Crisp’s disciples, a clearer, more precise understanding of the Mosaic covenant would emerge.

## Chapter One

On a November day in 1637, John Cotton was present in the courtroom of Newtown, Massachusetts for the second day of the trial of his parishioner, Anne Hutchinson. She had been charged with troubling the peace of the commonwealth and churches, being responsible for promoting the opinions that had disturbed the peace, aiding and abetting (being joined in “affinity and affection” with) those who had already been censured, slandering the ministers of Massachusetts, and persisting in holding her subversive home conventicles in defiance of the general assembly.<sup>57</sup> Some of the opinions she had disseminated at the gatherings at her home were antinomian, and the other ministers had not only kept a record of them, but had also appeared in court to testify against her.<sup>58</sup> Even when he was called down to sit next to Mrs. Hutchinson in order to serve as a witness for the defense, Cotton probably thought there was still some chance she might emerge from the trial with only a minor punishment.<sup>59</sup> After all, though the court wanted to banish her, they did not have much evidence to consider, and only a short time before, Stephen Greensmith had been ordered to pay a fine of forty pounds for saying essentially what the testimony could prove she had said.<sup>60</sup> If she just denied everything and Cotton either contradicted his colleagues or claimed not to remember details clearly, the court might not have had grounds to convict her.

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<sup>57</sup> “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown,” in David D. Hall, ed., *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 312.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-333. See also “John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines*,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 201-310.

<sup>59</sup> “Examination,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 332.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 270n.

But then the unthinkable happened. Immediately after Cotton had testified that his memory did not corroborate the testimony of the other ministers, elders and magistrates, Anne Hutchinson opened her mouth and began to incriminate herself. She voluntarily testified that she had received strange and immediate revelations from God to her spirit.<sup>61</sup> In the eyes of this puritan court, her spontaneous testimony rivaled the stories they had read about the radical Anabaptists during the previous century and about the father of the Family of Love, Hendrik Niclaes.<sup>62</sup> In light of their steadfast conviction that the Spirit of God had ceased giving revelation with the book of Revelation and the closure of the biblical canon, Mrs. Hutchinson's claims were clearly a violation of the received orthodoxy.<sup>63</sup> Cotton could no longer defend his parishioner. The first thing he said—after Mrs. Hutchinson's stunning disclosure and Mr. Bartholomew's claim that she had said similar things to him in London—amounted to a denial that he had known anything about her direct revelations from God.<sup>64</sup>

But suddenly, Cotton became the subject of the inquisition. Mr. Endicot asked whether Cotton believed that Hutchinson's secret and immediate revelation—that some great calamity would befall her, but that God would deliver her—was from God. Cotton did not want to answer this question and evaded it several times, attempting to qualify types of revelations and senses of the word “miracle.” The Deputy Governor lost his patience, and when Cotton would not plainly answer the question as to whether he believed Hutchinson's revelations were true or whether

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 336-338.

<sup>62</sup> “John Winthrop, *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines*,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 201-310.

<sup>63</sup> “Examination,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 341-342 – See Governor Winthrop's comments and the Court's consent to those comments.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 339.

they were from God, he rebuked Cotton.<sup>65</sup> As a result of what Anne Hutchinson had blurted out, the suspicion of guilt by association with her hung over Cotton's head. Other ministers and court members were incredulous that Cotton could not or would not unequivocally condemn her.<sup>66</sup>

But the other Boston ministers and elders had harbored some concerns about Cotton's orthodoxy with regard to the law even before the trial. As early as June 1636, Thomas Shepherd, another Massachusetts minister, had written to Cotton with concerns about the substance of Cotton's preaching.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the patriarchal figure Peter Bulkley had corresponded with Cotton sometime during 1636 over the doctrine of union with Christ.<sup>68</sup> When these private exchanges left too many questions unanswered, and when Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright had begun to murmur that only Cotton preached a covenant of grace while all other ministers preached a covenant of works, many ministers and elders from the Massachusetts Bay Colony called a conference. Cotton was able to satisfy his colleagues and to put what Hutchinson and Wheelwright had said in a sufficiently positive light, but the other ministers and elders soon wrote to Cotton with a list of sixteen questions for which they needed answers. Cotton's answers reveal that while he was a puritan, he also harbored some views that were highly unusual; and while he was not an antinomian, he did often sound like one.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 340-342.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 343-347.

<sup>67</sup> "Letters Between Thomas Shepard and John Cotton," in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 25-33.

<sup>68</sup> "Peter Bulkley and John Cotton: On Union with Christ," in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 35-42.

<sup>69</sup> "John Cotton, *Sixteene Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence*," and "Mr. Cottons Rejoynder," in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy* pp. 43-59 and 78-151.

As heirs of the Reformation, one of the doctrinal hallmarks of Calvinist puritans was the Protestant doctrine of justification and its relationship to the doctrine of sanctification. As sixteenth-century Protestant confessions interpreted the Bible, justification was God's forensic declaration to sinners, trusting in Christ alone, that their sins were freely forgiven and they were considered perfectly righteous only for the sake of Christ's righteousness imputed to them.<sup>70</sup> Those same confessions represented the Bible's teaching on sanctification as the lifelong process in which God slowly removed sin's influence in a Christian's life and gradually conformed him or her to the image of Christ, resulting in obedience to the Ten Commandments.<sup>71</sup> The relationship between these two doctrines was vital for Protestants: if sanctification was given logical or temporal priority over justification, then the result was the semi-Pelagian notion of sinful human beings meriting blessings from God;<sup>72</sup> if justification and sanctification were separated or divorced,

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<sup>70</sup> The following confessional citations are taken from James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation, Volumes I & 2* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008/2010): "The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)," Chapter III, pp. 142-143; "Calvin's Catechism (1537)," Number 16, pp. 368-369; "The French Confession (1559)," Articles XVIII-XX, p. 147; "The Waldensian Confession (1560)," *Of Justification and Righteousness Is by Faith Alone*, pp. 223-224; "The Belgic Confession (1561)," Articles XXII and XXIII, pp. 436-438; "The Hungarian *Confessio Catholica* (1562)," *The Gospel*, pp. 469-470 and *Concerning Justification*, pp. 487-489; "The Thirty-Nine Articles (1562/63)," Article XI, p. 758; "The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)," Questions and Answers 60-61, pp. 782-783; "The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," Chapter 15, pp. 838-840.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., "The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)," Chapter IV, pp. 143-144; "Calvin's Catechism (1537)," Numbers 17-19, pp. 369-371; "The French Confession (1559)," Articles XXI-XXII, pp. 147-148; "The Waldensian Confession (1560)," *Faith Is a Gift of God, Regeneration and Of Good Works*, p. 224; "The Belgic Confession (1561)," Article XXIV, p. 438; "The Hungarian *Confessio Catholica* (1562)," *Concerning Love and Concerning Good Works*, pp. 492-495; "The Thirty-Nine Articles (1562/63)," Article XII, p. 758; "The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)," Question and Answer 86, p. 789; "The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," Chapter 16, pp. 841-844.

<sup>72</sup> For a detailed summary of the way in which the Church understood semi-Pelagianism and responded to it, see F. H. Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of*



antinomianism was the result because individuals could be saved yet continue to live obstinately wicked lives; and if justification and sanctification were confused or not distinguished clearly, the Roman Catholic doctrine of acceptance with God on the basis of a mixture of Christ's righteousness and the individual's obedience would result.<sup>73</sup>

Cotton was acutely sensitive to incursions of legalism—the introduction of juridical conditions—into the Christian life, and the exchange that took place regarding his colleagues' sixteen questions reveal that he was willing to be theologically innovative in order to avoid it. Perhaps the phrase closest to the heart of the New England antinomian controversy was “going on in a covenant of works.” The thirteenth of the elders' questions indicates that they agreed with Cotton, that justification cannot be built upon sanctification, and if it were the believer would be “a going on in a Covenant of Workes.”<sup>74</sup> But they wanted to know whether Cotton believed this idea meant that sanctification was no evidence of justification—whether he denied James 2:14-26. In his first reply, Cotton made so many distinctions that it became difficult to understand his point. “Evidencing justification by sanctification” could mean two different things, he claimed. It could either mean that sanctification is the cause or ground of justification, or that sanctification is a sign or effect of justification. If it meant the former, then it was clearly the legalism of “going on in a covenant of works”—even if sanctification were to be taken as cause and ground of justifying faith, or whether it be taken as cause and ground of

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*Orange, A.D. 529: Text, with an Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Oxford: J. Thornton, 1882).

<sup>73</sup> Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Vol. 2, Trent to Vatican II* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), Council of Trent, Session Six, Chapters III, V-VII, XVI and Canons XI, XII, XIV, XIX, XXIV, XXV, XXVI, XXXII.

<sup>74</sup> “John Cotton, *Sixteene Questions*,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 52.

faith in the existence of justifying faith.<sup>75</sup> But giving sanctification as a sign or effect of justification could be further distinguished in two ways: sanctification could either be alone—having nothing else to offer as evidence of justification—or it could be “a concurrent Sign, together with other Signs and Witnesses, which may make both my Iustification and Sanctification evident and cleere to my selfe and others.”<sup>76</sup> Cotton was convinced of the latter option, and held that the other Signs and Witnesses are the Holy Spirit who uses the blood and water of 1 John 5:6 and 8 as evidence.<sup>77</sup>

Frequently Cotton appears to treat faith as a good work which sinners do. Yet in order to avoid making faith a meritorious work which God would be obligated to reward, Cotton described it as one of the fruits of union with Christ—one of the aspects of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) which Protestants believed followed after faith in Christ.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Cotton had previously argued this in his letters to Peter Bulkley.<sup>79</sup> But Cotton’s decision to leave open the theological possibility that the benefits of union with Christ (justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification) could come *before* faith was significant – for this brought Cotton within logical proximity of that doctrine of eternal justification which was coming to be associated with antinomianism.

It is tempting to associate Cotton with David Como’s “inherentist” or “perfectionist” antinomians, given his desire to protect Anne Hutchinson during the trial of 1637 and his doctrine of assurance based on the “seal of the Spirit” in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., *Propositions I-3*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., *Proposition 6*, p. 57.

<sup>78</sup> “Rejoynder” in David D. Hall, ed., *Antinomian Controversy*, pp. 92, 94.

<sup>79</sup> “Peter Bulkley and Union,” pp. 38-39.

Ephesians 1:13.<sup>80</sup> Yet Cotton clearly had a place for the law in the Christian life, and in some places his argument for assurance mirrored the sixteenth-century reformers:

And therefore if we claim or gather our first Assurance of blessing and comfort from any works of Sanctification, though we trust not to the merit of the work but to the grace and faithfulness of the promises, yet if we claime, I say, and gather blessings and comforts to ourselves from the promises made to the good works wrought in us, and by us (though of grace) before we see our union with Christ and right to all promises and comforts and blessings in him; we then do receive them not of Grace but of debt; and that in very truth must needs derogate from free grace.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, excessive reliance upon sanctification as evidence of justification makes it only too easy to become legalistic, substituting justice for grace in the way one relates to God. Therefore, Cotton concluded, Christians should not look to themselves—mere creatures—but to Christ for assurance.<sup>82</sup>

## **I. John Cotton Scholarship to Date**

Of all the Reformation and post-Reformation antinomian controversies, the New England dispute of 1636-1638 has probably received the most attention. It has been studied from a variety of angles, and since the inception of feminism and women's studies, Anne Hutchinson has arguably been given more attention than

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<sup>80</sup> David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 178.

<sup>81</sup> "Rejoynder," 98.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

John Cotton.<sup>83</sup> Still, there has been no dearth of theological analysis of this episode, some even focusing on covenant theology.

William K. B. Stoever's work in the area of covenant theology and the New England antinomian controversy is quite helpful.<sup>84</sup> He deftly parses the confusing

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<sup>83</sup> Regarding the "monstrous births" of the antinomians, see Margaret V. Richardson and Arthur T. Hertig, "New England's First Recorded Hydatidiform Mole – A Historical Note," *New England Journal of Medicine* 260:11 (1959), 544-545; Karyn Valerius, "'So Manifest a Sign from Heaven': Monstrosity and Heresy in the Antinomian Controversy," *New England Quarterly* 83:2 (2010), 179-199; Bryce Traister, "Anne Hutchinson's 'monstrous birth' and the feminization of antinomianism," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27:2 (1997), 133-158; Anne Jacobson Schutte, "'Such Monstrous Births': A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38:1 (Spring, 1985), 85-106. Regarding feminist analyses, see Cheryl C. Smith, "Out of Her Place: Anne Hutchinson and the Dislocation of Power in New World Politics," *Journal of American Culture* 29:4 (2006), 437-453; Lindal Buchanan, "A Study of Maternal Rhetoric: Anne Hutchinson, Monsters and the Antinomian Controversy," *Rhetoric Review* 25:3 (2006), 239-259; Anne G. Myles, "From Monster to Martyr," *Early American Literature* 36:1 (March, 2001), 1-30; Amy Schrager Lang, *Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); M. P. Nugent, "Apologizing to Anne Hutchinson," *Christian Century* 106:10 (1989), 304-305. Regarding literary analyses of this controversy, see Julie Sievers, "Refiguring the Song of Songs: John Cotton's 1655 Sermon and the Antinomian Controversy," *New England Quarterly* 76:1 (2003), 73-107; Michael W. Kaufman, "Post-secular Puritans: Recent Retrials of Anne Hutchinson," *Early American Literature* 45:1 (2010), 31-59; for alternative methods of reading this history, see Michael P. Winship, *The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson: Puritans Divided* Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Louise A. Breen, *Transgressing the Bounds: Subversive Enterprises Among the Puritan Elite in Massachusetts, 1630-1692* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Michelle Burnham, "Anne Hutchinson and the economics of antinomian selfhood in colonial New England," *Criticism* 39:3 (Summer, 1997), 337-358; Jessie Cheney, "If the Words Be Well Understood, or, What Did John Cotton Mean When He Accused Anne Hutchinson of Adultery?," *Religion & Literature* 36:3 (2004), 23-43; for focus on other figures, see S. Bush, Jr., "John Wheelwright's forgotten 'Apology': The last word in the Antinomian Controversy," *New England Quarterly* 64:1 (1991), 22-45; David Parnham, "Soul's Trial and Spirit's Voice: Sir Henry Vane against the Orthodox," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70:3 (2007), 365-400; David Parnham, "Redeeming Free Grace: Thomas Hooker and the Contested Language of Salvation," *Church History* 77:4 (2008), 915-954. There have even been leadership studies done on Cotton: Timothy L. Wood, "'Whosoever Will be Great Among You': The Leadership of John Cotton During the Antinomian Crisis," *Christian Scholar's Review* 35:1 (2005), 79-95; Jeffrey Kahl, "The Antinomian Controversy and the Puritan Vision: A Historical Perspective on Christian Leadership," *Quodlibet Journal* 6:3 (2004), <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/kahl-antinomianism.shtml>.

repartee between Cotton and his various interlocutors, providing a useful guide to David Hall's collection of texts in *The Antinomian Controversy* (1990). His discussion of covenant theology and its relation to Cotton's alleged antinomianism is one of the most extensive. Yet instead of taking account of the trajectory of the prior Reformed tradition and its development of the doctrine of the covenant of works, Stoever takes Cotton's contemporary and antagonist, Peter Bulkeley as the standard. In Stoever's presentation, Bulkeley holds that all divine covenants are governed by both principles of justice and grace—and this distorts the analysis of Cotton's covenant theology as it is measured against Bulkeley's. In its development of Luther's categories of law and gospel, the Reformed tradition had conceived of at least two distinct covenants—one governed by the principle of justice and conditioned upon human works, and one governed by the principle of grace and the unconditional gift of faith.<sup>85</sup> Stoever's analysis of these categories is further distorted by an anachronistic, neo-orthodox, nature-grace dialectic.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> William K. B. Stoever, *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven': Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press: 1978). See also his "Nature, Grace and John Cotton: The Theological Dimension in the New England Antinomian Controversy," *Church History* Vol. 44:1 (March 1975), 22-33.

<sup>85</sup> See Robert Letham, "The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting For Its Development," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14:4 (Winter 1983), 457-467; Richard A. Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* Vol. 18 (2007), 11-65; Richard A. Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* Vol. 17 (2006), 11-56; Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus a Brakel," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29:1 (1994), 75-100; Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42:2 (1980), 308-334; Mark W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions Within Reformed Theology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 59:4 (1987), 291-309; Mark W. Karlberg, "Moses and Christ: The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Trinity Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1989), 11-32; Mark W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Westminster*

By way of contrast, David Parnham has dealt with Cotton's covenant theology on the Reformed tradition's own terms.<sup>87</sup> Instead of taking Peter Bulkeley as the singular representative of Reformed federalism, Parnham responsibly takes him as one of many voices expressing the development in Calvinism. Parnham's analysis of Cotton's covenant theology is therefore more helpful than most. He deftly demonstrates Cotton's use of both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace in his preaching to the Boston church: a general covenant of works—and not the Mosaic covenant in particular—functioned existentially in Cotton's preaching as a means of preparing sinners to enter the covenant of grace.<sup>88</sup> Still, even though he briefly surveys the understandings of some of Cotton's contemporaries of the function of the Ten Commandments within the Mosaic covenant, his focus is not on Cotton's understanding of that function, nor his use of it for answering accused antinomians.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to the bulk of the theological analyses of the New England antinomian controversy, T. D. Bozeman focuses on Cotton's resemblance to the pietists of Old England whose rigorous precision caused the "antinomian backlash." While the observations which contribute to that conclusion have some merit (for

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*Theological Journal* 43:1 (Fall 1980), 1-57; Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

<sup>86</sup> In addition to Stoeber's *Church History* essay, "Nature, Grace and John Cotton," see Michael Jinkins, "John Cotton and the Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Profile of Experiential Individualism in American Puritanism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43:3 (1990), 321-349.

<sup>87</sup> David Parnham, "John Cotton's Bequest to Sir Henry Vane the Younger," *Westminster Theological Journal* 72:1 (Spring 2010), 71-101 and "Redeeming Free Grace: Thomas Hooker and the Contested Language of Salvation," *Church History* 77:4 (December 2008), 915-954. To a more limited extent, see Parnham's "Motions of Law and Grace: The Puritan in the Antinomian," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70:1 (Spring 2008), 73-104.

<sup>88</sup> Parnham, "Bequest," p. 83.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75, 77-78.

example, in 1611, Cotton argued that the Christian Sabbath should be made even more rigorous by starting on Saturday evening rather than Sunday morning), it is difficult to see how Cotton's reticence to point parishioners to their sanctification or their own "created graces" fits the paradigm of pietism.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps Bozeman means that Cotton's counsel against putting too much stock in the use of Word and sacrament ministry was of pietist orientation.<sup>91</sup> Still, Bozeman spends very little time on Cotton's covenant theology; and though he detects an inconsistency or contradiction in Cotton's overall insistence on the freeness of the covenant of grace, Bozeman gives neither adequate consideration to the development of Cotton's theology over time, nor to other theological factors which contribute to the inconsistency.<sup>92</sup>

Other studies have treated the New England antinomian controversy as a whole, with less attention to Cotton's theology. Michael Winship does a masterful job of "narrative recreation," plainly acknowledging that when re-telling a story based on "a very few documents," "some elements of the narrative and interpretation are inevitably more speculative and inferential than others."<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, when he does engage in theological analysis, his personal distaste for Calvinism so prejudices his conclusions that the characters about whom he writes would not have recognized their articulation of Christian faith in his work.<sup>94</sup> David Hall has

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<sup>90</sup> Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 224, 226.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-254.

<sup>93</sup> Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. Winship's implication that "most puritan ministers" were supralapsarians who believed that "God decreed [the covenant of works] after decreeing the damnation of the reprobates," is without any evidence other than a general appeal to John Coffey's book *Politics, Theology and the British Revolutions:*

provided a tremendous service by editing the documents which Winship used in his narrative recreation.<sup>95</sup> Yet his editorial comments, which introduce each document, do not engage Cotton's covenant theology. Philip Gura has surveyed the radical religion of suspected New England heretics.<sup>96</sup> While he exonerates Cotton from the charge of antinomianism, Cotton's covenant theology does not play a significant role in Gura's assessment.

There are various other studies of the New England antinomian controversy. Michael McGiffert, who appears to be working within R. T. Kendall's Calvin-against-the-Calvinists paradigm, sees English covenant theology and its sharp distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace as having its source in William Perkins.<sup>97</sup> Thus when Cotton writes about the covenant of works,

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*The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117-122, which does not support Winship's case. To claim that Cotton's infralapsarianism—or belief that God first decreed the fall and then elected or passed others over—was an “innovation” fails to account for the great statement of international Calvinism, *The Canons of the Synod of Dort*, which was attended by some English puritans.

<sup>95</sup> David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

<sup>96</sup> Philp F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984).

<sup>97</sup> See Michael McGiffert, “Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75:4 (1982) 463-502. See also Robert T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997); id., “Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers,” in *Living the Christian Life* (London: Westminster Conference, 1974), 45-60; id., “The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology,” ed., W. Stanford Reid, *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982), 199-214; Basil Hall, “Calvin Against the Calvinists,” ed., G. E. Duffield, *John Calvin* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay, 1966), 19-37. Richard A. Muller has decisively answered the idea that Calvin would not have recognized his theology in that of his English successors, in *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988); id., *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1, Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003); id., “Calvin and the ‘Calvinists’: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30:2 (November 1995), 345-375; id., “Calvin and the ‘Calvinists’: Assessing



McGiffert seems to see it as an English innovation.<sup>98</sup> In spite of that, McGiffert's most helpful contribution is his observation that when Cotton speaks of the covenant of works, he seems to be thinking of the Mosaic covenant—even when he is treating the situation with Adam and Eve before the fall.<sup>99</sup>

This study, while joining the ranks of a number of other worthy studies of Cotton's covenant theology, will fill a gap by focusing on his understanding of the Mosaic covenant, the relationship of the Ten Commandments to that covenant, and how those doctrines informed his response to antinomianism. Like Parnham, the goal here is to set Cotton within the context of the Reformed theological tradition, and to analyze his views on that tradition's own terms. While it may be understandable to take issue with a theological system so critical of human moral ability and so jealous to guard divine sovereign grace, it is hardly fair to Cotton and his contemporaries to ask them to answer to theological systems developed long after their time.

## **II. John Cotton and the Mosaic Covenant**

If William Twisse, moderator of the Westminster Assembly (1643-1648), accurately represented John Cotton's circa 1618 text on covenant theology and predestination, the latter held some highly unusual, if not heterodox views. That text of Cotton's, now lost to us except by way of quotations in one of Twisse's polemical works, has Cotton saying that "God offers mankind in Christ, greater grace and helps to keep the Covenant of works, then after the fall they could have attained to

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Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31:1 (April 1996), 125-160.

<sup>98</sup> McGiffert, "Grace and Works," 463-465.

<sup>99</sup> Michael McGiffert, "The Perkinsian Moment of Federal Theology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29:1 (April 1994), 143-145.

without Christ.”<sup>100</sup> In other words, Cotton was saying that in some sense and in some way, the salvation God provided in Christ came through the ability of individuals to obey God’s law in the covenant of works well enough to deserve the ultimate reward. This was formally and strikingly similar to what the Roman Catholic Council of Trent said in rebuttal to sixteenth-century Protestants.<sup>101</sup>

Having earned three degrees from Cambridge (one of which was a divinity degree), as well as having served as head lecturer, dean and catechist of Emmanuel College, John Cotton was no novice, ignorant of the finer points of Reformed theology.<sup>102</sup> Whether the covenant theology he articulated in the early part of the seventeenth century reflected an affinity for non-Reformed systems like Arminianism, or whether it was simply a symptom of confusion, it was out of step with the developing doctrine of the covenant of works. Still, it was ironic that Cotton was rebuked by Twisse, whose own view of justification was expressly declared unorthodox by the very assembly he moderated. Twisse may have been right, that Cotton was a crypto-Arminian, but Twisse was an antinomian. Whatever the reason for Cotton’s early covenantal idiosyncrasies, the rest of his surviving written corpus demonstrates him to be more or less in step with the Reformed tradition.

During the antinomian controversy, from 1636 to 1638, Cotton was preaching on covenant theology. These sermons were first published in 1654 under the title

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<sup>100</sup> William Twisse, *A treatise of Mr. Cottons clearing certaine doubts concerning predestination together with an examination thereof* (London, 1646), 271. For the dating of Cotton’s text, see Michael McGiffert, “From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19:2 (Summer 1988), 144 n.26.

<sup>101</sup> Council of Trent, *Canons and Decrees*, Session Six, Chapter VII, pp. 22-23.

<sup>102</sup> “Cotton, John (1585-1652),” Francis J. Bremer in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, see online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6416> (accessed March 20, 2012).

*The New Covenant*, and were republished the next year as *The Covenant of Grace*.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps ironically, in light of the titles, he spent a fair amount of time treating the covenant of works. In fact, in the first sermon of the collection, he observes how God “dealt with the Children of *Israel*, and called them to be a singular people unto himselfe, and yet but in a Covenant of works.”<sup>104</sup> While that observation was not strange in the context of the developing covenant theology of the Reformed tradition, it is strange that the Scripture passage he used to substantiate his point was Deuteronomy 7:6-8. That passage has God declaring to Israel that he is giving them the inheritance of the Promised Land because of the gracious covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Most covenant theologians appealed to Leviticus 18:5 to prove that Israel was under a covenant of works because it embodied the principle of simple justice: if an Israelite obeyed God’s law, he or she would live.<sup>105</sup>

As time went on, Cotton would continue to affirm that the covenant God made with Israel was a covenant of works. In *A brief exposition of the whole book of Canticles* (1642), he explained that Israel had voluntarily entered ‘into a covenant or

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<sup>103</sup> John Cotton, *The new covenant* (London, 1654); id., *The covenant of grace* (London, 1655); see Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, p. 245 and n.22 for more information on these texts.

<sup>104</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, p. 20.

<sup>105</sup> For example, see Johannes Piscator, *Aphorismi Doctrinae Christianae* (Oxford, 1630), pp. 50-51; Johannes Wollebius, *The abridgment of Christian divinitie* (London, 1660), 90-91, 137, 151; Henry Ainsworth, *The orthodox foundation of religion* (London, 1641), 59; William Allen, *A discourse of the nature, ends, and difference of the two covenants* (London, 1673), 85; David Dickson, *Truths victory over error* (Edinburgh, 1684), 137-138, 149; George Downname, *A treatise of iustification* (London, 1633), 205, 465; Herman Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* (Trajectum ad Rhenum: Halnam, 1694), I.III.VII; Herman Witsius, *Animadversiones Irenicae* (Utrecht, 1696), VIII.II; Edward Fisher, *The marrow of modern divinity* (London, 1646), 6, 40-42, 83, 153-154, 180-181; John Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (London, 1680), 229; James Ussher, *A body of divinitie* (London, 1645), 124-125; Thomas Wilson, *A commentarie vpon the most diuine Epistle of S. Paul to the Romanes* (London, 1614), 57, 241, 332, 429, 781-782.

law, that upon paine of death all the people should seeke the Lord onely.”<sup>106</sup> The key here was that the covenant was upon pain of death. The threat indicated the presence of at least one condition: if Israel disobeyed, Israel would die.

But Cotton’s clearest and most extensive statement in this regard came from his 1648 response to the Presbyterian Robert Baillie’s attack on congregational church polity. Baillie, jealous to guard Reformed orthodoxy, was disconcerted by Cotton’s talk of Christ and his benefits being communicated to God’s people by a covenant of works. Cotton quoted his own previous words to this effect, and then turned to explain them. The covenant which God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was two different things to two different groups of people. To those descendants of Abraham’s who trusted God’s messianic promises, the Sinai covenant was a covenant of grace. But to the “carnal seed,” or, unbelieving descendants, “it seemed to me to be a Covenant of Works, to prepare them for the saving benefits of that Covenant of Grace which was formerly given to *Abraham* and his seed.”<sup>107</sup> This preparatory function of the covenant of works is the key to Cotton’s view of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, and will be treated more fully below.

But Cotton went on to cite two sources of evidence to substantiate his claim. First, he provided evidence from the Bible—the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old Testament; then he cited some authors from the Reformed tradition to corroborate his reading of the Bible. The Apostle Paul, Cotton said, sees two covenants involved in Israel’s history. Paul makes the Sinai covenant “to be expressly a different Covenant from that of grace, to wit, a Covenant gendring unto

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<sup>106</sup> John Cotton, *A brief exposition of the whole book of Canticles* (London, 1642), p. 37.

<sup>107</sup> “John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*,” in David D. Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 406.

bondage.”<sup>108</sup> Moses even observed that all of the commandments were the righteousness of the people, and their life. In fact, that covenant at Sinai holds forth “righteousness and life upon obedience to all the Commandments, it is a Covenant of Works.”<sup>109</sup> Galatians 4:24-25, Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12 are the three biblical texts to which Cotton appeals for this view. The first passage, Galatians 4:24-25 has Paul saying that the covenant made at Sinai “gendereth unto bondage,” and “answereth to Jersusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.” Romans 10:5 quotes from Leviticus 18:5—“the man which doeth those things shall live by them”—and Cotton uses this to substantiate his idea that the Mosaic covenant held forth life upon condition of obedience, and was equally made upon pain of death for disobedience. Paul repeats the same line from Leviticus in Galatians 3:12, but adds that “the law is not of faith.”

Especially in dialogue with a Presbyterian, Cotton dared not make such a claim *de novo*. Though tradition was not a source of authority equal to the Bible within Protestantism, it did have a certain kind of regulatory function. The Bible is not an uninterpreted text, and many other rival traditions like Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Anabaptism, Arminianism, Socinianism and others claimed competing interpretations. Thus, theology—and especially polemical theology—was often done by appeal to others within the tradition who either articulated the same view, or whose writings established necessary principles.<sup>110</sup> In this regard, Cotton cited “chiefest Germane Divines, as well as *Piscator*, and *Polanus*” as having taken “the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>110</sup> For the way in which tradition functioned in Protestantism vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism and the Radical Reformation, see Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 280-288.

Covenant on Mount *Sinai* to be a covenant of Workes.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Piscator had described the covenant with Israel as a “legal covenant” (or *legale fedus* which he contrasts with the *gratuitum fedus* or “gracious covenant”) with the blessing of life “under the condition of perfect obedience” and “eternal death threatened [against] all those who transgress one of the commandments of the Law.”<sup>112</sup> While Piscator does not cite Romans 10:5, he does cite the verse Paul quotes there, Leviticus 18:5, as well as Galatians 3:12—and his interpretation of these verses matches Cotton’s: the Mosaic covenant is “conditioned upon perfect obedience.”<sup>113</sup> Likewise, Polanus said that in texts pertaining to the Mosaic covenant (e.g., Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 5:21, 1 Kings 8:21 and Hebrews 8:9) we find that “the repetition of the covenant of works is made by God.”<sup>114</sup> In case the meaning were in doubt, the margin note says, “*The covenant with Moses is the covenant of workes.*” Polanus gives four reasons for this repetition of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant: first, that by all means, God might stir people up to obedience; second, that every mouth might be stopped and that the whole world might be made subject to the condemnation of God for not performing perfect obedience; third, that God might make human beings aware of sin; and fourth, that God “might thrust us forward to seek to be restored in

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<sup>111</sup> “*Way of Congregational Churches*,” in David D. Hall, *Antinomian Controversy*, p. 407.

<sup>112</sup> Johannes Piscator, *Aphorismi Doctrinae Christianae*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Amandus Polanus, *The substance of the Christian religion* (London, 1595), p. 88. This is from the second edition which was translated from the Latin by “E.W.” Robert Letham cites the first edition on page 458 of his *Sixteenth Century Journal* essay “*The Foedus Operum*,” citing different wording in note 16: “*Hoc fedus pepigit Deus initio cum primis hominibus, Adamo & Eva, in statu primevae integritatis. Gen. 2.17.*” *Idem fedus repetivit Deus per Mosen cum populo Israelitico...* (“This is the covenant God made in the beginning with the first people, Adam and Eve, in the state of original integrity. God repeated the same covenant by Moses with the people of Israel...”)

the covenant of grace.”<sup>115</sup> This last reason of Polanus’ seems to have resonated with Cotton, because it is by far the most common way he speaks about the Mosaic covenant of works in his sermons from the late 1630s.

In many places in his *Covenant of Grace* sermons, Cotton uses the phrase “Covenant of works” as a cipher for legalism or works-righteousness—the idea that God accepts a person based upon the quality of his or her works, according to the principle of justice. So, for example, he says that Popery and Arminianism “hold forth no more but a Covenant of works.”<sup>116</sup> Later, he made the same point by establishing two principles: so far as the Law is besides or outside of Christ, so far a Christian is without the Law; so far as the Law is under Christ, so far a Christian is under the law. Then he warned his congregation to keep these principles in mind so that “by the use of the Law shall you not goe aside to a Covenant of works, nor by attendance unto grace, shall you neglect the Law.”<sup>117</sup> In the same way, a person who is “freed from the Covenant of works, is freed also from expecting salvation, or fearing damnation for what [that person] doth.”<sup>118</sup> Using the principle of justice very clearly, Cotton said that “if you are afraid of divorce from Christ because of your sins, or if you looke for any vertue or challenge right to any promise by vertue of any well-doing of your owne, in such a case, either you are under a Covenant of workes, or you are gone aside to a Covenant of works.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, in the main, “the covenant of works” is synonymous with legalism for Cotton.

But even legalism (or the covenant of works) could serve a purpose, according to Cotton. He reasoned that God does not immediately call people into the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 137.

covenant of grace, “but ordinarily he first bringeth them into a Covenant of works, and casteth them out of doors by a spirit of bondage and of burning, and then bringeth them in by the true door, and Jesus Christ is that doore.”<sup>120</sup> This explains why, for Cotton, there can be the appearance of salvation and its benefits—justification, adoption and sanctification—from someone who is currently under a covenant of works. Such appearances are not the true fruits of saving faith, “but onely such gifts as doe sanctifie them unto the work of the Ministry perhaps, or Magistracy, and fit them for household Government, or the like.”<sup>121</sup> Hypocrites can deceive others, and even themselves, at least for a while.

Still, this did not always work out tidily. Cotton could still talk about the covenant of works as if it offered salvation: “In the Covenant of works, the Lord offereth himselfe as a Father, his Son as a Redeemer, his Spirit as a Sanctifier, but this upon a condition of works.”<sup>122</sup> In fact, the ordinary manner in which the Lord deals with his people is to draw them “from all their sinfull lusts and passions, so as that they can find no hope of mercy in anything; and this is properly a Seal of the Covenant of works.”<sup>123</sup> Given Reformation orthodoxy—which held that salvation is *sola gratia*—this explains why Robert Baillie was less than comfortable with some of the ways in which Cotton could talk about the covenant of works. Cotton also tended to use “the Law” and “the covenant of works” interchangeably.<sup>124</sup> While it was commonplace for heirs of the Reformation to speak of the law as preparing the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 39. See also Cotton’s manner of speaking on pp. 58-59 – that “a Sanctification, which the terrors of the Law may produce (that is to say, such a Sanctification as may be found in a Covenant of works) is no evidence or witness of our union with Christ,” and “to distinguish in men between that Sanctification which floweth from the Law, and that which is of the Gospel, is a matter so narrow, that the Angels in Heaven have much adoe to discern who differ.”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 124-125.



way for the gospel, it was highly unusual to say that a person needed to enter into a covenant of works—or go through a period of legalism—before entering into the covenant of grace. Yet Cotton used the idea of the covenant of works somewhat synonymously with the idea of the Law so that the covenant of works could bring people to a recognition of their sin and their need for Christ. Indeed, that was the first use of the law.

### **III. John Cotton and the Place of the Law in the Christian Life**

Part of the reason Anne Hutchinson may have been so drawn to Cotton's preaching was that he was willing to talk about senses in which the Christian was free from the Law. In the sermons that he preached during the antinomian controversy, Cotton told his congregation that there is a sense in which a Christian is freed from the Law. If there is any sense, said Cotton, in which the Law is not under Christ, then in that sense a Christian is not under the law.<sup>125</sup> For Cotton, the Law is not under Christ when it functions as the conditions of a covenant, so that blessings are contingent upon obedience to it and curses are contingent upon disobedience to it. In other words, when the Law is a covenant—a covenant of works—then Christians are not under it because Christ has saved them from a covenant of works under the terms of a covenant of grace.<sup>126</sup> In fact, Cotton cited Romans 7:1-4 to argue that Christians are not even under the power or authority of the Law when the Law is a covenant of works.<sup>127</sup> Thus, he said, "if a man should look for life by his obedience to the Law, and fear condemnation by the breach of it, this would bring a

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

man under the Covenant of the Law.”<sup>128</sup> Yet “a Christian looketh not for life by his obedience, and that is plain,” because there is “no hope of salvation from our obedience to the Law.”<sup>129</sup> This theology was standard fare in Protestantism, but it was also deeply attractive to people like Anne Hutchinson.

Of course, for Cotton, there is also a sense in which the Christian is still under the Law, as well: when the Law is under Christ, then a Christian is under the Law at that point.<sup>130</sup> As with the covenant of works above, Cotton conceived of preparation for salvation as one of the greatest uses of the Law: the Law is under Christ so far as “when it hath brought the soule nearer unto Christ, and in a remote manner prepared him.”<sup>131</sup> In other words, the Law shows people their sin by comparing their internal dispositions and external behavior to the standard of God’s perfect character. Within Protestantism, this was known as the first use of the Law. This use of the Law was designed to show sinners that there is no hope of meeting with God’s approval within themselves, and thus it leads them to Christ as the only one who can save them. But it was not the only use Cotton had for the Law.

As we saw in the introduction, the sixteenth-century Protestant confessions identified the use of the Law which was denied by antinomianism as the third use—in which the law provides the pattern for the Christian life. Cotton was concerned at times that the third use of the Law was Christ’s having revived Moses, “but as the Law given by Christ is not a Covenant of works, but a Commandment of well-doing; and he having given it, we take our selves bound to be subject unto it.”<sup>132</sup> But even here, Cotton was jealous not to give the impression that the way in which believers

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 117.

were under the Law was anything like the way Israel had been under a covenant of works. Thus, in Cotton's formulation, the Law is under Christ; the Christian is under Christ's command, as well as under Christ's power and displeasure.<sup>133</sup> In this way, the Christian does not come into direct contact with the Law, nor is the Law able to thunder its displeasure at the Christian. Rather, "if he negligently sin against the Law, and unto Christ he runneth for pardon and cleansing, and unto him he cometh for acceptance of his obedience; so that he hath no use of the Law but unto Christ, and in and under him."<sup>134</sup> The Christian's relationship is with Christ and not the Law *per se*; "The Law is in Christ, and you subject to it in him."<sup>135</sup> Thus it would seem difficult for anyone to charge Cotton with antinomianism based upon these clear affirmations of the third use of the law, the affirmation that it was Christians' duty to obey the Law in Christ.

Yet Cotton may have been accused of antinomianism, for he felt the need to address the subject in his sermons, as a potential objection to his thesis. He had already observed that the New Testament authors "put it upon Christians to keepe the Law of God; and Christ himselfe beareth witness to the Law, *for God will never justifie sin to be no sin, though he will justifie the person of a sinner.*"<sup>136</sup> This was already a blow against antinomianism, because some antinomians had been saying similar things, such as that God sees no sin in believers.<sup>137</sup> But Cotton faced head on a hypothetical objection to his teaching:

If any therefore shall accuse the Doctrine of the Covenant of free grace, of  
*Antinomianisme*, and say it teacheth men freedome from the Law of *Moses*,

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>137</sup> John Eaton, *The honey-combe of free justification by Christ alone* (London, 1642), pp. 38-39.

and if they commit any sin, they plead they are not bound unto the Law; we see how false such an aspersion would be, for all the people of God know that *the Lord is an avenger of every such wickednesse*; There is none under a Covenant of Grace that dare allow himselfe in any sin, for if a man should negligently commit any sin, the Lord will schoole him thoroughly, and make him sadly to apprehend how unworthily he hath made bold to abuse & imbeazle the treasures of the grace of God.<sup>138</sup>

Grace did not provide any license to sin, Cotton insisted. Members of the covenant of grace are “free from the Covenant of the Law, but not from the Commandment of it.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, Cotton went on, Christ gave the Law, he gave his Holy Spirit to believers in order to enable them to keep it, and it is only because of the Law that their consciences know when they have done right or wrong.<sup>140</sup>

Highly unusual though some of his formulations were, Cotton was fervent to guard against legalism—or “going on in a covenant of works”—on the one hand, as well as antinomianism on the other. Since he was able to conceive of the Law as being under Christ, so that believers are obligated to obey the Law because they are under the Christ’s authority, he had an effective response to antinomians. His conception of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works because the Law functioned as conditions, made him vigilant against legalism and crushing believing consciences with impossible demands. But Cotton had another use for the Mosaic Law.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

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<sup>138</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136.

Cotton's most radical position on the Mosaic law was articulated in *An Abstract of the Laws of New England* (1641). The book has recently enjoyed a revival of interest. In 1977 Greg Bahnsen wrote *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, the thesis of which was that all civil governments of all times and all places are obligated to enforce the Mosaic Law in exhaustive detail (including the death penalty for all capital offenses, e.g., Sabbath-breaking, fornication, adultery, contempt of court and persistently disobeying one's parents).<sup>141</sup> In that book, Bahnsen cites John Cotton as perhaps the best historical exponent of theonomic politics – an argument he based on *An Abstract of the Laws of New England* (1641), in which Cotton applied the Mosaic Law (i.e., much more than the Ten Commandments) to the state in the New World.<sup>142</sup> Though it was never actually adopted, a large portion of Cotton's *Abstract* appears to have been copied directly from Exodus 22. Bahnsen also cited Cotton's *A discourse about civil government* (1663) because of its claim that "Theocratie, or to make the Lord our Governour (a), is the best Form of Government in a Christian Common-wealth," because in such a polity, "the Laws [godly elected officials] rule by are the Laws of God."<sup>143</sup> Here, Cotton plainly recognized that the theocracy he

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<sup>141</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1984). Gary North followed suit in his book *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), p. 273, saying, "The very idea of execution by public stoning embarrasses Christians, despite the fact that public stoning is by far the most covenantally valid form of execution, for God's law requires the witnesses to cast the first stones, and it also requires representatives of the entire covenantal community to participate directly, rather than hiding the act in a sanitary room in some distant prison."

<sup>142</sup> "A Historical Specimen of Theonomic Politics: Cotton's *Abstract of the Laws of New England*," in Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, pp. 549-558. Cf. John Cotton, *An Abstract of the Laws of New England* (London, 1641).

<sup>143</sup> John Davenport, *A discourse about civil government in a new plantation whose design is religion written many years since by that reverend and worthy minister of the Gospel John Cotton ; and now published by some undertakers of a new*

wanted to apply to the New England magistracy was “the Form which was received and established among the people of *Israel* whil’st the Lord God was their Goverour as the places of Scripture alledged shew; and is the very same with that which we plead for.”<sup>144</sup> Cotton wanted to bring Mount Sinai to the eastern shores of the Americas.

Cotton also advocated theocratic civil government in *A Brief Exposition of the whole book of Canticles* (1642).<sup>145</sup> There he argued that “good Kings” ought to enact “wholesome Lawes, and strait binding to the purity of Religion and the worship of God.”<sup>146</sup> Citing the example of one of the ancient kings of Judah, Cotton said that “*Whosoever would not seeke the Lord God of Israel, should be put to death.*”<sup>147</sup> Those magistrates were also obligated to “send forth savoury and gracious Ministers into all quarters of their dominions,” and to protect the preaching of the Word of God by countenancing “Priests and Levites.”<sup>148</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, this theocratic ideal made some fear at least for their liberty, if not for their lives; as Cotton put it, “It is no impeachment to their Christian liberty as Anabaptists dote, but an ornament to their beautie.”<sup>149</sup> Yet surely this could have only been true for Reformed Puritans like Cotton himself.

But Cotton’s position on civil politics created an interesting tension with his covenant theology. On the one hand, Cotton held that believers are under the covenant of grace.<sup>150</sup> Though he does not define grace with much precision, his

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*plantation for general direction and information* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1663), pp. 14-15.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>145</sup> John Cotton, *A Brief Exposition of the whole book of Canticles* (London, 1642).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>150</sup> Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, p. 124.

understanding of it can be seen perhaps most clearly when he contrasts it with “the Law,” or “the covenant of works.” Indeed, for Cotton, being under the covenant of grace necessarily precluded being under the covenant of works at the same time and in the same relationship.<sup>151</sup> Like other puritans, Cotton often modified the term “grace” with the adjective, “free,” as indicated in another published sermon entitled *The covenant of Gods free grace* (1645).<sup>152</sup> This stood in contrast to the covenant of works which was conditional and, far from free, came at the cost of perfect obedience to the Law.<sup>153</sup> In the covenant of grace, God gave himself freely to believers because of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>154</sup> As a result, though believers were to avoid breaking the Law at all costs, such violations would not forfeit the blessings of the covenant of grace.<sup>155</sup> At the very least, Cotton sees a clear distinction between the covenant of grace and the covenant of works.

On the other hand, Cotton held that the civil magistrate ought to be enforcing the Mosaic Law—that Law which Cotton had already identified as the covenant of works. At the very least, this Law was to be imposed upon Christian commonwealths in which people were free to choose their government.<sup>156</sup> Because Cotton held that this Law was the conditions of the covenant of works, it follows that any nation under Cotton’s theocracy was under a covenant of works.

Yet it is precisely here that the tension becomes most apparent. Given both Cotton’s covenant theology and his civil polity, Christians would simultaneously be under the covenant of grace as members of the Church and under the covenant of works as citizens. Put differently, the sword of the Church, which gives paper cuts,

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of Gods free grace* (London, 1645).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 12-13, 16, 25. Cf. Cotton, *Covenant of grace*, p. 42.

<sup>154</sup> Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 92, 94, 122-123, 125-126, 131-134.

<sup>156</sup> John Davenport, *A discourse about civil government*, p. 14.

could absolve one of a particular sin on Sunday; but the sword of the State, which ends lives, could bring about death for that same sin on Monday. Furthermore, if sinners (believers and unbelievers) sin because it is their nature to do so, and if sinners are put under a covenant of works, it follows that they will break that covenant. In any case, even though Cotton saw the Mosaic covenant of works as existentially necessary in terms of convicting sinners of their sin before their entrance into the covenant of grace, he had been so jealous to counter the idea that new covenant believers who were united to Christ by faith were under a covenant of works. His civil politics were at odds with his pastoral theology.

A number of scholars have noted Cotton's idea that believers and unbelievers could act in the same manner but for very different reasons. Michael McGiffert's analysis of Cotton's doctrine of the covenant of works claimed that Cotton used the concept of the covenant of works and the concept of the Mosaic covenant interchangeably. David Parnham has argued that Cotton believed the "covenant of works came stocked with an array of graces that so fitted the unregenerate for active integration into godly society as to render them all but indistinguishable from the regenerate occupants of the covenant of grace."<sup>157</sup> Unbelievers obeyed out of fear of punishment at the edge of the sword of the State patterned after the Mosaic covenant. Believers obeyed out of gratitude for the free grace shown to them in God giving them Christ for their salvation. Yet in light of Cotton's conviction that the Mosaic covenant—which he believed ought to be imposed upon the Christian commonwealth—the motivation for believers' obedience was in dispute. This was the epistemological dilemma inherent in Cotton's system: Given that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works, and that the Mosaic covenant was the pattern for

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<sup>157</sup> Michael McGiffert, "Perkinsian Moment," pp. 143-145; David Parnham, "Cotton's Bequest," p. 79; John Cotton, *The covenant of Gods free grace*, p. 12.



the New England magistrates, it was impossible to know whether believers were obeying out of gratitude on the one hand or fear of punishment and hope of reward on the other. This is likely what Cotton meant when he said that under a covenant of works, sanctification is transitory and not permanent.<sup>158</sup>

Ironically, this dilemma was an occasion for an incidental likeness between Cotton and at least one antinomian in terms of appealing to the same biblical text: Isaiah 26:12. Though it is almost impossible to know when Tobias Crisp would have preached the sermons that were first published in 1643, Crisp did invoke Isaiah 26:12 in his sermon “Christian Liberty no Licentious Doctrine.”<sup>159</sup> The biblical text says that “thou has wrought all our works in us”—an idea understandably attractive to people who opposed legalism. Cotton cited the same text in his sermons that he preached during the antinomian controversy. Interestingly, Cotton quotes the Bible here as acknowledging God to “*worke all their works for them.*”<sup>160</sup> He then went on to say: “And therefore as there is a reall difference in the preference of the Spirit; so also in the worke of faith in hypocrites, and the children of God, for the one putteth confidence in himself in the gift received, and the other in *Jehovah*. This is the first difference of Sanctification.”<sup>161</sup> Though Cotton believed there could be sanctification in the Mosaic covenant of works—the very covenant he desired to be the charter for the State—he recognized that it was hypocritical in those who were not the children of God. Still, he believed that sanctification under the Mosaic covenant of works was a gift which unbelieving hypocrites received from God. In the barely century-old Reformed tradition, such an idea would have been unusual, to

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<sup>158</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, p. 58.

<sup>159</sup> Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted* (London, 1690), p. 124.

<sup>160</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of grace*, p. 66.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

put it mildly. This was just one of many reasons why William Twisse attacked Cotton in print.<sup>162</sup>

John Cotton was anything but perspicuous, and his theological innovations only heightened the suspicion of his ministerial colleagues. Politics aside, his doctrine of the Mosaic covenant attempted to protect believers under the new covenant from the bare principle of justice which informed the Mosaic law. At least within the church, Cotton seemed eager for Christians to know that their right standing with God was the free gift of God's grace and not the reward of their obedience. Yet he still advocated obedience to the Ten Commandments. Though he was most certainly not an antinomian on the place of the Law in the Christian life, his other innovations likely account for the frequent and thorough questioning he received from the other church officers in Boston. Such ambiguity likely also explains why Anne Hutchinson thought she had a theological ally in John Cotton.

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<sup>162</sup> William Twisse, *A treatise of Mr. Cottons*; Cf. Michael McGiffert, "The Perkinsian Moment," p. 144.

## Chapter Two

In November 1633, two booksellers were hauled before the Court of High Commission. The first of these was Edward Fisher. Whether Fisher sold books as a hobby or as a way of pursuing his true, theological interests is not clear, but in the court records he was also identified as a barber. The records claim that Fisher “had trifled and dallyed with the Court in not giving his personall Answers to the Articles objected against him all this Tearme.” And as a result, he was sentenced to imprisonment until such time as he would cooperate with the court. Later, in 1638, a young cutler named Giles Creech met with Sir John Lambe (or his agents) to turn informant and, hopefully, preclude prosecution in the Courts of High Commission and Star Chamber.<sup>163</sup> He had good reason to fear: one year before, Archbishop William Laud had used these courts to arrest William Prynne, Henry Burton and John Bastwick for religious offenses. Not only did Laud deprive them of their livelihoods, but the courts fined them thousands of pounds and ordered that their ears be cut off; Prynne received especially harsh treatment, having, in addition to the mutilation of his ears, his nose slit and his cheeks branded. Prynne, Burton and Bastwick were then sentenced to life in prison.<sup>164</sup> Creech appeared to want to escape

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<sup>163</sup> David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>164</sup> “Prynne, William (1600–1669),” William Lamont in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22854> (accessed April 12, 2012); “Burton, Henry (*bap.* 1578, *d.* 1647/8),” Kenneth Gibson in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4129> (accessed April 12, 2012); “Bastwick, John (1595?–1654),” Frances Condick in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed.

this severity. And so he testified that he had been an antinomian himself before being brought to his senses by one of Laud's sermons. To demonstrate his new sincerity and loyalty to Laud, Creech identified several underground antinomian groups—"the familists of the mount," "the familists of the Valley," "the Essensualists," and the "Antinomians"—and even provided membership rolls. Creech also identified two illegal book sellers who distributed the writings of these antinomian groups, including manuscripts by Edward Fisher.<sup>165</sup> Creech's testimony does not specify which of Fisher's manuscripts were in circulation, but it did put the authorities back on to the London barber-surgeon. It may be that one of the Fisher manuscripts that was being passed around the antinomian underground was an early edition of his book, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645). Whatever manuscripts Creech meant, the court had already punished Fisher once; now Creech's testimony implicated Fisher in the dubious, underground world of antinomianism.

But the situation was soon to change. After Parliament had imprisoned Archbishop Laud and replaced his agents with their own during the tumultuous decade of the English civil wars, their official censor Joseph Caryl gave Fisher's *Marrow* his imprimatur. He said that *The Marrow* tended to "Peace and Holinesse," and he allowed it to be printed because it was "stored with many necessary and seasonable truths, confirmed by Scripture, and avowed by many approved Writers."<sup>166</sup> He also thought that it promoted the reconciliation and mending of differences that had recently broken out among the community of puritans. He recognized that bitterness and "uncomely reflection upon others" characterized much

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Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1659> (accessed April 12, 2012).

<sup>165</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, pp. 4-5, 73-103.

<sup>166</sup> Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (London, 1646), page opposite the title page.

of contemporary puritan literature, and he noted that such things were absent from *The Marrow*.<sup>167</sup>

Members of the Westminster Assembly (1643-1649) also gave *The Marrow* their approbation. Jeremiah Burroughs noted that *The Marrow* “fastned many precious truths together,” and that “the grace of God hath helped this Author in his worke”; the book’s goals were “very syncere for God and thy good.”<sup>168</sup> William Strong said that he had read it because a “learned and judicious Divine” had recommended it, and Strong had benefitted from it so much that he, in turn, had recommended it to his congregation. Strong especially appreciated that Fisher’s treatment of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace had helped to clarify the doctrines of the Law and the gospel as well as the representative roles played by Adam and Christ as the first and second Adams, respectively. Furthermore, Strong believed that “with evidence from Scripture, backt with the authority of most moderne Divines,” those who read *The Marrow* would understand why the antinomian position was in error.<sup>169</sup> This decision to oppose antinomianism—and to enlist the support of some members of the Westminster Assembly—was a strategic move on Fisher’s part.

But critical responses quickly appeared. One year after the first edition of *The Marrow* was published, an author identified only as “I.A.” (or, possibly “J.A.”) published “*A manifest and breife discovery of some of the errours contained in a dialogue called the Marrow of moderne divinity*” (1646).<sup>170</sup> Denying that the Ten Commandments had been given to Adam, and citing alleged errors such as the idea

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., A3ff.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., A4ff.

<sup>170</sup> J.A., *A manifest and breife discovery of some of the errours contained in a dialogue called the Marrow of moderne divinity* (London, 1646).

that faith precedes repentance, that there is no preparation for justification, and that everything done prior to true faith in Christ is sin, I.A. lamented that Fisher had “gone the direct way with the Antinomist.”<sup>171</sup> The author admitted that he would not be exhaustive in his critique, “for that were too great a worke for me.”<sup>172</sup> He also claimed that his brevity reflected a lack of “ability of body.”<sup>173</sup> But it was an extensive reply. It generated little interest, however: whoever I.A. was, no other contemporary puritan appears to have acknowledged his critique of *The Marrow*.

Richard Baxter entered the fray in a lengthy margin note in his book *The saints everlasting rest* (1650). There he expressed consternation at the fact that “so many eminent Divines” had endorsed Fisher for thinking that he had “found the mean between the Antinomian and the Legalist,” even though they “do fouly err in this point.”<sup>174</sup> Baxter indicated greater concern about *The Marrow* in his *Aphorismes of justification* (1655), by discussing Fisher’s book in the main body of his text. Again, discouraged by the approbation of respected theologians, he wrote forcefully against Fisher’s notion that “we must not Act for justification or salvation; but onely in thankfulness for it.”<sup>175</sup> Asserting that Christians’ forgiveness is a result of their forgiveness of others, that salvation comes by striving, and that the right to eat of the Tree of Life comes by doing Christ’s commandments, he asked rhetorically, “Doe these men thinke that we are perfectly justified and saved already?”<sup>176</sup> Then, for a span of more than ten pages, Baxter attacked Fisher’s repetition of the standard, Reformed distinction between the Law and the gospel—namely, that the Law conditions blessings upon obedience and curses upon disobedience, while the Gospel

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 2-6, 7-8, 11-16, 18-9 and A2, respectively.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., A2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., A3, end of dedicatory.

<sup>174</sup> Richard Baxter, *The saints everlasting rest*, (London, 1650), p. 9.

<sup>175</sup> Richard Baxter, *Aphorsimes of justification* (Hague, 1655), pp. 211-212.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 212.

freely offers eternal life by God's grace alone, through faith alone, because of the accomplishment of Christ alone.<sup>177</sup>

Evidently *The Marrow* concerned Baxter even into the Restoration because he continued to mention it as an example of doctrines he considered dangerous. In *Richard Baxters Catholick theologie* (1675), *The Marrow* stood as cipher for the standard, Protestant doctrine that in justification, Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers, which they receive only by the instrument of faith. According to Baxter, this was a perversion of the truth: the faith itself of the believer is what is accounted as righteous.<sup>178</sup> Finally, in 1681, Baxter said that Fisher was "tainted with *Antinomianism*," and discredited him as an upstart barber.<sup>179</sup>

But Baxter's critique was itself subject to criticism. In 1659, the anti-puritan Anglican Thomas Pierce wrote a direct response to Baxter in which he took notice of *The Marrow* and used it against Baxter. Though he was a controversialist like Baxter, Pierce's Oxford education made his abuse sharper and wittier. He told Baxter that *The Marrow* was "built upon your Foundation, and is publicly commended by some of your way; Master *Caryl*, Master *Burroughs*, Master *Strong*; Master *Sprigg*, and Master *Samuel Prittie*."<sup>180</sup> Having already cited Baxter's *Aphorismes of Justification* (1655), Pierce noted in passing "What desperate Doctrines have been applauded by some of the ablest Presbyterians, no whit better then those of Wickliff."<sup>181</sup> Given that Baxter believed that doing Christ's commands

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 262-272, 276-281.

<sup>178</sup> Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxters Catholick theologie* (London, 1675), pp. 254-255.

<sup>179</sup> Richard Baxter, *An apology for the nonconformists ministry* (London, 1681), p. 168.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas Pierce, *The new discoverer discover'd by way of answer to Mr. Baxter his pretended discovery of the Grotian religion, with the several subjects therein contined* (London, 1659), p. 83.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

earned the right to eternal life, it surely stung when Pierce pointed out that Fisher argued that Christ was not moved to love people more because of their good deeds, nor was his love diminished by their sins.<sup>182</sup> Pierce concluded, “If this is *Divinity*, the Author did well to call it *Modern*, for nothing was like it in *Antiquity* except the Heresie of the *Gnosticks*, that I can think on.”<sup>183</sup> If Jon Parkin is correct in his claim that Pierce had been convinced of Calvinism before his time at Oxford, then Pierce likely knew it would only embarrass Baxter when he told him that he supposed the idea that Christ had done all for believers “you disrelish as much as I, because you hold, that *the first sanctification is before justification*.”<sup>184</sup> Thus Pierce tormented Baxter about his fellow Presbyterians who approved of *The Marrow* and, knowing that he and Baxter were polemical opponents, mockingly congratulated him for doing well to object to the book.<sup>185</sup>

Likewise, the Anglican John Eachard, head of St. Catherine’s College, Cambridge—evidently not the same John Eachard whom David Como identifies as a disciple of the early seventeenth century antinomian preacher John Eaton—mentioned *The Marrow* in his book *A Free and impartial inquiry* (1673).<sup>186</sup> As part of an attack on the protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone, Eachard named the theologians “Mr. *Caryll*, Mr. *Burroughs*, Mr. *Stronge*, Mr. *Sprigge*, and Mr. *Prittie*” as “considerable persons in their Party” who commended *The Marrow*,

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. One of the hallmarks of Protestantism is that justification precedes sanctification. See also “Pierce, Thomas (1621/2–1691),” Jon Parkin in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22226> (accessed April 16, 2012).

<sup>185</sup> Pierce, *The new discoverer*, pp. 85, 89-90, 217-218.

<sup>186</sup> David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 177-178.



which taught that doctrine.<sup>187</sup> When he said that the title—*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*—usurped an honorable title, he may have been referring to *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (1642) by the paradigmatic puritan William Ames. In any case, the same passage from Fisher’s *Marrow* that bothered Thomas Pierce—that just as good works do not move Christ to love Christians more, so sins do not move him to love them less—also earned Eachard’s scorn. His quill dripping with sarcasm, he played on Fisher’s character named Evangelist in the dialogue:

I pray, Sir, tell me, is not here an excellent Evangelist? I dare assure you none of all the four in our Bibles are like him: indeed these words need no Comment, it will puzzle the Devil to invent plainer, or those that shall more strongly nourish profaneness and presumption. These will easily reconcile Saintship and the grossest impieties, and render men to believe, that the most detestable Crimes cannot blot their evidences for Heaven; seeing these may be but the stains of beloved Sons.<sup>188</sup>

Clearly, Eachard believed that the free grace advocated by Fisher could only yield license and libertinism.

Thus, Fisher was heartily approved by Parliament’s censor as well as some members of the Westminster Assembly, while also attacked by both puritans and Anglicans. Even though he had drawn on his manuscripts of “known and approved” theologians to write *The Marrow*, he was perceived as an antinomian by some fellow puritans during his own time and even into the ensuing century.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps he had developed a reputation as an antinomian because of Giles Creech’s testimony before

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<sup>187</sup> John Eachard, *A Free and impartial inquiry into the causes of that very great esteem and honour that the non-conforming preachers are generally in with their followers in a letter to his honoured friend H.M.* (London, 1673), pp. 69-70.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>189</sup> Edward Fisher, *The marrow of modern divinity* (London, 1646), A2.

an agent of the Court of High Commission. And yet other anti-antinomians such as Samuel Rutherford and Anthony Burgess – men with a habit of cataloguing their opponents – do not appear to have written against Fisher. Whatever their reasons for remaining silent about *The Marrow*, Fisher did represent an element of the Reformed tradition, and, especially in the eighteenth century, his explanation of Reformed doctrine would prove to be pervasively influential.

### **I. *Marrow* Scholarship**

Though the reception of Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* was mixed in the mid-seventeenth century, it does not appear to have impacted churches until almost a century later, when it divided the Church of Scotland in the early eighteenth century. The vast majority of scholarship on *The Marrow* is focused on the controversy surrounding that division.

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, the Scottish minister Thomas Boston (1676-1732) discovered a copy of *The Marrow* on the shelf of one of his parishioners who had fought in the English civil wars. After reading it, he claimed that it had changed his ministry, and decades later, he republished it with his own explanatory notes. Meanwhile, the Church of Scotland had been advancing on the basis of a competing reading of the covenants and its incipient legalism had provoked the presbytery of Auchterarder to react by requiring all ministerial licentiates to subscribe a creed of one sentence which stated, "It is not sound and orthodox to teach, that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God."<sup>190</sup> In 1717, the Auchterarder Creed was brought

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<sup>190</sup> "Boston, Thomas (1676–1732)," P. G. Ryken in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2943> (accessed April 23, 2012).

before the General Assembly, condemned and abolished. At that Assembly, Boston began to recommend *The Marrow* to others, and within a year he had republished it with his own notes and a preface by another minister of the Church of Scotland, James Hog.<sup>191</sup> When the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland officially forbade any of its ministers or members to recommend or read *The Marrow* in 1720, and later punished those who dissented from their decision, Boston, Hogg and a handful of other ministers seceded from the Church of Scotland. Those ministers became known as the Marrowmen, and the denominational trial in which they were involved is known as the Marrow Controversy.

This massive rupture in the Church of Scotland likely accounts for the scholarly focus on *The Marrow* at that point in time. Some accounts exist from the eighteenth century.<sup>192</sup> Some nineteenth-century historians also wrote about the controversy.<sup>193</sup> And there are a good number of contemporary historical, biographical and theological analyses of the Marrow Controversy.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Crawford Gribben, "James Hogg, Scottish Calvinism and Literary Theory," *Scottish Studies Review* 5:2 (Nov. 2004), pp. 9-26.

<sup>192</sup> Church of Scotland, *Answers to the Twelve Queries on Some Important Points in Divinity: Put by the Reverend the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (Which Met November 9th, 1721) to Mr. James Hog and Other Ministers* (Aberdeen, 1764); Church of Scotland, *A Full and True State of the Controversy Concerning the Marrow of Modern Divinity: As Debated between the General Assembly and Several Ministers in the Year 1720 and 1721* (Glasgow, 1773).

<sup>193</sup> James Muir, *Some Observations on a Book Called Marshall on Sanctification, The Marrow of Modern Divinity, with Boston's Notes, and the Marrow-Queries: And on an Act Concerning the Doctrine of Grace* (Glasgow, 1801); John Brown, *Gospel Truth Accurately Stated and Illustrated, by James Hog, Thomas Boston, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, and Others: Occasioned by the Republication of the Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Edinburgh: Ogle, Allardice & Thomson, 1817). Republished in 1827; Thomas M'Crie, *"The Marrow" Controversy: With Notices of the State of Scottish Theology in the Beginning of Last Century* (S.I.: s.n., 1850)

<sup>194</sup> David C. Lachman, "The Marrow Controversy: An Historical Survey with Special Reference to the Free Offer of the Gospel, the Extent of the Atonement and Assurance and Saving Faith" (Th.M. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1973); John J. Murray, "The Marrow Controversy: Thomas Boston and the Free

Paradoxically, almost nothing has been written on the discursive space and the theological reception of *The Marrow* in the seventeenth century. Only two substantial accounts have been published. William VanDoodewaard has written a helpful biographical preface about Edward Fisher in the most recent republication of Boston's edition of *The Marrow*.<sup>195</sup> Yet this preface does not deal substantively with Fisher's covenant theology, or with his theology of the law. Perhaps the most thorough biographical information about Fisher published to date is found in David Como's *Blown by the Spirit*. Como provides information about Fisher's encounters with England's ecclesiastical courts. In so doing, Como focuses on Creech's testimony that appears to put Fisher on equal footing with some of the more radical

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Offer," in *Preaching and Revival* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1984), pp. 34-56; David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy, 1718-1723: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988); Joseph H. Hall, "The Marrow Controversy: A Defense of Grace and the Free Offer of the Gospel," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999), pp. 239-257; Gerald L. Chrisco, "Theology of Assurance Within the Marrow Controversy," (M.A. Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual Campus, 2009); Herman C. Hanko, "The Marrow men and the Marrow Controversy," in *Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of Truth* (Jenison, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010); William VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition: Marrow Theology in the Associate Presbytery and Associate Synod Secession Churches of Scotland (1733-1799)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); William VanDoodewaard, "Marrow Theology and Secession Church History," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71:2 (Fall 2009), 399-416; Anne Skoczylas, "Archibald Campbell's *Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue*, Presbyterian Orthodoxy, and the Scottish Enlightenment," *The Scottish Historical Review* 87, 1:223 (April 2008), pp. 68-100; Christopher MacLachlan, "Burns and Ramsay," *Scottish Studies Review* 7:2 (November 2006), pp. 9-23; Jonathan D. Moore, "Calvin Versus the Calvinists? The Case of John Preston (1587-1628)," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 6:3 (2004), pp. 327-348; Jonathan Yeager, "Puritan or Enlightened? John Erskine and the Transition of Scottish Evangelical Theology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 80:3 (2008), pp. 237-253; Joseph H. Hall, "The Marrow Controversy: A Defense of Grace and the Free Offer of the Gospel," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999), pp. 239-257.

<sup>195</sup> William VanDoodewaard, "A Journey into the Past: The Story of the Marrow of Modern Divinity" in Edward Fisher and Thomas Boston, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), pp. 21-32.

antinomians of the seventeenth century.<sup>196</sup> Richard Muller’s insight into the theological milieu of Fisher is unparalleled. He compares Fisher’s *Marrow* with the Dutch theologian Joannes Cocceius’s *Summa theologiae* and sees the latter as a “positive statement” of covenant theology, while the former explicates “the doctrinal stresses and strains in a system that was beginning to atrophy even in its moment of final codification.”<sup>197</sup> He concludes that *The Marrow* “was a theological prelude to the issuance of the Westminster standards.”<sup>198</sup> By way of summary, a handful of essays have briefly mentioned the impact of *The Marrow* during the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>199</sup>

Sustained reflection on the significance of the theology of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* in its own time is sparse. This chapter will examine Fisher’s covenant theology with special attention to his understanding of the Mosaic covenant within that framework. Furthermore, since he was writing specifically about transgressions of Reformed orthodoxy regarding the Law—both antinomianism and legalism—his view of the relationship between the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Covenant will be taken into account. Whereas most scholarly attention has been given to Fisher’s view of the free offer of the gospel and its implications for his view of Christ’s atoning work, this chapter will highlight Fisher’s specific and direct response to antinomianism.

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<sup>196</sup> David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, pp. 1-7, 9, 23, 26, 30-31, 51, 53-54, 68, 73, 81, 99, 272, 433, 455-456.

<sup>197</sup> Richard A. Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Theme,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 42:2 (Spring, 1980), p. 311.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 311 n. 9.

<sup>199</sup> D. Patrick Ramsey, “In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66:2 (Fall 2004), pp. 373-400; Mark W. Karlberg, “Moses and Christ—The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism,” *Trinity Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1989), 11-32; Mark W. Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43:1 (Fall 1980), pp. 1-57.

## II. The Mosaic Covenant in Fisher's *Marrow*

Like other works by Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* is written as a dialogue. The main characters are an orthodox minister named Evangelista and a new Christian named Neophytus, while Antinomista and Nomista respectively represent the errors of antinomianism and legalism in the first part. In the second part, a character named Nomologista is identified as “a pratler of the Law.”<sup>200</sup> Immediately before beginning the dialogue in the first part, Fisher catalogued all of the orthodox, Reformation theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries upon whose works he had drawn in writing *The Marrow*. The list included such significant theologians as Luther, Tyndale, Calvin, Beza, Bullinger, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Wolfgang Musculus, Ursinus, Perkins and Ames.<sup>201</sup> But Fisher was also careful to include many of his orthodox contemporaries such as John Ball, Samuel Bolton, Thomas Goodwin, Thomas Hooker and John Lightfoot.<sup>202</sup> The theological insights of these authors are most often expressed via Evangelista, and Luther is the most frequently quoted, with Calvin second.<sup>203</sup>

The extent of Fisher's reliance upon Luther is all the more interesting in light of the fact that, though many antinomians were fond of quoting Luther in their support, the anti-antinomian and Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, Samuel Rutherford, failed to mention Fisher or *The Marrow* in his

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<sup>200</sup> Edward Fisher, *The marrow of modern divinity, the second part* (London, 1648), p. 1.

<sup>201</sup> Fisher, *marrow* (London, 1647), the page preceding page 1.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> A search of the 1646 EEBO edition revealed 40 hits for Luther and 17 for Calvin.

*Spiritual Antichrist* (1647). Part of Rutherford's purpose in writing that work against the antinomians was expressed in part of the subtitle: *The minde of Luther, a most professed opposer of Antinomians, is cleared, and diverse considerable points of the law and the Gospel, of the spirit and the letter, of the two covenants, of the nature of free grace, exercise under temptations, mortification, justification, sanctification, are discovered.*<sup>204</sup> Though all of that was the stuff of *The Marrow*, Rutherford's silence regarding Fisher's work could indicate that he had not yet become aware of the work. However, since he published at least a second edition of *Spiritual Antichrist*, and since fellow members of the Westminster Assembly had endorsed *The Marrow* prior to the first edition of Rutherford's book, that is unlikely. Rutherford's silence is all the more striking in that, as VanDoodewaard has observed, Fisher's preface had alluded to John Eaton's book, *The honey-combe of free justification* (1642), which Rutherford had already denounced.<sup>205</sup> Of course, it is possible that what Fisher was expressing in *The Marrow* was antinomianism as Rutherford understood it. But Rutherford was not alone; other significant anti-antinomians were also silent regarding *The Marrow*. Thomas Edwards, Anthony Burgess and Robert Baillie all wrote against antinomianism with a heightened register and tone. Yet *The Marrow* does not appear to have been among their targets. Furthermore, the Reformation heritage and theological tradition which Fisher was trying to demonstrate by quoting respected theologians also implies that Baxter, I.A., Thomas Pierce and John Eachard understood the Reformed tradition in very different terms than Fisher did.

So when Fisher described the covenant God made with Moses and Israel on Mt. Sinai as a covenant of works, he was in good and Reformed company. Of course, he held to the general covenant schema which had become standard fare in

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<sup>204</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall antichrist* (London, 1647).

<sup>205</sup> William VanDoodewaard, "A Journey into the Past," p. 27.

Reformed theology: God had made a covenant of works with Adam at creation,<sup>206</sup> and God had made a covenant of grace with Adam and all believing descendants of Adam after the Fall.<sup>207</sup> The former was based upon the principle of justice, the idea that the blessed life resulted from obedience to God's commandments.<sup>208</sup> The latter was based on the principle that the blessed life was God's gift in spite of disobedience.<sup>209</sup> Fisher also held to an eternal covenant between the persons of the Trinity in which the Son agreed to perform all the obedience owed by the elect, and to bear all the punishment due to them.<sup>210</sup>

But since Fisher seemed most interested in errors regarding God's Law—as evidenced by the characters in the dialogue named Antinomista, Nomista and Nomologista—the Mosaic covenant (including the Ten Commandments) is the most central and important covenant in *The Marrow*. To be sure, the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to both the original covenant of works with Adam and the subsequent covenant of grace is a critical component. Yet, Fisher's main concern appeared to be to help Christians understand how they were related to the Mosaic covenant by virtue of their union with Christ by faith.

Fisher's argument that the Ten Commandments, as they were delivered to Israel on Mt. Sinai, were the covenant of works, was part of his case that Christians are not under the Mosaic covenant.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, quoting from John Ball's book, *A treatise of the covenant of grace* (1645), Fisher says, “at one and the same time, a

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<sup>206</sup> Fisher, *marrow* (1646), pp. 6, 8, 10-23.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-38.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 41-42, 153-154.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-27, 154.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-28.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 46-47.



man cannot be under the covenant of works and under the covenant of grace.”<sup>212</sup> Christians are under the covenant of grace.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, according to Fisher, Christians cannot be under the Mosaic covenant as it was a covenant of works.

Like most other Reformed theologians, Fisher appealed to Leviticus 18:5 (“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord”) and the principle of simple justice to argue for the Mosaic covenant being a covenant of works.<sup>214</sup> On this particular point, he produced a litany of quotations from Reformed theologians as sources of this idea. He cites Polanus as defining the covenant of works as being conditioned on “perfect obedience to the Law of workes” for eternal life and on disobedience for eternal death. He went on to say that, “God made this covenant in the beginning with the first man *Adam*, whilst hee was in the first estate of integrity; the same Covenant God did repeat and make againe by Moses with the people of Israel.”<sup>215</sup> Fisher also cited John Preston as saying that Leviticus 18:5 articulates the basis of the covenant of works, that such a covenant was made with Adam, “and the Covenant that is expressed by Moses in the Morall law.”<sup>216</sup> George Walker was called upon to substantiate the idea that “the first part of the covenant which God made with Israel and Horeb, was nothing else but a renewing of the old covenant of works which God made with Adam in paradise.”<sup>217</sup> Finally, Fisher invoked Samuel Bolton to support

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 144. In the margin, Fisher notes that this comes from p. 15 of Ball’s book, which he calls “*On the new Covenant.*”

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 6, 40-42, 83, 153-154, 180-181.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 41. Fisher cites pp. 184-185 of Polanus’ book *Substance of Religion*.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 41-42. Fisher cites p. 317 of Preston’s book *The New Covenant*.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 42. Fisher cites p. 128 of Walker’s book which he calls “*O cov.*” – probably *The manifold wisdom of God In the divers dispensation of grace by Iesus Christ, In the Old and New Testament* (1640).

the idea that “we are by Christ delivered from the Law, as it is a Covenant.”<sup>218</sup> Clearly, Fisher was presenting himself as being well read in Reformed covenant theology.

Aside from the identifying principle of positive justice, Fisher also observed other characteristics that distinguished the Mosaic covenant from other divine covenants. First, he denied that the Mosaic covenant was part of the covenant of grace.<sup>219</sup> Part of his reasoning was based on Deuteronomy 5:3 (“The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day”).<sup>220</sup> The point was that immediately upon Adam’s fall into sin, God made a covenant with people based upon a very different principle than justice—namely, grace—and yet the covenant made at Sinai was based on justice. The covenant of grace was not based on the principle of “do this and live” found in Leviticus 18:5, but, as Fisher put it, “live and do this.”<sup>221</sup> In other words, in the covenant God made after Adam sinned—and confirmed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—God promised blessings freely, while grateful, human obedience to his laws was the expected result. As Fisher and many of the Reformed authors he cited saw it, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the “fathers” referenced in Deuteronomy 5:3. Therefore, “this covenant” mentioned in that verse referred to the covenant made at Sinai and its difference from the covenant of grace.

He also found support for this in Galatians 3:19 (“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 42. Fisher cites p. 23 of Bolton’s book *The true bounds of Christian freedom*.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 41, 45-47.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 154.

promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.”).<sup>222</sup> Fisher understood this verse to teach that the Mosaic covenant was not “added by way of ingrediency, as a part of the covenant of grace, as if that covenant had been incompleat [sic] without the covenant of works, for then the same covenant should have consisted of contradictory materials , and so it should have overthrown it self.”<sup>223</sup> Rather, the Mosaic covenant was subservient to the covenant of grace.<sup>224</sup> As Fisher saw it, the Mosaic covenant was the same in principle with the covenant of works, made with Adam, but the Mosaic covenant had a different purpose: to convince the Israelites of their sin and cause them to flee to Christ.<sup>225</sup> Elsewhere, he argued that God renewed the covenant of works with Israel in order to humble them and make them sigh for Christ so that God could renew the covenant of grace with them.<sup>226</sup> In other words, law preceded gospel, and conviction preceded faith and repentance.

Fisher also saw the Mosaic covenant as having a unique typological significance. Specifically, the “promise of the land of Canaan and outward prosperity in it, [w]as a type of heaven and eternall happinesse.”<sup>227</sup> Thus, the principle of works served to give Israel the right to remain in Canaan in a manner typological to the way in which Christ earned the right to life in heaven.<sup>228</sup> In other words, by his own obedience, Christ earned the right to enter new creation; in the same way, Israel was supposed to have earned the right to remain in Canaan, the miniature picture of the new creation. Yet Moses and Aaron were barred from

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 46. Here, Fisher cited a work by an “M. Marshal” on “Infants-baptisme.”

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 54-55. Here Fisher cited Calvin’s *Institutes*, p. 157.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 36-37, 54-55, 69, 240

entering the Promised Land for their disobedience, and the people of Israel were carried off as slaves and captives as the outcome of their violation of the Mosaic Law.<sup>229</sup>

Fisher does appear to equivocate somewhat on the nature of the Mosaic covenant later on. Though he had already denied that the Sinai covenant was the covenant of grace, he also affirmed that “there was little difference betwixt the *Jews* Covenant of Grace and ours.”<sup>230</sup> In fact, the difference between Israel’s covenant and the New Covenant was primarily of the Israel’s own making: “they should have been driven to Christ by the Law, but they expected life in obedience to it, and this was their great error and mistake.”<sup>231</sup> It is difficult to conceive how it could be the case both that God had republished the covenant of works on Sinai, and that Israel had made the law to be a covenant of works by wrongfully expecting life in obedience to it.

Still, in spite of his own inconsistencies, Fisher’s *Marrow* was a powerful compendium of the Reformed tradition on covenant theology – especially on the nature of the Mosaic covenant. Yet his inconsistency manifested the lack of unanimity in the tradition, even if Fisher was unintentional in making this revelation.<sup>232</sup> Though not unanimous, the tradition demonstrated a fair amount of

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 41, 45-47 and 89 respectively.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>232</sup> See Mark Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 183-203; Robert Letham, “The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting For Its Development,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14:4 (Winter 1983), 457-467; Richard A. Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* Vol. 18 (2007), 11-65; Richard A. Muller, “Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* Vol. 17 (2006), 11-56; Richard A. Muller, “The Covenant of Works and

consensus regarding two kinds of covenants: one of works and the other of grace. In the pages of *The Marrow*, Fisher demonstrated that the consensus included the idea that the Mosaic covenant was cut from the cloth of the former and not the latter covenant.

### III. The Ten Commandments in Fisher's *Marrow*

Whether or not Nomista's initiatory role in the dialogue means that Fisher saw legalism as the greater danger, Nomista turns immediately to the subject of the law, inquiring whether or not the law ought to be a rule of life for the believer. Evangelist soon countered, asking which law Nomista believes ought to be that rule of life: the law of works, the law of faith or the law of Christ.<sup>233</sup> When Nomista reduces them all to the Ten Commandments, Evangelist distinguishes between the Decalogue as the matter of the law of works and the Decalogue as the law of Christ. The former "holds forth as much as the covenant of works."<sup>234</sup> It is based on the principle of justice, offering blessings for obedience and threatening curses for

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the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus a Brakel," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29:1 (1994), 75-100; Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42:2 (1980), 308-334; Mark W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions Within Reformed Theology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 59:4 (1987), 291-309; Mark W. Karlberg, "Moses and Christ: The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Trinity Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1989), 11-32; Mark W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43:1 (Fall 1980), 1-57; Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 6-10. Here, Fisher cites Wolfgang Musculus for support, as well as George Downname's book on justification and Robert Rollock's *Treatise of Effectual Calling*.

disobedience.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, it is the covenant of works and believers are not under the Ten Commandments as they are the law of works.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, Fisher said that “it is generally laid down by our Divines, that we are by Christ delivered from the Law, as it is a covenant.”<sup>237</sup> Whether he was relying solely on previously recognized contributors to the Reformed tradition, or whether he was also receiving reports of the concurrent work of the Westminster Assembly, the Assembly agreed with this claim. In Chapter 19, section 6 of its Confession, the Assembly declared, “Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.”<sup>238</sup> In this vein, Fisher went on to say that “as the Law is the Covenant of works, all true believers are dead unto it, and it dead unto them.”<sup>239</sup> This is so because “they being incorporated into Christ, what the Law or Covenant of works did to him, it did the same to them, so that when CHRIST hanged on the Crosse believers, after a sort, hanged there with him.”<sup>240</sup>

In more than one place, Fisher cites fear of punishment and hope of reward as the only two possible motivations for obeying the law of works.<sup>241</sup> This fits with the principle of justice in which the hope of reward corresponds to the offer of blessings for obedience and the fear of punishment corresponds to the threat of curses for

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 62-89.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 42. Here Fisher cites Samuel Bolton’s *True Bounds of Christian Freedom*.

<sup>238</sup> Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), pp. 33-34.

<sup>239</sup> Fisher, *Marrow*, 83.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 41-42, 153, 176, 202.

disobedience.<sup>242</sup> Fisher called upon Luther and John Preston to establish the fact that obedience motivated by self-love was hypocrisy and ultimately as bad as disobedience.<sup>243</sup> The proper motivation for obedience comes only from faith in Christ, which, in turn, provides a different perspective on the role of the law.

That other perspective was to view the same ten imperatives as the law of Christ. The Ten Commandments were the substance and matter of both the law of Christ and the law of works.<sup>244</sup> The difference is that the law of works says, “*doe this and thou shalt live, and if thou doe it not, thou shalt die the death,*” whereas the law of Christ says, “And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own bloud, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy bloud live, And whosoever liveth and believeth in mee shall never die.”<sup>245</sup> In other words, “the one saith doe this for life; the other saith, doe this from life: the one saith, *If thou do it not, thou shalt die*, the other saith, *If thou doe it not, I will chastise thee with the rod*; the one is to be delivered by God as hee is a creatour out of Christ, onely to such as are out of Christ; the other is to be delivered by God as he is a redeemer in Christ, onely to such as are in Christ.”<sup>246</sup> The difference was between the principles which govern the different covenants—the difference between justice and grace. Still, it is ironic that Fisher alluded to Ezekiel 16:6 when he referred to the law of Christ speaking to the new covenant Christian about having seen that Christian “polluted in thine own bloud.” Ezekiel 16 is an allegory about God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai and not a prophecy of the new covenant.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 6-7, 41.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 176. Here, Fisher cited Luther’s commentary on Galatians and Preston’s *On Love*.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 153-154.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 154.

Since the law of works is the covenant of works, and since believers are not under the covenant of works, then believers are not under the law of works. In Fisher's parlance, believers are under the law of Christ. He argued that, "where believers are sayd not to bee under the Law, and freed from the Law, it is to be understood of the Law, as it is the covenant of works, and where it is said that believers are under the Law, and that faith establisheth the Law; it is to be understood of the Law, as it is the law of Christ."<sup>247</sup> Indeed, Fisher declared that when believers violated any of the Ten Commandments, they are not to understand their sin as a violation of the covenant of works.<sup>248</sup> Consequently, any displeasure of God as a result of believers' violation of the Ten Commandments is not the wrath that causes unbelievers to perish eternally. Instead, when believers disobey the Ten Commandments, they disobey the law of Christ and it will displease and grieve Christ and cause him to chastise such believers. But it will not mean their soteriological rejection or damnation.<sup>249</sup>

In keeping with the Reformed doctrine that salvation has always been by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, Fisher saw the distinction between the law of works and the law of Christ at work in the Old Testament. In this regard, he distinguished between three kinds of Jews who were under the Mosaic covenant. First, believing Jews did not trust in their own ability to keep the law of works, but in "the Messiah or promised seed."<sup>250</sup> The "Sadduces and their Sect" did not believe in the resurrection.<sup>251</sup> Finally, "the Scribes and Pharisees and their Sects"

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 197-198.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 198-199.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 70-71.



believed in the resurrection.<sup>252</sup> However, these last two groups were alike in that they were under the law of works. As Fisher saw it, unbelieving Jews obeyed the law out of hope of temporal reward and fear of temporal punishment.<sup>253</sup> For believing Jews, “the law of the tenne Commandments was a rule for their obedience, yet not as it was the Law of workes or Covenant of workes, but as it was the Law of Christ.”<sup>254</sup> Fisher understood this as the significance of the second giving of the Decalogue, in which God had Moses put the stone tablets inside the Ark of the Covenant—a type of Christ. This signified “that [the Ten Commandments] were perfectly fulfilled in him, Christ being the end of the Law, for righteousness, to every one that beleeveth.”<sup>255</sup> Fisher also saw meaning in the fact that the tablets on which the Decalogue were written were placed on the mercy seat of the Ark, between the two cherubim. This was “to assure beleivers, that the Law now came to them from the Mercy-seat, for there the Lord promised to meet *Moses*, and to commune with him of all things which he would give him in commandment to them.”<sup>256</sup> On this reading, the first giving of the Decalogue constituted the law of works; the second was the law of Christ.

Thus, Fisher read the articulation of covenant theology within the Reformed tradition to the effect that believers had been under the law of Christ as the rule of obedience ever since the fall of Adam—and not under the law of works as the condition of earning a reward from God. It could not be otherwise, because this was the essence of Fisher’s distinction. If Christ had merited the reward of the covenant on behalf of believers by his own obedience, then whether they believed the promise

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

prospectively or the fulfillment retrospectively, their obedience to the law would be free from the fear of punishment and the hope of reward. Christians would be free to obey Christ out of love for and gratitude to him.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Edward Fisher masterfully integrated quotes from significant Reformed theologians in his fictional dialogue in order to steer a middle course between antinomianism and legalism. Given the heightened state of awareness of antinomianism and the profound concern over social chaos and upheaval, the silence of prominent anti-antinomians like Samuel Rutherford, Anthony Burgess, Robert Baillie and Thomas Edwards with regard to *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* was significant. Though David Como has implied that Fisher had been less than forthright about his antinomian associations and convictions even after his encounter with the courts, the text of *The Marrow* and its ecclesiastical and political milieus do not substantiate the claim that Fisher continued to hold antinomian views.<sup>257</sup> Even according to the wide range of ways in which one could be considered an antinomian in the seventeenth-century, Fisher, by almost all accounts, appears to have been innocent.

Still, Fisher did make some potentially controversial statements in *The Marrow*. Firstly, the first edition of *The Marrow* (1645) contained what VanDoodewaard believes was a cryptically positive reference to the antinomian John Eaton's *The honey-combe of free justification* (1642): "I have endeavoured to imitate the laborious Bee, who out of divers flowers gathers honey and waxe, and thereof

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<sup>257</sup> Regarding David Como, see footnote 34 above.

makes one combe... yet I hope it will not be distasteful to any.”<sup>258</sup> VanDoodewaard also sees significance in the marginal reference to Henry Burton who wrote heated treatises against John Eaton. Secondly, Fisher also made some statements that sounded close to one of the ideas that had earned Eaton his reputation as an antinomian—and those statements survived into the later editions of *The Marrow*. Not only was Fisher willing to talk about a sense in which believers were free from the law, but he said that when believers transgress the law, God cannot see any of their transgressions.<sup>259</sup> Fisher was careful to qualify these things by means of the distinction between the law of works and the law of Christ, between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Specifically, Fisher claimed that God does not see believers’ transgressions of the law of works—or covenant of works—because they are not under that law.<sup>260</sup> Thus, he reasoned, “if he sees it not, then can ye neither be angry with them, nor yet chastise them for it.”<sup>261</sup> The idea that “you are not now under the Law, but are by Christ freed from it,” certainly sounded antinomian.<sup>262</sup> But so did the idea that,

neither are you to conceive, that God either sees your transgressions, or is angry with you, or doth chastise you for them, as they are any way a transgression of that Covenant, for you being freed from that Covenant, and so consequently from sinning against it, must needs likewise be freed from all wrath, anger, miseries, calamities and afflictions, as fruits, and effects of any transgression, against that Covenant.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> See footnote 43 above.

<sup>259</sup> Fisher, *Marrow*, 198.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

In particular, the argument that God does not see believers' transgressions, had been made infamous by John Eaton. Indeed, toward the end of the dialogue, Antinomista admits that he used to believe that believers were not under the law, did not sin, did not have any sins for God to see, could not anger or offend God, and thus did not have any reason to humbly confess their sins to God.<sup>264</sup> But after Evangelists's instruction, he could plainly see "that by means of your distinguishing betwixt the law as it is the law of works and as it is the law of Christ," the reverse was true with regard to believers and the law of Christ.<sup>265</sup> By making a distinction between the law of works and the law of Christ, Fisher was able to make some of Eaton's ideas orthodox.

By the end of *The Marrow*, Fisher had narrated conversions for both Nomista and Antinomista from their respective errors to orthodoxy. Thus they not only agreed with Evangelist, but they were also reconciled to each other.<sup>266</sup> If *The Marrow* is compared to many of Fisher's other dialogues, reconciliation and unity among orthodox Christians appears to be a common goal. In fact, he wrote *Faith in five fundamental principles* (1650) in order to demonstrate that two major factions of English Protestants—Independents and Presbyterians—were of one accord regarding five essential doctrines. There, though he was still willing to argue that antinomians or "Libertines" were outside the pale of orthodoxy, he could also claim "that those whom they call Independent Ministers, and those whom they call Presbyterian Ministers, doe not differ but agree in these Fundamentals."<sup>267</sup> Thus, though he was not ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament, Fisher seemed to understand his

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 205-206.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 205-207, 244-245.

<sup>267</sup> Edward Fisher, *Faith in five fundamental principles*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1650), pp. 4, 14.

polemics as having a sort of disciplinary function with the goal of restoration to orthodoxy and fellowship.

Giles Creech's testimony had associated Fisher with antinomians because, as a book dealer, Fisher had been willing to circulate antinomian manuscripts. Though Fisher may have had antinomian sympathies in the 1620s or 1630s, his anti-antinomian convictions had become established by the time he published the first edition of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* in 1645. Given Fisher's cryptic approbation of John Eaton and Fisher's argument that God could not see believers' transgressions insofar as they were transgressions of the law of the covenant of works, it is at least possible that Fisher was attempting to reconcile Eaton with orthodox puritans. Another possibility is that by this argument that God could not see believers' transgressions, Fisher intended to argue that Eaton's meaning was actually what *The Marrow* had articulated more clearly and carefully. Both options were only possible because Fisher believed that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works. This acknowledged both the necessity of obedience to the law of Christ and the danger of using the Ten Commandments in a legalistic way. And much like alleged antinomians, this view of Fisher's was an attempt to protect Christians from having to fulfill conditions in order to please God. In either case, Fisher simultaneously avoided the condemnation of the most vitriolic anti-antinomians of his day, and had a profound influence on the subsequent Reformed tradition by means of *The Marrow*.

### Chapter Three

John Owen (1616-1683) was well known in the seventeenth century for being a promoter and defender of Protestant orthodoxy in the Reformed tradition. He was one of England's university-educated Puritans (earning his Bachelor and Master degrees from Queens College, Oxford), who also enjoyed friendships with some politically influential people. His friendship with Oliver Cromwell resulted in, among other privileges, an appointment to be the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 1651 to 1657. Owen was also highly regarded by the Parliament, which ordered him to preach for them on more than one occasion.<sup>268</sup> It should come as little surprise, then, that when an antinomian controversy erupted in the 1690s, both sides attempted to appeal to Owen's written corpus for support. What may be surprising is that the instigator of that controversy had repeatedly accused Owen himself of antinomianism since the late 1640s.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was terrified of practical antinomianism—licentious living and life-threatening political chaos, as he saw it—and was certain that theological antinomianism was the surest path to the realization of that fear. So when Owen published *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu* in 1648, Baxter suspected him of promoting antinomianism. In *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, a polemical work against Arminianism and Amyrauldianism, Owen argued that Christ actually accomplished the salvation of the elect by his passive obedience in submitting to death on the cross, and by his active obedience to God's law, such that

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<sup>268</sup> Richard L. Greaves, "Owen, John (1616-1683)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.; Oxford University Press, May 2009), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.elib.tcd.ie/view/article/21016?docPos=4> (accessed October 6, 2011).

his righteousness would be imputed to all who believe.<sup>269</sup> Baxter was afraid that the sovereign grace which Owen attributed to God would eliminate any motivation for anyone to live in obedience to God's law. Furthermore, with reasoning materially similar to that of the theologians at the Council of Trent, Baxter argued that Owen's doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers was sure to lead to moral laxity.<sup>270</sup> In fact, Baxter's reaction to antinomianism caused him to depart

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<sup>269</sup> Arminianism, named after the Dutch minister Jacob Arminius, was first expounded by Arminius's students who remonstrated (i.e., The Remonstrants) against the Reformed Church in the Netherlands with five points: first, God elected people on the condition of his foreknowledge of their future faith; second, Jesus died for and obtained the redemption and forgiveness of sins of all human beings of all times and all places, even though believers are the only ones who enjoy the benefits of Jesus' death; third, God helps people to do good things, like believe, by causing them to be born again in Christ; fourth, God gives prevenient or assisting grace, but this grace is resistible; fifth, only believers who are ready for temptation, desire Christ's help, and are active, will persevere to the end. Amyrauldianism, named after Moses Amyraut, a seventeenth century French theologian who, though holding to most of the system of Reformed soteriology, creatively adjusted the doctrine of the atonement such that God wills all people to be saved provided that they believe. While all people could hypothetically meet that provision, some will not because God has not chosen them and their sinful condition causes them to persist in unbelief.

<sup>270</sup> Specifically, first, beginning on page 30 of *Aphorismes of Justification* (1655) and going on for the rest of the book, Baxter argues against the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers as the ground of justification. Cf. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, Canon 11 as quoted in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical notes, Volume II, The History of Creeds* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.html>. Second, on page 178 of *Of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers in what sence [sic] sound Protestants hold it and of the false divided sence by which libertines subvert the Gospel* (1675), Baxter makes faith the one work of evangelical obedience which, as a condition of the covenant, a person must do in order to be reckoned righteous. Cf. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, Canon 24 as quoted in Schaff vol. 2 as above. Third, in *Of justification four disputations clearing and amicably defending the truth against the unnecessary oppositions of divers learned and reverend brethren* (1658), and *Of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers* (1675), Baxter argued that Christ's obedience had secured for believers a new kind of covenant that was easier to keep (i.e., by their evangelical obedience). Cf. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, chapter 10 as quoted in Schaff vol. 2 as above. See also C.F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London: S.P.C.K., 1966), pp.

from historic, confessional Protestantism, by denying the completeness of justification, calling justification—like sanctification—“a transient act.”<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, Baxter argued, “Neither Pardon nor Justification are perfect before Death.”<sup>272</sup>

The self-taught Baxter and the Oxford-educated Owen were highly critical of one another and wrote barbed critiques of and responses to each other’s positions. Tim Cooper has helpfully navigated the voluminous output of each man, outlining how Baxter and Owen viewed the Civil Wars and various political figures. Their divergent views account for much of their mutual acrimony.<sup>273</sup> But Owen had, in fact, argued something which many in the broader puritan community would have identified as antinomian. In 1657, John Owen wrote *The saints fellowship with the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost*.<sup>274</sup> In the third chapter he argued that God loves his people, and because God never changes, his love for his people always remains constant and equal. Recognizing that more than one seventeenth-century antinomian had made virtually identical arguments to his, Owen anticipated the charge that he was claiming that “*God loves his people in their sinning, as well as in their strictest obedience*.”<sup>275</sup> He understood that many puritans believed such an idea to be utterly destructive to any motivation to obey God’s law. Confident that he would win the

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154-177 and Michael G. Brown, “Not By Faith Alone: The Neonomianism of Richard Baxter,” *The Puritan Reformed Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 2011): pp. .

<sup>271</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification*, p. 318. Cf. pp. 196, 226-318.

<sup>272</sup> Richard Baxter, *An end of doctrinal controversies which have lately troubled the churches by reconciling explication without much disputing* (London, 1691), p. 255. Cf. pp. 238-255.

<sup>273</sup> See Cooper. *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012) and also his *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>274</sup> Owen. *Of communion with God the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly in love, grace, and consolation, or, The saints fellowship with the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost*. (Oxford: 1657).

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 30. I am indebted to Dr. Tim Cooper for alerting me to the fact that Owen had entertained such an idea.



argument, Owen responded to the anticipated charge by rooting God's love in his eternal and immutable decree, arguing, "What then! loves he his people in their sinning? Yes, his *People*, not their sinning. Alters he not his *Love* towards them? Not the *purpose* of his will, but the *dispensations* of his Grace. He *rebukes* them, he *chastens* them, he *hides his face* from them, he *smites them*, he fills them with a sense of indignation; but *woe*, *woe* would it be to us, should he change in his love, or take away his kindness from us."<sup>276</sup> By not shrinking from an infamous tenet of antinomianism, yet formulating it in the context of Reformed orthodoxy, Owen had identified himself with the antinomians—the same antinomians to whom Baxter, and indeed a majority of puritans, responded with such force. Just as Edward Fisher had rehabilitated elements of John Eaton's theology, so John Owen was willing to affirm the elements of truth in Eaton's and other antinomians' doctrine.

### **I. Owen's Theological Foundations: The Context of Covenant**

If seventeenth-century antinomians were not opposed to divine law, but were simply puritans who desired to be free from an oppressive legalism and moralism and who simultaneously desired to hear God's grace in Christ preached and offered freely, as Tim Cooper and T.D. Bozeman argue, then John Owen was an antinomian. Yet Owen was not an antinomian, at least not on the order of John Agricola. Nor was he an antinomian who, while desiring to arrive at Reformed orthodoxy, employed heterodox means to get there. For example, some scholars argue that men like Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh were essentially orthodox, but were misunderstood by the broader puritan community because of the loose and imprecise

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

formulations they used to articulate their ideas.<sup>277</sup> But Owen held a traditionally Reformed view of the moral law as found in the Ten Commandments and formulated a doctrine of the Mosaic covenant which allowed him to do a better job than many of his contemporaries of safeguarding Christians from the requirements of the works of the Law that attended the justice of the Old Covenant.<sup>278</sup>

For Owen, the Decalogue—that which antinomians were assumed to reject—required careful inquiry and explanation for its proper understanding. This was because the substance of the Decalogue had been employed in various ways and in various contexts throughout the history of God’s covenantal dealings with humanity.<sup>279</sup> So before Owen’s treatment of the Decalogue can be examined, his analysis of the various covenantal contexts in which the Decalogue has been employed must be described.

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<sup>277</sup> See Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), p. 130. See also his *The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology*, Thesis (Th.D.)—Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980, pp. 145-154; and his “Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43:1 (Fall 1980), pp. 27-29. Consider also that Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson include Tobias Crisp in their book *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2006).

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Chapter XII (Of the Law of God) of *The Second Helvetic Confession*, Article XXV (The Fulfillment of the Law) of *The Belgic Confession* and Chapter XIX (Of the Law of God) of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) as found in Schaff’s *The Creeds of The Evangelical Protestant Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.html>--in which the moral Law (or Ten Commandments) are confessed to be the rule of life for Christians.

<sup>279</sup> See Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews viz, on the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters : wherein together with the explication of the text and context, the priesthood of Christ ... are declared, explained and confirmed : as also, the pleas of the Jews for the continuance and perpetuity of their legal worship, with the doctrine of the principal writers of the Socinians about these things, are examined and disproved* (London, 1680), pp. 199-200, 229, 231, 237-239.

Owen used the historical order of the divine covenants to structure his *Theologoumena Pantodapa De Natura, Ortu, Progressu, et Studio, Verae Theologiae* (1661), but he left the details about those covenants for his four-volume commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews: *Exercitationes on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1668), *Exercitationes on the epistle to the Hebrews concerning the priesthood of Christ* (1674), *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (1680) and *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (1684). In *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, he moves historically from God's covenant with Adam, to the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses and ending with the covenant with Christ, or the New Covenant. Following the text of the Epistle to the Hebrews in his commentary, Owen is primarily interested in the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant. His secondary theological interest is in the relationship between the original covenant of works with Adam and the Mosaic covenant. Given that the Hebrews commentary represents Owen's mature thought—in which he gives the most sustained and thorough attention to the Mosaic covenant—it is curious that when Carl Trueman surveys Owen's covenant theology in *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, he completely omits the category of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>280</sup> Yet it is Owen's understanding of the relationships between those three covenants (the covenant of works with Adam, the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant) which provide the context for his discussion of the Decalogue.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Owen's understanding of the original covenant of works with Adam is its juridical nature. As he saw it, "The whole intire [sic] Nature of the *Covenant of Works* consisted in this; *That upon our personal*

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<sup>280</sup> Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007).

*obedience, according unto the Law and Rule of it, we should be accepted with God, and rewarded with him.*"<sup>281</sup> However, in the course of this biblical narrative, Adam, acting as humanity's representative, disobeyed and violated the law of the covenant. Instead of exercising his justice by bringing about the threatened curse of Genesis 2:17, God not only granted humanity a stay of execution, but in Genesis 3:15, he promised that another man would come to succeed where Adam had failed.<sup>282</sup> Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."<sup>283</sup> In keeping with Reformed federal theology, Owen identifies that promise with the covenant of grace which is in force from Adam's Fall to the second coming of Christ.

But the covenant of grace is not without contour throughout its historical unfolding. Owen's argument, that the covenant of grace began in principle immediately after the Fall in Genesis 3:15, raised questions about the relationship to

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<sup>281</sup> John Owen, *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed, & vindicated by John Owen* (London, 1677), p. 397.

<sup>282</sup> Genesis 2:17 says, "*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*"

<sup>283</sup> That Owen understood Genesis 3:15 as presented here is amply witnessed by at least 15 of his published works. For the sake of space, only the one with the most references will be cited here: *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews also concerning the Messiah wherein the promises concerning him to be a spiritual redeemer of mankind are explained and vindicated, his coming and accomplishment of his work according to the promises is proved and confirmed, the person, or who he is, is declared, the whole oeconomy of the mosaical law, rites, worship, and sacrifice is explained: and in all the doctrine of the person, office, and work of the Messiah is opened, the nature and demerit of the first sin is unfolded, the opinions and traditions of the antient and modern Jews are examined, their objections against the Lord Christ and the Gospel are answered, the time of the coming of the Messiah is stated, and the great fundamental truths of the Gospel vindicated : with an exposition and discourses on the two first chapters of the said epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1668), pp. 50, 85, 96, 127, 142, 203.

that covenant of all subsequent covenants.<sup>284</sup> The covenant with Abraham reveals more of the identity of the “seed of the woman.” The people of Israel are a partial fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of a people, and during the course of the Mosaic covenant it is revealed that the Abrahamic promise of a king will be the seed of David, the paradigmatic king of Israel. Finally, Jesus Christ is the seed of Eve, Abraham and David who ratifies the New Covenant by his own blood—the same blood which saves his people from their sins—and ascends to the right hand of the Father to reign as king over his heavenly kingdom.<sup>285</sup>

The difficulty of describing the role and function of the Mosaic covenant in the wider context of the covenant of grace was particularly troubling to the seventeenth century Reformed tradition. After all, with its myriad laws, threats of curses for disobedience and offers of reward for obedience, the Mosaic covenant did not always seem to fit comfortably within the covenant of grace—a covenant in which God gives ultimate blessing to his people in spite of their sin. Though the Westminster Assembly (1643-1647) debated a wide range of issues, it classified the Mosaic covenant as one of two administrations of the covenant of grace after very little recorded debate.<sup>286</sup> In section five of the seventh chapter of the Confession, the Assembly declared, “This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come,

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<sup>284</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 251.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 230, 232, 240, 255, 325, 327 and in the section on Hebrews Ch. 10, see pp. 16 and 38.

<sup>286</sup> Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1653* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Vol. III, 735, 737-738; Vol. IV, 252-260, 436-439; See the discussion of covenant theology in Vol. III, 726.

which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.”<sup>287</sup> Section six of that seventh chapter concludes: “There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.”<sup>288</sup>

The minutes of the Westminster Assembly on the subject of the Mosaic covenant are scant. And the Assembly’s final statement regarding the Mosaic covenant was not universally convincing, for John Owen formulated the nature of the Mosaic covenant and the relationship between the covenant of grace and the Mosaic covenant entirely differently. In short, Owen held that the Mosaic covenant was a revival of the original covenant of works with Adam. By way of chronological overview, Owen seems to have first introduced this idea in a sermon entitled *The branch of the Lord, the beauty of Sion* in 1650. In 1668 he confirmed this in the first volume of his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews: *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. He affirmed the principle of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant in a 1669 work entitled, *A practical exposition on the 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm*. In 1671 he reiterated the same idea about the Mosaic covenant in *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use and continuance of a day of sacred rest*. The same idea is supported in his 1676 treatise, *Pneumatologia*. Just a year later he defended the idea in *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed and vindicated* (1677). His most mature thought on the Mosaic covenant had crystalized and come to full expression

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<sup>287</sup> Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), 14.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

by the time he wrote *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1680).<sup>289</sup>

As Owen understood it, the Mosaic covenant “revived, declared and expressed *all the Commands of that [original] Covenant [of Works with Adam]*.”<sup>290</sup> Yet, aware of a variety of possible misunderstandings and objections to such a formulation, Owen was careful to qualify how this was the case. “This Covenant called the *Old Covenant*, was never intended to be of itself the absolute Rule and Law of Life and Salvation unto the Church, but was made with a particular design, and with respect unto particular ends.”<sup>291</sup> In other words, “God never [did] intend it as a means to *give Life and Righteousness*, nor was it able so to do.”<sup>292</sup> Owen said that “although in itself it requires a perfect Righteousness, and gives a Promise of Life thereon, *He that doth these things, he shall live in them*; yet it could give neither Righteousness nor Life, unto any in the state of sin, see *Rom. 8. 3. Chap. 10. 4.*”<sup>293</sup> That was because the Mosaic covenant “absolutely considered, had No promise of grace, to communicate spiritual strength,” no promise “of eternal life,” yet it did have promises of temporal life as one of the “temporal things in the Land of Canaan inseparable from it.”<sup>294</sup>

To be sure, there were characteristics of a covenant of works which functioned as criteria for Owen when he analyzed the Mosaic covenant. In an earlier

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<sup>289</sup> At least one posthumous book argued the same point: *The true nature of a Gospel church and its government* (London: 1689).

<sup>290</sup> John Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 229. Cf. the statement farther down the same page: “Now this is no other but the Covenant of Works revived.” Cf. also p. 231.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. the statement on p. 229, “Nor had this Covenant of *Sinai* any Promise of eternal Life annexed unto it, as such, but only the Promise inseparable from the Covenant of Works which it revived, *saying, Do this and live.*”

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

book, *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed and vindicated* (1677), he explained that “[t]he whole entire nature of the covenant of works consisted in this, — *that upon our personal obedience, according unto the law and rule of it, we should be accepted with God, and rewarded with him.* Herein the essence of it did consist; and whatever covenant proceeds on these terms, or has the nature of them in it, however it may be varied with additions or alterations, is the same covenant still, and not another.”<sup>295</sup> In that case, “whatever Variations may be made in, or Additions unto the Dispensation of the first Covenant, so long as this Rule is retained, *Do this and live;* it is still the same Covenant, for the Substance and Essence of it.”<sup>296</sup> It should be noted that Owen had gone on to argue that once God had made a covenant of works with humanity, there could be no new covenant of works, “unless the *Essential Form* of it were of another nature; namely, that our own *Personal obedience* be not the rule and cause of our Acceptation and Justification before God.”<sup>297</sup> Perhaps that is why he left the differences between the “*Covenant of Sinai*” and the “New Testament” as “belong[ing] not unto our present Argument.”<sup>298</sup>

Owen centered on the differences between those two covenants in the 1680 installment of his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. He used the criteria

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<sup>295</sup> John Owen, *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed and vindicated* (London, 1677), p. 397.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid. Cf. page 400 where he says, “(3.) *There would then have been Merit of Works, which is now excluded.* Answ. Such a Merit as ariseth from an equality and proportion between Works and Reward, by the rule of commutative Justice, would not have been in the Works of the first Covenant; and in no other sense is it now rejected by them that oppose the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ. (4.) *All is now resolved into the Merit of Christ, upon the account whereof alone, our own Personal Righteousness is accepted before God unto our Justification.* Answ. The Question is not *on what account*, nor for what reason it is so accepted, but whether it be or no; seeing its so being is effectually constitutive of a Covenant of Works.”

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 396-397.



that he had articulated in 1677 to conclude that the Mosaic covenant was a revival of the original covenant of works with Adam. Owen observed that the terms of the original covenant of works were present in the Mosaic covenant: “Sin it forbad, that is all and every sin in matter and manner, on the pain of death, and gave the promise of life unto *perfect sinless obedience* only.”<sup>299</sup> He often qualified his identification of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, by highlighting the eschatological nature of the covenant with Adam and contrasting that with the temporal nature of the covenant with Israel via Moses. Part of the reason for this is that Owen understood the stipulations—and the concomitant blessings and curses—of the Mosaic covenant as only applying to those who lived within the borders of the land of Canaan. “Wherefore having granted unto this People those great Priviledges [sic] of the *Land of Canaan*, and the *Ordinances of Worship* relating unto the great end mentioned, he moreover prescribed unto them *Laws, Rules, and Terms of Obedience*, whereon they should hold and enjoy that Land, with all the Priviledges [sic] annexed unto the possession thereof.”<sup>300</sup> Unlike any other epoch or administration within the broader covenant of grace, the Mosaic covenant “had especial [sic] Promises and Threatnings [sic] annexed unto it as such, whereof none did exceed the Bounds of

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<sup>299</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, pp. 236-237. Cf. pp. 229, 230, 242. Cf. also *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews also concerning the Messiah wherein the promises concerning him to be a spiritual redeemer of mankind are explained and vindicated, his coming and accomplishment of his work according to the promises is proved and confirmed, the person, or who he is, is declared, the whole oeconomy of the mosaical law, rites, worship, and sacrifice is explained: and in all the doctrine of the person, office, and work of the Messiah is opened, the nature and demerit of the first sin is unfolded, the opinions and traditions of the antient and modern Jews are examined, their objections against the Lord Christ and the Gospel are answered, the time of the coming of the Messiah is stated, and the great fundamental truths of the Gospel vindicated : with an exposition and discourses on the two first chapters of the said epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1668), pp. 287-288.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. Note well that “whereon” is a preposition which indicates the immediate result. This makes holding and enjoying the land of Canaan with all its privileges the result of doing or keeping the laws, rules and terms of obedience.

the Land of *Canaan*.<sup>301</sup> Owen had made the same point almost a decade earlier in his *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest*:

Unto this Renovation of the Covenant in the manner, and for the ends expressed, there was added a *Typical Church State*, with a great number of Religious Laws and Ordinances, in themselves *carnal* and *weak*, but mystically significant of spiritual and heavenly things; and instructive how to use the Promise that was before given, for their relief from the Rigor and Curse of the Law or Covenant, now proposed unto them. And in all these things did the *Covenant* of God made with that people in the Wilderness consist. The Foundation, Matter, Manner of Administration, Promises and Threatnings [sic] of it were the same, with the Covenant of Works; but they were all accommodated to their *Ecclesiastical* and *Political Estate*, with especial Respect unto their approaching condition in the Land of *Canaan*.<sup>302</sup>

Here Owen includes the category of typology in his analytical toolkit.

This category of typology also shapes his thinking when he turns to consider the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace. If the Mosaic covenant revived the original covenant of works with Adam in some sense,

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 234. Owen seems to have indicated what was “especial” about the promises and threatenings of the Mosaic covenant previously. Earlier, in the same paragraph, he explains the special threatenings: “Unto the terms and conditions of this Covenant was the whole Church obliged indispensibly on pain of *Extermination*, until all was accomplished, *Mal.* 4. 4, 5, 6.” The special promises were explicated in the previous quote: “*Laws, Rules, and Terms of Obedience*, whereon they should hold and enjoy that Land.”

<sup>302</sup> John Owen, *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest wherein the original of the Sabbath from the foundation of the world, the morality of the Fourth commandment with the change of the Seventh day are enquired into : together with an assertion of the divine institution of the Lord's Day, and practical directions for its due observation* (London, 1671), p. 231. Cf. p. 235.

and if the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant were all related to the land of Canaan, then the question that needed to be answered was what the Mosaic covenant had to do with the covenant of grace – especially in light of the “twofold administration of the covenant of grace” formulation of both the Westminster Confession (1647) in chapter 7, sections five and six, and the Savoy Declaration (1658) in chapter seven, section five. The Westminster Assembly was the preeminent deliberative body of Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century, and so set the theological standard for English Calvinism. The Savoy Assembly met in October of 1658 in an effort to improve upon the Westminster Confession, especially on the subject of church government. John Owen, as one of the leading Congregationalist theologians, was one of the principle architects of the Savoy Declaration. Perhaps that is why the Savoy Declaration says less about the Mosaic covenant than the Westminster Confession. Rather than requiring the godly to affirm that the multiplicity and ostentatiousness of the ordinances of the old covenant compared to the new accounts for the primary difference between the old and new covenants, the Savoy Declaration seemed content to simply affirm the continuity of the covenant of grace.<sup>303</sup>

In his own writing, Owen answered the question of the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace by seeing the Mosaic covenant as associated with the covenant of grace (at least in terms of the forgiveness offered in the sacrificial system), but not identical to it. The Westminster and Savoy assemblies were eager to maintain the unity of the covenant of grace in their

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<sup>303</sup> Compare Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), 14-17, chapter VII.V, VI with Anonymous, *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy* (London, 1658), 14-15, chapter VII.IV, V.

doctrinal formulations regarding the divine covenants—that since Adam fell, salvation had always been by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone. Owen shared that commitment while simultaneously modifying the “twofold administration of one covenant of grace” formulation. He argued that, “If *Reconciliation and Salvation by Christ* were to be obtained not only *under the Old Covenant*, but *by vertue [sic] thereof*, then it must be the same for substance with the New. But this is not so; for no Reconciliation with God, nor Salvation could be obtained by vertue [sic] of the Old Covenant, or the Administration of it, as our Apostle disputes at large, though all Believers were reconciled, justified and saved by vertue [sic] of the Promise, whil'st they *were under that Covenant*.”<sup>304</sup> Thus on Owen’s formulation, the Promise (or covenant of grace) was operating concurrently with the Mosaic covenant so that “Believers were *saved under it*, but not *by vertue [sic] of it*,” because the Promise “was the instrument of life and salvation unto all that did believe.”<sup>305</sup> In other words, “[a]ll that lived under the Administration of it, did attain eternal life, or perished for ever, but not *by vertue [sic] of this Covenant* as formally such.”<sup>306</sup> So convinced was Owen of the uniqueness of the Mosaic covenant, that in *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, he actually came out against the formulation of one covenant of grace under two administrations. He said that, “there is such express mention made not only in this, but in sundry other places of the Scripture also, *of two distinct Covenants or Testaments*, and such different Natures, Properties and Effects ascribed unto them, as seem to constitute two distinct Covenants.”<sup>307</sup> Yet a few pages later,

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<sup>304</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 234. Cf. p. 201.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

he used even more forceful language: “These things being observed, we may consider that the Scripture doth plainly and expresly make mention of *two Testaments or Covenants*, and distinguish between them in such a way, as what is spoken can hardly be accommodated unto a *twofold Administration* of the same Covenant.”<sup>308</sup> Still, he saw his position as only semantically and not substantially different than that of his peers who affirmed the Westminster formulation.<sup>309</sup>

But not everyone interprets Owen’s argument in this way. Jeong Koo Jeon reads Owen as saying exactly the opposite—that the Mosaic and New covenants were simply two administrations of one covenant of grace.<sup>310</sup> Sinclair Ferguson sees Owen struggling with the nature of the Mosaic covenant in light of the covenant of grace. Ferguson says that for Owen, on the one hand, “it is the precepts of that first covenant which seem to be renewed at Sinai, in a new and objective way.”<sup>311</sup> He goes on to say, “On the other hand, the Sinaitic covenant cannot be thought of as the covenant of grace.”<sup>312</sup> Quoting Owen’s earlier *A practical exposition on the 130th Psalm*, David Wai-Sing Wong understands Owen similarly to Ferguson: Owen wants to see the Mosaic covenant as “immixed” with “the covenant.”<sup>313</sup> But when Wong turns to Owen’s mature thought in the commentary on Hebrews, he finds Owen’s commitment to the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.<sup>314</sup> Yet even Owen’s

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>310</sup> Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the Historical Development* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999), p. 50.

<sup>311</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 28.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>313</sup> David Wai-Sing Wong, *The Covenant Theology of John Owen*, Thesis (Ph.D.)—Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998, p. 204.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 205. Wong does not seem to take account of any development in Owen’s thought, and so his presentation of Owen’s position on the Mosaic covenant seems contradictory at points.

final analysis of the Mosaic covenant allowed for both the continuity of the covenant of grace—the idea that sinners have always been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone—and the view that the covenant given at Sinai was a typological covenant of works. This seemed to satisfy both Owen’s desire to be orthodox and his conscience as an exegete.

In order to provide further biblical evidence of the distinctive character of the Mosaic covenant, Owen also draws upon the Apostle Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:15-17.<sup>315</sup> Owen argues that “The *Church of Israel* was never absolutely under the power of that Covenant as a Covenant of Life. For from the days of *Abraham*, the *Promise* was given unto them and their Seed. And the Apostle proves that no Law could afterwards be given, or Covenant made, that should disannul that Promise, *Gal. 3. 17.*”<sup>316</sup> In other words, Owen read Paul as saying that if God had promised Abraham and all believers eternal life by grace alone, through faith alone, because of the promised Messiah alone, then according to God’s own justice, God could not introduce a covenant 430 years later that offered Abraham’s descendants eternal life by justice alone, through works alone. That is why Owen understood the life offered as the reward under the Mosaic covenant as a good, long life in the land of Canaan—not heaven.

Owen’s understanding of the Mosaic covenant is markedly different than many other Reformed puritans, insofar as the statements of the Westminster Confession represent a puritan consensus. This is not to say that many of Owen’s

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<sup>315</sup> Galatians 3:15-17 reads, “Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto... And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.”

<sup>316</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 219.

English contemporaries did not hold a similar view; certainly many of them did.<sup>317</sup> But it is to say that Owen's willingness to call the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works did not represent the view of the majority of his peers. Owen himself admitted as much: "By the *New Covenant*, not the New Covenant absolutely and originally as given in the first Promise, is intended; but in its compleat [sic] Gospel-administration, when it was actually established by the death of Christ, as administred [sic] in and by the Ordinances of the New Testament. This with the Covenant of *Sinai* were, as most say, but different administrations of the same

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<sup>317</sup> See, for example, Amandus Polanus, *The svbstance of Christian religion. Soundly set foorth in two bookes, by definitions and partitions, framed according to the rules of a naturall method: / by Amandus Polanus professor of diuinitie. ; The first booke concerneth faith: the second concerneth good workes. The principall points whereof are contayned in a short table hereunto annexed* (London, 1608), pp. 184-185; William Pemble, *Vindiciae fidei, or A treatise of iustification by faith wherein that point is fully cleared, and vindicated from the cauils of it's aduersaries. Deliuered in certaine lectures at Magdalen Hall in Oxford, by William Pemble, Master of Arts of the same house: and now published since his death for the publike benefit* (Oxford, 1625), pp. 138; John Preston, *The nevv covenant, or the saints portion A treatise vnfolding the all-sufficiencie of God, and mans uprightnes, and the covenant of grace. delivered in fourteene sermons vpon Gen. 17. 1. 2. Wherevnto are adioyned foure sermons vpon Eccles. 9.1. 2. 11. 12.* (London, 1629), p. 71; Edward Fisher, *The marrow of modern divinity touching both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace : with their use and end, both in the time of the Old Testament, and in the time of the New ... : in a dialogue betwixt Evangelista, a minister of the gospel, Nomista, a legalist, Antinomista, an Antinomian, and Neophytus, a young Christian* (London, 1645); Vavasor Powell, *Christ and Moses excellency, or Sion and Sinai's glory. Being a triplex treatise, distinguishing and explaining the two covenants or the gospel and law: and directing to the right understanding applying, and finding of the informing and assuring promises, that belong to both Covenants* (London, 1650), pp. 2, 26, 202, 206-207; Thomas Boston, *The marrow of modern divinity. : the first part, touching both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace: with their use and end, both in the time of the Old testament, and in the time of the New. Clearly describing the way of eternal life, by Jesus Christ. In a dialogue betwixt Evangelista, a minister of the Gospel. Nomista, a legalist. Antinomista, an antinomian. And Neophytus, a young christian. By Edward Fisher. The fourteenth edition, corrected. With notes, by the late eminent and faithful servant of Jesus Christ Mr. Thomas Boston, minister of the Gospel at Ettrick. To which is prefixed, an appendix, containing the difference betwixt the law and the Gospel, by the author of the same book, not prefixed to some of the former editions* (Glasgow, 1752).

Covenant.”<sup>318</sup> Among possible explanations for this is the ongoing development of federal theology. In *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, Carl Trueman observes that though the Westminster Confession did not mention an eternal, intratrinitarian covenant, Owen was one of the seventeenth century theologians who had begun to develop that doctrine under the rubric of “the covenant of redemption.”<sup>319</sup> The significance, as Trueman sees it, is that “concepts almost invariably predate the specific terms with which they are later described.”<sup>320</sup> So it is at least plausible that this same phenomenon accounts for the minority report which Owen represents on the issue of the Mosaic covenant. The concept of the covenant of works was in place, and Owen and others were applying the criteria for a covenant of works to the Mosaic covenant. Yet this does not explain why Owen is not considered at all in the work of Mark Karlberg on the history of Reformed interpretation of the works principle in the Mosaic covenant.<sup>321</sup>

## **II. Owen’s Theological Foundations: The Decalogue**

The Decalogue played an essential role in the works character of the juridical Mosaic covenant. Given the striking similarities that Owen observed between the original covenant of works with Adam and the Mosaic covenant—especially the condition of perfect and personal obedience—he could not help but see the

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<sup>318</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 224-225.

<sup>319</sup> Trueman, *John Owen*, pp. 80-92.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>321</sup> Mark Karlberg, *The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology* Thesis (Th.D.)—Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980.



stipulations which God had given to Adam revived in the Decalogue.<sup>322</sup> Those ten words were “a Transcript of the Law of Works,” “nothing but a Divine Summary of the Law written in the heart of man at his Creation.”<sup>323</sup> As the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, they also had a unique theocratic use as the primary “Instrument or Rule of the Polity and Government of their Nation.”<sup>324</sup>

So at least as far as the application of the Decalogue in the Church under the New Covenant was concerned, Owen had serious concerns about the importation of the Ten Commandments *as Old Covenant law*—a concern he wrote about at length specifically in regard to the fourth commandment in *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest wherein the original of the Sabbath from the foundation of the world, the morality of the Fourth commandment with the change of the Seventh day are enquired into*. So embedded was the Decalogue in a revived form of the covenant of works, that in the book mentioned above, Owen criticized the Church of England for directing its members to pray that God would write all the laws of the Decalogue on their hearts.<sup>325</sup> This was because each one of the Ten Commandments was related to every other law in the Mosaic covenant. In fact, in his 1676 work, *Pneumatologia*, Owen counseled his readers not to obey the Decalogue *as the Old Covenant*.<sup>326</sup> That distinction is important; for while each covenant has an expression of the moral will of God, that

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 237, 229.

<sup>324</sup> Owen, *Exercitations concerning the name, original, nature, use, and continuance of a day of sacred rest*, p. 185.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 188. Cf. pp. 227-228.

<sup>326</sup> John Owen, *Pneumatologia, or, A discourse concerning the Holy Spirit wherein an account is given of his name, nature, personality, dispensation, operations, and effects : his whole work in the old and new creation is explained, the doctrine concerning it vindicated from oppositions and reproaches : the nature also and necessity of Gospel-holiness the difference between grace and morality, or a spiritual life unto God in evangelical obedience and a course of moral virtues, are stated and declared* (London, 1676), 461-462.

moral will does not function the same way in each covenant. Owen's point is that if we do not take account of how the moral law and obedience to it functioned in the Old Covenant, while trying to obey it in the same way now, under the New Covenant, then "[t]he whole Mystery of Godliness must be renounced, if we intend to give way unto such Imaginations. Be it so then, that this *Moral Vertue* [sic] and the Practice of it, do contain and express all that Obedience *materially* considered, which was required by the Law of Nature in the Covenant of Works, yet, I deny it to be our Holiness or *Evangelical Obedience*; and that as for many other Reasons, so principally, because it hath not that respect unto Jesus Christ which our Sanctification hath."<sup>327</sup> In other words, obedience not done out of gratitude for Christ's death and imputed righteousness on our behalf is either moralism (i.e., bare, abstract ethical imperatives) or legalism (i.e., ethical imperatives done for the purpose of earning God's favor), and should be avoided. Such obedience would be sinful rather than pleasing to God.

Owen was convinced of this position by observing the way the Decalogue functioned in the Mosaic covenant in comparison to how it functioned in the New Covenant. First, the substance of the Decalogue was "imposed on [the Israelites] with rigor" as the condition of a long and prosperous life in Canaan, whereas the primary feature of the New Covenant is "the *accomplishment and establishment of the Covenant of Works*, both as unto its Commands and Sanction, in the obedience and suffering of the Mediator [Christ]."<sup>328</sup> Second, God had ordered the "principal fundamental part of" the Old Covenant to be written on tablets of stone so "that the first draught of them should be broken, to intimate that the Covenant contained in

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 237.

them was not everlasting nor unalterable. But the New Covenant is written in the *fleshly Tables of the hearts of them that do believe*, 2 Cor. 3. 3. Jer. 31. 33.”<sup>329</sup> In other words, “the whole *Law of Moses*, as given unto the *Jews*, whether as *used* or *abused* by them, was repugnant unto and inconsistent with the Gospel, and the Mediation of Christ, especially his Priestly Office therein declared.”<sup>330</sup> This was because the Decalogue had functioned as the condition of the Old Covenant, the touchstone of the sanctions of the covenant: obedience caused blessings while disobedience caused curses. But “the Lord Christ by the *One Offering of himself*, had made perfect Attonement [sic] for Sin; so that the Sacrifices of the Law could be of no more Use or Signification. And the continuance of them, wherein there was *renewed mention of the Expiation of Sin*, did declare that there was not a perfect Expiation already made, which over-throws the Efficacy and Virtue of the Sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>331</sup>

There was also a difference between the way the Decalogue has functioned in the history of God’s redemptive plan (*historia salutis*), and the uses it has as that redemption is applied to individual believers (*ordo salutis*). In the original covenant of works with Adam, the contents of the Decalogue functioned as “the absolute Rule and Law of Life.”<sup>332</sup> Human beings, as God’s creature, had no other mode of being than owing obedience to the Law, the “*eternal unalterable rule of our Relation* unto God, as rational creatures capable of moral obedience, and eternal rewards.”<sup>333</sup> That is because the Decalogue “contained the summe [sic] and substance of that obedience which is due unto God from all rational creatures made in his Image, and

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 323.

nothing else.”<sup>334</sup> It was “nothing but a Divine Summary of the Law written in the heart of man at his Creation.”<sup>335</sup> But Adam introduced a moral change in humanity such that obedience to the Law was no longer possible. That is why, in the covenant of grace, we are still “subject unto [the Law], but not in order unto *life and salvation*. For unto those ends it is fulfilled in and by the Mediator of the New Covenant, who is *the end of the Law for Righteousness to every one that believeth*, Rom. 10. 4.”<sup>336</sup> So when the Decalogue was given as a revival of the covenant of works at Sinai, it could not function eschatologically. That is to say, it could not offer eternal life in heaven or threaten eternal death in hell because it was being given to sinners. But it was revived as a typological covenant of works, offering temporal life in Canaan for obedience and threatening exile from Canaan for disobedience.

Owen spent a great deal of his writing energy urging his readers to personal holiness. In *Pneumatologia* he had explained that the Law is “an Effect of [God’s] infinite Wisdom, Love and Goodness,” given as “*Commands for Holiness*.”<sup>337</sup> Believers under the New Covenant have a new ability to obey and “[n]o man who is instated in the *Covenant of Grace*, comes *short* or *fails* of the Performance of that Obedience which is required and accepted in that Covenant, meerly [sic] for want of Power and *spiritual strength*. For God therein *according to his Divine Power gives unto us all things that pertain unto Life and Godliness, through the Knowledge of him that hath called us to Glory and Vertue [sic]*, 1 Pet. 1. 3.”<sup>338</sup> Though in his later work, when discussing the Decalogue in relationship to the New Covenant, his

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>337</sup> Owen, *Pneumatologia*, pp. 543-544.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 544.

emphasis seems to have been on the vicarious fulfillment of it by Christ for believers.

### III. Conclusion

Even if Owen's emphasis on personal holiness had sounded like the rigorous legalism of pietism to antinomians, his position on the Mosaic covenant provided a safeguard. By recognizing the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, he had effectively cut off the primary means of abusing his hearers and readers with the Law. If the Decalogue was given to Israel as the condition for their tenure in the land of Canaan, and if believers are declared righteous by God and guaranteed tenure in heaven on the basis of Christ's obedience to the Decalogue, then the Law could no longer condemn the believer in Christ. After all, Owen had even counseled his own readers against obeying the Decalogue *as the Old covenant*.<sup>339</sup>

Owen's understanding of the Mosaic covenant may also account for his compassion for the Irish. On the first of February 1649, Oliver Cromwell invited—but later, more or less commanded—Owen to accompany him and the Parliamentary army to Dublin, Ireland. Cromwell went out to Drogheda to fight English royalists who had taken over the city, but Owen did not see the bloodshed because he stayed at Dublin Castle and the University of Dublin, Trinity College.<sup>340</sup> What he did see

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<sup>339</sup> See note above on pages 461-462 from *Pneumatologia*.

<sup>340</sup> See Greaves, "Owen, John (1616-1683)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.; Oxford University Press, May 2009), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.elib.tcd.ie/view/article/21016?docPos=4> (accessed October 14, 2011). Cf. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, pp. 7-8 and Robert W. Oliver, "John Owen – his life and times," *John Owen: The Man and His Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2000), pp. 20-21.

must have moved him because when he returned to London, he pleaded with the House of Commons:

How is it that Jesus Christ, is in *Ireland* only as a *Lyon [sic] stayning [sic] all his garments with the bloud [sic] of his Enemies?* and none to hold him out as a *Lamb sprinkled with his own bloud [sic]* to his friends? Is it the Sovereignty [sic] and Interest of *England* that is alone to be there transacted? For my part, I see no further into the MYSTERY of these things, but that I could heartily rejoyce [sic], That Innocent blood being expiated, the *Irish* might enjoy *Ireland so long as the Moon endureth*, so that Jesus Christ might possesse [sic] the *Irish*.<sup>341</sup>

Had Owen not understood the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, he would have had motive and opportunity, theologically, to see the British as God's special people analogous to Israel, England as the holy land analogous to Canaan, and all non-British people (e.g., the Irish) as unholy, outside God's saving covenant and in need of extermination analogous to the Canaanites, Hittites or Moabites. Instead, he described the people of Dublin as genuinely desiring the Gospel; and unlike the Israelites, he implored English Christians to supply the Irish in their spiritual need as readily as they would supply beggars in their material need:

The Land mourneth, and *the People perish for want of knowledge: Many run to and fro*, but it is upon other designs; *knowledge is not increased*. They are sensible of their *Wants*, and cry out for *Supply*. The Tears and Cryes [sic] of the Inhabitants of *Dublin*, after the Manifestations of Christ, are ever in my view. If they were in the dark, *and lived to have it so*, it might something

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<sup>341</sup> John Owen, *The stedfastness of promises, and the sinfulness of staggering: opened in a sermon preached at Margarets in Westminster before the Parliament Febr. 28. 1649. Being a day set apart for solemn humiliation throughout the nation* (London, 1650), pp. 42-43.

close a door upon the bowels of our Compassion: but they cry out of their darkness, and are ready to follow every one whosoever, to have a Candle. If their being Gospelless, move not our hearts, it is hoped, Their importunate Cryes [sic] will disquiet our Rest: and wrest help, as a Beggar doth an Alms.<sup>342</sup>

On the one hand, since the Decalogue was for Israel a revival of the covenant of works—and for their unique theocratic polity—then seventeenth-century non-Israelite people could not appropriate the Decalogue for the same purposes. Under the New Covenant, however, “the very first thing that is proposed, is the *accomplishment and establishment of the Covenant of Works*, both as unto its Commands and Sanction, in the obedience and suffering of the Mediator.”<sup>343</sup> In other words, instead of requiring people to obey the Decalogue on pain of death or captivity, God forgives believing sinners who have broken the Decalogue and imputes his Son’s perfect obedience to them, in the New Covenant. This would certainly provide a motive for compassion toward the Irish. Yet if this were Owen’s reasoning about the Mosaic covenant, uneasy tensions would still exist with regard to his close ministerial relationship with the civil magistrate: Parliament and various military officers.

We have already noticed that Richard Baxter suspected Owen of latent antinomianism because of Owen’s doctrines of the imputation of Christ’s active obedience and the atonement, Tim Cooper has demonstrated that a major contributing factor to the conflict between the two men was their respective civil

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>343</sup> Owen, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 237.

political philosophies, military associations and perspectives on the Civil Wars.<sup>344</sup>

Baxter believed that since Owen had supported Parliament's war and the regicide in 1649 Owen must have been an antinomian. When asked to preach before Parliament, Owen often expressed such support in theological terms.<sup>345</sup> Perhaps, had

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<sup>344</sup> Tim Cooper. *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001); Cf., Cooper, "Why Did Richard Baxter and John Owen Diverge? The Impact of the First Civil War," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61:3 (2010): 496-516; and Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity*. (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012). For Baxter's views of Owen as a latent antinomian, see Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification, with their Explication annexed: Wherein also is opened the nature of the Covenants, Satisfaction, Righteousnesse, Faith, Works, &c: Published especially for the use of the Church of Kederminster in Worcestershire*. (London: 1649), p. 138 and his *Rich: Baxter's Confesssion [sic] of his Faith, Especially concerning the Interest of Repentance and sincere Obedience to Christ, in our Justification and Salvation. Written for the satisfaction of the misinformed, the conviction of calumniators, and the explication and vindication of some weighty truths*, (London, 1655), Preface, sig. bv4, sig. elr-v, 219, 254, 485 and *Universal Redemption of Mankind, By The Lord Jesus Christ: Stated and Cleared by the late Learned Mr. Richard Baxter. Whereunto is added a short Account of Special Redemption, by the same Author*, (London, 1694), p. 80.

<sup>345</sup> Consider sermons in which the State is called upon to execute holy tasks: John Owen, *A sermon preached to the Honourable House of Commons, in Parliament assembled: on January 31. A day of solemne humiliation. With a discourse about toleration, and the duty of the civill magistrate about religion, thereunto annexed. Humbly presented to them, and all peace-loving men of this nation. / By John Owen, pastor of the Church of Christ, which is at Coggeshall in Essex* (London, 1649); *The advantage of the kingdome of Christ in the shaking of the kingdoms of the vworld: or Providentiall alterations in their subserviency to Christ's exaltation. Opened, in a sermon preached to the Parliament Octob. 24. 1651. a solemne day of thanksgiving for the destruction of the Scots army at Worcester with sundry other mercies, by John Owen minister of the Gospell* (Oxford, 1651); *God's presence with a people, the spring of their prosperity; with their speciall interest in abiding with Him. A sermon, preached to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, at Westminster, Octob. 30. 1656. A day of solemne humiliation. / By John Owen, D.D. a servant of Jesus Christ, in the work of the Gospel. Printed by Order of Parliament* (London, 1656), especially p. 24; *God's work in founding Zion, and his peoples duty thereupon. A sermon preached in the Abby Church at Westminster, at the opening of the Parliament Septemb. 17th 1656* (London, 1656); *An humble testimony unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations, or, The only way to deliver a sinful nation from utter ruine by impendent judgments, in a discourse on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Luk. 13, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5* (London, 1681).



Owen lived more consistently with his theological convictions regarding the Mosaic covenant, he would have gone at least less noticed by Richard Baxter.

## Chapter Four

John Bunyan, the fifteen-year husband of Elizabeth Bunyan, was having an adulterous relationship with the twenty-two year old Agnes Beaumont—or at least that is what Anthony Lane, local Bedfordshire Anglican curate, told others on a Friday in February of 1674. Lane had stared “as if he would have stared his eyes out” as Bunyan took Agnes for a ride on his horse.<sup>346</sup> Agnes was a devout puritan who wanted to partake of the Lord’s Supper, which would be administered that Friday at a service led by Bunyan in Gamlingay. However, she lived seven miles south in Edworth. As she was wondering if there were any possible way to get there, Bunyan happened to arrive at her father’s farm on horseback. She was too embarrassed to ask Bunyan herself for transportation, so she convinced her brother John to ask on her behalf. Bunyan declined, but Agnes and her brother John implored him repeatedly and eventually he gave in.

The incident gave Bunyan’s enemies an effective story to compliment the rumors that were circulating about him. Richard Greaves claims that accusations of Bunyan’s participation in sexual scandals had been in existence long before the Agnes Beaumont episode in 1674.<sup>347</sup> He cites *Grace Abounding* as one piece of evidence, yet it is not in the first edition in 1666, but in the fifth edition in 1680 that Bunyan acknowledged false reports “that I had my *Misses*, my *Whores*, my *Bastards*, yea *two wives at once*, and the like.”<sup>348</sup> Apart from citing a secondary source about Agnes’ father and his disdain for Bunyan’s reputation for “scurrilous conduct,”

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<sup>346</sup> Agnes Beaumont, *The Narratives of the Persecutions of Agnes Beaumont*, ed. Vera J. Camden (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>347</sup> Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 309.

<sup>348</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace abounding. To the chief of sinners* (London, 1680), p. 124, § 310.

Greaves provides no evidence that Bunyan was considered an ethical antinomian before the 1670s.

Instead, Bunyan's reputation as an ethical and theological antinomian was engineered at the end of his preaching career. Richard Baxter waited until 1690 to accuse him of theological antinomianism. Baxter, only too concerned about the licentiousness of antinomians and always on the lookout for them, put Bunyan in the company of a well-known antinomian, John Saltmarsh, in his book *The Scripture Gospel defended, and Christ, grace, and free justification vindicated against the libertines* (1690). Baxter listed among the antinomian apologists,

such men as prefaced the Book called *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which on pretence of *Moderation* is Antinomian or Libertine, and very injudicious and unsound: And others Books (such as *Paul Hobsons*, Mr. *Saltmarshes*, *Bunyan on the Covenants*, &c.) which ignorantly subverted the Gospel of Christ, came out on the same business, and revealed mens mistakes on pretence of revealing the Mystery of *Free Grace*.<sup>349</sup>

In spite of Greaves' claim that Bunyan was considered an ethical antinomian during the 1670s, it is possible that Bunyan only felt the need to defend himself in his later years because that reputation only developed toward the end of his life.

Greaves has also implicated Bunyan in theological antinomianism. Greaves traces this theological antinomianism back to the covenant theology which Bunyan imbibed and taught. Greaves suggests that Calvin's idea of a unilateral, promissory covenant of grace was developed by men like John Robinson, William Perkins, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Samuel Petto, John Tombes and Archbishop James

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<sup>349</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Scripture Gospel defended, and Christ, grace, and free justification vindicated against the libertines* (London, 1690), sig. A2, preface.

Ussher, and that the “extreme” outgrowth of that tradition was exemplified by Saltmarsh, Crisp and Bunyan.<sup>350</sup>

Some Presbyterians developed the habit of identifying all Baptists as antinomians. Thomas Edwards did so in his book *Gangraena* (1646), and Robert Baillie would follow suit in *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisome, and the most of the other errours, which for the time due trouble the Church of England* (1647).<sup>351</sup> Thus by the time of the interregnum, many Presbyterians would have regarded Bunyan, who was then beginning his preaching and publishing careers, as an antinomian – merely because of his position on baptism.

If the guilt of antinomianism could be imputed by association, then Bunyan could have been regarded as an antinomian because of his association with the Yelden, Bedfordshire rector, William Dell. Thomas Edwards had already pilloried Dell as an antinomian in *Gangraena* and Samuel Rutherford mounted his own attack in his book *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1648).<sup>352</sup> In 1659, Dell extended an invitation to Bunyan to preach the Christmas service to the Yelden congregation – an invitation which Bunyan accepted. When Bunyan accepted this invitation, he was

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<sup>350</sup> John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace unfolded and I will pray with the Spirit*, Richard L. Greaves, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. xxiv-xxv. Greaves also lists Vavasor Powell and Walter Cradock as antinomians, but he may be relying on Baxter’s opinion, for their names do not appear in common, contemporary lists of antinomians. Almost nothing has been written about post-civil war antinomianism. Thus, Greaves would be breaking new ground by making this claim on his own.

<sup>351</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* (London, 1646); Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisome, and the most of the other errours, which for the time due trouble the Church of England* (London, 1647).

<sup>352</sup> Thomas Edwards, *The third part of Gangraena*. (London, 1646), pp. 213, 242, 262, 266; Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall antichrist* (London, 1648), pp. 191, 214, 230, part II pp. 162, 181, 187, 193; Rutherford also mentions Dell in four of his other books.

deciding to identify himself with a minister who had been identified as an antinomian for over a decade. We do not know why Bunyan went north to Yelden that Christmas, instead of remaining in Bedford. Perhaps Dell had been wrongly accused of antinomianism. Perhaps Dell was only considered an antinomian within certain puritan circles, and Bunyan's fellow Bedfordshire believers were not within those circles. Whatever the reason, even though the subject of Bunyan's sermon on that occasion is lost to us, the members of Dell's church were incited to complain to the House of Lords – though part of their complaint was that communion was not celebrated in the service, the fault may not have been entirely Bunyan's.<sup>353</sup>

Quite apart from any malicious and scandalous rumors about Bunyan's personal conduct or associations, he had made some comments in *The Doctrine of Law and Grace unfolded* (1659) which sounded close to some antinomian ideas. When answering a hypothetical interlocutor, he advised coming to Christ, “with all thy sins upon thee, even as filthy as ever thou canst.”<sup>354</sup> He also counseled his readers against doing *anything* in a “Legal or old-Covenant Spirit” which he found exemplified in Romans 4:4: “To him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” So as Bunyan saw it, the motivation for a particular action could be, in some ways, more significant than the action itself: obedience for obedience's sake was not a godly practice. Even uniquely Christian ordinances should not be engaged in, if they were being pursued for fear of punishment or hope of reward. He said, “though they be in themselves Gospel ordinances, as baptisme [sic], breaking of bread, hearing, praying, meditating, or the like: yet I say if they be not done in a right

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<sup>353</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, pp. 96, 124; see also Roger Pooley, “Dell, William (d. 1669),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7461> (accessed February 4, 2012).

<sup>354</sup> John Bunyan, *The doctrine of the law and grace unfolded* (London, 1659), p. 297.

spirit, they are thereby used as a hand by the devil, to pull thee under the Covenant of Works.”<sup>355</sup> Bunyan went on to give four reasons why this was so. First, the “legal spirit” causes people to be unable to be persuaded that God will have mercy on them unless they obey God’s word. Bunyan insisted that bare faith in Christ and what he has done is what secures the mercy of God, not what any other person does.<sup>356</sup> Second, he continued, when a person is content with the quality of his or her participation in Christian duties—for example, prayer, baptism, communion, reading and hearing the Bible—that person is hoping to receive the reward of heaven from God. But this only turns people into Pharisees who are only too relieved that they are better than others around them.<sup>357</sup> Third, if people find their assurance of eternal life in the precision with which they live the Christian life, they are acting out of a “legal spirit.” Abstaining from wickedness and being strict in Christian practice does not meet the bar of the justice of God and therefore cannot provide assurance of salvation.<sup>358</sup> Finally, Bunyan concluded, the legal spirit induces people to think that they must somehow make themselves acceptable to Christ if he will save them. But if people can render themselves acceptable, then why would they need Christ? They can already do for themselves what he claims to have done for them.<sup>359</sup>

For these ideas in particular, and Bunyan’s description of the law more generally, he owed a debt to Martin Luther. In *Grace abounding to the chief of Sinners* (1680), Bunyan acknowledged that debt and specified that Luther had showed him “that the Law of *Moses*, as well as the Devil, Death and Hell, hath a

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 309-310.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 310-311.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 311-313.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 313-315.

very great hand” in the rise of temptations.<sup>360</sup> This was not the way puritans usually spoke about the law. Disparaging the law was likely to earn a person a reputation as an antinomian. In fact, Samuel Rutherford was so exercised over what he perceived to be contemporary antinomian reliance upon Luther, that he devoted much of his book, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (1647), to vindicating Luther on the topic of the law.<sup>361</sup> Rutherford’s publishing career was over before Bunyan’s conversion, so we will never know whether Rutherford would have attacked Bunyan. But Bunyan mentions Luther in five different books and may have had Luther’s commentary on Galatians with him while he was in prison.<sup>362</sup> This gave Luther’s sharp contrast between law and gospel time to saturate Bunyan’s thinking about the law as it would come to expression in Bunyan’s covenant theology.

It is curious that it was only Bunyan’s work on the covenants that aroused Baxter’s ire, since, toward the end of his life, Bunyan actually did end up affirming a doctrine which Baxter identified with antinomianism—justification from eternity.<sup>363</sup> In *A discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publicane* (1685), Bunyan was defending

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<sup>360</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace abounding. To the chief of sinners* (London, 1680), pp. 50-51, §131.

<sup>361</sup> Notice the prominent role Luther plays in the title: *A survey of the spirituall antichrist. Opening the secrets of Familisme and Antinomianisme in the antichristian doctrine of John Saltmarsh, and Will. Del, the present preachers of the army now in England, and of Robert Town, Tob. Crisp, H. Denne, Eaton, and others. In which is revealed the rise and spring of Antinomians, Familists, Libertines, Swenck-feldians, Enthysiasts, &c. The minde of Luther, a most professed opposer of Antinomians, is cleared, and diverse considerable points of the law and the Gospel, of the spirit and letter, of the two covenants, of the nature of free grace, exercise under temptations, mortification, justification, sanctification, are discovered. In two parts* (London, 1647).

<sup>362</sup> John Bunyan, *The holy citie*, (London, 1669), p. 146; *Come & welcome to Jesus Christ*, (London, 1678), p. 111; *The life and death of Mr. Badman* (London, 1680), p. 203; *Questions about the nature and perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath and proof that the first day of the week is the true Christian-sabbath* (London, 1685), p. 118.

<sup>363</sup> Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification* (Hague, 1655), pp. 112, 117, 123, 318-319; Baxter, *The life of faith in three parts* (London, 1670), p. 321-326; Baxter, *The Scripture Gospel defended* (London, 1690), p. 20.

the Protestant doctrine of justification against pharisaical legalism. However, he was so jealous to guard the gracious principle of Romans 4:5—that God “justifieth the ungodly”—that he transgressed the seventeenth century confessional boundaries.<sup>364</sup> He gave three reasons to ensure that Christ’s righteousness was imputed for justification prior to sanctification, prior to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and prior to the gift of faith or any other grace. First, he wanted to make a distinction in perspective. From God’s perspective, a believer may be justified “even then when himself knoweth nothing thereof, *Isai.* 40. 2. *Matth.* 9. 2, and so when, and while he hath not Faith about it, but is ungodly.”<sup>365</sup> But he also wanted to consider justification from the believer’s perspective. Since God had already imputed Christ’s righteousness to the believer from eternity, faith was simply the application of that act to the believer’s conscience and consciousness for the assurance of having peace with God.<sup>366</sup> Finally, people “gather” their justification not simply from God’s single act of imputation, but from “the world, the which they neither see nor understand, till it is brought to their understanding by the light and glory of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>367</sup> Perhaps concerned that he might be misunderstood as having downplayed faith, Bunyan added that “He then that is justified by Gods Imputation, shall believe by the power of the Holy Ghost; for that *MUST* come, and work Faith, and

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<sup>364</sup> Anon, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a confession of faith* (London, 1647), p. 23, 11:4; Anon, *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, October 12. 1658* (London, 1658), p. 21, 11:4; Anon, *A Confession of faith put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians, (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the country : with an appendix concerning Baptism* (London, 1688), p. 42, 11:4.

<sup>365</sup> John Bunyan, *A discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publicane* (London, 1685), p. 135.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136. By the term “world,” Bunyan presumably means salvation, eternal life and spiritual matters.



strengthen the Soul to act it, because imputed righteousness has gone before.”<sup>368</sup> By 1685, Bunyan’s mind appears to have changed, because his promotion of justification from eternity in *The Pharisee and the Publicane* is deliberate.

Bunyan is a prime example, in one person, of some of the variety of ways in which one could be an antinomian in the seventeenth century. This does not mean that he fits the classic, sixteenth-century Protestant definition of an antinomian as one who rejects the normative role of the law in the Christian life.<sup>369</sup> But that will be demonstrated below in the discussion of Bunyan’s theology of the law.

## I. Contemporary Bunyan Scholarship

Most Bunyan scholarship is carried out from the perspective of literary analysis. The irony, noted by Roger Pooley, is great: even though Bunyan disparaged university education in light of his disagreement with the Oxford professor Thomas Smith, his allegories are now standard fare in university humanities courses.<sup>370</sup> By contrast, relatively little attention has been focused on the theological content of Bunyan’s voluminous literary output; even less on the role of the divine covenants and the law. Even the *Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* (2010), while offering literary, psychoanalytic, political and historical analyses, pays very little attention to theology. There is a minimal amount of theology discussed in W. R. Owens’ chapter “John Bunyan and the Bible,” but only because it serves the

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>369</sup> See note 119 below and “The Solid Declaration” of the “Formula of Concord” V:15, 17 in *Triglot Concordia: The symbolic books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

<sup>370</sup> Roger Pooley, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the line of allegory,” in Anne Dunan-Page, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 92.

larger purposes of the bibliography of the Bible in the seventeenth century and the literary analysis of Bunyan's allegories.

The interdisciplinary study of literature and theology is a prominent contemporary approach in Bunyan studies. Thomas Hyatt Luxon exemplifies this approach in his essay "The Pilgrim's Passive Progress" (1986). In that essay, Luxon sees more of Luther's influence in *The Pilgrim's Progress* than perhaps anyone else to date. He recognizes the significance of the imputed righteousness of Christ in the Protestant doctrine of justification—what he cites Luther as calling "passive righteousness" on hundreds of pages of his Galatians commentary—as undergirding the plot of *Pilgrim's Progress*. He observes that "Bunyan's Christian always gets himself into trouble by trying to *do* something," and his salvation comes by "the power of the Word [which] works in the conjunction of scripture, preaching and faithful hearing."<sup>371</sup> However, Luxon goes too far in calling Bunyan a Lutheran, as that tradition has not countenanced Bunyan's doctrines of covenant theology and the Lord's Supper. Rebecca S. Beal also engages in this interdisciplinary study of Bunyan. In her analysis of his spiritual autobiography, Beal broaches the subject of covenant theology, but does not significantly engage it.<sup>372</sup>

Some essays in the *Bunyan Studies* journal have taken account of Bunyan's theology, though still from within the discipline of English literature. Mary Ann Lund examines the function of puritan writings as pastoral care and counsel for an audience wider than the local congregation. She places Bunyan within the tradition of early modern pastoral writing, noting especially Bunyan's desire to help English

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<sup>371</sup> Thomas Hyatt Luxon, "The Pilgrim's Passive Progress: Luther and Bunyan on Talking and Doing, Word and Way," *ELH* 53:1 (1986), 79, 81.

<sup>372</sup> Rebecca S. Beal, "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners: John Bunyan's Pauline Epistle," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 21:1 (1981): 147-160.

Protestants apply Luther's distinction between law and gospel to faith and life.<sup>373</sup> Maxine Hancock discusses the literary strategies and narrative structures Bunyan used in *The Pilgrim's Progress* to convey his theological points.<sup>374</sup> P. J. H. Titlestad discusses Bunyan's "Mapp Showing the Orders and Causes of Salvation and Damnation," comparing it to William Perkins' "Golden Chaine" diagram decades before. The contrast between law and gospel is critically assessed in light of the distinction in Reformed theology between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. However, his commitment to R. T. Kendall's thesis in *Calvin and English Calvinism* (1979) prohibits a judicious treatment because of the assumption of substantial discontinuity between the Reformer and his English heirs.<sup>375</sup> Richard A. Muller has answered Kendall's thesis in *Christ and the Decree* (1986) and his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (1987), demonstrating essential continuity between the Reformer and his English heirs. He has also classified Bunyan's covenant theology as "a reaction against a legalistic covenant theology: it is, in other words, a movement away from the center toward the antinomian side of the spectrum, which nevertheless avoids the pitfalls of true antinomianism as described by [Edward] Fisher."<sup>376</sup>

Literary scholar Michael Davies demonstrates his interest in Bunyan's understanding of divine law and covenants in his responsible treatment of Bunyan's theology. He recognizes that for Bunyan, "The covenant of works is, quite simply,

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<sup>373</sup> Mary Ann Lund, "Bunyan and the Tradition of 'Pastoral' Writing in Early Modern England," *Bunyan Studies* 12 (2006/2007), pp. 6-21.

<sup>374</sup> Maxine Hancock, "Folklore and Theology in the Structure and Narrative Strategies of the Pilgrim's Progress," *Bunyan Studies* 9 (1999/2000), pp. 7-24.

<sup>375</sup> P. J. H. Titlestad, "From Beza to Bunyan: The Pilgrim Road Mapped?" *Bunyan Studies* 13 (2008/2009), pp. 64-81.

<sup>376</sup> Richard Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42:2 (Spring 1980), pp. 320-321.

the moral law every individual is naturally placed under and which has been revealed most significantly in the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai.”<sup>377</sup> Davies also brings Bunyan’s covenant theology to bear on the issue of antinomianism, and, more helpfully than most Bunyan scholars, even questions the helpfulness or utility of the term “antinomian.”<sup>378</sup> However, when answering the question of whether Bunyan was an antinomian, he uses only the notion of the rejection of the moral law in the Christian life and does not account for the semantic range of the term in seventeenth-century theological literature. But the rejection of the moral law could take two different forms. It could refer to the immoral behavior of people who claimed to be Christians but who were also reputed to intentionally violate the Ten Commandments. Or it could refer to a theological commitment against the binding nature of the Ten Commandments, even if the behavior of the people who held that commitment generally conformed to the Decalogue anyway. Sometimes—as in Bunyan’s case—it referred to someone who believed in justification from eternity. Other times, it could be used to politically marginalize anyone who was perceived as a threat to the stability of society. If he is aware of these distinctions, Davies appears to overlook the three pages Bunyan spent defending justification from eternity in *The Pharisee and the Publicane* (1685) when he turns to discuss the role of faith in Bunyan’s soteriology.<sup>379</sup> Thus, Davies incorrectly concludes that Bunyan was an antinomian due to his “emphasis upon the inadequacy of all human efforts to achieve righteousness through works” because

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<sup>377</sup> Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 23.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30.

that results in “a rejection of the law as a means to salvation...in absolute terms.”<sup>380</sup> Such a definition renders every Protestant confession an antinomian document.

Christopher Hill is one scholar who gives some sustained attention to Bunyan’s theology in the context of his Marxist historiography. Yet Hill mistakenly takes Perkins’ axiom—that God “accepts the will for the deed”—as a hallmark not only of Reformed covenant theology in general, but Bunyan’s in particular. Hill was much closer to the mark when he recognized that the “origins of the covenant theology are to be found in Luther,” specifically, Luther’s razor-sharp distinction between the law and the gospel.<sup>381</sup> Bunyan was acutely aware that the bar of God’s justice was set so high, only the obedience of Christ—true God and true man—could meet it; a fact also recognized by Hill.<sup>382</sup> Like the Reformed mainstream, Bunyan transposed the Lutheran distinction between the law and the gospel into the covenantal contrast between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. In the Reformed two-covenant schema, the covenant of works required perfect, personal obedience to the entire law of God in exhaustive detail; the covenant of grace required Jesus Christ to perform that perfect, personal obedience to the entire law of God in exhaustive detail *on behalf of believers* because it was taken for granted that sinners were completely incapable of meeting the demands of the covenant of works. Thus, in Bunyan’s own words, which Hill cites to substantiate his claim that covenant theology requires the idea that God accepts the will instead of the deed, Bunyan actually says that either Christ does everything for us, or he is no savior at all.

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>381</sup> Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church 1628-1688* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 170.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 176.

Richard L. Greaves, author of *Glimpses of Glory* (2002), the definitive Bunyan biography, is first among Bunyan scholars in the disciplines of church history and historical theology. Nevertheless, Greaves demonstrates some novel ideas about what constitutes “strict Calvinism” and “moderate Calvinism” when he classifies various seventeenth-century theologians. He also uncritically adopts Richard Baxter’s use of the term “antinomian” when he evaluates the orthodoxy of certain early modern figures. Nevertheless, Greaves helpfully summarizes Bunyan’s covenant theology. Bunyan fitted comfortably into the Reformed, two-covenant schema, even if he took the unusual position that the covenant of grace preceded the covenant of works.<sup>383</sup> This was due to the development of covenant theology across the seventeenth century, a development which recognized an eternal, intratrinitarian covenant, but often confused or conflated that covenant with the temporal covenant of grace.<sup>384</sup> Greaves sees allusions to seventeenth-century English politics in many of Bunyan’s writings, especially his allegories.<sup>385</sup> David Walker joins Greaves in this observation, but seems to be the only one to identify this feature in Bunyan’s

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<sup>383</sup> Richard L. Greaves, “John Bunyan and Covenant Thought in the Seventeenth Century,” *Church History* 36:2 (1967): 151-169.

<sup>384</sup> See, for example, question and answer 31 of the Westminster Larger Catechism in *The humble advice of the assembly of divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a larger catechisme* (London: 1647), p. 7, which reads, “Q. *With whom was the Covenant of Grace made?* A. The Covenant of Grace was made with Christ, as the second Adam, and, in him, with all the elect, as his seed.” Compare this with 7:3, “Of Gods [sic] Covenant with Man” in *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a confession of faith* (London, 1647), pp. 15-16, which says that Christ made the Covenant of Grace with believers – and 25:2, “Of the Church” (pp. 44-45), which says that the visible church is made up of professing believers and their children. Interestingly, in 1689, the year after Bunyan’s death, the Particular Baptists would adopt their own confession of faith – a reworking of the Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration – which distinguished between the eternal, intratrinitarian covenant of redemption and the temporal covenant of grace.

<sup>385</sup> Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 249-252, 436-438, 511-512, 608.

work on covenant theology, *The Doctrine of Law and Grace* (1659).<sup>386</sup> Thus Walker's interest is more in how Bunyan understood the relationship between civil law—not divine law—and covenant theology.

Historical theologian Pieter de Vries devotes the bulk of his book on Bunyan to Bunyan's soteriology. Specifically, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation* (1994) is about the subject matter of Romans 8:29-30 and the individual, chronological experience of all the benefits of Christ. De Vries helpfully captures Bunyan's desire to preach both law and gospel: "What he wanted was law and Gospel to be properly kept distinct."<sup>387</sup> Yet he seems to think "that [Bunyan] understands the Gospel as proceeding from the law, rather than the other way around," even though Bunyan appears to affirm both.<sup>388</sup> De Vries also has a generally helpful section on seventeenth-century covenant theology, and Bunyan's place in it. However, his treatment of antinomianism is an excursus and he comes closest to connecting antinomianism to covenant theology when he asserts, "those who had Antinomian leanings were in favour of the two covenant teaching."<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, he does not take sufficient account of the variety of ways in which it was possible to be an antinomian in the seventeenth century.

Critic Gordon Campbell has observed that the focus of Bunyan's theology was on soteriology.<sup>390</sup> Given Bunyan's ecclesiastical context in history, this is not

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<sup>386</sup> David Walker, "'Heaven is prepared for whosoever will accept of it': politics of the will in Bunyan's *Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659)," *Prose Studies* 21:3 (1998), 19-31.

<sup>387</sup> Pieter de Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 74. For a more nuanced treatment of which covenant Bunyan sees as having chronological priority, see below.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>390</sup> Gordon Campbell, "Fishing in Other Men's Waters: Bunyan and the Theologians," in N. H. Keeble, ed., *John Bunyan Conventicle and Parnassus: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 146.

surprising; and yet, it should be observed that he did write entire books on the trinity, baptism and apologetics (against Quakers and Ranters) as well as a confession of faith and a book on the nature of the Christian Sabbath.<sup>391</sup> Daniel V. Runyon deduces that in Bunyan's *Holy War* (1682), the new covenant is the necessary result of the defective old covenant, but he wrongly locates "the root of Bunyan's covenant theology" in the lines "Thy Law is within my heart. I delight to do thy will."<sup>392</sup> For Bunyan, the emphasis is placed on the covenant of grace because the law covenant only serves to condemn sinners. T. L. Underwood briefly mentions covenants in Bunyan's thought, and the fact that Bunyan was accused of being a "Ranting Antinomian," but does not connect these two ideas.<sup>393</sup> Anjov Ahenakaa has dealt with the seventeenth-century charges of antinomianism against Bunyan, attempting to vindicate him. However, like Davies, Ahenakaa fails to account for Bunyan's later departure from Reformation orthodoxy on the issue of the role of faith in justification.<sup>394</sup>

Seventeenth-century responses to Bunyan were almost exclusively theological, yet modern responses to him are almost exclusively non-theological. This suggests that Bunyan the dangerous theologian of the seventeenth century has become Bunyan the inventor of the novel as our mode of response has changed

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<sup>391</sup> John Bunyan, "Of the Trinity" in Charles Doe, ed., *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan* (London, 1692); *Differences in judgment about water-baptism, no bar to communion* (London, 1673); *Some gospel-truths opened according to the Scriptures* (London, 1656); *A confession of my faith and a reason of my practice* (London, 1672); *Questions about the nature and perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath and proof that the first day of the week is the true Christian-sabbath* (London, 1685).

<sup>392</sup> Daniel Virgil Runyon, *John Bunyan's Master Story: The Holy War as Battle Allegory and Biblical Context* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p. 139.

<sup>393</sup> T. L. Underwood, "It pleased me much to contend: John Bunyan as Controversialist," *Church History* 57:4 (1988): 456-469.

<sup>394</sup> Anjov Ahenakaa, "Justification and the Christian Life: A Vindication of Bunyan from the Charge of Antinomianism" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), pp. 20, 116-120, 134.



radically over the centuries. In almost three centuries of ongoing Bunyan studies, this shift is relatively recent. Yet it not only takes its place among the relatively few theological analyses, but it is unique in its simultaneous consideration of both Bunyan's theology of divine law and covenants, and the myriad ways one could be an antinomian in the seventeenth century. Though this will only complement—and not threaten—Bunyan's place in literary studies, it may have interesting effects upon his place in studies of historical theology.

## II. Bunyan's Theological Background

Though Bunyan is arguably best known for his allegories, the bulk of his literary output consisted of straightforward theological prose. Bunyan's work in which he explains his view of the function and significance of divine law is *The Doctrine of Law and Grace unfolded* (1659). It reflects Bunyan's appreciation for Martin Luther's commentary on the epistle to the Galatians.<sup>395</sup> Especially from the epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans, Luther learned that the law and the gospel were diametrically opposed as principles of inheriting heaven. Based on these and others of Paul's letters, Luther believed that the law's purpose was to crush human pride and kill any hope of right standing before God based on mere human obedience.<sup>396</sup> In contrast, Luther understood the gospel to be the free offer of God's complete forgiveness, acceptance and declaration of right standing based solely upon Jesus' life, death and resurrection—received by sinners by faith alone.

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<sup>395</sup> Martin Luther, *A commentarie of Master Doctor Martin Luther upon the epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians [sic]* (London, 1644), Fol. 132-134, 139, 149. Fol. 123-136, 138, 149-156.

<sup>396</sup> Martin Luther, *A methodicall preface prefixed before the epistle to the Romanes* (London, 1632), A6-8.

In the first edition of his spiritual autobiography, *Grace abounding to the chief of sinners* (1666), Bunyan had said nothing explicit about the influence Luther had exercised on his thinking. But in a later edition, toward the end of his life, Bunyan takes the better part of two pages to extol the senior Reformer. He says that during his spiritually darkest hour, God “cast into [his] hand” Luther’s commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. The old, tattered book was almost talismanic—a venerated relic to Bunyan—for, he said, “I found my condition in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his Book had been written out of my heart; this made me marvel.”<sup>397</sup> On other occasions, Bunyan would claim that he only used his Bible and a concordance to write his books, but here he plainly endorsed this work of Luther: “I must let fall before all men, I do prefer this Book of Mr. *Luther* upon the *Galatians*, (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the Books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”<sup>398</sup> Bunyan was critical of most of his contemporaries for not producing something of equal profundity for struggling Christians. But when Bunyan himself would write to crush the pride of the “Pharisees” of his day and encourage the “publicans” among his readers, he would take his cues from Luther.

Bunyan at least parallels certain seventeenth-century Lutheran and Reformed theologians in his understanding of God’s purpose and goal for Adam in his state of creation before the Fall. In his commentary on Genesis, Bunyan says, “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, was a Type of the Law, or Covenant of Works, as the sequel of the story clearly manifesteth; for had not Adam eaten thereof, he had

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<sup>397</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace abounding*, pp. 50-51, § 130.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, § 131.

enjoyed forever his first Blessedness.”<sup>399</sup> Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), a Lutheran professor at Jena, Germany said that Adam and Eve had lost the “good gifts” which had been “like a deposit, to be faithfully guarded for themselves and their posterity.”<sup>400</sup> Likewise, Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688), a Lutheran theologian at Wittenberg, Germany said that eating from the Tree of Life would have enabled Adam and Eve to “perpetuate life.”<sup>401</sup> Luther held that Adam’s goal before the fall had been heaven.<sup>402</sup> However, it is highly unlikely that Bunyan read either Gerhard or Quenstedt. Not only does Bunyan’s autobiographical information indicate that the only Lutheran he read was Luther himself on Galatians, but the evidence available to us indicates that he could only read English, while these two Lutheran theologians wrote in Latin. But the more likely explanation is that Bunyan was simply reflecting Aquinas’ medieval distinction between humanity as it was created in its purely natural state (*ex puris naturalibus*) and humanity as it was subsequently either aided by divine grace, or entered into covenant with God (*donum superadditum*) in order to achieve the higher enjoyment (*fruitio*) of eternal life with

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<sup>399</sup> John Bunyan, *An exposition of the first ten chapters of Genesis, and part of the eleventh*, in *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan*, (London, 1692), pp. 11. Later, on the same page: “This *Tree of Knowledge*, as I said before, was a Type of the Covenant of Works, the which had not *Adam* touched, (for by touching it he broke that Covenant,) he then had lived ever, but touching it he dies.”

<sup>400</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Francofurtum, 1657), IV, 315. Yet Gerhard seemed to say that Adam’s goal had always been heaven in *Loci Theologici*, XI, §77 and XIII, §5.

<sup>401</sup> Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica* (Wittebergae, 1691), II, 8. Like Gerhard, Quenstedt also seemed to say that Adam’s goal before the fall had been heaven in *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, II, 52.

<sup>402</sup> Here, as in some other instances, Luther himself held a view closer to the Reformed tradition, even though he did not work it out in theological detail. In Martin Luther, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, and George Victor Schick, *Luther’s Works, Volume 1, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 56, Luther says, “Adam was not to live without food, drink, and procreation. But at a predetermined time, after the number of saints had become full, these physical activities would have come to an end; and Adam, together with his descendants, would have been translated to the eternal and spiritual life.”

God. It is not unreasonable to think that Bunyan could have simply inherited this from his English theological heritage. After all, not only had significant medieval English theologians like Robert Holcot and Thomas Bradwardine—and the Scottish theologian Duns Scotus—maintained this distinction, but it even made an impression on the covenant theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>403</sup> This distinction is reflected in chapter seven, section 1. There the Confession states that

The distance between God and the Creature is so great, that although reasonable Creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their Blessednesse and Reward, but by some voluntary condescension on Gods part, which he hath been pleased to expresse by way of Covenant.

As Karlberg observes, while the language of “reasonable Creatures owing obedience unto God as their Creator,” reflects a relationship of law, the term “fruition” is a remnant of medieval scholasticism which “introduces a speculative element within the confessional formulation.”<sup>404</sup> In contrast to this speculative distinction, the Reformed tradition tended to rely on the biblical distinction between creation and redemption. The Reformed tradition generally held that God had created Adam—and the rest of the universe—in the context of a juridical covenant such that, had Adam obeyed perfectly, he would have merited eternal life in heaven according to God’s covenant stipulations.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> See Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), pp. 95-100.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>405</sup> See Mark A. Herzer, “Adam’s Reward: Heaven or Earth?” in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 162-182. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.xv.8; Zacharias Ursinus, *The summe of Christian religion*:

Yet even though Bunyan maintained Luther's sharp contrast between law and gospel, he was not a Lutheran. He came to faith in the context of seventeenth-century, puritan religion. The circles within which he moved owed a debt to John Calvin and the Reformed branch of the Protestant Reformation. Therefore, his inclination was to transpose Luther's law-gospel antithesis into the Reformed language of covenant theology. For Bunyan, "the word [LAW] and the word [GRACE] in this sixth of the *Romans*, do hold forth the two Covenants, which all men are under."<sup>406</sup> So when Bunyan refers to "the Law"—specifically the Ten Commandments—he means "the Covenant of Works." Bunyan argues that "The word Law, in Scripture, may be taken more ways then one, as might be largely cleared. There is the Law of Faith, the Law of Sin, the Law of men, the Law of Works, otherwise called the Covenant of Works; or the first, or old Covenant, *Heb.* 8. 13."<sup>407</sup> Again he says, "The Covenant of Works, or the Law here spoken of, is the Law delivered on Mount *Sinai* to *Moses*, in two Tables of stone, in ten particular

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*deliuered by Zacharias Vrsinus in his lectures vpon the Catechism autorised by the noble Prince Frederick, throughout his dominions: wherein are debated and resolved the questions of whatsoever points of moment, which haue beene or are controuersed in diuinitie*, translated by Henrie Parrie, (Oxford, 1587), pp. 126-127, 130, 134, 136-137; Amandus Polanus a Polansdorf, *Syntagma Theologiae christianae ab Amando Polano Juxta leges ordinis Methodici conformatum, atque In libros decem digestum, jamque demum in unum volumen compactum ... novissime emendatum atque ... auctum* (Hanoviae, 1625), VI, 50; Johannes Wollebius, *Christianae theologiae compendium, accurata methodo sic adornatum, ut ad SS. Scripturas legendas, ad locos communes dirigendos, ad controversias intelligendas, sit manuductio* (Amstelodami, 1633), I.viii; Samuel Maresius, *Collegivm theologicvm, sive Systema breve vniversae theologiae; comprehensium octodecim dispytationibus, collegialiter olim habitis in Academia provinciali ... ordinum Groninae & Omlandiae ... Editio sexta ivxta exemplar qvartae & quintae ab avthore ultimo recognitae, excusa* (Genevae, 1662), VIII, 23ff.; Johannes Coccejus, *Doctrina de foedere et Testamento Dei* (Genevae, 1665), II, § 32, 38, 39; see also Coccejus' *Summa theologiae ex scripturis repetita* (Genevae, 1665), XXIII, 13-14; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), VIII.i.5-6; Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei Cum Hominibus Lib: Editio Secunda* (Leovardie, 1685) I.IV.1-X and I.VII.

<sup>406</sup> Bunyan, *Law and Grace*, p. 4.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

branches, or heads.”<sup>408</sup> Similarly, he continued, “Tis true, there was a glory in the Covenant of Works, and a very great excellency did appear in it; namely, in that given in the stones on Sinai.”<sup>409</sup> In Bunyan’s covenant scheme, the Mosaic covenant was the “first Covenant,” while the New Covenant which was made between Christ and believers is the “second Covenant.”<sup>410</sup> Later, in the 1670s, Bunyan’s debt to Luther in regards to the relationship between works and grace would come out in his book *Saved By Grace* (1677/1678).<sup>411</sup> In that book, he said that the covenant of grace is “set in opposition to the Covenant of Works, and because it is established to us in the doings of Christ, founded in his Blood, stablished on the best Promises made to him, and to us by him.”<sup>412</sup> Here, Bunyan was simply establishing that the principles of justice and grace were opposed to each other in the history of redemption. By restricting that opposition of principle to the realm of history, he was carefully avoiding contradicting many of his peers who wanted to maintain that in the individual experience of salvation, law and gospel were complementary.

Interestingly, Bunyan also refers to the primal covenant made with Adam and Eve as the “first Covenant.” He reasons that just as “the first covenant [was] made with the first *Adam*, so was the second Covenant made with the second.”<sup>413</sup> This primal covenant was also a covenant of works, but he does not spend much time developing the concept.<sup>414</sup> Yet Bunyan sees a direct correspondence between the covenant with Adam and the covenant with Moses in the principle of justice. He argues that “the conditions of that on Sinai, and of that in the Garden are all one, the

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<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 19; 8.

<sup>411</sup> For the dating of this work, see Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, p. 359.

<sup>412</sup> John Bunyan, “*Saved By Grace*,” in *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan*, Charles Doe, ed., (London, 1692), p. 565.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-142.

one saying, *Do this and live*, the other saying the same. Also, judgement denounced against men in both kinds alike; therefore this law, it appeareth to be the very same, that was given on Mount Sinai.”<sup>415</sup> Like many other puritans, Bunyan sees an identity between the content of the law given to Adam at creation and the Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai, but the decisive factor for him is the principle of justice which conditions both covenants.<sup>416</sup> In answering a possible objection to the identification of the Adamic and Mosaic covenants, Bunyan said, “That which was given to *Adam* in Paradise, you will grant was the Covenant of Works; for it runs thus. *Do this and live*; do it not, and die; nay *thou shalt surely die*. Now there is but one Covenant of Works: If therefore I prove, that that which was delivered on Mount Sinai, is the Covenant of Works, then all will be put out of doubt.”<sup>417</sup>

That juridical principle is of the essence of a covenant of works, according to Bunyan. In fact, the person bound by the covenant of works is “*bound upon pain of eternal damnation, to fulfill, and that compleatly, and continually, every particular point of the Ten Commandments, by doing them; do this, and then thou shalt live: otherwise, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all* (in every particular thing) (or) *things that are written in the book of the Law to do them*, Gal. 3. 10.”<sup>418</sup> In other words, under a covenant of works, the blessing of life is given as a reward for obedience to the law, while the curse of eternal damnation is given as a punishment for disobedience to the law.

Since Bunyan saw the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, based upon the same principle of justice, he wrote about it in much the same way that Luther

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 19.

wrote about the Law. Perhaps Bunyan believed that the primary purpose of the Mosaic covenant was to kill sinners. Bunyan said that before God saves people, “he doth first kill them with the Covenant of *Works*, which is the Morall Law, or Ten Commandments.”<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, he argued that the law kills in four respects. First, it kills the soul with respect to sin.<sup>420</sup> Second, the law kills the soul with respect to the law itself: “O saith the soul, the Law hath killed me to its self, *I through the Law am dead to the Law* (Gal. 2. 19.).”<sup>421</sup> Third, “The soul also now is *killed* to his own righteousness, and counts that but dung, but dross, not worth the dirt hanging on shoes.”<sup>422</sup> Finally, the soul is killed with respect to “*its own faith, its notion of the Gospel, its own hope, its own repentings, its own promises and resolutions to its own strength, its own virtue, or whatsoever it had before.*”<sup>423</sup> In this regard, Bunyan was engaging in the Reformed recasting of the Lutheran Law-Gospel antithesis with the covenant of works corresponding to the category of Law.

So for Bunyan, the Mosaic law has a primarily—though not exclusively—negative design and function. In addition to its killing role, the Mosaic covenant was also given to curse and condemn sinners, for “they are under that dispensation, or administration, whose proper work is to curse, and condemn, and nothing else.”<sup>424</sup> Citing Romans 5:20, Bunyan says the Mosaic law was not given to “to take away sin in any, but to discover the sin which is already begotten, or that may hereafter be begotten, by lust and Satan: I say, this is one proper work of the Law to make manifest sin; it is sent to finde fault with the sinner.”<sup>425</sup> Furthermore, the principle of

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 224-225.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 233-234.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 52.



justice embedded in the law is categorically opposed to mercy and forgiveness. In answering a hypothetical objection about whether he might be speaking too harshly about the Ten Commandments, Bunyan said:

The Law as it is a Covenant of works, doth not allow of any repentance unto life, to those that live and dye under it; for the law being once broken by thee never speaks good unto thee, neither doth God at all regard thee if thou be under that Covenant, notwithstanding all thy repentings, and also promises, to do so no more. No, saith the Law, thou hast sinned, therefore I must curse thee; for it is my nature to curse, even, and nothing else but curse every one that doth in any point transgress against me, *Gal. 3. 10. They brake my Covenant, and I regarded them not saith the Lord*, Heb. 8. Let them cry, I will not regard them; let them repent I will not regard them; they have broken my Covenant, and done that in which I delighted not; therefore by that covenant I do curse, and not bless; damn, and not save; frown, and not smile; reject, and not embrace; charge sin, and not forgive it. *They brake my Covenant, and I regarded them not*: So that I say if thou break the Law, the first Covenant; and thou being found there, God looking on thee thorow that, he hath no regard on thee, no pittie for thee, no delight in thee.<sup>426</sup>

This is not to say that Bunyan believed God had no place for mercy or forgiveness. But those characteristics belonged to the opposite category from justice—namely, grace (or, in Luther’s parlance, “gospel”)—and its covenantal corollary, the covenant of grace.

So severe was the verdict of the law toward sinners that Bunyan calculated eleven reasons why sinners under the law are in a “sad condition.” First, “they are

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

under that which is more ready (through our infirmity) to curse than to bless: they are under that called the ministration of condemnation.”<sup>427</sup> Second, Bunyan says that they are under a covenant that is simply waiting for an opportunity to condemn them.<sup>428</sup> Third, it is not only their disobedience with which the law finds fault, but their obedience as well.<sup>429</sup> Put differently, and fourthly, nothing they do will satisfy the law.<sup>430</sup> Fifth, hearkening back to Augustine’s debate with Pelagius, it is not even possible for them to do what the law commands.<sup>431</sup> Sixth, even obedience to the law will lead only to a cursed eternity in hell.<sup>432</sup> Bunyan says that, seventhly, they will never have any assurance of forgiveness or hope of eternal life, because they do not know what they are working for.<sup>433</sup> Eighth, “they are under that administration, upon whose souls God doth not smile (they dying there).”<sup>434</sup> Ninth, they are “out of the faith of Christ” because “that dispensation which they are under, is not the administration of faith, *The Law is not of faith*, saith the Apostle.”<sup>435</sup> Recalling Paul’s argument at the beginning of the third chapter of Galatians, tenthly, “they have not received the Spirit; for that is received *by the hearing of faith*, and not by the Law, nor the Works thereof.”<sup>436</sup> Finally, for those under the covenant of law, “Jesus Christ will neither pray for thee, neither let thee have one drop of his Blood to wash away thy sins; neither shalt thou be so much as one of the least in the Kingdome of Heaven; for all these priviledges come to souls under another

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 44. Here, Bunyan cites 2 Corinthians 3.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid. Cf. Romans 5:20 and Galatians 3:10.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 50. Here, Bunyan cites Galatians 3:12.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. Cf. Galatians 3:2.

Covenant.”<sup>437</sup> Clearly, the primary use of the law, for Bunyan, was condemning sin and crushing human pride.

Thus, for Bunyan, the law was necessary because it was the expression of the perfect will of God, but it was excruciatingly unrelenting in its condemnation of sinners. Citing the epistle to the Galatians a number of times in the quotations above, Bunyan’s primary use of the law seems most in line with what Paul says in Galatians 3:24—“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Like Martin Luther, Bunyan saw this theological use of the law as highlighting the terrible nature of the law’s message so that the message of the gospel would truly be good news.

### **III. Bunyan on the Role of the Law in the Life of the Believer**

We have already noticed that one of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation was the recognition of three distinct uses of the law in the Bible. Though Lutherans and Calvinists arranged the first two uses differently—one being the perfect standard of God’s holiness against which to measure and condemn human sin, the other being a rule by which to curb human sinfulness in the civil sphere—both traditions agreed that the third use of the law was a positive one, informing Christians of God’s will for them in their daily lives. With regard to the definition of antinomianism found in the Reformed confessions – a denial of the third use of the law – perhaps Bunyan’s most important distinction is between the Law as a guide or rule of the Christian life, and “the Law as it is a Covenant of Works.”<sup>438</sup> The former

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 50-52.

<sup>438</sup> For a survey of Reformed confessional statements about antinomianism, see pages 5-6 of the Introduction.

is essentially identical to the law of nature, while Bunyan identifies the latter most often with the law given to Moses on Sinai and calls it a covenant of works.

Bunyan began writing about the law shortly after his conversion, in *A vindication of the book called, Some Gospel-truths opened* (1657). It was a response to criticism of a book he had written the previous year. This work certainly reflected the Protestant consensus on the role of the law in the life of the Christian. In it, Bunyan assured believers that with regard to their right standing before God, their obedience to His law counted for nothing, “though that Law be a rule for every one that believeth to walke by, but not for justification.”<sup>439</sup> However, sanctification—that lifelong process of moral renovation that follows after justification—teaches “believers their dutie to their GOD, for his love in giving Christ.”<sup>440</sup> As will be seen below, these words reflected the Protestant faith as codified in the ideas of the Reformed confessions which had come to maturity in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and would later be reaffirmed in the Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Second London Baptist Confession (1677).

Obviously, Bunyan was consumed with the subject of the law in *The Doctrine of Law and Grace*, but that book was about the theological use of the law which shows people their sin. But fifteen years after his *Vindication of a book called Some Gospel-truths opened*, in *A confession of my faith and a reason of my practice* (1672), Bunyan returned to writing about the third use of the law. In the latter book, he makes a unique observation: there were two episodes involved in the giving of the Ten Commandments, and each episode corresponded to a different covenant. In other books, Bunyan associates the first episode of the giving of the law on Sinai

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<sup>439</sup> John Bunyan, *A vindication of the book called, Some Gospel-truths opened* (London, 1657), p. 15.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*

with the covenant of works because the tablets were broken in light of Israel's breaking the precepts which were written on them. But here he takes that first episode for granted: "The Law was given twice on *Sinai*; The last time it was given with a proclamation of grace and mercy of God, and of the pardon of sins going before. *Exo. 19. and chap. 34.1.10.*"<sup>441</sup> The "royal Law" or the "perfect Law" was "the moral precept Evangelized or delivered to us by the hand of Christ" according to James 2:8-9. This is what is signified by the second episode of the giving of the Law on Sinai, "for so it cometh after faith, which first receiveth the proclamation of forgiveness; hence we are said to do this righteousness in the joy and peace of the holy Ghost." In this way, Moses gave the Ten Commandments to Israel on Sinai to be a covenant of works for them, but in the context of the covenant of grace, Jesus gives the law to Christians on another mountain in his summary: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.*"<sup>442</sup>

Toward the end of his life, Bunyan returned to the third use of the law in *Questions about the nature and perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath and proof that the first day of the week is the true Christian-sabbath* (1685). In the course of answering those who argued for a Saturday Sabbath which should be observed as Israel would have observed it in the old covenant, Bunyan needed to make the case for why Christian practice is different. In 1659 he had already explained this in terms of different covenant administrations: Israel was under the covenant of works, while Christians were under the covenant of grace. But the seventh-day Sabbath position raised the question of the role of the Ten Commandments in the Christian

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<sup>441</sup> John Bunyan, *A confession of my faith and a reason of my practice* (London, 1672), p. 71 [typographical error which should be p. 81 in the sequence]. Cp. Bunyan, *A defence of the doctrine of justification, by faith in Jesus Christ* (London, 1673), p. 104; and Bunyan, *Law and Grace*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

life. Repeatedly in *The Doctrine of Law and Grace unfolded* Bunyan had identified the Ten Commandments with the covenant of works, but in *Questions about the nature and perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath* he is sensitive to the difference of historical situation. “[T]he *nature* of that Law is *moral*, but the ministration, and Circumstances thereunto belonging, are *shadowish* and *figurative*.”<sup>443</sup> The “ministration and Circumstances” meant the mode in which the Ten Commandments were given to people, and the “Place and time” of those people.<sup>444</sup> The “nature” of the law was its “matter,” which Bunyan summarized with a quotation from Mark 12:29-31: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thy self*.”<sup>445</sup> So the “matter” of the Ten Commandments was everlasting and rooted in nature: “for this Law commenced and took being and place that day in which man was created: Yea, it was concreate with him, and without it he cannot be a rational creature, as he was in the day in which God created him.”<sup>446</sup> Indeed, for Bunyan, it was impossible for the Ten Commandments as given to Moses on Sinai to be identical to the moral law which binds Christians, because the Ten Commandments came two thousand years after natural law, were not universal like natural law (e.g., the Sabbath was not binding on all human beings), and had a terminus unlike natural law (e.g., the seventh-day Sabbath and the specific geographical condition attached to the injunction to honor father and mother).<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> John Bunyan, *Questions about the nature and perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath and proof that the first day of the week is the true Christian-sabbath* (London, 1685), p. 33.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

Clearly, then, the law in its “ministration and Circumstances” as it was given to Moses was “a Law of Works.” But now it “is delivered into the hand of Christ, who imposes it now also; but not as a Law of Works, nor as that Ministration written and engraven in Stones, but as a Rule of life to those that have believed in him, 1 Cor. 9. 21.”<sup>448</sup> This is virtually identical to the Westminster Confession of Faith in the chapter “On the Law of God.” Chapter 19, section 6 says, “Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.”<sup>449</sup> The Savoy Declaration essentially reproduces this statement.<sup>450</sup> This was a topic on which the Independents were in substantial agreement with Parliament’s Assembly. The Particular Baptists were in full agreement, as this section of the Westminster Confession was repeated verbatim in their confession of 1689.<sup>451</sup>

Bunyan reiterated the same idea in *Of the Law and a Christian* (1692), which, though published posthumously, was written sometime in the 1680s.<sup>452</sup> Though his main point in the single-page work is that Christians are not bound to keep the law as a covenant of works, he does affirm that the law is “a rule, or directory to those who

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>449</sup> Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), pp. 33-34.

<sup>450</sup> Congregational Church in England and Wales, Savoy Meeting (1658), *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England; agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, Octob. 12. 1658* (London, 1659), p. 16.

<sup>451</sup> Anon., *A Confession of faith put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians, (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the country : with an appendix concerning Baptism* (London, 1688), p. 65.

<sup>452</sup> On the dating of the writings that appear in Charles Doe’s 1692 edited collection of Bunyan’s previously unpublished writings, see Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*.

already are found in the clift of the rock, Christ.”<sup>453</sup> Though the Christian is not under “the first or old Covenant, yet even he is not without Law to him as considered under grace, not without Law to God, but under the Law to Christ.”<sup>454</sup>

In the same collection of Bunyan’s posthumous writings was a book entitled *Israel’s Hope Encouraged* (1692). Written primarily about individual and national reform, this book also affirms the binding nature of the moral law on Christians. In a section on the individual reform of Christians, Bunyan stated that “The Knowledge & Faith of this Redemption prepareth Man to an holy life. By an holy life I mean, a life according to the moral Law, flowing from a Spirit of thankfulness to God, for giving his Son to be my Redeemer. This I call an holy life, because it is according to the rule of holiness, the law.”<sup>455</sup> This is perhaps Bunyan’s clearest statement on the matter, and while it does not differ substantively from what he wrote in *The Doctrine of Law and Grace unfolded*, here he is willing to speak of conformity to the moral law in a way that he studiously avoided in 1659. Stated differently, while Bunyan never denied the third use of the law, *Israel’s Hope Encouraged* marks clarity on and comfort with the issue in a manner previously unseen in his writings. This could represent development in his theological convictions. But if Bunyan had been reading contemporary puritan literature, it is at least possible that he had become aware of the notes of increasing alarm and concern being expressed about antinomianism. That theme in the literature might have motivated him to adjust his rhetoric in order to avoid identification with antinomianism. It is also worth observing that the 1644 Baptist confession of faith did not explicitly address the

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<sup>453</sup> John Bunyan, “Of the Law and a Christian,” in *Works*, p. 191.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> John Bunyan, “Israel’s Hope Encouraged” in *Works*, p. 223.



topic of the law of God.<sup>456</sup> Some Presbyterians argued that Baptists were inherently antinomian because their 1644 confession in fact bound no one.<sup>457</sup> Certainly, neglecting the subject of the law of God left the Baptists who subscribed this confession wide open to the charge of antinomianism, even by those who might have been more charitable. By the time their revised confession was published (1677) and ratified by the general assembly (1689), the Baptist community had changed its position to precisely mirror that of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the topic of the law.<sup>458</sup> Though Bunyan did not always get along with other Baptists, he would have at least been aware of the issues that were important to them.<sup>459</sup> But by finding the ground of the moral law in natural law, Bunyan was able to affirm a positive role for the law in the life of the Christian under the covenant of grace. In this way, there is room for both the continuity of the covenant of grace throughout redemptive history and the moral injunctions of the natural law upon members of the covenant of grace.

Aside from the genre of didactic theology, Bunyan also wrote about the role and functions of the law in his allegories. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Interpreter takes Christian into a parlour that is full of dust. After Interpreter called someone to sweep the room, the dust began to fly everywhere and Christian began to

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<sup>456</sup> Anonymous, *The Confession of faith of those churches which are commonly, though falsly, called anabaptists* (London, 1644).

<sup>457</sup> Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisme, and the most of the other errors, which for the time doe trouble the Church of England* (London, 1647).

<sup>458</sup> Anonymous, *A Confession of faith put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the country* (London, 1677), pp. 62-67, Ch. 19; Anonymous, *A Confession of faith put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians, (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the country : with an appendix concerning Baptism* (London, 1688), pp. 62-66, Ch. 19.

<sup>459</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 116-117, 167, 214, 292, 296, 315, 330, 336.

choke. The problem was resolved when Interpreter called someone else to sprinkle the room with water. Interpreter then explains that the parlour is the human heart, the dust is original sin, the sweeper is the law, and the one who sprinkled water is the gospel. Bunyan has Interpreter say: “This is to shew thee, that the Law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working) from sin, doth revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, as it doth discover and forbid it, but doth not give power to subdue.”<sup>460</sup> This is the first use of the law—the use that kills and leaves room for hope only in Christ’s work on behalf of God’s people.

Later in the story, after Faithful meets Christian on the way, Faithful tells a story about someone who had caught up to him on his journey: “he was but a word and a blow; for down he knocked me, and laid me for dead.” In spite of Faithful’s attempts to recover, his attacker struck him down two more times, accusing him of a “secret inclining to *Adam the First*.” Faithful was sure that he would have died had it not been for another person—Jesus—who came along and “bid [the attacker] forbear.” The attacker, as Christian surmised, was Moses: “He spareth none, neither knoweth he how to shew mercy to those that transgress his Law.”<sup>461</sup> It is significant that these scenes are not shown or recounted to Pilgrim *before* his pilgrimage (and conversion), but to Christian while on his pilgrimage. These examples reflect Luther’s influence on Bunyan in the conviction that the primary use of the law was the theological, condemning use.

In *The holy war* (1682), however, Bunyan allegorizes two uses of the law. First, the King, in the story, has four military captains. Together they represent God’s final judgment by the colors and images of their banners: blackness, lightning

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<sup>460</sup> John Bunyan, *The pilgrim's progress from this world to that which is to come* (London, 1678), pp. 21-22.

<sup>461</sup> Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, pp.92-93.

bolts, red, a burning fiery furnace and an axe laying at the root of a fruitless tree. One of the captains – Captain Conviction – has an Ensign whose scutcheon or insignia is “the Book of the Law wide open, from whence issued a flame of fire.”<sup>462</sup> Bunyan echoes Paul’s and Luther’s portrayal of the Law as the dealer of death to sinners, for the Ensign is named *Mr. Sorrow*, and he bears “the pale Colours.” This is the theological use of the law in its killing and condemning functions. The captains are commissioned to converge on the city of Mansoul and give the people two options: submission or destruction.

Second, the story of *The holy war* follows the Reformed pattern of piety: guilt, grace and gratitude. The city of Mansoul is under attack by Diabolus, and the guilt of Mansoul is seen in its willingness to go along with Diabolus as its ruler. But Emmanuel demonstrates grace toward Mansoul by rescuing it from Diabolus, in spite of Mansoul’s guilt. As a result, the book ends with Emmanuel’s proclamation of what Mansoul’s fealty should look like: “Deck thyself therefore according to my bidding, and make thy self by my Law straight steps for thy feet, so shall thy King greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him.”<sup>463</sup> This is the third use of the law in its positive disposition, informing the inhabitants of Mansoul how to show gratitude to the King for his deliverance from the tyranny of Diabolus. As just one example of a concrete application of this part of Bunyan’s allegory, most puritans believed that they ought not do simply whatever seemed good in public worship, but only what the Bible positively instructed them to do. Perhaps the motif of “decking thyself,” would have conjured up images of ministers wearing surplices—something most seventeenth century Archbishops enforced by the sword of the civil magistrate. Yet puritans like Bunyan would not have felt free to wear a

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<sup>462</sup> John Bunyan, *The holy war* (London, 1682), pp. 50-51.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 393-394.

surplice because King Jesus had not bid them to deck themselves that way in his word.

Bunyan's written corpus gives us no reason to think that he ever denied the normative role of God's moral law in the Christian life. In fact, his writings suggest that his convictions in this regard only became stronger and deeper as time went on. Furthermore, given his books like *Profitable Meditations* (1661), *Christian Behaviour* (1663), *One Thing is Needful* (1665), *Instruction for Ignorant* (1675), *Case of Conscience* (1683), *A Holy Life* (1684), *Seasonable Counsel* (1684), *Questions about Sabbath* (1685), *Desire of the Righteous* (1692) and *Of the Law and a Christian* (1692), Bunyan might have been indicted by T.D. Bozeman as a legalist or moralist, had the latter's *Precisianist Strain* encompassed Bunyan's time.<sup>464</sup> Thus, as far as the only mode of antinomianism that was ever explicitly mentioned in any of the Reformed confessions—as “contemptuously rejecting the law” or being “against the law”—Bunyan was not an antinomian.<sup>465</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

By 1685, even after laboring to vindicate himself from antinomian aspersions cast upon him by Richard Baxter, rumors about his personal ethics and his association with William Dell, John Bunyan had become orthodox on the matter of the law, and heterodox on the time of justification. The Westminster Confession of

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<sup>464</sup> For the dating of Bunyan's works listed here, see Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, pp. 637-641. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>465</sup> See chapter twelve of “The Second Helvetic Confession 1566” in Philip Schaff *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.html>.

Faith stated that believers were not under the law as a covenant of works but that the law was, for believers, a rule of life; Bunyan also affirmed the law as a rule of life even as he strenuously argued against believers making use of anything—law or gospel—in a legal spirit. But whereas the Westminster Assembly, so concerned to combat antinomianism, had denied justification from eternity, Bunyan affirmed justification from eternity three years before his death. In Westminster Confession 11:4, the Assembly made a distinction between the eternal decree of God, the accomplishment of the decree in time by Christ and the application of Christ's work to believers in time by the Holy Spirit.<sup>466</sup> Part of the implication of their formulation was to make faith the instrumental cause of justification. For Bunyan, in 1685, faith was more for assurance after the fact.

The reasons for Bunyan's change of position are not clear. While Richard Greaves sees political allusions and even motivations in most of Bunyan's writings, it is difficult to see how justification from eternity could be a blow against a tyrannical monarchy or state church.<sup>467</sup> Whatever extra-theological motivations may have been at work in Bunyan, his dominant concern in *The Pharisee and the Publicane* (1685) was to ensure that no room be given to any degree of moral renovation inside a person prior to God's extrinsic imputation of Christ's righteousness and his forensic declaration of right standing.<sup>468</sup> As one who had drunk so deeply from Luther's well, Bunyan would have understood any grace imparted prior to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to be a reversal of that order and thus a return to Rome. Perhaps such a capitulation reflected his political

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<sup>466</sup> Anonymous, *Westminster... Confession of faith*, IXX.6, p. 23.

<sup>467</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 264, 324, 395, 397, 436, 536, 581, 590.

<sup>468</sup> John Bunyan, *A discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publicane* (London, 1685), p. 135-137.

and ecclesiastical fear in light of the impending ascendancy of James II and Bunyan's unwavering opposition to the Church of England (which he viewed as nascently Roman Catholic).

It is also interesting that Bunyan viewed especially the Church of England as being under the Mosaic covenant of works in the sense that it was liable to God's curse for its disobedience.<sup>469</sup> In at least three works, Bunyan issued warnings to the Church of England, using the biblical language reserved for Israel.<sup>470</sup> Thus, the concept of the covenant of works appears to function in various ways for Bunyan. On the one hand, it operates as a concrete, historical reality. This is its primary role in *Law and Grace* (1659), and *An exposition of the first ten chapters of Genesis* (1692). In this sense, Bunyan understood the biblical data to teach that the relationship between God and Israel (as well as between God and Adam) was based on the principle of justice. On the other hand, Bunyan sometimes talked about the covenant of works as if it could function as an existential state in which an individual human being might find himself or herself.<sup>471</sup> In this sense, the law might *become* a covenant of works to someone who either tries to obey it out of fear of punishment or hope of reward, or who lives in flagrant disobedience and unbelief. In other words, Bunyan identified legalism or moralism in the Christian life as an indication of the individual being under a covenant of works.

Bunyan never appears to have commented on this tension, though he often argued that the covenant of works and the covenant of grace were mutually exclusive: membership in one of them necessarily precluded membership in the other. If a person were under the law, that is, if a person were under the covenant of

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<sup>469</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, pp. 258, 276, 308-309, 364, 369, 394.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 257, 269, 279, 284-285, 287, 304, 308-309, 320, 326, 353, 362-364, 369, 398, 466, 530-531.

<sup>471</sup> John Bunyan, *Law and Grace* (London, 1659), p. 101.

works, it is fairly clear that Bunyan believed it impossible for this person to be in the covenant of grace.<sup>472</sup> This raises interesting questions about how Bunyan would have understood himself, or even his congregation to whom he would have been writing. Based on texts like *Law and Grace*, he would have seen believers in Christ as being under the new covenant and its governing principle of grace. Yet in texts like *The barren fig tree* (1688), Bunyan argued that England's relationship with God was governed by the principle of justice; it was a covenant of works. Even the title of the book is an allusion to Jesus' parable about God's judgment upon Israel for its violation of the Mosaic covenant. So he was barely disguising his opinion that England had earned the curse of the Mosaic covenant of works—the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD—when he said “This therefore must be your End, altho you are planted in the Garden of God, for the barrenness and unfruitfulness of your Hearts and Lives, you must be cut off, yea, rooted up, and cast out of the Vineyard.”<sup>473</sup> This does not seem easily reconcilable with his opinion in *Law and Grace* (1659), that it was impossible for a person to be under both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. If this were the case, a person might be simultaneously assured of salvation by faith in Christ, but in terror of a gruesome death as punishment for the infidelity of the nation.

Bunyan's view of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works conscribed his use of the Ten Commandments. Since he was thoroughly committed to the free graciousness of the new covenant, he could not talk about the Decalogue as the conditions of fellowship with, or the reception of blessings from, God. In this way, he shared the anti-legal theological convictions of Como's “imputationist”

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>473</sup> John Bunyan, *The barren fig tree* (London, 1688), p. 4. See also Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, pp. 307-309.

antinomians. Yet in his writing, he consistently maintained the normative and perpetually binding nature of the substance of the Ten Commandments in the Christian life. In other words, Bunyan believed that Christians ought to obey not out of fear of punishment or hope of reward based on the conditional nature of the Mosaic covenant, but out of gratitude toward Christ for his definitive accomplishment in the new covenant. Thus his written legacy vindicates him from the charge of antinomianism in its traditional, confessional and etymological sense.

The tinker of Bedford may have been inconsistent in his preaching and writing, but this should hardly be shocking. Many ministers who preach on a weekly basis contradict themselves at some point, and Bunyan had made a conscious decision not to publish certain of his books during his lifetime. Without explicit commentary from Bunyan himself, there is no way to know whether the desire to avoid contradiction motivated his decisions about publication. Furthermore, consistency is often the luxury of hindsight. Bunyan may have lacked a university education, but he was obviously self-educated. His debt to Luther in *Law and Grace* is clear, and while it is possible that he may have mirrored the biblical and theological insights of his puritan peers by sheer independent brilliance, it is not probable. Perhaps his allegories were the product of his own hermetically sealed, literary genius, but it is likely that he had encountered the genre during his lifetime, and found it an especially helpful medium for conveying his message. He may have sounded clear notes of anti-intellectualism when he decried the “hell bred Logick” of the university, in good Luther-style, but obviously expected his vast literary output to be read, studied and applied.<sup>474</sup> Indeed, the tinker of Bedford continues to be the

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<sup>474</sup> On Bunyan’s dismissal of Thomas Smith for using “hell bred Logick,” see Thomas Smith, “A Letter sent to *Mr. E. of Taft* four miles from *Cambridge* a Year since, to which no answer hath been returned,” in *The Quaker disarm’d* (London,



subject of university studies the world over for the windows he not only provides into modern psychoanalytic theory, but the early modern literary mind, its political turmoil, and its theological disputes and discourse.

In spite of his inconsistencies, Bunyan is a fascinating case study. In spite of his stated intentions, Bunyan had achieved a reputation as an antinomian in a variety of ways: in terms of his own ethics, as a Baptist (as conceived by some Presbyterians), by holding to justification prior to faith, and by association with others who had been identified as antinomians. Though other figures in this study were accused of antinomianism, none were so accused for such a range of reasons. In sixteenth-century Protestant confessions, the term “antinomianism” denoted a rejection of the binding validity of the moral law in the Christian life. In the seventeenth century, antinomianism referred to all of the reasons Bunyan was known as an antinomian, and more. Modern scholarship on antinomianism in the seventeenth century has only just begun to recognize this spectrum. What remains to be seen is what will become of antinomianism’s modern reputation as news of its multiform adherents spreads.

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1659), §16; on Luther’s disdain for reason, see his last sermon delivered in Wittenberg in 1546 in Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God—An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947), p. 86 – “But the Devil’s bride, reason, the lovely whore comes in and wants to be wise, and what she says, she thinks, is the Holy Spirit.”

## Chapter Five

One of the loudest voices of the anti-antinomians, and certainly one of the most prolific writers among them, Richard Baxter had first accused John Owen of antinomianism in his 1649 book *Aphorismes of Justification*. Owen responded to Baxter in print in 1650, but Baxter never relinquished his concerns about Owen.<sup>475</sup> This makes Baxter's silence regarding one of Owen's colleagues, Samuel Petto, incredible, considering that Petto articulated views that were virtually identical to Owen's. In fact, not only did Petto express the Protestant doctrine of justification in identical terms to Owen—and in direct opposition to Baxter's formulation—but he also called the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works like Owen did. Without using Baxter's name, Petto even engaged and refuted some of Baxter's specific arguments regarding these doctrines.<sup>476</sup> John Owen and Samuel Petto were at least acquainted, if not friends, as suggested by the fact that Owen wrote a hearty commendation to preface Petto's book *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant Explained* (1674). Given Baxter's acrimony toward Owen, his controversialist nature and the fact that Baxter did not die until 1691—giving him a full seventeen years to respond to Petto—his silence regarding Petto is all the more surprising.

Indeed, references to Petto in the writings of his contemporaries are scarce. Even his date of birth and genealogy are not certain. If he was a descendant of the Peyto family, he may have been born around 1624 in Warwickshire.<sup>477</sup> Or he may

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<sup>475</sup> Owen's response was *Of the Death of Christ* (London, 1650). Baxter wrote rejoinders in *Confession of his Faith* (London, 1655) and *Universal Redemption of Mankind* (London, 1694).

<sup>476</sup> See below for specific examples.

<sup>477</sup> Stephen Wright, "Petto, Samuel (c. 1624-1711)," Stephen Wright in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22067>.

have been the son of the Parliament-supporter Sir Edward Peto.<sup>478</sup> In either case, the first definitive records of his life come from his education at Cambridge University where on 15 June 1644 he was admitted as a “sizar”—a term denoting an allowance from the University for financial hardship—at St. Catherine’s College.<sup>479</sup> He matriculated on 19 March 1645 and received his BA in 1647.<sup>480</sup> Some sources also indicate that he also earned a master’s degree.<sup>481</sup> In 1648, he became the rector of Sandcroft in the deanery of South Elmham, Suffolk.<sup>482</sup> Sometime after this, he married a woman named Mary, though she died the year after the 27 April 1654 baptism of their son, Samuel.<sup>483</sup> During his ministry in Suffolk, Peto would have written most of his theological treatises. Based on his published corpus, it is clear that Peto advocated standard, Protestant doctrine, including justification by faith alone and the antithesis between law and gospel in terms of his covenant theology.

Peto distinguished clearly between the freeness of salvation in the covenant of grace and the conditional nature of the justice which informed the Mosaic covenant—much like John Bunyan and John Saltmarsh had done, earning Baxter’s

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<sup>478</sup> Tim Mowl and Brian Ernshaw, *Architecture Without Kings: The Rise of Puritan Classicism Under Cromwell* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), 125.

<sup>479</sup> Wright, “Petto, Samuel,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Cf. “sizar, n.,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, September 2012, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180585?redirectedFrom=sizar>.

<sup>480</sup> Wright, “Petto, Samuel,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Cp. A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy’s Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-62* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 388.

<sup>481</sup> Wright, “Petto, Samuel,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Cp. W.W. Hodson, *The Manse and the Meeting House; or, The Story of the Independents of Sudbury* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), dedication page.

<sup>482</sup> Wright, “Petto, Samuel,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

condemnation as antinomians.<sup>484</sup> But what should have caught Baxter’s attention was Petto’s arguments against Baxter’s views regarding the atonement of Christ as it related to the divine covenants, and regarding the function of justice in the new covenant. Against Owen, Baxter had argued that Christ had made a payment equivalent (*salutio tantidem*) to what God demanded of us for our sins.<sup>485</sup> But Petto boldly contradicted him: “Jesus Christ suffered not the *tantundem*; something *in lieu or stead* of what we should have suffered, but *the idem*, the very same punishment of the Law that was due to us.”<sup>486</sup> Petto reasoned that if Christ only suffered something analogous to what God required of us, then God’s threat in Genesis 2:17—that “In the day thou eatest... dying thou shalt die”—would have been empty.<sup>487</sup> Therefore, Jesus underwent the same curse that was uttered against Adam and all mankind in Genesis 2:17 so that believers in Jesus would be free from that same curse.<sup>488</sup> In other words, Petto (like most other Protestants) understood the Bible to teach that God’s holiness and justice requires satisfaction in the form of the punishment of sinners. However, Jesus bore the very same punishment that sinners deserve, giving God the legal basis upon which to forgive and accept them.

Yet Petto was still bolder than that. He also challenged Baxter’s doctrine of justification as it related to the way in which covenant blessings were earned under the old covenant compared to the new. Taking a position uncharacteristic of Protestants, Baxter argued that just like the original covenant of works with Adam, the new covenant had a “new Law... the Conditions whereof should be more easie to

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<sup>484</sup> Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification* (London, 1649), 58, 74, 176, 220-203; Baxter, *The Scripture Gospel defended, and Christ grace, and free justification vindicated against the libertines* (London, 1690), A2.

<sup>485</sup> Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification* (London, 1649), pp. 47, 301-302.

<sup>486</sup> Samuel Petto, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Explained* (London, 1674), p. 231.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-232.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

the Sinner and yet more abasing.”<sup>489</sup> In fact, Baxter argued that “*Faith it self is our Righteousness,*” and that it is “the fulfilling of the conditions of the new Covenant.”<sup>490</sup> To illustrate this, Baxter appealed to the example of a tenant who forfeits his lease by failing to pay rent to his landlord. Such a tenant, deeply in debt, is not only evicted, but imprisoned until he can pay his debt. To make the analogy to our salvation, Baxter posited Christ as the landlord’s son who pays the tenant’s debt, gets him out of prison and moves him back into the house (which the landlord’s son has now purchased for himself), charging him merely one peppercorn per year for rent.<sup>491</sup> Petto objected to all of these ideas, noting that faith is not a condition of life, nor is it believers’ righteousness.<sup>492</sup> But Petto directly engaged Baxter’s claim that believers’ obedience was payment or rent to Christ for their salvation:

but Faith it self (though necessary, yet) doth *receive a title* from Jesus Christ, doth not give one, 1 Joh. 1. 12. That Axiom [*he that believeth shall be Saved*] is not expressive of the *tenour of the New Covenant*; we claim Salvation not in the right of any act of ours, not upon the Rent of Faith (as men hold Tenements by the payment of a Penny, a Rose or such like) no such thing

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<sup>489</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p. 74, 77, 91-92.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.

<sup>492</sup> Petto, *Old and New Covenant*, p. A7, 33, 75, 133, 136, 139-142, 180-181, 203-207, 217-223, 226, 273, 290, 319. On p. A7, Petto said, “*Faith it self is not the least of that righteousness; it is an act of obedience, but as such it is not said to justify, nor as it worketh by love, although it doth so work, Gal. 5. 6. Nor as a condition of life (as I have elsewhere manifested) but only as a means for the applying Christ and his righteousness.*” On p. 33, “And so *faith* cannot be it, for the promises were not made to Jesus Christ upon *Condition* of our believing, but upon what he himself should do and suffer; rather therein he hath a promise, assurance that we shall believe.” On p. 226, “Faith it self doth but receive a right, doth not give one.” On p. 290, “*Faith* is not then properly the *condition* of the Covenant, upon the performance of which, they have a right and title to it; but a choice *effect* of it, and a singular means for the application of the promises, and fetching in of Covenant blessings to the Soul.”

here; all is paid to the utmost Farthing by our Surety, and we hold and claim, upon the obedience of Jesus Christ alone, *Rom.* 5. 18, 19, 21.”<sup>493</sup>

Given the reference to rent and tenancy, Petto’s relationship with John Owen, and Owen’s debate with Baxter in print, it is not unreasonable to see Petto here taking aim at Baxter.

Donald Strickland has observed that Thomas Blake advocated a neonomianism similar to Baxter’s, and that Blake described the theology to which Petto subscribed as antinomian.<sup>494</sup> It is true that Blake cited Baxter for support in many places in his *Vindiciae Foederis* (1658).<sup>495</sup> Blake may not be as clear as Baxter about the way in which faith is a condition, but Blake does explicitly call both faith and repentance conditions of the covenant of grace.<sup>496</sup> Like Baxter, Blake also held that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers was not the ground of justification. Taking a very similar position on justification to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, Blake said that the formal cause of believers’ justification is “the imputation of Christs righteousness without ours, when we fall short of the righteousness of the Law.”<sup>497</sup> This Petto thoroughly denied.<sup>498</sup> Though Petto was willing to admit a certain sense in which some new covenant promises were

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>494</sup> Donald Strickland, “E.F. Kevan, Samuel Petto and Covenant Theology,” *Reformation Today*, No. 137, January 1994. The term “neonomianism” was coined during the seventeenth century debates over antinomianism to describe the view that the gospel is a new law which must be kept in order to enjoy the blessings of the new covenant.

<sup>495</sup> Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis* (London, 1658) pp. 107-108, 110, 134, 144, 197, 261, 290-291, 294, 447. He does appear to differ amicably with Baxter on pp. 100, 405.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 48-52, 99, 102, 104, 106-108, 115-148.

<sup>497</sup> Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis*, p. 200. Cp. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, Chapters V, XI, and XVI, Canons IX, X and XI as quoted in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical notes, Volume II, The History of Creeds* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.html>.

<sup>498</sup> Petto, *Old and New Covenants*, pp. A9, 268-273.

conditional, that could only be “if condition be taken improperly.”<sup>499</sup> Unlike Baxter or Blake, Petto distinguished between antecedent and subsequent conditions.<sup>500</sup> On the one hand, antecedent conditions were those which satisfied the principle of justice, granting a right or access to something. Petto denied that believers faced anything like antecedent conditions in the covenant of grace.<sup>501</sup> On the other hand, subsequent conditions were something like a test of whether one still had a right or access to something. Here again, Petto denied that there is “any subsequent condition to be fulfilled by us, the use of that is, for the continuation of a right, and upon the failing thereof all is forfeited, as in the case of Adam.”<sup>502</sup> Grace is a principle completely different than justice; and in a covenant governed by the principle of grace, Petto saw no room for either kind of condition.

But one of Petto’s more surprising positions that Blake likely would have labeled antinomian was Petto’s view of assurance of salvation. Blake stated quite plainly that “Assurance of salvation cannot be gained, but in a way of covenant-keeping; yea, the conditions of the covenant are the basis, and never failing bottom of our Evidence and Assurance.”<sup>503</sup> Blake then articulated the “practical syllogism”—only those who believe and repent are saved; I believe and repent; therefore I am saved.<sup>504</sup> Petto had quite a different prescription for doubting or

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 207-208.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 212-213, 222.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 212-213.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid. 213.

<sup>503</sup> Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis*, 195.

<sup>504</sup> Though Aristotle may have coined the phrase in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, it was used by Reformed theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in answer to the problem of assurance. See Theodore Beza, *A briefe and pithie summe of Christian Faith* (London, 1565), 34; William Perkins, *A Briefe Discourse, Taken out of the Writings Her. Zanchius* (London, 1592), 50 (appended to his) *A Case of Conscience: The Greatest That Ever Was* [London, 1592]); Zacharias Ursinus, *A collection of certaine learned discourses* (London, 1600), 149; Nicholas Byfield, *A commentary: or, sermons vpon the second chapter of the first epistle of Saint Peter*

troubled Christians. He was consistent with his belief that Christ had fulfilled the condition of the covenant; therefore, assurance must come from trusting what Christ had done. He held that faith—far from being a condition of the new covenant which believers must fulfill—looks away from self to Christ as the one “*alone that giveth it subsistence in Spiritual Life.*”<sup>505</sup> He even said,

I have often thought, if Christians did give more attendance to such *direct acts of Faith*, and spent less time in questioning their conditions, or giving way to doubtings about them, they would find their interest in the Covenant cleared up, yea and consolation also coming in as by the by.<sup>506</sup>

This ran contrary not only to Thomas Blake, but to the practical theology of many puritan divines. To some, it may have been cause to suspect Petto of the moral laxity that results from antinomianism.

Samuel Petto clearly taught that believers were obliged to obey the moral law as will be seen below. But he did not hesitate to confront some of the ideas of some vocal anti-antinomians. Most of these ideas were more directly related to the Protestant doctrine of justification. But Petto saw that doctrine as intimately related to the divine covenants. In that regard, he used the same terminology for the Mosaic covenant as John Bunyan and John Owen, calling it a covenant of works. Baxter

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(London, 1623), 752; William Pemble, *Vindiciae gratiae* (London, 1627), 161; George Downname, *The covenant of grace* (London, 1631), 101, 107; William Ames, *Conscience with the power and cases thereof Devided into V bookes* (London 1639), 21, 53; John Cotton, *A conference Mr. John Cotton held at Boston with the elders of New-England* (London, 1646), 16-17; Thomas Bedford, *An examination of the chief points of Antinomianism* (London, 1647), 53, 57, 62; Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spiritual antichrist* (London, 1648), 57, 83-84; Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining* (London, 1652), 46, 53-54, 146; Thomas Manton, *A practical commentary* (London, 1657), 186; Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis* (London, 1658), 196; James Durham, *A practical exposition of the X. Commandments* (London, 1675), 88; John Flavel, *The method of grace* (London, 1681), 139, Thomas Watson, *A body of practical divinity* (London, 1692), 201, among others.

<sup>505</sup> Petto, *Old and New Covenants*, 294.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.



called the latter two antinomians, but he said nothing about Petto. In his *Difference Between the Old and New Covenant*, Petto worked out the implications of the biblical data regarding the divine covenants for the doctrine of justification. In so doing, he flatly contradicted Baxter's neonomian notion of the gospel being an easier law, the keeping of which is believers' payment of rent to Jesus for salvation. He also refuted the view of both Baxter and Blake that faith (and, for Blake, repentance) is the condition of the new covenant. Though Blake wrote his *Vindiciae Foederis* (1658) before Petto's *Difference between the Old and New Covenant* (1674), Blake clearly condemned as antinomian what Petto would later affirm. But Baxter was curiously silent about the bold preacher from Sudbury and theological ally of John Owen's named Samuel Petto.

## I. Petto Scholarship

Michael Brown is patently correct when he observes that "secondary literature devoted to Petto is almost nonexistent."<sup>507</sup> That is likely because, as Mark Jones astutely notes, "if John Owen is the forgotten man of English theology, it may rightly be said that Samuel Petto is the unknown man of English theology."<sup>508</sup> Apparently, if Richard Baxter and other anti-antinomians did not notice him after he advocated the republication of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant and free grace in the new, he was overlooked in his own day, at least on the issues of law, covenant and justification. But he was certainly not unknown to all seventeenth-

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<sup>507</sup> Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624-1711)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 3-4.

<sup>508</sup> Mark Jones, "Introduction," in Samuel Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace: Or, the Difference between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained* (Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs: Tentmaker Publications, 2007), 9.

century English citizens. His defenses of infant baptism and lay preaching made him the polemical target of some Baptists and Presbyterians, respectively.<sup>509</sup> People from the academic and ecclesiastical milieus were familiar with him, as suggested by a few, brief biographical sketches.<sup>510</sup> Yet so little is known about him outside of his books and private correspondence, that the only monograph devoted to him fills less than 150 pages.

Aside from the passing reference to Petto in Richard Greaves' brief if confused list of "strict Calvinists," there exist two journal essays about Petto: one biographical, one theological, both preliminary sections of the only historical-theological study of Petto, by Michael Brown.<sup>511</sup> As a result of some of Petto's other writings regarding eschatology and witchcraft, and pneumatology, Petto's name

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<sup>509</sup> Thomas Grantham, *Presumption no proof, or, Mr. Petto's arguments for infant-baptism considered and answered* (London, 1687); Thomas Grantham, *The infants advocate against the cruel doctrine of those Presbyterians who hold, that the greatest part of dying infants shall be damned* (London, 1688); Matthew Poole, *Quo warranto, or, A moderate enquiry into the warrantableness of the preaching of gifted and unordained persons* (London, 1659); John Collinges, *Vindiciae ministerii evangelici revindicatae: or The preacher (pretendedly) sent, sent back again...by way of reply, to a late book (in the defence of gifted brethrens preaching) published by...Mr. Samuel Petto of Sandcroft in Suffolk* (London, 1658).

<sup>510</sup> John Twigg, *A History of Queen's College, Cambridge, 1448-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 104; "Samuel Petto (ca. 1624-1711)" by Elliot Vernon in Francis J. Bremer and Tom Webster, eds., *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 200-201; Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 34-48; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 135; Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, 388; Charles Sperling, ed., *A short history of the borough of Sudbury, compiled from materials collected by W.W. Hodson* (Sudbury, UK, 1896), 152-153.

<sup>511</sup> See Richard L. Greaves, "John Bunyan and Covenant Thought in the Seventeenth Century," *Church History* 36:2 (1967), 152; Cp. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 106, 107 n. 91, 657, 686. Cf. Michael Brown, "Christ and the Condition: Samuel Petto (c. 1624-1711) on the Mosaic Covenant," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 20 (2009), 131-157; Michael Brown, "Samuel Petto (c. 1624-1711): a portrait of a Puritan pastor-theologian," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 27:2 (2009), 176-191; these articles were used in Brown's book *Christ and the Condition* (2012).

appears in a few modern studies.<sup>512</sup> Mark Jones has helped orient students of puritans to Petto in the Introduction to a recent republication of Petto's *Difference Between the Old and New Covenant*.<sup>513</sup> In addition to a brief overview of Petto's covenant theology, Jones does deal with the issue of antinomianism and attempts to relate it to Petto's work on the covenants. However, instead of taking the definition of antinomianism from Protestant confessions, or even from the writings of prominent seventeenth-century anti-antinomians, Jones is actually stricter than most scholars when he defines as antinomians, "those who abrogated the necessity of the moral law in the new covenant."<sup>514</sup> Not only does this move the definition from the realm of belief to the realm of action, but Jones goes further, claiming that this active abrogation of the moral law "was alive and well in the seventeenth century."<sup>515</sup> It is difficult to find concrete specimens of people from the seventeenth-century who genuinely abrogated the necessity of the moral law in the new covenant, and Jones' historical analysis falters at that point.

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<sup>512</sup> David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18 (The Number of the Beast) : A Study in the History of Exegesis* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 17, 119, 215-216; Kenneth G.C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5, 57; Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122-123; Gilbert Geis and Ivan Bunn, *A Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Prosecution* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 140-141, 206-207; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Crawford Gribben, *God's Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ian Harris, *The Mind of John Locke: A Study of Political Theory in Its Intellectual Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>513</sup> Mark Jones, "Introduction" in Samuel Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, 9-27.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*

Brown focuses primarily on Petto's covenantal hermeneutic, especially as it highlights Petto's somewhat unique view of the Mosaic covenant. Brown does deal with the issues of justice, grace, law and justification, but mainly as implications of Petto's theology of the Mosaic covenant. To date, Brown has the most extensive analysis of Petto's covenant theology in general—his adherence to the sharp contrast between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and his refusal to distinguish between the covenant of grace and the eternal, intratrinitarian covenant of redemption—and Petto's view that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works for Christ to fulfill. In fact, in an effort to contextualize Petto's view of the Mosaic covenant in his theological milieu, Brown spends a great deal of time on the way many other puritans viewed the Sinai covenant. However, aside from a passing observation about Herman Witsius' book about the late seventeenth-century dispute between antinomians and neonomians, and a brief reference to John Saltmarsh, Brown does not treat antinomianism, nor the way Petto's theology of the Mosaic covenant, the ten commandments, conditions and grace gave Petto the tools to respond effectively to antinomianism.<sup>516</sup>

More work needs to be done on the unknown man of English theology. After all, the forgotten man of English theology, who is currently enjoying a renaissance of biographical and theological study, had high praise for Petto's contribution to the development of Reformed theology. In fact, Owen said that Petto was a "Worthy Author," whose labor in the relationship between the Mosaic covenant, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace was a success.<sup>517</sup> Owen even saw the doctrine of the Mosaic covenant—and Petto's success in treating it, in spite of the miscarriage of "not a few" covenant theologians—as significantly related to antinomianism because

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<sup>516</sup> Brown, *Christ and the Condition*, 83, 95-96.

<sup>517</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, b2.

“of the weight and use of it in the whole business of Religious Obedience.”<sup>518</sup> This study will offer new insight into the significance of Petto’s answer to seventeenth-century antinomianism.

## II. Petto’s Contribution to the Theology of the Mosaic Covenant

As covenant theology developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a clear contrast emerged between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace—as exemplified and codified by the Westminster Assembly in its *Confession of Faith* and *Larger Catechism*.<sup>519</sup> Far from being a Lutheran anomaly, the sharp distinction between law and gospel was also given expression in Reformed theology. Even Petto held that “*the grand difference between the Law and the Gospel is, the one justifieth by our own, the other by anothers righteousness.*”<sup>520</sup> Yet Reformed theology developed this distinction in terms of the two corresponding covenants of works and grace. Petto could not have been more clear in his affirmation that “*There was a Law or Covenant of Works made with the first Adam and his Seed before the fall.*”<sup>521</sup> The governing principle of that covenant was justice or “*Do and live,*” and human beings were to keep the terms of the covenant by their own obedience.<sup>522</sup> Likewise, Petto held that “*there is a Covenant of Grace, provided for the recovery of some by Jesus Christ, from a state of sin and death unto a state of*

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid., a6.

<sup>519</sup> Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London, 1647), 13-15; Compare *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a larger catechism* (London, 1647), 9-10.

<sup>520</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, A6.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

*righteousness and eternal life.*”<sup>523</sup> This other covenant was governed by the principle of grace, and in standard, Protestant fashion, Petto said that “the holy Spirit giveth us both the terms of the distinction, by making *grace and works* such opposite terms, as one excludeth the other.”<sup>524</sup> Thus, the covenant of works did not offer a gift in spite of sin, and the covenant of grace did not require good works as the condition of its blessings. In fact, just as Petto had denied that there were juridical conditions for believers in the covenant of grace, so he also denied that there was any “Gospel grace” in the covenant of works.<sup>525</sup>

Petto viewed these two covenants as tied inseparably to two individuals: Adam and Christ. Both functioned as representatives of humanity such that their individual actions would be imputed to those whom they represented. The covenant “made with the first *Adam* was a *Covenant of Works*.” On the other hand, “the accepting of Jesus Christ, in our stead, to be our second *Adam* was as by Covenant, so of meer grace, as well as what is promised to us through him; they together make up but one Covenant of grace.”<sup>526</sup> Like other Reformed theologians who contributed to the development of covenant theology, Petto saw Romans 5 as the primary source of this comparison and contrast between Adam and Christ.<sup>527</sup> Since Paul there calls Adam “a figure of him that was to come” (Romans 5:14), Petto, like his colleagues, understood Paul to mean that “the two *Adams* are paralleled.”<sup>528</sup> Indeed, Petto often spoke of the “first Adam” of the first three chapters of Genesis, and the “second Adam” who is Jesus Christ.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 21, 46, 56, 129, 179, 198, 272, 277, 284.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 56. Cf. p. 276.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 2, 13, 22, 44, 56, 223, 271, 276.

Though Adam was created in a state of innocence, his disobedience plunged humanity into a helpless state of sin.<sup>530</sup> This is because the “Covenant of Works runneth upon perfect obedience as the condition of it,” and “urgeth duty in a way of Justice.”<sup>531</sup> Due to the apostle Paul’s two-Adam schema, Petto and other covenant theologians saw the positive justice involved in the original covenant of works as the offer of eternal life in heaven for perfect obedience.<sup>532</sup> But the negative justice involved in the covenant of works with Adam is found in Genesis 2:17, “*In the day thou eatest dying thou shalt die.*”<sup>533</sup> As the biblical narrative goes, Adam disobeyed; and because his disobedience was imputed to all of his descendants, this introduced the need for redemption from sin and death.<sup>534</sup>

This redemption was provided in what Reformed theology called the covenant of grace. While Petto could have distinguished even more sharply between justice and grace, something constrained him to identify an element of each in both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It is true that he denied both that there was “Gospel grace” in the covenant of works as well as any “proper” conditions for believers in the covenant of grace.<sup>535</sup> Yet on the one hand he was willing to both speculate that a finite creature like Adam could not truly merit any reward from God, and to deal with the concrete terms of the covenant in Genesis 1 and 2 which revealed that God “promised [an infinite reward] to [Adam’s] perfect unsinning works.”<sup>536</sup> On the other hand, while he refused to say that Adam’s reward before the fall would have come by “Gospel grace” (thus confusing it with the same

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid., A7, 2, 103, 132, 144, 157, 220-221.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 22, 103-104.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 25, 40, 103, 112, 125, 130, 144, 155, 157, 231, 270, 284.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 213, 271, 276.

<sup>535</sup> See note 44 above.

<sup>536</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 220-221.

kind of grace given to helpless sinners after the fall), he did affirm that “the making of a promise to *Adam* in a state of innocency for the rewarding of his works *was of grace.*”<sup>537</sup> This was because “a reward may be *of merit and of debt, and yet of grace in some sense* (though not of special Gospel grace) for all good promised or given by the Lord to his creature is *of grace*, seeing God oweth nothing to any.”<sup>538</sup> Still, Petto saw grace as consisting “*in excusing us from a personal performance of that righteousness which is the condition of life and admitting Jesus Christ to answer the Law in our stead.*”<sup>539</sup> Thus, even though he did not articulate it this way, his definition of grace presupposed that God’s justice required perfect obedience, and humanity must first have violated God’s justice and come to deserve his ultimate punishment in order for grace to have any meaning. In other words, Adam’s sin abrogated the covenant of works in which God would have been obligated to reward Adam’s obedience, and instead obligated humanity to pay for Adam’s sin with physical and eternal death. Thus, salvation is from God’s “good pleasure,” making Jesus the mediator for his people and a “surety” who becomes liable for his people’s sin “to answer our debt to the utmost farthing, he put his name into our Obligation.”<sup>540</sup> In this way, grace is God’s (and not human) faithfulness, and the exclusivity of Jesus’ work to please and satisfy God’s justice.<sup>541</sup> Still, in good Reformed fashion—not wanting to question the necessity of the law for regulating human ethics—Petto said that “*grace and works*” were “such opposite terms, as one excludeth the other” because “the way of Salvation is here ascribed unto grace.”<sup>542</sup> That is, in terms of the way in which human beings could obtain the eternal

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<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid. Cf. p. 15.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., A6. Cf. pp. 103, 154.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 322, 15, 39, respectively.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 296, 291, respectively.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 13.



inheritance of heaven, it was impossible for grace and works to be more opposed than they were in the Bible.

This sharp distinction between the law and the gospel—and the corresponding covenants of works and grace—provided the foundation for Petto’s view of the Mosaic covenant. He acknowledged that “it is usually said, that [the Mosaic and new covenants] are *two administrations or dispensations of the same Covenant*.” But because of his sharp distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, he saw the Mosaic and new covenants as distinct.<sup>543</sup> According to Petto, there were a number of reasons for this. First, Galatians 3:15-17 says that the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was made 430 years before the Sinai covenant. There Paul says that God gave the inheritance to Abraham by the promise according to the principle of grace, while God offered Israel blessings according to the principle of works (or justice) if they obeyed the Law. He even cited Deuteronomy 5:2-3 to demonstrate that “*the Lord made not this Covenant with our Fathers [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], but with us [Moses and Israel]*.”<sup>544</sup> Second, he appealed to Jeremiah 31:31-32 which says that God will make a new covenant which is not according to the covenant which he made with Israel’s fathers at Sinai. Petto pointed out that this meant “*this New Covenant is not opposed to the Covenant with Abraham, and to that with David, but only to that with Moses and Israel at Mount Sinai*.”<sup>545</sup> Third, he understood the language of Hebrews 8:6 regarding “another” covenant besides the old Mosaic covenant, which is “better,” to mean that they were two distinct covenants.<sup>546</sup> Fourth, he argued that the biblical terms “old” and “new,” as well as “first” and “second” in the book of Hebrews indicated a

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 87-90.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

distinction between the Mosaic and new covenants. Here he quoted John Owen as saying, “That it should be affirmed of one and the same Covenant, that this is the *first Covenant*, and that is *the second*, and yet those two should be but both one, that is strange.”<sup>547</sup> Fifth, in Hebrews 10:9 Petto found the principle that “Nothing cometh in the room and stead of it self, but of something else.”<sup>548</sup> Finally, Petto appealed to Galatians 4 where Paul “expressly affirmed, that there are *two Covenants or Testaments*.” There he saw the radical difference between freedom and bondage to be plain, exegetical warrant for distinguishing the Mosaic covenant from the Abrahamic covenant of grace. He even understood Galatians 3:19 to prohibit the identification of those two covenants.<sup>549</sup>

In spite of his puritan identity, this put Petto at odds with the Westminster Confession which said of the Mosaic covenant, “*There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations*.”<sup>550</sup> He was careful to point out that he did not believe there were two covenants of grace.<sup>551</sup> In fact, he was in the oldest of Reformed company when he said that “the Elect were saved in one and the same way, for substance and essence in all Ages, viz. by Grace, through a Mediator, by Faith in him.”<sup>552</sup> Still, Petto did not do exegesis by polling Reformed theologians. Unlike most of his colleagues and peers, he thought that,

*whereas it is usually judged that the Old is one and the same wit the New, differing from it only in some circumstances and accidents, as rigorous*

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 93-97.

<sup>550</sup> Anonymous, *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a Confession of faith* (London: 1647), p. 15.

<sup>551</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, A5, 85.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 85.

*exaction of duty by fear, terror, &c. I on the other hand think that spiritual blessings were dispensed out by the Covenant with Abraham, and though Israels obedience to the Moral Law, was on another account, a fruit of holiness and sanctification, yet as the same obedience had relation to the Mount Sinai Covenant, so it ushered in only temporals to them.*<sup>553</sup>

Thus, not only was the Mosaic covenant distinct from the new covenant, but it was distinct from the Abrahamic covenant of grace as well.

But it was not enough to simply contradict the prevailing view. Petto was bold enough to say that the mixing or identification of the Mosaic covenant with the covenant of grace (or new covenant) “occasioned darkness” and was downright sinful.<sup>554</sup> For this, he gave two reasons. First, there is a “sinful mixing” of the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace “*when there is a joyning any thing of ours with Jesus Christ in the manner of acceptation unto eternal Life.*” Christians ought to obey God out of love for Christ “*in the way to Salvation,*” but not at all as if the outcome of the new covenant were the reward for that obedience. For those who obeyed out of hope of reward, “Christ would be rendered of no effect unto such souls.”<sup>555</sup> Second, mixing the two covenants would cause people to live “*in the Spirit of the Old Covenant, in dealing with the Promises of the New.*” In other words, Christians might be tempted to think that the new covenant promise of forgiveness of sins was conditioned upon their obedience because the blessings of the Mosaic covenant were conditioned upon Israel’s obedience. On the other hand, Christians might be tempted fear that Jesus had not satisfied curse of the Law in their

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid., A5.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 56, 96-97.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 97-99.

stead, if they believed that the threats of curse and punishment from the Mosaic covenant applied as equally to them as they did to Israel.<sup>556</sup>

As Petto understood the Mosaic covenant, it was based upon the principle of justice. Philosophically, he appreciated Aquinas's definition: "*justice consisteth in giving to another what is his due, viz. by contact, promise or otherwise.*"<sup>557</sup> However, like most Protestant theologians, Petto found the theological explication of the principle of justice in Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12.<sup>558</sup> Leviticus 18:5 says, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD." The other two verses are the apostle Paul's interpretation of that Old Testament verse. Petto's shorthand for the teaching of these verses came from more than a century of Protestant reflection on them and found expression in the phrase, "Do [this] and live." In other words, the commandments and statutes of the Mosaic covenant functioned as conditions: rewards were offered for obedience and punishment and curses were threatened for disobedience.<sup>559</sup>

For this reason, Petto identified the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.<sup>560</sup> Even though this was not the majority report of Reformed theologians up to his time, this view of the Mosaic covenant was not unusual.<sup>561</sup> But Petto's variation on it was. Whereas many of his like-minded colleagues struggled to affirm

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 99-111.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 8, 73, 122-123, 127, 143-145, 187, 202.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 3, 70, 75, 100, 124, 128, 148-149, 156-157, 164-165, 186, 188, 203, 205-206, 219, 222, 273, 318.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., A4, 16-17, 69-72, 94, 100-111, 102-169.

<sup>561</sup> See "The Mosaic Covenant in Reformed Orthodoxy" in Michael Brown's *Christ and the Condition*, 43-85 and Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy" in Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko and David VanDrunen's *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009), 76-108.

the way in which Israel could be simultaneously under a covenant of works and be saved by grace alone, through faith alone because of Christ alone, Petto focused almost exclusively on Christ as the one for whom the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works. Thus, his clearest definition of the Sinai covenant was this: “*In general it was a Covenant of Works, as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but not so to Israel.*”<sup>562</sup> Perhaps for those who were not completely comfortable with that, he was also willing to affirm that “*It was the Covenant of Grace as to its legal condition to be performed by Jesus Christ, represented under a conditional administration of it to Israel.*”<sup>563</sup> In either case, the purpose of the Mosaic covenant was for Jesus to keep and fulfill it on behalf of his people.

Though Petto saw the Promised Land of Canaan as a typological picture of heaven, he did not understand Israel’s relationship to the Sinai covenant that way.<sup>564</sup> For him, a covenant of works, by definition, “*requireth perfect personal obedience, promising life or a reward of Justice thereupon, and threatening death upon the least violation thereof.*”<sup>565</sup> His discussion of the reasons why the Sinai covenant could not have been a covenant of works for Israel reveals that he understood the life promised by that covenant to be eternal life in heaven, and the death threatened to be eternal punishment in hell.<sup>566</sup> Thus, unlike sinful Israel, Christ was the only one who could safely and successfully submit to the juridical conditions of that covenant.

The impossibility of sinners faithfully keeping the Mosaic legislation was part of the reason why Petto was willing to say that the Mosaic covenant was the

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<sup>562</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 102.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 165, 167.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-110.

worse covenant, while the new covenant is the better covenant.<sup>567</sup> After all, the promises in the Mosaic covenant were conditioned upon Israel's obedience. On the one hand, if they obeyed all the laws that God had given them, they would enjoy long life in the land flowing with milk and honey. On the other hand, if they disobeyed, the land with its crops and livestock would shrivel up and die, and Israel's enemies would carry them off into captivity. In contrast to this, Petto understood the New Testament to teach that the new covenant was better than its Mosaic predecessor because it "*is an absolute Divine grant by way of Promise, of those great blessings which come in by the mediation and Ministry of Jesus Christ.*"<sup>568</sup> In other words, the new covenant was based on an absolute gift or promise of eternal blessings to God's people because of Christ's perfect obedience, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. As Petto put it, Christ,

having finished the work of *Satisfaction*, ver. 1, 2, 6. and *the condition* contained in the Old, being exactly and compleatly fulfilled by him, it naturally or necessarily must turn into *an absolute form* as in the *New*, because upon his performance, nothing more is to be demanded of him, but all must certainly be accomplished unto us.<sup>569</sup>

In this way, the accomplishment of Christ in his life, death and resurrection brought an end to the "*unquestionably conditional*" Mosaic covenant and inaugurated the new covenant which is "*undoubtedly absolute.*"<sup>570</sup>

As a Calvinist, Petto believed in the sovereignty of God.<sup>571</sup> He understood that though God had sovereignly established the Mosaic covenant, God had not

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 69-84.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 203-204.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 53, 207.

guaranteed that Israel would receive the covenant blessings. The combination of the conditional nature of that covenant and Israel's sinfulness resulted in two episodes of captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet the new covenant is different. Petto understood that God sovereignly established the new covenant as well, but God also sovereignly guaranteed ultimate and eternal blessings to his people by sending his Son to perfectly and personally fulfill all righteousness on behalf of his people. This explains both why Petto placed so much emphasis on the Mosaic covenant being a covenant of works for Christ, as well as why he pointed his readers outside of themselves to Christ for their assurance of salvation.

### **III. The Ten Commandments in Petto's Theology of the Mosaic Covenant**

Since the Ten Commandments were given in the context of the Mosaic Covenant, Petto was careful to distinguish the way in which they were binding upon Christians in the new covenant. On the one hand, he did not want to be one of what he called the "false prophets" or "Judaizing prophets"—the Judaizing antagonists in the book of Galatians who taught that Christians had to keep the Mosaic law in addition to having faith in Christ.<sup>572</sup> On the other hand, he did not agree with antinomianism as defined by the Second Helvetic Confession: the rejection of that use of the law which instructs Christians about God's will for them on a daily basis.<sup>573</sup> The former group, known polemically as Neonomians in the seventeenth century because of their advocacy of conditions which Christians must meet for salvation, would likely have viewed Petto as an antinomian. But a true antinomian

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 88-89, 94-95.

<sup>573</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.html>.

would likely have viewed Petto as a legalist because he would not countenance the abrogation of the moral law. His treatment of the Ten Commandments in *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant* (1674) anticipated and answered hypothetical objections from both groups.

Perhaps it was because of the Neonomians' reputation for requiring Christians to earn their salvation by their faith, repentance or obedience that Petto was so jealous to argue that eternal life in heaven was not the goal of Israel's keeping of the Ten Commandments. That way, even if someone did confuse or mix the Mosaic and new covenants, obeying the law for the purpose of earning eternal life would never be an option. Petto was clear: "*righteousness* did not come by the *Law*, i.e. as performed by us in our own persons; and also, that *the Law* could not give *Life, no Eternal Life* to be expected by it."<sup>574</sup> The only sense in which he was willing to talk about eternal life being the reward for keeping the Ten Commandments was in reference to the work which Christ came to do on behalf of his people. The Sinai Law "*promised its blessings, especially Eternal Life, upon the condition* of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ."<sup>575</sup> The only thing Israel stood to merit by obeying the law was "*temporal mercies.*"<sup>576</sup>

To those who wanted to say that elements of the Mosaic covenant were still binding upon Christians in the new covenant, Petto answered that the Mosaic covenant was no longer in force. Some of the reasons he gave for this were directly related to the Mosaic law. For one thing, "*the Ceremonial and Judicial Laws are generally granted to be abrogated, and so the old Covenant as to them* (which make

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<sup>574</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 108.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*



a considerable part of it) *is not continuing.*<sup>577</sup> For another, “*Jesus Christ hath perfectly satisfied and fulfilled the mount Sinai Moral Law, as it was a covenant for eternal life.*”<sup>578</sup> In other words, Jesus’ perfect and personal obedience to the Ten Commandments marked the end of the need to obey them in the way they functioned in the Mosaic covenant. Another reason Petto gave was that, “*the Lord is not rigorously exacting duty from Believers now, upon the legal terms of the Sinai covenant [cursed is he that continueth not in all].*”<sup>579</sup> The bracketed phrase comes from Galatians 3:10 in which Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 when the Decalogue was given for the second time. Since Jesus both continued in all the things written in the law and bore the curse of the law in the stead of his people, the Ten Commandments cannot speak to members of the new covenant in the same way they did to members of the Mosaic covenant. Yet another reason Petto gave was that “*if the Sinai Covenant were still continuing, then the people of God within it, might still be laying claim to the blessings of it, by vertue of the same promises in the very form as they are found therein.*”<sup>580</sup> That is, the new covenant does not offer rewards for obeying the Mosaic law, or threaten curses for disobeying it like passages such as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Finally, “*Various expressions holding forth our freedom from the Law do conclude that it is not continuing as a Covenant.*”<sup>581</sup> Here Petto had in mind New Testament passages like Romans 6:14 (“ye are not under the Law but under grace”) and Romans 7:4 (“Ye are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ, that ye might be married to another, even to him that is raised from

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 176-179.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 179-181.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 181-183.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 183-184.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 184-186.

the dead”).<sup>582</sup> Clearly, Petto would not countenance the idea that obedience to the Ten Commandments conditioned any blessings or curses for believers in the new covenant.

In fact, Petto would not even countenance things like faith and repentance—things usually associated with the new covenant—as conditions which believers must meet in order to be saved. He was speaking to the Richard Baxters and the Thomas Blakes when he said that “if they should give *Repentance, mourning for sin, self-emptiness, yea Faith it self*, the same place, and act therein upon such a ground as they did in *Circumcision*, Christ would be rendred of no effect unto such Souls.”<sup>583</sup> These were strong words indeed. Though Petto had no sympathy for antinomianism as defined by the Second Helvetic Confession, he perhaps had even less sympathy for legalism and neonomianism. Most puritans were willing to define antinomians as being outside the pale of Protestant orthodoxy. Petto was willing to do the same for legalists and neonomians.

But Petto was also concerned about believers’ consciences, assurance of salvation and motivations regarding their obedience (or disobedience) to the Ten Commandments. He warned his readers that if they acted according to the Mosaic covenant’s “*inforcements, terror, wrath, [and] curse,*” they were living “*in the spirit of the Old Covenant,*” “rather than by *the allurements of grace* in the free promise.”<sup>584</sup> One of the ways in which he thought believers might be tempted to live in the spirit of the Mosaic covenant, was to fear that they might still face eternal punishment for breaking the Ten Commandments. In light of this, he worked hard to comfort and encourage believers. First, he told them that they “*have always an*

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 184-185. Cf. p. 182.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 186.

*actual interest in Jesus Christ his righteousness and the satisfaction made by him,* and therefore are not one moment so *unpardoned* after the commission of new sins.”<sup>585</sup> Second, they “*are at all times actually interested in the general acquittance obtained by Jesus Christ, and therefore are not without the actual pardon of particular sins one moment after the commission of them.*”<sup>586</sup> Third, they “*are alwaies under Justification unto life, and therefore cannot at any time be actually under the obligation of the Law unto Eternal death.*”<sup>587</sup> Finally, they “*are continually under the New Covenant, and therefore the very instant wherein their sins are committed they are remitted; or the persons are disobliged from the Law Curse, and so actually pardoned.*”<sup>588</sup> Some of this counsel may have sounded dangerously close to the alleged antinomianism of the seventeenth century. But Petto had the courage of his convictions. He boldly announced: “The greater freedom from the Law as a Covenant, the more grace is used towards freedom from the dominion of sin.”<sup>589</sup> That is, fear of punishment and hope of reward only demonstrated to people that they were slaves to their sin; whereas the good news that Jesus had not only died for them but had obeyed for them as well, motivated to obey the Ten Commandments out of gratitude and joy.

Yet Petto seemed well aware that some might mistake his view of the Mosaic covenant and the role of the Ten Commandments within it for antinomianism. His response to any who would so accuse him was unequivocal: “*the substance of the ten Commandments is still obliging.*”<sup>590</sup> His reasons were fourfold. First, “*the moral Law is a perfect rule of righteousness and conformity to the Will of God, and*

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 229-234.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 234-236.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 236-238.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 238-243.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 171.

therefore *is perpetual*.<sup>591</sup> He noted that sin is only identifiable because the moral law—or Law of Nature, written on the human heart (Romans 2:14-15)—is perpetual. Second, “*the Lord hath declared his approbation of conformity to the moral Law, and with great severity witnessed against disconformity to it in all Ages.*”<sup>592</sup> In other words, God has never—nor will ever—tolerate violations of the substance of any of the Ten Commandments.<sup>593</sup> Third, “*the Natural tendency of the moral Law is to promote love.*”<sup>594</sup> Here Petto cited Jesus’ summary of the Ten Commandments in Matthew 22 in terms of love of God and love of neighbor. Finally, “*the moral Law is explained and obedience to it earnestly pressed in the times of the Gospel.*”<sup>595</sup> Even here, in the middle of pressing home examples of ethical imperatives which believers are obliged to obey, Petto notes that while even the smallest disobedience is sinful, it does not bring believers under condemnation.<sup>596</sup> Thus his answer to the hypothetical charge of antinomianism is Law in the Mosaic mode, but Law which is a joy to obey because the gospel which prevents it from damning.

Another line of evidence Petto used in answer to the hypothetical charge of antinomianism was the biblical idea of the law being written on people’s hearts. On the one hand, he cites Romans 2:14-15 where Paul argues that part of the reason why all of humanity is without excuse in its guilt before God is because “the work of the

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 171-172.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 172-173.

<sup>593</sup> Fascinatingly, as Petto mentions the substance of each of the Ten Commandments on p. 172, in order to demonstrate its permanence and perpetuity, he makes a move quite similar to Lutheranism in collapsing the first and second commandments into each other. Whereas the Reformed have historically understood the second commandment to prohibit making images of God—especially Christ—Lutherans have simply understood Exodus 20:4-6 as part of the first commandment’s prohibition against idolatry.

<sup>594</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 173.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 173-175.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 173-174. Cf. p. 182.

law is written in their hearts.”<sup>597</sup> But on the other hand, he cites Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8 even more frequently because there God’s writing of his law on the hearts of his special, covenant people as a gracious blessing of the New Covenant.<sup>598</sup> The point, as Petto sees it, is that in the Mosaic covenant, the moral law was outside of God’s people, standing over them and condemning them. But in the new covenant, God writes his law on his people’s hearts and that “shall wonderfully secure those that are really in the New, from the violation of it.”<sup>599</sup> Petto acknowledges that believers still sin; prior to the return of Christ, even this blessing of the new covenant will not completely eliminate that.<sup>600</sup> But in light of Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8, antinomianism is simply impossible for believers since they carry the moral law around with them in their hearts.

Ultimately, Petto urged his readers to obey the Ten Commandments out of their union with Christ by faith and their desire to become more like Christ.<sup>601</sup> Certainly, “the Law in the hand of Christ” is still useful to show believers their sin.<sup>602</sup> But in terms of instruction in God’s will for them, “Christians ought to perform all duty in conformity to Jesus Christ, *in the way to Salvation*, but *not* in the least *as that which justifieth or saveth*.”<sup>603</sup> For believers, duty ought to be “managed with a *Gospel Spirit*” such that the Divine Spirit is acting upon the “Soul by the Promise of the New Covenant.”<sup>604</sup> In other words, though Christians are to obey the Ten Commandments, those Commandments themselves do not contain or confer the power to obey. Only the gospel of Christ’s obedience to the Ten Commandments in

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid., 9-10, 171.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., a2, 33, 46, 78, 84, 256, 260-261, 266, 301.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid., 245, 247, 287, 324.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., 230, 241, 279,

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 100.

the place of his people and his substitutionary death in their place provides the motivation to obey.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

If Petto's doctrine of Christ's atonement, his advice for assurance of salvation, or his doctrine of the Mosaic covenant gave anyone reason to suspect him of antinomianism, he dispelled all doubts when it came to the so-called antinomian idea of justification from eternity. Justification from eternity had become associated with antinomianism because certain men such as Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh and John Eaton who had been labeled as antinomians, taught something close to the doctrine.<sup>605</sup> In *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant* (1674), Petto thoroughly denounced eternal justification as a "mistake" for many reasons.<sup>606</sup> First, "*None are actually interested in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, before union with him and the gift of Faith.*"<sup>607</sup> That is, Christ's righteousness does not become imputed to anyone until a person trusts Christ. Second, there is "*no actual interest in the promises of the New and better Covenant before union with Jesus Christ and Faith.*"<sup>608</sup> If justification is a preeminent blessing of the new covenant, then membership in that covenant is not even secure prior to union with Christ by faith. Third, "*None are actually and personally the Seed of Jesus Christ as the second Adam, before union with him and Faith; therefore none are actually and personally*

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<sup>605</sup> Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 114, 118, 119-120.

<sup>606</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 241.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-273.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-276.

*justified till then.*”<sup>609</sup> Fourth, “*All are in a state of condemnation till union with Jesus Christ by Faith, and so have no actual Justification till then.*”<sup>610</sup> In other words, condemnation is the opposite of, and only other possible alternative state besides justification; if a person is not justified until he or she trusts Christ, then that person is condemned before faith. Finally, Petto argued that there were “*many absurdities that attend the asserting Justification from Eternity.*”<sup>611</sup> The greatest absurdity which he seems able to conceive is that Adam would have been simultaneously under the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Not only would he have been seeking eternal life in two contradictory ways, but eternal justification would have meant that he was justified from sin before he had fallen into it.

At the same time, Petto believed that “*The love of God is an unchangeable and eternal act of his Will, ever one and the same, admitteth of no increase or decrease in him.*”<sup>612</sup> To some, this may have sounded dangerously close the idea espoused by John Eaton and others, that God loves his people as much when they sin as when they perform their best obedience—and that therefore, God cannot see sin in his elect.<sup>613</sup> But like his colleague John Owen, Petto was able to affirm that God has always loved his people because God does not change, while Petto also denied that God loved the elect’s sinful qualities or actions.<sup>614</sup> Indeed, “*From Eternity, although God had not a love of approbation to the state of the Elect unconverted, yet he had a*

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<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-278.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, 279-284.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-287.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>613</sup> John Eaton, *The honey-combe of free justification by Christ alone* (London, 1642), 120.

<sup>614</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 62-63. Cp. John Owen, *Of communion with God the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly in love, grace, and consolation* (Oxford, 167), 30.

love of commiseration unto their persons.”<sup>615</sup> Thus Petto’s careful theological analysis allowed him to affirm God’s free grace while denying antinomianism.

Though Michael Brown suggests that Petto may have been associated with the Fifth Monarchists—a group which believed that in 1666, Christ’s kingdom would be ushered in by civil political means—it is unclear how much evidence supports this.<sup>616</sup> What is more, Petto makes scant political references in his extant books. If John Owen’s politics were a major contributing factor to Richard Baxter’s awareness and dislike of Owen, perhaps it was Petto’s silence on matters civil that kept him from being noticed by the anti-antinomians.<sup>617</sup> Still, there were plenty of reasons that Petto should have provoked their ire. Firstly, he was an Independent, which men like Robert Baillie were sure indicated antinomian convictions.<sup>618</sup> Secondly, he had directly engaged some of Baxter’s peculiar doctrines. This, it seemed, was all it took to make Baxter suspect a person of antinomianism.<sup>619</sup> Thirdly, Petto shared the anti-legal theological conviction of many alleged antinomians, though he was able to express this in more orthodox ways. Instead of advocating justification from eternity or the idea that God cannot see sin in his elect, Petto used the doctrine of the Mosaic covenant being a covenant of works to oppose the imposition of the Ten Commandments on Christians as the condition of their acceptance before God.

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<sup>615</sup> Petto, *Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, 63.

<sup>616</sup> Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition*, 18. Brown also cites Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (1978; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 135.

<sup>617</sup> Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012) and also his *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>618</sup> Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisme, and the most of the other errours, which for the time doe trouble the Church of England*, (London, 1647); *A dissuasive from the errours of the time wherein the tenets of the principall sects, especially of the Independents, are drawn together in one map, for the most part in the words of their own authours, and their maine principles are examined by the touch-stone of the Holy Scriptures*, (London, 1645).

<sup>619</sup> See above.



It is this last point that makes Petto's microhistory so valuable for this thesis. By understanding the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works and seeing it as distinct in principle from the new covenant of grace, Petto was able to proclaim to Christians that the Ten Commandments did not come to them with the words, "Do this and live." That is, he believed that Christians were not under a covenant of works because Christ had successfully undergone the covenant of works on their behalf. This, he taught, is precisely what made the new covenant gracious and free for believers. Yet he did not believe that the principle of grace removed the responsibility of Christians under the new covenant to obey the Ten Commandments. If alleged antinomians like Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh and John Eaton did advocate obedience to the moral will of God, Petto outstripped them by grounding the obligation of Christians to obey the moral law in the unchanging nature of God and the implications of humanity having been made in God's image. But like the "imputationist" antinomians, Petto was careful to motivate Christian obedience by first proclaiming that Christ had not only satisfied the law's curse, but kept the law's precepts perfectly on behalf of his people. In any case, this unknown man of English theology wrote, perhaps, one of the most sophisticated responses to antinomianism of the seventeenth century.

## Chapter Six

In the spring of 1685, the government of the Netherlands sent an embassy to King James in London in order to renew treaties that had been signed by Charles II.<sup>620</sup> Though his health was poor, Herman Witsius was persuaded to accompany the chaplain. During his four-month stay, Witsius enjoyed getting to know William Sancroft, archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Compton, bishop of London, and various dissenting Protestants. His fame and reputation as a theologian and churchman made an impression on the English theological community, because when controversy over antinomianism returned in the 1690s, it was to Witsius that leaders in this community turned for mediation and advice.

Perhaps they approached Witsius because of his *magnum opus*, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus libri quatuor* (1675) which spent a great deal of time analyzing the Mosaic covenant and defending the third use of the law.<sup>621</sup> Perhaps they chose him because of his history of mediating theological disputes in the Netherlands – most famously, attempting to reconcile the disciples of Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Cocceius.<sup>622</sup> Perhaps they were impressed by his careful, theological method. Likely all of these reasons commended Witsius to the organization of Presbyterian and independent ministers that was known as the

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<sup>620</sup> J. van Genderen, *Herman Witsius: bijdrage tot de kennis der gereformeerde theologie* (s'Gravenhage: Guido de Bres, 1953), 70. I am indebted to Gert A. van den Brink for his help with this work.

<sup>621</sup> Witsius, *De oeconomia*, I.III.VII-XI, XXIV-XXVI; I.IV.VII; I.IX.XVI, XVIII; III.I.VII-IX, XVIII-XXII; III.III.II-X, XIV-XV, XXIV-XXVI, XXIX-XXXI; IV.IV.II, XII, XIV, XXV, XXVII-XXVIII, XXX-XXXI, XXXVII-XXXVIII, XLII, XLIV, XLVII-XLIX, XLI-XLV, XLVII; IV.XII.XXVI, XLIII, LX, LXII, LXXIII, LXXVI-LXXVII; IV.XIII.IX; IV.XIV.I, XX-XXII, XXV, XXXII, LI-LII.

<sup>622</sup> See “The Life and Theology of Herman Witsius” by Joel R. Beeke, ed. in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010) 8-9.

“Happy Union.”<sup>623</sup> However, according to Gert van den Brink, who published *Herman Witsius en het antinomianisme: met tekst en vertaling van de Animadversiones Irenicae* (2008), these English ministers did not choose Witsius for any prior experience with answering antinomians, for there were none to speak of.<sup>624</sup>

For the most part, after the Restoration, antinomian controversies seemed to have settled down – until Samuel Crisp republished his father Tobias Crisp’s posthumous collection of sermons, *Christ Alone Exalted* (1690). Richard Baxter, ever fearful of antinomianism, quickly produced a reply in his *Scripture Gospel defended* (1690), some months before his death. But Daniel Williams quickly took up a defense of Baxter’s position in his book *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated* (1692). The rising tide of polemic threatened the stability of the Happy Union, a network of dissenting Presbyterians and Congregationalists which existed for the support of rural churches. Other ministers in the union threatened to withdraw in light of Williams’s vitriol. Isaac Chauncey, a minister sympathetic to Crisp, wrote a book in response to Williams, entitled, *Neonomianism Unmask’d* (1692). Williams shot back with *A Defense of Gospel-Truth* (1693) and Chauncey countered again with *A Rejoynder* (1693). The antinomian controversy was back with a vengeance.

It was in this context that members of the Happy Union contacted Herman Witsius, sent him the books involved in the controversy, and requested his help. His

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<sup>623</sup> For what follows on the Happy Union, see D. Patrick Ramsey, “Meet Me in the Middle: Herman Witsius and the English Dissenters,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 19 (2008): 143-164. Cf. Tim Cooper, “Recrudescence: The Later Seventeenth Century,” in *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 152-191.

<sup>624</sup> Gert van den Brink, *Herman Witsius en het antinomianisme: met tekst en vertaling van de Animadversiones Irenicae* (Apeldoorn: Instituut Reformatieonderzoek, 2008). Van den Brink’s focus in this work is to connect Witsius’ response to antinomians with other theological loci like the doctrine of God, predestination, providence, Christology, pneumatology and anthropology. He is not interested in covenant theology or the mosaic covenant.

response was a book entitled *Conciliatory or Irenical Animadversions On the Controversies Agitated in Britain Under the unhappy names of Antinomians and Neonomians* (1696). While he addresses the debates' participants as "Brethren," it is difficult to discern with any certainty whether Witsius had made the acquaintance of any of the disputants during his time in London. Even so, he cited the fact that he "had scarce a tolerable knowledge of [their] language," and humbly demurred that he was "at all endowed with such wisdom and authority, as to be accounted a proper judge in so great a controversy" as reasons why he was reluctant to participate in their discussion.<sup>625</sup> But participate he did. We will return to his *Animadversions* after examining the theological groundwork Witsius had laid in his *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus libri quatuor* (1675).

## I. Tobias Crisp

When the English network of Independents and Presbyterians known as the Happy Union contacted Witsius in the early 1690s, it was, in large part, because of the republication of Tobias Crisp's book *Christ alone exalted* (1690) had reinvigorated the antinomian controversy. Witsius himself said that the brothers of the Happy Union had sent him books.<sup>626</sup> Whether Crisp's was among them, he does not say—nor does he mention Crisp by name in his *Animadversions* (1696). However it seems unlikely that both sides would neglect to include the book that had initiated the discord.

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<sup>625</sup> Herman Witsius, *Animadversiones Irenicae Ad Controversias Qua, sub infaustis Antinomorum Et Neonomorum Nominibus, in Britannia nunc agitantur* (Utrecht, 1696), 5-6.

<sup>626</sup> Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 5.

Born in 1600, Tobias Crisp (d. 1643) was a minister in the Church of England who earned four university degrees, the last one being a Doctor of Divinity from Cambridge in 1638. Surviving records indicate that he only wrote sermons, and those were only published posthumously, beginning in 1643 under the title *Christ alone exalted, in fourteene sermons preached in, and neare London*.<sup>627</sup> Richard Baxter attacked the first publication of *Christ alone exalted* with his own book, *Aphorismes of justification with their explication annexed* (1649) because he was convinced that Crisp had been an antinomian.<sup>628</sup>

It is true that Crisp formulated some doctrines very unusually. He preached that believers were justified before they exercised faith in Christ, but he seems to have done so in an attempt to counter positions that would see faith as a good work or as the condition of the new covenant which man must meet in order to be saved.<sup>629</sup> He also preached that the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant were two distinct covenants of grace.<sup>630</sup> In its Confession of Faith (1646), the Westminster Assembly seems to have taken aim at this very formulation of justification in chapter 11, section 4, and this approach to covenant theology in chapter 7, section 6.<sup>631</sup> Yet the

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<sup>627</sup> Tobias Crispe, *Christ alone exalted, in fourteene sermons preached in, and neare London* (London, 1643).

<sup>628</sup> Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification with their explication annexed: wherein also is opened the nature of the covenants, satisfaction, righteousness, faith, works, &c.* (London, 1649).

<sup>629</sup> See, for example, Tobias Crisp, “The New Covenant of Free Grace, Isaiah xlii. 6, 7” in *Christ Alone Exalted* (London, 1690), 84-86. Yet, in the same sermon, he says, “...There is no person under heaven shall be saved till he have believed. This I grant; yet this will not make faith to be the condition of the covenant,” p. 84.

<sup>630</sup> Crisp, “The Two Covenants of Grace, Hebrews viii.6” in *Christ Alone Exalted*, 241-259.

<sup>631</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) XI.IV says, “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins and rise again for their justification; nevertheless they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.” VII.VI says, “Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed, are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the

charge of antinomianism does not fit what Crisp preached, if by antinomianism is meant the normative function of the Decalogue for believers.<sup>632</sup> He was antinomian in the “anti-legal” sense, to be sure, but he bears virtually no resemblance to Luther’s Agricola or Calvin’s Libertines.

Crisp’s analysis of the divine covenants bears further attention here in light of Witsius’s use of covenant theology in answering the antinomian/neonomian controversy. In his sermon entitled, “The new covenant of free grace,” Crisp follows the Reformed distinction between two kinds of covenants: works and grace. He identifies the covenant of works, which he also calls “the first covenant” and “the old covenant” as being conditioned on the terms, “Do this, and live.”<sup>633</sup> In fact, “if the covenant stands upon such conditions, the covenant is frustrated, so soon as the conditions are broken.”<sup>634</sup> In contrast, “the new covenant is without any conditions on man’s part.”<sup>635</sup> It is “the second covenant” or “the covenant of grace.”<sup>636</sup>

Yet he very quickly departs from the Reformed analysis. First, he does not appear to understand Adam as having been involved in a covenant of works.<sup>637</sup> Granted, Calvin does not explicitly articulate a creational covenant of works with

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sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.”

<sup>632</sup> In “Men’s own righteousness their grand idol Romans x.3” in *Christ Alone Exalted*, 136. Crisp says, “I speak not against the doing of any righteousness according to the will of God revealed. Let that mouth be for ever stopped, that shall be opened to blame the law that is holy, just and good; or shall be the means to discourse people from walking in the commandments of God blameless.”

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>637</sup> On page 87 of Volume 1, Crisp compares and contrasts Adam and Christ, but he only mentions the covenant of grace with reference to Christ. All he says of Adam is, “Adam was all mankind, as all mankind was in Adam, in the loins of Adam...”

Adam. Yet Calvin does understand Adam as being under the principle of law, in his commentary on Genesis 2:16.<sup>638</sup> But in spite of that, Witsius himself is proof that Reformed theology had developed since the time of Calvin, such that an original covenant of works with Adam was standard fare within a century of Calvin's death.<sup>639</sup> In fact, even though it would be published after Crisp's death, Witsius himself would write in 1685, "But I esteem much more dangerous the opinions of some men, in other respects very learned, who deny that a covenant of works was made with Adam."<sup>640</sup> He went on to say that the effects of a denial of the covenant of works with Adam would include problems with the doctrines of Christ and salvation. It would seem that with a Bachelor of Divinity and a Doctor of Divinity among his four degrees, Crisp should have been familiar with this development in Reformed theology.

Second, while in many places Crisp speaks of Christ as being himself the covenant of grace, he also speaks of Christ as being the covenant of works to Israel. "As for the first, the old covenant, the covenant of works, which stood upon these

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<sup>638</sup> Jean Calvin, *A commentarie of Iohn Caluine, vpon the first booke of Moses called Genesis* (London, 1578), 69-71.

<sup>639</sup> For Witsius on the covenant of works with Adam, see the entirety of Book 1 of *De oeconomia*. For others who spanned the time between Calvin and Witsius, and who understood there to be a covenant of works with Adam, see Zacharias Ursinus, *Summa theologiae* (1562); Dudley Fenner, *Sacra theologia, sive veritas quae est secundum pietatem* (Geneva, 1585), to the extent that Fenner cited Genesis 2:17 in support of the idea of the covenant of works; Johannes Piscator, *Aphorismi doctrinae christianae* (1589); Amandus Polanus à Polansdorf, *Partitiones theologicae juxta naturalis methodae leges conformatae duobus libris* (Basel: Waldkirch, 1590); Robert Rollock, *Tractatus de vocatione efficaci* (Edinburgh: Waldegrave, 1597); William Perkins, *The works of that famous and worthie minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins gathered into one volume, and newly corrected according to his owne copies* (Cambridge, 1603); William Ames, *Medulla SS theologiae, ex SS literis, earumque interpretibus, extracta, et methodice disposita* (Amsterdam, 1627). I am indebted to Robert Letham for the list above, in his essay "The foedus operum: some factors accounting for its development," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14, no. 4 (1983) pp. 457-467.

<sup>640</sup> From the fifth page of "A Pacific Address," in *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* (Leovardiae, 1685).

terms, ‘Do this and live,’ it is very probable, if not certain, that Christ was this first covenant unto men, even the covenant of works...”<sup>641</sup> This formulation is not at all familiar to Reformed federal theology.

Third, Crisp argues that there are actually two covenants of grace. In a sermon entitled, “The two covenants of grace,” based upon Hebrews 8:6 (“But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”), he says,

the whole administration of that covenant, which the priests had to manage, was wholly and only a matter of grace: and though it were a Covenant of Grace, yet it is opposed to that Covenant which Christ in his own Person did mediate. Therefore the opposition which stands here, is not between the Covenant of Works, and Covenant of Grace, but it is between the Covenant of Grace *weak, imperfect, unprofitable, disannulled*; and another Covenant of Grace that is *perfect, established*, and makes the comers thereunto perfect. So that indeed, though *Christ* be the subject matter of the Covenant of Grace, whether it be the Old or the New Covenant, and though there be Remission of sins in both the Old and New Covenant: (for I call the Priests Covenant now the Old, and that I will make good presently) yet, I say, there is such a difference between these two, that they are two distinct Covenants one from the other.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>641</sup> Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 79.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 247. He makes a similar move in the sermon “The new covenant of free grace” on p. 79 when he says, “...for, however, [the old covenant] be not a *Covenant of Grace*, as the second and new *Covenant* is, yet it may, in some sense, be called a *Covenant of Grace*, in reference to other Creatures, for all Creatures are under this tie *To do this*; that is, what their part is which God hath imposed upon them: Yet no Creature hath this privilege of *Grace*.” However, while he seems to be closer to dealing with the legal stipulations of the Mosaic covenant here, his point is not at all clear.



This actually bears some resemblance to Witsius's formulation of the Mosaic covenant in *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus*. Witsius could not help but see continuity in the divine covenant of salvation such that began at the Fall and continues on through history until Christ returns. That gave him pause as he considered the place and function of the Mosaic covenant in that larger context.<sup>643</sup> It seems that Crisp may have been doing something similar, here. However, Crisp's major innovation at this point was to define the old and new covenants as two distinct covenants of grace. It does not appear that he has in view here, the Decalogue or even other Mosaic laws with the stipulations of "Do this and live" and "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them," in his desire to distinguish the two covenants. Instead, Crisp was contrasting the imperfection of the old covenant sacrificial system with the better sacrifice of Christ. Ironically, it is the sacrificial system with its offer of forgiveness which caused Witsius and other covenant theologians to see continuity with the covenant of grace.

While it is difficult to evaluate a system of thought based solely on sermons, it does seem that the antinomianism of Tobias Crisp amounts to what T. D. Bozeman has called "the antinomian backlash" against the intense strictures of the emerging puritan pietism. That is, Crisp's sermons make him seem more interested in being "anti-legal" than in denying the normativity of the Ten Commandments in the Christian life. He may have recognized that the ethos of puritan piety was different than that of the earlier Reformation theologians on the continent, but he does not appear to have appropriated or even developed the theology of the latter. Most significantly, in this regard, is what he said regarding the covenant of works. He uses the phrase, and provides evidence of the works principle from scripture, but

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<sup>643</sup> See note 642, above.

since he says nothing about a covenant with Adam, and claims that the Mosaic covenant was a second, weaker covenant of grace, it is difficult to know where Crisp would locate the covenant of works, historically.

## II. Witsius' Covenant Theology

Herman Witsius (1636-1708) was one of the most significant seventeenth-century theological figures in the Netherlands. He had many distinguished peers, including Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) and Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), but Witsius stands out for not only not having a party spirit, but for being sought out as a mediator in theological disputes. Born in Enkhuizen in 1636, Witsius was veritably destined for the worlds of theology and academics as the grandson of a minister, the son of an elder and the nephew of an able linguist. There is scant information about his academic degrees, but in 1651, when he was fifteen years old, his uncle sent him off to the university at Utrecht and in 1655 he defended his thesis entitled *Disputatio philological, S.S. Trinitatem ex Judaeis contra Judaeos probans*.<sup>644</sup> On 15 April, 1675, he was declared Doctor of Divinity by the university at Utrecht.<sup>645</sup> He was minister of word and sacrament at Reformed churches in Leovaarden, West Wouden, Wormer, Goese, Franeker and Utrecht.

Arguably the most infamous dispute in which Witsius intervened was between Gisbertus Voetius and Johannes Cocceius and their respective disciples.

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<sup>644</sup> See Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 25-28; Genderen, *Herman Witsius*, 11. I am indebted to Gert A. van den Brink for his help with the last citation.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Voetius was a systematic theologian who discussed biblical data topically, and arranged theological loci according to their logical relationships to one another. Cocceius was primarily interested in the biblical data in terms of how the metanarrative of God's redemption of sinners unfolded throughout history. Both were working with the same data, but analyzing it according to different organizing principles. But Voetius and Cocceius were critical of each other because of their respective methodologies. Students and masters mocked and insulted each other, and the conflict threatened the peace of the Dutch Reformed churches.

But Witsius saw a way through this debate surrounding the genre of theological inquiry. In 1675 he published *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum omnibus libri quatuor*, a work which took Christian doctrines of salvation (topics) and analyzed them according to their use and development in the various biblical covenants from the beginning of time to the end (history).<sup>646</sup> In fact, the biblical data concerning divine covenants was the topic to which Witsius gave most of his time and attention in this work.

Since Reformed theology holds that the primary purpose of the Bible is for the salvation of human beings, promoting and protecting that doctrine of salvation is the chief task of the Reformed theologian. But Reformed theology also holds that covenants are the instruments God has used to administer his kingdom, and, after the Fall, to save sinners. That accounts for the emphases of *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum omnibus*. While there are many interesting details involved in a covenant theology that comprehends all of history from creation to consummation, the basic plot is not complicated. Reformed covenant theology holds that God created Adam

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<sup>646</sup> While *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* demonstrated that the organizing principles of logic and history were easily harmonized, neither the Voetians nor the Cocceians were satisfied.

and Eve in a covenant based upon the principle of simple justice. The reward for their obedience was eternal life in heaven, while the punishment for their disobedience was eternal death in hell. Their choice to sin caused them and their descendants to fall from their created state of righteousness and merit hell. But, the Reformed system holds, God immediately instituted a remedial covenant based upon the principle of grace—divine favor in spite of the deserved punishment. Yet God’s justice is not set aside, because the basis of his grace is the incarnation of the eternal Son, his perfect obedience to the law, his substitutionary death and his vindictory resurrection—all on behalf of believers. Reformed theology developed the idea that the three persons of the Trinity had covenanted among themselves for the salvation of the elect. J. Mark Beach has attested to Witsius’ role in the development of that aspect of Reformed covenant theology.<sup>647</sup> Reformed theology also holds that everyone after Adam who trusts that what Christ did, he did for them, will receive the same eternal life in heaven that was originally offered to Adam and Eve.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> J. Mark Beach, “The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 13 (2002): 101-142.

<sup>648</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.x.20, 23 and II.xi.1-14. See also, J.V. Fesko, “Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant,” in Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 25-43; Mark A. Herzer, “Adam’s Reward: Heaven or Earth?” in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 162-182; Zacharias Ursinus, *The summe of Christian religion*, (Oxford, 1587), pp. 126-127, 130, 134, 136-137; Amandus Polanus a Polansdorf, *Syntagma Theologiae christianae ab Amando Polano Juxta leges ordinis Methodici conformatum, atque In libros decem digestum, jamque demum in unum volumen compactum ... novissime emendatum atque ... auctum* (Hanoviae, 1625), VI, 50; Johannes Wollebius, *Christianae theologiae compendium, accurata methodo sic adornatum, ut ad SS. Scripturas legendas, ad locos communes dirigendos, ad controversias intelligendas, sit manuductio* (Amstelodami, 1633), I.viii; Samuel Maresius, *Collegium theologicum, sive Systema breve universae theologiae; comprehensum octodecim disputationibus, collegialiter olim habitis in Academia provinciali ... ordinum Groninae & Omlandiae ... Editio sexta iuxta exemplar quartae & quintae ab avthore ultimo recognitae, excusa* (Genevae, 1662),

Within this system of covenants, the most complex covenant of postlapsarian history is the covenant God made with Israel through Moses. It was in the context of that covenant that God gave the Decalogue, and the Decalogue has functioned in both the Lutheran and Calvinist wings of the Protestant Reformation as the pattern for the Christian life. Hence, as we have seen, any who would deny the continuing validity of the Decalogue was considered an antinomian. But what made it so complicated was that it bore striking similarities to the original covenant with Adam in that it offered blessings for obedience and threatened curses for disobedience. Yet it was a covenant made with sinners in the context of the postlapsarian covenant of grace. The question that troubled many early modern theologians was how the principles of justice and grace could operate within the same covenant.<sup>649</sup>

Witsius recognized this problem early on in *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus*. In the chapter on “the Law, or Condition, of the Covenant of Works,” he states that the law which defined the principle of justice in the prelapsarian covenant with Adam was the law of nature.<sup>650</sup> Furthermore, that natural law is inescapable because it is the result of human beings having been made in the image of God.<sup>651</sup> But right away, Witsius makes an interesting move with regard to the Mosaic covenant. In speaking of the law of nature, he says that it “is the same in substance

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VIII, 23ff.; Johannes Coccejus, *Doctrina de foedere et Testamento Dei* (Genevae, 1665), II, § 32, 38, 39; see also Coccejus’ *Summa theologiae ex scripturis repetita* (Genevae, 1665), XXIII, 13-14; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), VIII.i.5-6.

<sup>649</sup> Richard Muller sees Calvin in essential continuity with the later development of the idea of the covenant of works—even as it was applied to the Mosaic covenant in his essay, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus À Brakel,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 88-89. Witsius himself wrestled with this question in *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* (Trajectum ad Rhenum: Halman, 1694) IV.IV.XLIV-LVII and IV.XII.XXVI.

<sup>650</sup> Witsius, *De oeconomia* I.III.II and I.III.VII.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, I.III.X.

with the decalogue.”<sup>652</sup> That would seem to connect the Adamic covenant of works with the Decalogue of the Mosaic covenant in terms of the governing principle of simple justice. Witsius goes on to say that “the decalogue contains such precepts, ‘which if a man do he shall live in them,’ Lev. 18:5. But those precepts are undoubtedly the law proposed to Adam, upon which the covenant of works was built.”<sup>653</sup> In fact, Witsius identifies the Mosaic law and the covenant of works in terms of their threatening contents “against the transgressors thereof, as in the second and third commandments: and this is the sanction of the covenant of works”<sup>654</sup> In other places he is even more explicit. He says that the law which was given at Sinai “was a repetition of the covenant of works.”<sup>655</sup> “For both the very same precepts are inculcated, on which the covenant of works was founded, and which constituted the condition of that covenant; and that sentence is repeated, ‘which if a man do he shall live in them’”<sup>656</sup>

In fact, it almost seems that Witsius cannot discuss the covenant with either Adam or Moses without discussing the other. One fascinating feature of his treatment of the covenant of works with Adam in *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* is his use of biblical passages which have to do with the Mosaic law in order to prove the prelapsarian covenant of works. For example, when arguing for the perfection that is required in keeping the law of the covenant of works, he cites Galatians 3:10: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., I.III.VII. See also IV.IV.II.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., I.III.VII.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XIV.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XLVIII.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XLVII.

the book of the law to do them.”<sup>657</sup> Without getting into the exegetical case for understanding the “works of the law” as the Mosaic law, the last phrase – “the Book of the Law” – clearly refers to the Pentateuch. So both in theological principle and in interpretive practice, Witsius identifies the principle of justice—“do this and live”—as operative both in the prelapsarian covenant of works with Adam and in the Mosaic law.<sup>658</sup> But even more explicitly, Witsius cites Deuteronomy 6:5 (“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”) and 27:26 (“Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen”) for support of the same thing. Both verses are from the Mosaic law.

Yet at the same time, Witsius saw the Mosaic covenant as being of the same substance as the covenant of grace. Indeed, “*by the Old Testament*, we are by no means to understand *the legal covenant*, obtaining salvation by our own works; that being very different from the covenant of grace.”<sup>659</sup> By implication, then, Witsius is saying that the Old Testament, including the Mosaic covenant, is part of the covenant of grace. Elsewhere he says that even though the covenant of grace is dispensed differently after Christ than it was before, those two dispensations are not opposed to one another.<sup>660</sup> Using something like the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accidents, Witsius says,

It is a matter of the greatest moment, that we learn distinctly to consider the covenant of grace, either as it is in its *substance* or essence, as they call it, or

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid., I.III.XXIV.

<sup>658</sup> Compare the same phenomenon on the part of Witsius’s contemporaries at the Westminster Assembly in the scripture proofs for section 2 of Chapter 7: “Of God’s Covenant with Man.” The Confession cites Galatians 3:12; Romans 5:12-20; Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:10, all which refer to the Mosaic covenant (the Romans 5 passage referring to both the Adamic and Mosaic covenants).

<sup>659</sup> Witsius, *De oeconomia*, III.III.II.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., IV.XII.XXVI.

as it is in divers ways proposed by God, with respect to *circumstantials*, under different economies. If we view the *substance* of the covenant, it is but only *one*, nor is it possible it should be otherwise.<sup>661</sup>

In other words, if the prelapsarian covenant of works with Adam held out the promise of eternal life in heaven on condition of perfect obedience, it would not be possible to reintroduce all of those elements in the postlapsarian situation because sinners cannot earn their own eternal life.<sup>662</sup>

But this left Witsius in a predicament about the precise nature of the Mosaic covenant. On the one hand, it “was not formally the covenant of works” for the reasons listed above.<sup>663</sup> But on the other hand, “[n]or was it formally the covenant of grace: because that requires not only obedience, but also promises, and bestows the strength to obey.”<sup>664</sup> His angst regarding which position he will take on the nature of the Mosaic covenant comes out clearly when, considering the principle of justice and the condition of obedience in that covenant, he says,

We are not to think that God, by these words, required Israel to perform perfect obedience in all parts and decrees, as the condition of the covenant. For in that case, the whole of this proposal would be nothing, but an intimation of an inevitable curse. Seeing it is absolutely impossible for sinful man to give such a perfect observance, even though he is regenerated and

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<sup>661</sup> Ibid., III.II.I.

<sup>662</sup> Cp. Ibid., IV.IV.XLIX. See also Fesko, “Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant,” 36-38.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.LI.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., IV.IV. LIII. It should be noted that by “requiring obedience” here, Witsius does not mean conditions that must be met in order to receive eternal life. He is using the idea of obedience being required in the sense of the third use of the law: believers must produce good works. The requirement or necessity is an effect of the salvation, not a cause of it.



sanctified. But a conditional proposal upon an impossible condition, is equivalent to an absolute denial.<sup>665</sup>

Even as he sees the doctrine of the covenant of works republished in the Decalogue, Witsius does not see how a covenant of works could be made with sinners.

### **III. Witsius on the Decalogue and its relationship to the Mosaic Covenant**

His solution to this difficulty appears to have been to distinguish the Decalogue from the rest of the Mosaic covenant. The law, containing the doctrine of the covenant of works, is part of the types and shadows that anticipated Christ's arrival on the scene of history, whereas the Mosaic covenant—as a postlapsarian covenant—is of the same substance as the covenant of grace. In fact, he says of members of the Mosaic covenant, that “they were likewise partakers of the Abrahamic covenant, which was a pure covenant of grace.”<sup>666</sup> This allows for continuity in the covenant of grace, but simultaneously makes room for the legal, conditional and justiciary nature of the Mosaic law. It is that same law that is at issue in the antinomian controversy.

Yet as is so typical of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology, the Decalogue, in Witsius's system, may be considered as both entailing the doctrine of the covenant of works and being “that law, which still continues to be the rule of our actions, and whose righteousness ought to be fulfilled in us,” under the covenant of grace.<sup>667</sup> As to its rigor and curse, he says the law was the covenant of works; yet “as it is the rule of life and manners. . . Christians are no less under the decalogue

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XLIV.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., IV.XII.XXVI.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., I.III.VII.

than the Jews were formerly.”<sup>668</sup> Which way it is viewed depends upon whether it is being treated in the context of the *historia salutis* (in which case it would be functioning as the stipulations of the covenant of works) or in the context of the *ordo salutis* (in which case it would be functioning as the pattern of life under the covenant of grace). This is, again, the difference between the law as a principle of justice, the keeping of which would cause one to receive the blessing of the covenant, and the law as the pattern to which believers are conformed as an effect of eternal life. This is the difference, says Witsius: “that under the covenant of works, this condition is required to be performed by man himself; under the covenant of grace it is proposed, as already performed, or to be performed by a mediator.”<sup>669</sup>

Witsius is jealous to identify the principle of law contained in the covenant of works with the law of nature. This is not only important for the function of the Decalogue within the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, but it is a vital component of Witsius’s response to traditional antinomianism (i.e., the rejection of the third use of the law). He acknowledges that there have been those within protestant orthodoxy (specifically naming Zanchius and Musculus) who have denied that the Decalogue, *as uniquely part of the Mosaic covenant*, could bind anyone outside of that covenant “but only in so far, as they agree with the law of nature, common to all nations, and confirmed by Christ, whom we acknowledge to be our king.”<sup>670</sup> Thus, Witsius concludes that because “the decalogue contains the sum of the law of nature, and, as to its substance is one and the same therewith, so far it is of perpetual and universal obligation.”<sup>671</sup> But his strongest argument in this regard comes from the doctrinal locus of man as *imago Dei*. In Colossians 3:10 (“And have

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XXXVIII.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XVII.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XXVII.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., IV.IV.XXVIII.

put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him”), Witsius sees the apostle Paul arguing that since man is made in the image of God, and since God is holy, therefore the human beings ought to resemble the divine original as much as is possible for human creatures.<sup>672</sup> The indicative of creation in the image of God has an imperatival force to it: “Seeing God therefore is holy in his nature, on that very account it follows, that men should be so too.”<sup>673</sup>

#### IV. Animadversions

When Heinrich Bullinger came to discuss the place of the law as he wrote the Second Helvetic Confession in 1566, he used the Latin phrase “contra legem Dei” (lit. “contrary to the law of God”) to describe those “heretics” who taught antinomianism.<sup>674</sup> It is not insignificant that in the title of his reply to the English theologians, Herman Witsius did not use the same lexeme or even one from the same semantic domain. Instead, he transliterated the English word “Antinomian” (Latin: Antinomorum), signaling that perhaps Witsius did not necessarily consider Tobias Crisp and his defenders the heretics mentioned in the Second Helvetic Confession.<sup>675</sup> This point is further underscored by the fact that he considered the term “Antinomian” to be *infaustis* (“unhappy” or “unfortunate”). In light of the medieval philosophical schools of nominalism and realism, it is not coincidental that the

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<sup>672</sup> Ibid., I.III.X. William Crookshank, the translator of the 1822 English edition, believes that there has been an error by the publisher of the Latin original (presumably the 1694 edition) with regard to the Scripture reference, here. Crookshank believes the reference should be to Ephesians 4:24. If the publisher did introduce an error it had been perpetuated at least in the 1685 edition as well.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid., I.III.X.

<sup>674</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of The Evangelical Protestant Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.html>.

<sup>675</sup> Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 1.

learned Witsius also called the lexeme “Antinomian,” *nominibus* (“name”).<sup>676</sup> In other words, Witsius did not believe that Tobias Crisp, Richard Baxter, or anyone who lined up behind them were completely outside the pale of Protestant orthodoxy *in reality*.

Still, Witsius did express real, theological differences with Crisp, albeit in the irenic manner promised. Given what Crisp preached about the law of God and the need for good works, most of Witsius’s interaction with Crisp was within the domain of covenant theology. On the relationship between the covenant of grace and the Mosaic covenant, Witsius succinctly repeats what he had already said in *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus*. There he had been careful to insist that there was fundamental unity to the covenant of grace, even though the Mosaic covenant contained typological accretions. Even though “the testament of grace is eternal salvation, with every thing belonging to it, through Jesus Christ; which is equally common to believers in all ages,” the Mosaic or Old covenant differed in the following: “the inheritance of the land of Canaan, as a pledge of heaven, with a bondage to the elements of the world, and the exclusion of the Gentiles, and a less measure of the Spirit of grace.”<sup>677</sup>

Likewise, in the *Animadversiones*, Witsius defends the unity of the covenant of grace, but he does so in the context of highlighting the principle of works that was operative in the Mosaic covenant. Using the same biblical texts he had in *De oeconomia* (Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 27:26), he argues that Moses

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<sup>676</sup> In fairness, it should be noted that the term “Neonomian” was included with the term “Antinomian” in the title, so that everything that has been said about the latter is also true of the former. Still, in *Animadversiones* chapter VIII, section VIII, Witsius compares the Neonomian position to Socinianism.

<sup>677</sup> Witsius, *De oeconomia* III.III.IV.

“inculcated the same precepts upon which the covenant of works had been built.”<sup>678</sup> He went on to say that “that repetition of the covenant of works was designed to convince the Israelites of their sin and misery, to drive them out of themselves, to teach them the necessity of a satisfaction, and to compel them to cleave to Christ: and thus it was subservient to the covenant of grace, Romans 10:4.”<sup>679</sup> And yet, the covenant dealings between God and Israel did not involve “any thing opposite to the genius of the covenant of grace; that, on the contrary, they implied, and supposed that covenant, at least in respect of the elect.”<sup>680</sup>

But while he was insistent on the integrity of the one covenant of grace, Witsius was careful to avoid the implication that given a “repetition of the covenant of works,” Israel would have earned eternal life in heaven by their obedience to the law of God. It is not “as if God had intended, by the ministry of Moses, to make a new covenant of works with Israel, with a view to obtain righteousness and salvation by such a covenant.”<sup>681</sup> This is given corroborative context by an earlier statement in the *Animadversiones* with regard to Adam:

The law of works is that which demands works to be done by man himself, as the condition of life, or the cause of claiming the reward: the tenor of which is this, ‘The man who doeth these things shall live in them,’ Romans 10:5. Such a law was given to Adam of old, who, if he had persevered in his integrity, would have obtained a right to eternal life by his works of righteousness.<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> Witsius, *Animadversiones*, VIII.II.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid., XIV.IV.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid., VIII.II.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid., VIII.I.

In other words, according to Witsius's theological categories, a covenant of works must necessarily be made with respect to a heavenly inheritance. Yet Witsius understands that his scriptural support for the covenant of works comes from texts from the Mosaic covenant.<sup>683</sup> This explains his angst over the classification of the Mosaic covenant in *De oeconomia*. While he expounded the typological aspect of the Mosaic covenant in III.III.III and III.III.IV of *De oeconomia*, here, in the *Animadversiones*, he appears more willing to apply the phrase “the covenant of works” to the Mosaic covenant, while emphasizing that *insofar as it was part of the covenant of grace*, the inheritance of the Mosaic covenant was heaven itself. That is why “the carnal Israelites, not attending to the purpose of God, mistook the true sense of this covenant, embraced it as a covenant of works, and sought their righteousness by it.”<sup>684</sup>

As Witsius read scripture with his Reformed forbears, the only (mere) human being who should have sought his righteousness by the covenant of works was Adam. Even in the *Animadversiones*, Witsius has no problem affirming “the first covenant between God and Adam.”<sup>685</sup> In that covenant, “Adam was bound, either to obedience perfect in all respects, or to punishment.”<sup>686</sup> Earlier, in differentiating between the covenant of works with Adam and the covenant of works with Israel on the basis of eternal inheritance, Witsius had said that Adam had been working to earn

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<sup>683</sup> Furthermore, using the Protestant principle of the *analogia fidei*, Witsius is convinced that the Mosaic covenant is, in some sense a covenant of works, by the Apostle Paul: “That this is the curse of the law, as it stands opposed to the covenant of grace, Paul teacheth, Galatians 3:10 which, however, is not so to be understood, as if God had intended, by the ministry of Moses, to make a new covenant of works with Israel, with a view to obtain righteousness and salvation by such a covenant.” *Animadversiones* VIII.II.

<sup>684</sup> Witsius, *Animadversiones* VIII.III.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.V.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*

eternal life in heaven, whereas Israel was not. Again, he says, “Perpetual life was promised to Adam, provided he would obey.”<sup>687</sup>

This was clearly different than Tobias Crisp’s covenant theology. Instead of two covenants of grace, one better and one weaker, Witsius propounded one covenant of grace (by which all the elect would be saved) with a subservient (or typological) covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant. Instead of a covenant-less context for Adam’s representation of all humanity, Witsius not only clearly identified the relationship between God and Adam as qualified by covenant, but he even located the covenant of works in that primitive history. Finally, while Crisp argued that Christ *is* the covenant of grace, Witsius consistently spoke of Christ as the surety of the covenant of grace. The theological rationale for this was the eternal, intratrinitarian covenant, or *pactum salutis*. Under that covenant, “it behoved the surety to satisfy according to the rigor of the law,” even though “the reward of his work was not promised to our surety, except he should at once both perform the most perfect obedience to the law, and likewise endure the punishment due to sin. And therefore *the law* in all its rigor, both as to its preceptive part, and as to its penal sanction, is the *condition* of that covenant which took place between *God and the surety*.”<sup>688</sup> Thus, for Witsius, the apostle Paul’s schema of Adam and Christ as the two covenant representatives of humanity functioned as the theological hermeneutic for analyzing the divine covenants with humanity. It could not be otherwise; for as Witsius and his reformed forbears understood Paul in passages like Romans 5:12-20 and 1 Corinthians 15:40-50, every human being was either represented by Adam or by Christ.

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid.

## V. Conclusion

One of the distinctive features of Herman Witsius was his membership in the Dutch Reformed Church. He was ordained to the pastoral ministry in that denomination in May of 1656, and he served in that capacity for fifty-two years.<sup>689</sup> This sets him apart from the other figures in this thesis. John Cotton, John Owen and Samuel Petto were Independents. John Bunyan was a Baptist. Edward Fisher was probably a member of a Presbyterian church, but he did not hold office there.<sup>690</sup> The Dutch Reformed Church was the continental counterpart to the English and Scottish Presbyterian Churches.<sup>691</sup> The crucial difference, however, was that the Dutch Reformed Church enjoyed greater stability due to its widespread acceptance in the Netherlands.<sup>692</sup> While puritans of various ecclesiologies tried and failed to achieve ecclesiastical hegemony in England during the seventeenth century, the Dutch Reformed Church was able to focus on other matters—including receiving English puritan refugees. Part of the significance of this was that, while the Dutch Reformed certainly had their intramural theological disputes, they were able to engage in them in relative tranquility. In large measure, the Dutch Reformed did not know the same degree of profound alarm over social and political chaos and unrest as their English

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<sup>689</sup> William Crookshank, “The Life of the Author,” in *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Printed by Thomas Turnbull, 1803), 24.

<sup>690</sup> William VanDoodewaard, “A Journey into the Past: The Story of the Marrow of Modern Divinity” in Edward Fisher and Thomas Boston, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 27.

<sup>691</sup> Joseph H. Hall, “History and Character of Church Government,” in David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall, eds., *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 3-11.

<sup>692</sup> Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, “Introduction” in R. Po-Chia Hsia and H.F.K. Van Nierop, eds., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-7.



puritan brethren. While puritans labeled each other the Antichrist, and remained concerned that antinomians—whether inherentist/perfectionist, imputationist, theological, ethical or political—would upend world and church, their Dutch brethren went about other business.

This likely accounts not only for the reason why the Happy Union invited Witsius to mediate their dispute, but also for the reason why Witsius' animadversions were so irenic. Of course, simply his status as an outsider allowed him to enjoy a relative degree of objectivity. But his daily ecclesiastical life—with local consistories of elders and regional classes of officers who regularly attended to matters of discipline—afforded him time and perspective to address the dispute between the alleged antinomians and neonomians. The stability of Witsius' context within a confessional church was likely also a boon to his mediatorial efforts. The Dutch Reformed Church's hegemony in the Netherlands meant that rather than being engaged in fierce polemics with Independents, Anglicans, separatists or Baptists, Witsius could analyze the conflict within the Happy Union with the confidence that came from known and definitive theological boundaries.

Witsius' church's confessional documents did not articulate a covenant theology as developed as that in the Westminster Confession, but his *Economy of the Covenants* (1675) demonstrated his familiarity with the theological developments within the broader Reformed tradition.<sup>693</sup> It was his understanding of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works that gave Witsius the latitude to affirm the anti-legal commitment of the alleged antinomians. Witsius did have gentle, yet firm

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<sup>693</sup> The Belgic Confession contains only one reference to covenant: it is in Article XXXIV on Holy Baptism as the rationale for baptizing the infants of believers. The same is true for the Heidelberg Catechism (see Lord's Day 27, Q&A 74). Likewise, The Canons of the Synod of Dort employs covenant in the context of infant baptism. But in Article 9:II it briefly recognizes the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

corrections for them on the time of justification. But his bold identification of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works in *Irenical Animadversions* (1696) VIII.II may imply that he did not fear censure from the Dutch Reformed Church courts for articulating such a view, or using that view for pastoral counsel.

As established in the introduction to this thesis, there was consensus of the entire Protestant community on the third use of the law—that use which informs Christians of God’s will for them on a daily basis. This was no different for the Dutch Reformed Church with its Three Forms of Unity.<sup>694</sup> Thus, Witsius could affirm the anti-antinomian commitment of the so-called neonomians. Just as with his words to the alleged antinomians, Witsius gently, yet firmly corrected the so-called neonomians regarding the idea that God sees no sin in his elect. While he affirmed the orthodox doctrine of God’s omniscience, he also invoked the doctrine of the imputation of believers’ sins to Christ and his satisfaction for them as an orthodox way to affirm that God does not see the sins of believers.<sup>695</sup> Given the emphasis of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism on comfort and assurance, Witsius’ counsel was well within the bounds of his church’s confession.

Unlike John Cotton, Edward Fisher, John Owen, John Bunyan and Samuel Petto, there is no evidence that Witsius was ever accused of antinomianism. Instead, he was a minister in good standing of the Dutch Reformed Church. The stability of that identity provided him with the perfect discursive space within which to promote

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<sup>694</sup> Article 24 on The Sanctification of Sinners and Article 25 on The Fulfillment of the Law in the Belgic Confession is perspicuous in its advocacy of the third use of the law. Likewise, in Article 18:5, the Canons of the Synod of Dort confesses that the obedience of faith is the effect of God’s electing grace, and Article 16 on Regeneration’s Effect identifies obedience as a result of the Holy Spirit’s gracious work in regeneration. The third use of the law cannot be missed in the Heidelberg Catechism, as it forms the third and final major section of the catechism—Lord’s Days 32-52, Q&As 86-129.

<sup>695</sup> Witsius, *Animadversions*, XII.II.

peace in the unhappy disunion of English Presbyterians and Independents. Though it is not likely that everyone involved in the dispute was satisfied by Witsius' *Aninmadversiones*, it provides an appropriate end to the microhistories of this thesis. His professed concern for both sides of the conflict stands in stark contrast to the polemical partisanship of the alleged antinomians and the anti-antinomians in the preceding decades of the seventeenth century.

## Conclusion

In 1545, John Calvin wrote a tract against a group of people he called the Libertines. The English translation of the title is *Against the Fanatic and Frantic Sect of the Libertines Who Call Themselves Spiritual* (1545).<sup>696</sup> The contents reveal that this group about which Calvin was concerned paralleled certain seventeenth century English antinomian groups such as the Familists, Muggletonians, Grindletonians, and other mystics. However, the defining feature of Calvin's Libertines was their belief that because God does everything, there is no longer any need to be concerned about anything, nor is it lawful to condemn anything. Calvin believed this implied that the Libertines brazenly disobeyed all laws, civil and religious. This accounts not only for the polemical label Calvin assigned them, but also for the fear this group struck in the hearts of all God-fearing and law-abiding citizens.

However, even Calvin's Libertines may not have compared to the Second Earl of Rochester. In January 1660, shortly before the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England, a young man named John Wilmot entered Wadham College, Oxford as an undergraduate. Whether his bisexual promiscuity was prompted by the physically intimate sleeping conditions he had with his childhood tutor, or whether he was simply expressing his own character, while at Oxford, Wilmot "grew debauched."<sup>697</sup> There he was known to borrow a faculty patron's academic robes in order to carouse late at night in disguise.<sup>698</sup> His Oxford education provided him with the skill to take the beauty of the poetic form and imbue it with filth as he boasted

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<sup>696</sup> John Calvin, *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertines, qui se nomment spirituelz* (Geneva, 1545).

<sup>697</sup> James William Johnson, *A Profane Wit: The Life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), pp. 18-20, 28-39.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-36.

about pedophilia with his page, orgies in St. James's Park, homosexual trysts, liaisons with prostitutes, and his obsession with human genitalia.<sup>699</sup> He even used his poetic mastery to charm his wife who stayed at home while he lived licentiously.<sup>700</sup> If ever there were a libertine, John Wilmot was it.

Even more disturbing to Calvin's seventeenth-century English theological heirs would have been the fact that Wilmot was a courtier to whom Charles II was like an adoptive father.<sup>701</sup> John Wilmot's father, Henry Wilmot, had fought bravely and loyally for Charles I, and was rewarded by being made Earl of Rochester. When Henry died in 1658, ten year-old John was the next male heir in line; and so he became the Second Earl of Rochester. Thus, even though the king was offended by some of Rochester's poetry, they did carouse and frequent brothels together—Rochester, at times, even arranging adulterous appointments for the king.<sup>702</sup> Although there is no evidence that Charles II engaged in pedophilic or promiscuously homosexual activity, in all other ways, his lifestyle seemed as libertine as Rochester's.

Given the deep concern which many Reformed puritans had about antinomianism, it would seem that if Rochester did not alarm them the most, the fact that his libertinism reached all the way to the head of state certainly should have. At the very least, it is curious that the widespread knowledge of the king's behavior did

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<sup>699</sup> John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *Poems on several occasions by the right honorable the E. of R-* (Antwerpen, 1680), pp. 14-19, 30, 59-60, 131. See also ms. archived at Princeton University Library, Anon., "Sodom," [*Collection of English Restoration Plays, Poetry, and Other Works*] (England, 1680), pp. 1-108.

<sup>700</sup> Johnson, *A Profane Wit*, 69, 92.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 114, 375n40; See also Frank H. Ellis, "Wilmot, John, second Earl of Rochester (1647-1680)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29623> (accessed August 28, 2012) where Charles II is said to have "made Rochester his foster son."

<sup>702</sup> Johnson, *A Profane Wit*, 103-118.

not temper their embellishment of the New Testament's teaching about the civil magistrate in the Westminster Confession and Savoy Declaration.<sup>703</sup> The main passage, Romans 13:1-7, simply says that the ruler is "the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid." Yet the creedal descriptions of the civil magistrate say he

"hath Authority, and it is his duty to take order, that Unity and Peace be preserved in the Church, that the Truth of God be kept pure and intire, that all Blasphemies and Heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in Worship and Discipline prevented or reformed: and all the Ordinances of God duely settled, administered and observed. For the better effecting whereof he hath power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mine of God."<sup>704</sup>

This hardly fit well with a king who seemed to relish opportunities to be drunk and adulterous. The court of Charles II—including Rochester—embodied the very things many puritans professed to fear. Though some Reformed puritans unjustly accused Quakers of libertinism—including wanting to commit adultery with Reformed wives—it was Lord Rochester who was most likely to give the heirs of the English Reformation reason to fear.<sup>705</sup>

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<sup>703</sup> On knowledge of the king's behavior, see Jenny Uglow, *Charles II's Restoration Game: A Gambling Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 464-474; Jim Daems, *Seventeenth-Century Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: Continuum Books, 2006), 10-11; Lorraine Madway, "'The Most Conspicuous Solemnity': The Coronation of Charles II," ed. Eveline Cruickshanks, *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), 146, 154.

<sup>704</sup> Anon., *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a confession of faith with the quotations and texts of Scripture annexed* (Edinburgh, 1647), 42; i.e., Westminster Confession of Faith XXIII.III.

<sup>705</sup> Richard Baxter, *A defence of the principles of love* (London, 1671), 168; John Brown, *Quakerisme the path-way to paganisme* (Edinburgh, 1678), 84-87, 327, 332.

Puritans like Samuel Rutherford and Richard Baxter used the term “Libertine” to refer to alleged antinomians like Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh, John Eaton, Walter Cradock, Vavasor Powell and John Bunyan.<sup>706</sup> While Grindletonians, Muggletonians and Familists may have approximated Calvin’s Libertines in many ways, the individuals above simply wanted less legalism, less moralism and above all, less importation of the Mosaic covenant’s principle of justice into the new covenant of grace. Yet the more vocal anti-antinomians seemed to confuse libertinism for something closer to libertarianism. Indeed, Rutherford thought that only antinomians or libertines could possibly favor the kind of liberty that would tolerate anything other than his version of confessional, Reformed orthodoxy. He reasoned that any argument for tolerance after the time of Christ was equally an argument against “*Magistracy in the Old Testament*,” which was obliged to punish every sin against the Mosaic law.<sup>707</sup>

Murray Rothbard and his students have identified the Levellers, John Locke, John Lilburne and Richard Overton as proto-civil libertarians.<sup>708</sup> But this only

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<sup>706</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory* (London, 1673), 925; *Catholic communion doubly defended by Dr. Owens, vindicator, and Richard Baxter and the state of that communion opened, and the questions discussed, whether there be any displeasure at sin, or repentance for it in Heaven* (London, 1684), 39; *Of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers in what sence [sic] sound Protestants hold it and the false divided sence by which libertines subvert the Gospel* (London, 1675), 21; *The Scripture Gospel defended, and Christ, grace, and free justification vindicated against the libertines* (London, 1690), A2; Samuel Rutherford, *A free disputation against pretended liberty of conscience tending to resolve doubts* (London, 1649), 14, 77, 119, 202; *A survey of the spiritual antichrist* (London, 1648), d3, 13, 21, 102, 194, 201-207, 219, 222, 230, 246, 275, 277, 281, 340, 54, 58, 81, 102, 139, 159, 161, 162, 166-168, 171, 175, 186, 201, 223, 201, 231; *Christ dying and drawing sinners to himself* (London, 1647), 72, 82, 511, (c)2, 104, 320-321, 475, 504, 512, 500, 502, 512.

<sup>707</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A free disputation*, 129-132. See also Robert Baillie, *A dissuasive from the errors of the time* (London, 1645), \* 3 from “FOR The Right Honorable the Earl of Lauderdale Lord Metellaine.”

<sup>708</sup> Murray N. Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought, Volume 1* (Aldershot, Hants:

highlights the difference between species of antinomians. Leveller-types were political antinomians; Crisp, Saltmarsh, Bunyan and others targeted by Rutherford and Baxter were theological antinomians, who were distinct, still, from theologians who rejected the normativity of the Decalogue. The Levellers and their ilk were more concerned about curbing abuses of human authority than about flouting divine law. The theological antinomians—specifically those who advocated justification prior to faith, or the idea that God cannot see sin in believers—were far less interested in civil liberty than they were in the covenantal and ecclesiastical liberty that comes with the principle of grace.

Still, the point should not be missed that what many puritans professed to be most concerned about was life-threatening anarchy and social upheaval. While most puritan polemics against antinomianism took aim at fellow puritans, very few of the alleged antinomians posed real threats to the stability and order of life in the seventeenth century. After all, advocacy of ideas like justification prior to faith, that God cannot see sin in his people, or that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works do not seem to rise to the level of stealing, raping or murdering with impunity. Besides, the irony of regicidal puritans who suspected theological deviants of overthrowing traditional values is great indeed. And yet Rochester's libertinism did approximate the kind of threat that alarmed the puritan community. Though his writings were not likely widely available to the godly by policy of the official censor,

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Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1995), 312-323; Carl Watner, "Come What, Come Will!" Richard Overton, Libertarian Leveller," *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* IV:4 (Fall 1980), 405-432 and "Oh, Ye Are For Anarchy!': Consent Theory in the Radical Libertarian Tradition," *The Journal of Libertarians Studies* VIII:1 (Winter 1986), 111-137; Peter Richards, "John Lilburne (1615-1657): English Libertarian," *Libertarian Alliance* 25 (2008), 1-19.



his reputation was.<sup>709</sup> Yet when puritan Increase Mather did write about Rochester, it was not about his behavior, but about how Rochester's involvement in war had caused him to doubt the existence of the soul.<sup>710</sup> Thus, the simultaneous obsession of the anti-antinomians with alleged theological antinomians and their silence regarding real moral and legal scoundrels remains mysterious.

## I. Antinomianism and the Secular State

Transatlantic puritans had inherited the theocratic impulse of the Magisterial Reformation and of other Christians, who, since the time of Constantine, had concluded that the relaxation of official, persecutorial policies meant that the State was a handy tool for accomplishing the purposes of the Church. From the time of James V when the Protestant Reformation came to England through most of the seventeenth century, English history seems to have largely been a battle to determine whether the royal sword would punish non-Protestants or non-Catholics. Of course, that struggle was not unique to the Anglos or their colonists in the Americas. European countries also wrestled internally over whether their princes would be Protestant or Catholic. The principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* which was codified

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<sup>709</sup> Anon. *The Burning shame* (London, 1700); B.J. *Two letters written to a gentleman of note guilty of common swearing* (London, 1691), 64; Gilbert Burnet, *The libertine overthrown* (London, 1690); *Some passages of the life and death of the right honorable John, Earl of Rochester who died the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 1680* (London, 1680); Robert Parsons, *A sermon preached at the funeral of the Rt Honorable John Wilmot Earl of Rochester* (Oxford, 1680); William Dyer, *Heaven upon Earth* (London, 1697), 149-165. Parsons gives evidence of Rochester's widespread infamy in that, while he protected the identities of everyone else whose conversion narratives he told by using only their initials, he introduced Rochester as "John Earl of Rochester." Parsons even named Rochester's widow as the source of his story.

<sup>710</sup> Increase Mather, *An essay for the recording of illustrious providences wherein an account is given of many remarkable and very memorable events which have hapned this last age* (Boston in New-England, 1684), 243-245.

in 1555 by imperial treaty in Augsburg, Germany established that whichever side won the contest of political power could then lord it over the other side upon the threat of death by means of the sword of the State. In 1648, The Peace of Westphalia imposed the same principle of “whose reign, his religion” on much of the rest of Europe. Thus, even Herman Witsius’ Netherlands was embroiled in this violent ecclesiastical-political controversy.

This theocratic principle fit well with the Westminster Confession’s declaration that the magistrate was responsible to suppress all blasphemies and heresies, prevent all corruptions and abuses in worship and church discipline, ensure that people make right use of word and sacrament ministry, and call and monitor church councils;<sup>711</sup> or the Belgic Confession’s (1561) assertion that magistrates were to hinder and extirpate all idolatry and false worship, to throw down the kingdom of Antichrist, exalt the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to cause the gospel to be preached everywhere.<sup>712</sup> Based at least on the Westminster Assembly’s own use of Scripture texts to support its theological statements, the main line of evidence they used to buttress these claims about the magistrate was taken largely from the Old Testament Mosaic theocracy.<sup>713</sup> This hermeneutic also informed most puritan songs in worship. The reasoning went that if God had supplied an inspired songbook in the book of Psalms, the Church ought not pretend to be wiser than God by inventing new, uninspired songs. In the same way, most puritans tended to reason that if God had supplied inspired, civil legislation in most of the Old Testament, the State—and

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<sup>711</sup> Anon., *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines*, 42.

<sup>712</sup> Guy de Brès, *The confession of faith, of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands with the formes which they use* (Amsterdam, 1689), 19.

<sup>713</sup> Specifically, 2 Chronicles 26:18; Isaiah 49:23; Psalm 122:9; Ezra 7:23, 25-28; Leviticus 24:16; Deuteronomy 13:5-6, 12; 1 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 19:8-11; 1 Chronicles 13:1-9; 2 Kings 23:1-26; 2 Chronicles 34:33; 2 Chronicles 15:12, 13; 2 Chronicles chapters 29 and 30.

especially Christian magistrates—would err if it enforced anything else. In other words, when asking the question of what a godly State ought to be like, Reformed Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seemed to instinctively turn to that portion of the Bible where they thought they found a godly state.

Thus, to anti-antinomians like Rutherford, a tolerant or secular state must necessarily be an antinomian state. If divine law bound all people of all times and all places equally and without qualification—whether professing believers or unbelievers—then the enforcement of that law must apply to all people without prejudice. This type of ethical singularity left no room for law enforcement that exempted non-Christians from worshiping the triune God in the manner he had prescribed, or from sanctifying the twenty-four hour period of Sunday—to name just a few examples. Thus, on this reasoning, a state that did not use the sword to punish non-Christians for violations of laws like these must be an institution committed to the same kind of lawlessness as Calvin’s Libertines or the Second Earl of Rochester. Even if the divine law had been given to God’s people—namely, the Church—the State was the institution tasked with using violence to coerce obedience.

Interestingly, Henry Burton made this same argument in his book *The law and gospel reconciled* (1631). He begins by saying that the Moral Law is “*a rule of conversation*” to believers which they “*owe obedience unto it in poynt of duety and conscience.*”<sup>714</sup> If the Law loses its status as a rule, the root and knot “*of all ciuill society, and happy vnion and communion between King and Subjects, Head and Members*” is severed.<sup>715</sup> But his rhetoric intensified, moving the Moral Law beyond a rule for believers only. The law of God is “*the strongest ligature to combine the*

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<sup>714</sup> Henry Burton, *The law and gospel reconciled* (London, 1631), A3.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*

*Head and Body politicke in a firme society, whereby it becomes inuincible, perpetuall, and glorious.*”<sup>716</sup> Thus, he reasoned,

*these Lawlesse Antinomians, enemyes to God, to Kings and States, would robb Christian Kings of this blessed booke of Gods Law, that foe, if they could strippe them of the grace and feare of God in their hearts, letting loose the reynes of all honestie and conscience, they might vsurpe a gouernment after the lust of man, not after the law of God, and so precipitate ineuitable ruine to Princes and Commonweales.*<sup>717</sup>

In other words, a state that did not enforce the Ten Commandments by the sword was not only antinomian, but antitheist, civilly disobedient and anarchically seditious.

Between burgeoning Enlightenment influences and King James II’s political machinations to pave the way for the tolerance of Roman Catholicism, many seventeenth-century civil governments began the transformation into secular states. The Peace of Augsburg and of Westphalia had removed coerced religious conversion as a rationale for one nation-state initiating aggression against another. Instead, they left princes and other magistrates free to violently coerce their own subjects to either join their own cultus, or flee their territory. But the move toward a secular state began to dismantle such policies for the magistrate. The most radical experiment with a secular state and its separation from the Church would not come until the next century in America. The trend was clearly toward magisterial toleration of theological differences, leaving churches to discipline themselves in a non-lethal manner.

Though American Presbyterians in the eighteenth century would remove some of the more overtly Constantinian features of the Westminster Confession’s

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid., A4.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid., A3-A4.

statement on the civil magistrate, they did not completely purge the principle of theocracy from the confession. As one of the most widely and violently persecuted sects, Baptists were one of the first groups to make a confessional move toward a tolerant or secular state. Interestingly, the earlier Baptist confession of 1644, while silent on the law, said a great deal about the civil magistrate. It not only repeated the language of Romans 13:1-7, but it also claimed that all the civil laws of the King and Parliament were to be obeyed; it contained the supplication that the King and Parliament might protect subscribers from the tyranny and oppression of the state church; that Christians must persevere in worship according to the confession's interpretation of the Bible in spite of state persecution; and that all obedience, taxes and everything else due to the magistrate ought to be given willingly.<sup>718</sup> By the time a new confession was drafted in 1677 and received by churches in 1689, Baptists confessed much less about the civil magistrate. Though it acknowledged that Christians could be civil magistrates (in contradistinction from the Anabaptists) and that Christians ought to obey lawful commands, this new document confessed simply that God had ordained the civil magistrate "for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers."<sup>719</sup> Without further elaboration, this could mean that the sword of the state ought to punish actual violations of persons or their possessions. That is, in a secular state, the phrase "evil doers" might refer to criminals who had merely human victims, and not necessarily to anyone who violated Christian orthodoxy.

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<sup>718</sup> Anonymous, *The Confession of faith of those churches which are commonly, though falsely, called anabaptists* (London, 1644), sections XLVIII, XLIX, L, LI and LII.

<sup>719</sup> Anonymous, *A Confession of faith put forth by the elders and brethren of many congregations of Christians (baptized upon profession of their faith) in London and the country* (London, 1677), 81, section XXIV.1.

Of course, neither the Baptist confessions of 1644 nor 1677 advocated the principle of theocracy. In this regard, both documents could be perceived as a move toward a tolerant or antinomian state. One of the problems inherent in Baptist ecclesiology, however, was that neither confession had real, binding force.<sup>720</sup> For example, someone like John Bunyan believed that if a person were baptized, it should be done upon that person's profession of faith; yet he seemed to have little else in common with General Baptists or Particular Baptists. While he was well-positioned to understand the golden rule with regard to the civil toleration of competing religious beliefs (as someone who spent more than a decade in jail for preaching according to his conscience and convictions), his literary output did not reflect this. After his release, Bunyan wrote *The holy war* (1682), in which military imagery is used to allegorize the suppression of non-Christian faith and practice. Even in spite of the new Baptist confession published in 1677 and 1688, Bunyan wrote *The barren fig tree* (1688), a stern warning to the English nation that it was liable to God's judgment for its violation of God's commandments. Thus, when faced with the transition toward a tolerant, secular state, Bunyan—like many of his fellow puritans—chose instead to resist this with continued advocacy of theocracy. Perhaps this vindicates William Hunt's observation that "a Puritan who minds his business is a contradiction in terms."<sup>721</sup>

## II. Antinomianism and the Mosaic Covenant as a Covenant of Works

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<sup>720</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A free disputation against pretended liberty of conscience* (London, 1649), 38; Robert Baillie, *A dissuasive from the errors of the time*, 6, 38. Of course, Baillie saw the suppression of the Church of England, the Anabaptists and all others who do not have "the true, visible, orderly, constitute Church of Christ" as belonging to the magistrate (p. 33).

<sup>721</sup> William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 146.

Certainly the large number of puritans who believed that the Mosaic covenant was simply one of many administrations of the one covenant of grace had no hermeneutical obstacles to applying the theocratic ethics of the Mosaic covenant to public policy in the nations in which they lived. Instead, these puritans experienced challenges in reconciling the principle of grace with the principle of justice found in significant texts of the Mosaic covenant—like Leviticus 18:5, Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. The variety of views of the Mosaic covenant and the amount of ink spilled on the subject testifies to the magnitude of this challenge.<sup>722</sup>

But those puritans who believed that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works, had a different challenge. By identifying the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works and distinguishing it from the new covenant—which was almost universally identified as a covenant of grace—these puritans were able to shield new covenant Christians from the conditionality and juridical nature of the Mosaic covenant. In other words, if Christians were members of the new covenant of grace, then they could neither hope for rewards from God on the basis of their obedience, nor fear God’s punishment for their disobedience. Yet given the theocratic inclinations of the puritan community, seventeenth-century Reformed Christians were not shielded from the penal sanctions of the Mosaic covenant when the state enforced them. That is, the difficulty posed by the combination of viewing the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, and believing that the civil magistrate

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<sup>722</sup> Brenton C. Ferry, “Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy,” in Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 76-108; William Allen, *A discourse of the nature, ends, and difference of the two covenants* (London, 1673); John Flavel, *Vindiciae legis & foederis* (London, 1690); Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & medulla Bibliorum the mysterie and marrow of the Bible* (London, 1657); Thomas William, *Scriptures opened and sundry cases of conscience resolved* (London, 1675).

ought to enforce the Mosaic law was that Christians might be forgiven by the church and punished by the State for, potentially, the same sins. Put differently, this implies that a Christian who was a member of the new covenant of grace could simultaneously be under a covenant of works (of sorts) in which the sword of the state could punish violations of divine law.

This may have been one of the factors which influenced the anti-legal backlash of the “imputationist” antinomians. If they could not escape what they perceived to be unrelenting (and seemingly condemning) divine wrath in puritan pulpits and books—and if they certainly could not escape that same divine wrath at the hands of state agents like the Courts of High Commission and Star Chamber—then they would preach and publish a gospel of grace more free than they thought anyone on either side of the Atlantic had heard before. Of course, this caused them to run afoul of civil courts, church courts and individual theological warriors whose calling, it seemed, was to vanquish antinomianism.

Still, even if there were unresolved (or unacknowledged) tensions between the theology and public policy of puritans who believed the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works, their response to at least imputationist antinomians was more effective, and certainly more irenic. The testimonies of Joseph Caryl, Jeremiah Burroughs and William Strong in the seventeenth century, and of Thomas Boston in the eighteenth century indicate that Edward Fisher had been successful in helping them to root out legalism in their own ministries.<sup>723</sup> If Bozeman’s thesis is correct—that a rigorous moralism and pietism among the puritan community produced an antinomian (or anti-legal) backlash—then the anti-legal hearts of alleged

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<sup>723</sup> See Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (London, 1646), page opposite the title page, A3, A4. See also Edward Fisher and Thomas Boston, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 35-37.



antinomians like John Saltmarsh might have been encouraged by the effects of Fisher's *Marrow* (1645). Had Tobias Crisp and John Eaton lived to see *The Marrow* in print, perhaps they would have been comforted as well.

John Owen and Samuel Petto both used orthodox theological formulations to affirm the idea that God loves his people as much in their sinning, as in their best obedience. While they were careful to deny that God would approve of sin, or that it would not offend him, they were equally careful to affirm what was right about a common antinomian saying.<sup>724</sup> There is no extant record of alleged antinomian responses to Owen or Petto. Still, this was a step that most in the puritan community were unwilling to take. But no seventeenth-century Reformed theologian was bolder than Witsius to affirm as much of the doctrines of free grace, the imputation of believers' sins to Christ, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers and the unchangeable character of God's verdict of justification as he could find in so-called antinomian literature. In this regard, his *Animadversions* (1696) were truly irenic and conciliatory. Unlike Edward Fisher, Witsius only received passing mention as "the Learned Witsius" by two men after he mediated the dispute between the alleged antinomians and neonomians of the Happy Union.<sup>725</sup> Considering Daniel Williams' staunch support for Richard Baxter and his opposition toward antinomianism, perhaps Williams' brief acknowledgement and lack of any negative comment about Witsius was praise enough.

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<sup>724</sup> See Owen. *Of communion with God the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly in love, grace, and consolation, or, The saints fellowship with the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost* (Oxford: 1657). See also Samuel Petto, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Explained* (London, 1674), 62-63.

<sup>725</sup> Vincent Alsop, *A vindication of the faithful rebuke to a false report against the crude cavils of the pretended defence* (London, 1698), 57; Daniel Williams, *The answer to the report, &c., which the united ministers appointed their committee to draw up* (London, 1698), 91.

These men—John Cotton, Edward Fisher, John Owen, John Bunyan, Samuel Petto and Herman Witsius—all shared some common bonds. They all affirmed that the Mosaic covenant was, in some sense, a covenant of works. Fisher and Witsius recognized the principle of justice at work in that covenant, but were the most circumspect about calling it a covenant of works. According to Ferry’s thesis, both Fisher and Witsius believed that the Mosaic covenant was a distinct covenant made with Israel; for Fisher it was a covenant of works made only with respect to temporal things; for Witsius its distinctiveness lay in its being made uniquely with the nation of Israel.<sup>726</sup> If this is true, both Fisher and Witsius would also fit something close to Mark Jones’ definition of a “trichotomist” view of covenant theology.<sup>727</sup> Still, both Fisher and Witsius seem, at times, to equivocate on the nature of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>728</sup> Furthermore, Ferry seems to only cite Witsius’s earlier work *De oeconomia foederum* (1675), while ignoring his later book, written in response to a British antinomian controversy, *Animadversiones Irenicae* (1696).<sup>729</sup> In the latter book, Witsius specifically identifies the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.<sup>730</sup> Authors and theologians often develop and change their views over time—a fact with which many scholars fail to reckon adequately. As helpful as taxonomies like Ferry’s are, individual authors like Fisher and Witsius often defy neat, facile categorization.

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<sup>726</sup> Brenton C. Ferry, “Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy,” in Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, Pennsylvania: P&R Publishing, 2009), 104-105.

<sup>727</sup> Mark Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” in Michael A.G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 194-202.

<sup>728</sup> Fisher, *Marrow*, 41, 45-47, 89; Witsius, *De oeconomia*, IV.IV.LI, IV.IV.LIII;

<sup>729</sup> Ferry, 105.

<sup>730</sup> Witsius, *Animadversiones*, VIII.II.

Both Fisher's and Witsius's responses to antinomianism are significant for at least two reasons. First, their writings bracket this study, with Fisher's *Marrow* being one of the earliest, and Witsius's *Animadversions* being the last. It is true that John Cotton was dealing with an antinomian controversy in New England before Fisher published *The Marrow*. But Fisher's involvement with antinomianism may have even predated that New England controversy, as discussed earlier.<sup>731</sup> Second, as those whose writings stand on each end of the period of 1630 through 1696, Fisher and Witsius mark development in the tenor of anti-antinomian literature. While Fisher himself did not give much evidence of fear or anxiety in *The Marrow*, other Reformed theologians who published books about antinomians around the same time did evince fear and anxiety about what they thought were the inevitable results of antinomianism: anarchy, social upheaval and political chaos.<sup>732</sup> Fisher wrote in that milieu in an effort to solve the problem of antinomianism, and thus calm the related fears and anxieties. Witsius, on the other hand, instead of trying to vanquish every expression of suspected antinomianism, tried to affirm as much of the good and the true in antinomian aphorisms as he could, without affirming heterodoxy or heresy. In fact, the tenor of his *Animadversions* delivers what is promised in the title: it is irenic and conciliatory. In that book, he gives no indication that he fears the imputationist antinomians, nor that he fears the wrath of any fellow Reformed divines for his irenic and conciliar stance.

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<sup>731</sup> See p. 74 above. See also David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>732</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* (London, 1645) and *The third part of Gangraena* (London, 1646); Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification* (London, 1649); Samuel Rutherford, *A survey of the spiritual antichrist* (London, 1648) and *A free disputation against pretended liberty of conscience* (London, 1649); Robert Baillie, *A dissuasive from the errors of the time* (London, 1645) and *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisme, and the most of the other errors, which for the time due trouble the Church of England* (London, 1647).

John Cotton, too, affirmed that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works, but he usually qualified this by treating it as an existential experience of legalism.<sup>733</sup> Ferry identifies this as the view that the Mosaic covenant is a “relative, formal covenant of works.”<sup>734</sup> In other words, believers were to find good and holy rules for life in the Mosaic covenant, while unbelievers would inevitably “go on in a covenant of works” as they attempted to earn God’s favor by trying to keep the laws of Moses. Given this somewhat unusual view, it is difficult to determine with any certainty whether Cotton’s relativism qualifies as what Mark Jones considers a mainstream “dichotomist” position, or whether Cotton’s willingness to call the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works necessarily fits better within “trichotomy.” However one categorizes Cotton’s view of the Mosaic covenant, his response to antinomianism was, like Fisher’s, written in the context of fear about the socio-political effects of this departure from orthodoxy. While he was zealous to guard against legalism, his response to Anne Hutchinson was calculated to keep the peace and avoid the passionate—and, perhaps, even paranoid—vitriol of the anti-antinomians. The actions of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in Boston, as well as Robert Baillie’s book suggest that Cotton’s response to antinomianism was not very effective.<sup>735</sup>

While John Bunyan was adamant that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works, he was not as careful to affirm the continuity of the covenant of grace as the other figures in this thesis. This may have been partly the result of his view of baptism as belonging only to professing believers; given such a conviction, he likely

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<sup>733</sup> John Cotton, *The covenant of grace* (London, 1655), 49, 115, 131.

<sup>734</sup> Ferry, 93.

<sup>735</sup> Robert Baillie’s book *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisme, and the most of the other errorrs, which for the time due trouble the Church of England* was, in part, an attack on Cotton and his handling of the New England antinomian controversy.

would have been sensitive to paedobaptist arguments from the continuity of the one covenant of grace. However, it likely owes much to his admiration for Luther and Luther's law-gospel hermeneutic. In any case, Bunyan's view defies classification in any taxonomy attempted so far. He appears to hold only to two covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Yet by that formulation, he seems to refer to the Mosaic covenant compared to the new covenant, and not much outside of those two in particular. If that makes him one of Mark Jones's "dichotomists," then Bunyan is likely the only dichotomist who called the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works and the new covenant a covenant of grace in as stark of terms as he did. Ferry does identify James Pope and Thomas Collier as holding similar views.<sup>736</sup> However, when account is taken of Bunyan's view of the Mosaic covenant as the "first covenant," his view of the new covenant between Christ and believers as the "second covenant," and yet his willingness to identify another "first covenant" of works with Adam before the fall, it becomes clear that he has no analogues.<sup>737</sup> His response to antinomianism could be viewed in two different ways. Viewed in light of Reformed confessions, Bunyan responded in staunch opposition to antinomianism throughout his life, as he insisted on obedience to God's moral will. Yet viewed in light of the way most seventeenth-century Reformed theologians wrote about antinomianism, Bunyan's response ultimately amounted to joining the antinomians.

Samuel Petto, too, does not fit neatly into most of the taxonomic categories. He would qualify as one of Mark Jones's "trichotomists." That is, he held that there was a prelapsarian covenant of works with Adam, a postlapsarian covenant of grace with believers, and he held that the Mosaic covenant was a distinct covenant as a

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<sup>736</sup> Ferry, 105.

<sup>737</sup> John Bunyan, *The doctrine of the law and grace unfolded* (London, 1659), 8, 19; and "Saved By Grace," in *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan*, Charles Doe, ed., (London, 1692), 141.

covenant of works. Thus, at first, he would seem to fit in with some of Ferry's three-covenant theologians like Thomas Boston, Samuel Bolton, Tobias Crisp and Jeremiah Burroughs.<sup>738</sup> Yet what set Petto apart was that he was only willing to affirm that the Sinai covenant was one of works for Christ, and not for Israel. Thus, his response to antinomianism was to encourage obedience to the Ten Commandment out of gratitude for Christ's obedience to the Ten Commandments on behalf of his people. This certainly marks a shift away from the fearful and anxious polemic that had characterized most previous responses to antinomianism.

John Owen was the most careful theologian of them all, taking time in his multi-volume commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews to make his case. So substantial was Owen's view of the Mosaic covenant, that Mark Jones devotes a discrete section to Owen's theological nuances.<sup>739</sup> Ferry assigns Owen a place among theologians who held to four covenants, one of which was a Mosaic covenant distinct from the covenant of grace.<sup>740</sup> There is likely truth to this classification. However, given the sheer size of Owen's commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews—not to mention his other writings in which he treats the Mosaic covenant—it is likely that Owen scholarship will continue to uncover more facets of Owen's theology of the Mosaic covenant. While Owen does take issue with the idea that the Mosaic covenant is simply one of two administrations of the covenant of grace, he also appears to understand the significance of affirming the unity of the covenant of grace. Unlike most other seventeenth-century covenant theologians, Owen also appreciates the typological aspect of the Mosaic covenant of works, which he sees expressed in the blessings and curses attached to the land of Canaan,

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<sup>738</sup> Ferry, 104-105.

<sup>739</sup> Mark Jones, 199-202.

<sup>740</sup> Ferry, 104-105.

as well as the temporary, theocratic government in Israel. Many scholars have misread Owen, or have ignored his view of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>741</sup> In light of that, and in light of the quantity and quality of Owen's literary output, his view of the Mosaic covenant deserves further doctoral research. Owen's response to antinomianism also demonstrates a shift away from polemical responses based on fear. His willingness to take seriously the antinomian idea that God loves his people as much in their sinning as in their best obedience, seems to indicate that even though he had a loyal opponent in Richard Baxter, Owen himself did not succumb to a fear of antinomianism.

These theologians also affirmed that while God's moral will was revealed in the Ten Commandments, it had not been revealed there alone. Thus, because they shared a belief that God's law was written on the hearts of all humanity as a result of being made in God's image, they were united in teaching that everyone—especially Christians—owed obedience to God. But because they distinguished so clearly between the works of the Mosaic covenant and the grace of the new covenant, they were able to urge Christians to obey God's moral will out of gratitude for what God had done for them in Christ's life, death and resurrection. It was this that made these liminal puritans unique in their response to alleged antinomians, and commends them for further study.

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<sup>741</sup> See pages 105-118 above; Cp. Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant," 78-79.

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Beza, Theodore, *A briefe and pithie summe of Christian faith made in forme of a confession, with a confutation of al such superstitious errors, as are*

*contrarie therunto* (London, 1565).

Blake, Thomas, *Vindiciae foederis, or, A treatise of the covenant of God enterd with man-kinde in the several kindes and degrees of it, in which the agreement and respective differences of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, of the old and new covenant are discust ... / [by] Thomas Blake ... ; whereunto is annexed a sermon preached at his funeral by Mr. Anthony Burgesse, and a funeral oration made at his death by Mr. Samuel Shaw. Paul's last farewell* (London, 1658).

Bolton, Robert, *Instructions for a right comforting afflicted consciences with special antidotes against some grievous temptations: delivered for the most part in the lecture at Kettering in North-hampton-shire* (London, 1631).

Bolton, Samuel, *The true bounds of Christian freedome or a treatise wherein the rights of the law are vindicated, the liberties of grace maintained, and the severall late opinions against the law are examined and confuted. Whereunto is annexed a discourse of the learned Iohn Camerons, touching the threefold covenant of God with man, / faithfully translated, by Samuel Bolton minister of the word of God at Saviours-Southwark* (London, 1645).

Boston, Thomas, *The marrow of modern divinity. : the first part, touching both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace: with their use and end, both in the time of the Old testament, and in the time of the New. Clearly describing the way of eternal life, by Jesus Christ. In a dialogue betwixt Evangelista, a minister of the Gospel. Nomista, a legalist. Antinomista, an antinomian. And Neophytus, a young christian. By Edward Fisher. The fourteenth edition, corrected. With notes, by the late eminent and faithful servant of Jesus Christ Mr. Thomas Boston, minister of the Gospel at Ettrick. To which is prefixed, an appendix, containing the difference betwixt the law and the Gospel, by the author of the same book, not prefixed to some of the former editions* (Glasgow, 1752).

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Bullinger, Heinrich, *Fiftie godlie and learned sermons diuided into fiue decades, conteyning the chiefe and principall pointes of Christian religion, written in*

*three seuerall tomes or sections* (London, 1577).

Burgess, Anthony, *The doctrine of original sin asserted & vindicated against the old and new adversaries thereof, both Socinians, Papists, Arminians and Anabaptists, and practically improved for the benefit of the meanest capacities : in four parts : to which is added a digressive epistle concerning justification by faith alone, excluding the conditionality of works in that act* (London, 1658).

Burnet, Gilbert, *Some passages of the life and death of the right honorable John, Earl of Rochester who died the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 1680,* (London, 1680).

-----, *The libertine overthrown, or, A mirror for atheists wherein they may clearly see their prodigious follies, vast extravagancies, notorious impieties and absurdities : containing a compendious account of the ... life and ... death of that the whole ... abstracted from the remarks of the Right Reverend D. Gilbert Burnet ... and the Reverend Mr. Parsons,* (London, 1690).

Burroughs, Jeremiah, *Gospel-conversation: wherein is shewed, I. How the conversation of believers must be above what could be by the light of nature. II. Beyond those that lived under the law. III. And suitable to what truths the Gospel holds forth* (London, 1650).

Bunyan, John, *A case of conscience resolved viz. whether, where a church of Christ is situate, it is the duty of the women of that congregation, ordinarily, and by appointment, to separate themselves from their brethren, and so to assemble together to perform some parts of divine worship, as prayer, &c. without their men? : And the arguments made use of for that practice examined* (London, 1683).

-----, *A confession of my faith and a reason of my practice, or, With who, and who not, I can hold church-fellowship, or the communion of saints* (London, 1672).

-----, *A defence of the doctrine of justification, by faith in Jesus Christ: shewing, true Gospel-holiness flows from thence. Or, Mr. Fowler's pretended design of Christianity, proved to be nothing more then to trample under foot the blood of the Son of God and the idolizing of man's own righteousness. As also, how while he pretends to be a minister of the Church of England, he overthroweth the wholesom doctrine contained in the 10th. 11th. and 13th. of the Thirty Nine Articles of the same, and that he falleth in with the Quaker, and Romanist, against them* (London, 1673).

-----, *A discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publicane* (London, 1685).

-----, *A holy life, the beauty of Christianity, or, An exhortation to Christians to be holy* (London, 1684).

-----, *An exposition of the first ten chapters of Genesis, and part of the eleventh, in The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan, late minister of the Gospel and pastor of the congregation at Bedford containing ten of his excellent manuscripts prepared for the press before his death, never before printed, and ten of his choyce books formerly printed ... : collected and printed by the procurement of his church and friends and by his own approbation before his death, that these his Christian ministerial labours may be preserved in the world : together with a large alphabetical table containing the contents of the whole* (London, 1692).

-----, *A vindication of the book called, Some Gospel-truths opened; according to the Scriptures, and the opposition made against it by Edward Borrough, a professed Quaker, (but proved an enemie to the truth) examined and confuted by the word of God. And also, the things that were then laid down, and declared to the world by me, are a second-time born witness to, according to truth: with the answer of Edward Burrough to the quaeries then laid down in my book reproved. And also, a plain answer to his quaeries, given in simplicitie of soul; and is now also presented to the world, or who else may read, or hear them; to the end (if God will) that truth may be discovered thereby* (London, 1657).

-----, *Christian behaviour, or, The fruits of true Christianity shewing the ground from whence they flow, in their godlike order in the duty of relations, as husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants, &c. : with a word of direction to all backsliders* (London, 1663).

-----, *Come & welcome to Jesus Christ, or, A plain and profitable discourse upon the sixth of John, 37 vers shewing the cause, truth and manner of the coming of a sinner to Jesus Christ, with his happy reception and blessed entertainment* (London, 1678).

-----, "Desire of the Righteous," in Charles Doe, ed., *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan, late minister of the Gospel and pastor of the congregation at Bedford containing ten of his excellent manuscripts prepared for the press before his death, never before printed, and ten of his choyce books formerly printed ... : collected and printed by the procurement of his church and friends and by his own approbation before his death, that these his Christian ministerial labours may be preserved in the world : together with a large alphabetical table containing the contents of the whole*, (London, 1692).

-----, *Differences in judgment about water-baptism, no bar to communion, or, To communicate with saints, as saints, proved lawful in answer to a book written by the Baptists, and published by Mr. T.P. and Mr. W.K. entitled, Some serious reflections on that part of Mr. Bunyan's confession of faith, touching church-communion with unbaptized believers : wherein, their objections and arguments are answered, and the doctrine*

*of communion still asserted and vindicated : here is also Mr. Henry's Jesse's judgment in the case, fully declaring the doctrine I have asserted (London, 1673).*

-----, *Grace abounding. To the chief of sinners: or, A brief and faithful relation of the exceeding mercy of God in Christ, to his poor servant John Bunyan Namely in his taking of him out of the dunghil, and converting of him to the faith of his blessed son, Jesus Christ. Here is also particularly shewed what sight of, and what trouble he had for sin; and also, what various temptations he hath met with, and how God hath carried him through them. Corrected and much enlarged now by the author, for the benefit of the tempted and dejected Christian (London, 1680).*

-----, *Instruction for the ignorant being a salve to cure that great want of knowledg which so much reigns both in young and old / prepared and presented to them in a plain and easie dialogue, fitted to the capacity of the weakest (London, 1675).*

-----, "Israel's Hope Encouraged" in Charles Doe, ed., *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan, late minister of the Gospel and pastor of the congregation at Bedford containing ten of his excellent manuscripts prepared for the press before his death, never before printed, and ten of his choyce books formerly printed ... : collected and printed by the procurement of his church and friends and by his own approbation before his death, that these his Christian ministerial labours may be preserved in the world : together with a large alphabetical table containing the contents of the whole, (London, 1692).*

-----, "Of the Law and a Christian" in Charles Doe, ed., *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan, late minister of the Gospel and pastor of the congregation at Bedford containing ten of his excellent manuscripts prepared for the press before his death, never before printed, and ten of his choyce books formerly printed ... : collected and printed by the procurement of his church and friends and by his own approbation before his death, that these his Christian ministerial labours may be preserved in the world : together with a large alphabetical table containing the contents of the whole, (London, 1692).*

-----, "Of the Trinity," in Charles Doe, ed., *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan, late minister of the Gospel and pastor of the congregation at Bedford containing ten of his excellent manuscripts prepared for the press before his death, never before printed, and ten of his choyce books formerly printed ... : collected and printed by the procurement of his church and friends and by his own approbation before his death, that these his Christian ministerial labours may be preserved in the world : together with a large alphabetical table containing the contents of the whole, (London, 1692).*

-----, *One thing is needful; or, Serious meditations upon the four last*

*things, death, judgement [brace] and [brace] heaven, hell. Unto which is added Ebal and Gerizzim, or, The blessing and the curse (London, 1680).*

-----, *Profitable meditations fitted to mans different condition in a conference between Christ and a sinner, in nine particulars (London, 1661).*

-----, *Questions about the nature and perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath and proof that the first day of the week is the true Christian-sabbath (London, 1685).*

-----, *Seasonable counsel, or, Advice to sufferers (London, 1684).*

-----, *The barren fig tree, or, The doom and downfall of the fruitless professor shewing that the day of grace may be past with him long before his life is ended : the signs also by which such miserable mortals may be known / by John Bunyan ; to which is added his Exhortation to peace and unity among all that fear God (London, 1688).*

-----, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace unfolded and I will pray with the Spirit, Richard L. Greaves, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).*

-----, *The doctrine of the law and grace unfolded: or, A discourse touching the law and grace. The nature of the one, and the nature of the other: shewing what they are, as they are the two covenants, and likewise who they be, and what their conditions are, that be under either of these two covenants. Wherein, for the better understanding of the reader, there is several questions answered, touching the law and grace, very easie to be read, and as easie to be understood, by those that are the sons of wisdom: the children of the second covenant. Also, several titles set over the several truths contained in this book, for thy sooner finding of them, which are those following the epistle (London, 1659).*

-----, *The holy citie, or, The new-Jerusalem wherein its goodly light walls, gates, angels, and the manner of their standing, are expounded : also, her length and breadth, together with the golden measuring-reed, explained, and the glory of all unfolded : as also, the numerousness of its inhabitants, and what the tree and water of life are, by which they are sustained (London, 1669).*

-----, *The holy war, made by Shaddai upon Diabolus, for the regaining of the metropolis of the world, or, The losing and taking again of the town of Mansoul (London, 1682).*

-----, *The life and death of Mr. Badman presented to the world in a familiar dialogue between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive (London, 1680).*

-----, *The pilgrim's progress from this world to that which is to come delivered under the similitude of a dream, wherein is discovered the*



*manner of his setting out, his dangerous journey, and safe arrival at the desired country (London, 1678).*

-----, "Saved By Grace," in Charles Doe, ed., *The works of that eminent servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan, late minister of the Gospel and pastor of the congregation at Bedford containing ten of his excellent manuscripts prepared for the press before his death, never before printed, and ten of his choyce books formerly printed ... : collected and printed by the procurement of his church and friends and by his own approbation before his death, that these his Christian ministerial labours may be preserved in the world : together with a large alphabetical table containing the contents of the whole, (London, 1692).*

Burgess, Anthony, *Spiritual refining: or A treatise of grace and assurance Wherein are handled, the doctrine of assurance. The use of signs in self-examination. How true graces may be distinguished from counterfeit. Several true signs of grace, and many false ones. The nature of grace under divers Scripture notions or titles, as regeneration, the new-creature, the heart of flesh, vocation, sanctification, &c. Many chief questions (occasionally) controverted between the orthodox and the Arminians. As also many cases of conscience. Tending to comfort and confirm saints. Undeceive and convert sinners. Being CXX sermons preached and now published by Anthony Burgess sometime fellow of Emanuel Colledge in Cambridge, and now pastor of the church of Sutton-Coldfield in Warwickshire. , London, (London, 1652).*

Burmannus, Franciscus, *Synopsis Theologiae et speciatim oeconomiae foederum Dei ab Initio Saeculorum usque ad Consummationem eorum (Amsterdam, 1699).*

Burton, Henry, *The law and the gospell reconciled, or, The euangelicall fayth, and the morall law how they stand together in the state of grace a treatise shewing the perpetuall vse of the morall law vnder the gospell to beleeuers, in answere to a letter written by an Antinomian to a faithfull Christian : also how the morality of the 4th commandment is continued in the Lords day, proued the Christian Sabbath by diuine institution : a briefe catalogue of the Antinomian doctrines, (London, 1631).*

Byfield, Nicholas, *A commentary: or, sermons vpon the second chapter of the first epistle of Saint Peter vvherein method, sense, doctrine, and vse, is, with great variety of matter, profitably handled; and sundry heads of diuinity largely discussed. By Nicholas Byfield, late preacher of God's Word at Isle-worth in Middlesex. , London, (London, 1623).*

Calvin, John, *A commentarie of Iohn Caluine, vpon the first booke of Moses called Genesis: translated out of Latine into English, by Thomas Tymme, minister (London, 1578).*

-----, *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertines, qui se*

*nomment spirituelz* (Geneva, 1545).

-----, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, eds. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960).

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Coccejus, Johannes, *Doctrina de foedere et Testamento Dei* (Genevae, 1665).

-----, *Summa theologiae ex scripturis repetita* (Genevae, 1665).

Collinges, John, *Vindiciae ministerii evangelici revindicatae: or The preacher (pretendedly) sent, sent back again, to bring a better account who sent him, and learn his errand: by way of reply, to a late book (in the defence of gifted brethrens preaching) published by Mr. John Martin of Edgefield in Norfolk, Mr. Samuel Petto of Sandcroft in Suffolk, Mr. Frederick Woodale of Woodbridge in Suffolk: so far as any thing in their book pretends to answer a book published, 1651. called Vindiciae ministerii evangelici; with a reply also to the epistle prefixed to the said book, called, The preacher sent. By John Collinges B.D. and pastor of the church in Stephens parish in Norwich. Preacher sent*, (London, 1658).

Cotton, John, *A brief exposition of the whole book of Canticles, or Song of Solomon lively describing the estate of the church in all the ages thereof, both Jewish and Christian, to this day* (London, 1642).

-----, *A conference Mr. John Cotton held at Boston with the elders of New-England 1. concerning gracious conditions in the soule before faith, 2. evidencing justification by sanctification, 3. touching the active power of faith : twelve reasons against stinted forms of prayer and praise : together with the difference between the Christian and antichristian church / written by Francis Cornwell*, (London, 1646).

-----, *An abstract or the lawes of New England as they are novv established* (London, 1641).

-----, *The covenant of Gods free grace most sweetly unfolded and comfortably applied to a disquieted soul from that text of 2 Sam. 23. Ver. 5. : also a doctrinall conclusion that there is in all such who are effectually called, in-dwelling spirituall gifs [sic] and graces wrought and created in them by the Holy Ghost / by that reverend and faithful minister of Gods word, Mr. John Cotton, Teacher of the Church at Boston in New-England ; whereunto is added, A profession of faith, made by the reverend divine, Mr.*

*John Davenport, in New-England, at his admission into one of the Churches there (London, 1645).*

-----, *The covenant of grace discovering the great work of a sinners reconciliation to God / by John Cotton ... ; whereunto are added Certain queries tending to accommodadation [sic] between the Presbyterian and Congregationall churches ; also a discussion of the civill magistrates power in matters of religion ; by the same author (London, 1655).*

-----, *The new covenant, or, A treatise unfolding the order and manner of the giving and receiving of the covenant of grace to the elect as also, shewing the difference between the legallist and the true Christian : being the substance of sundry sermons / preached by Mr. Cotton (London, 1654).*

Council of Trent, *The canons and decrees of the Council of Trent celebrated under Paul III, Julius III, and Pius IV, Bishops of Rome / faithfully translated into English (London, 1687).*

Cradock, Walter, *Glad tydings, from Heaven to the worst of sinners on earth (London, 1648).*

Crispe, Tobias, *Christ alone exalted, in fourteene sermons preached in, and neare London (London, 1643).*

Davenport, John, *A discourse about civil government in a new plantation whose design is religion written many years since by that reverend and worthy minister of the Gospel John Cotton ; and now published by some undertakers of a new plantation for general direction and information (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1663).*

de Brès, Guy, *The confession of faith, of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands with the formes which they use ... translated out of Dutch into English, (Amsterdam, 1689).*

Dickson, David, *An exposition of all St. Pauls epistles together with an explanation of those other epistles of the apostles St. James, Peter, John & Jude: wherein the sense of every chapter and verse is analytically unfolded and the text enlightened (London, 1659).*

-----, *Truths victory over error, or, An abridgement of the chief controversies in religion which since the apostles days to this time, have been, and are in agitation, between those of the Orthodox faith, and all adversaries whatsoever, a list of whose names are set down after the epistle to the reader : wherein, by going through all the chapters of The confession of faith, one by one, and propounding out of them, by way of question, all the controverted assertions, and answering by yes, or no, there is a clear confirmation of the truth, and an evident confutation of what tenets and opinions, are maintain'd by the adversaries : a treatise, most useful for all persons, who desire to be instructed in the true Protestant*

*religion, who would shun in these last days, and perillous times, the infection of errors and heresies, and all dangerous tenets and opinions, contrary to the word of God (Edinburgh, 1684).*

Downame, George, *A treatise of iustification* (London, 1633).

-----, *The covenant of grace or An exposition upon Luke 1. 73.74.75. By George Downame Doctour of Divinity, and Bishop of Dery, (Dublin, 1631).*

Durham, James, *A practical exposition of the X. Commandements with a resolution of several momentous questions and cases of conscience, (London, 1675).*

Dyer, William, *Heaven upon earth, or, Good news for repenting sinners being an account of the remarkable experiences and evidences for eternal life of many eminent Christians in several declarations made by them upon solemn occasions, displaying the exceeding riches of the free grace and love of God, (London, 1697).*

Eachard, John, *A Free and impartial inquiry into the causes of that very great esteem and honour that the non-conforming preachers are generally in with their followers in a letter to his honoured friend H.M. / by a lover of the Church of England and unfeigned piety ; to which is added a discourse on 1 Tim. 4:7 to some of the clergy at a publick meeting (London, 1673).*

Eaton, John, *The honey-combe of free justification by Christ alone collected out of the meere authorities of Scripture and common and unanimous consent of the faithfull interpreters and dispensers of Gods mysteries upon the same, especially as they expresse the excellency of free justification (London, 1642).*

Edwards, Thomas, *Gangraena: Or a Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time, Vented and Acted in England in These Last Four Years: As Also, a Particular Narration of Divers Stories, Remarkable Passages, Letters; an Extract of Many Letters, All Concerning the Present Sects; Together With Some Observations Upon, and Corollaries From all the Fore-Named Premisses, (London: 1645).*

-----, *The third part of Gangraena. Or, A new and higher discovery of the errors, heresies, blasphemies, and insolent proceedings of the sectaries of these times; with some animadversions by way of confutation upon many of the errors and heresies named. ... Briefe animadversions on many of the sectaries late pamphlets, as Lilburnes and Overtons books against the House of Peeres, M. Peters his last report of the English warres, The Lord Mayors farewell from his office of maioralty, M. Goodwins thirty eight queres upon the ordinance against heresies and blasphemies, M. Burtons Conformities deformity, M. Dells sermon before the House of Commons; ... As also some few hints and briefe observations on divers*

*pamphlets written lately against me and some of my books* (London, 1646).

Eglini Iconii Tigurini, Raphaelis, *De Foedere Gratiae* (Marburg, 1614).

Fenner, Dudley, *Sacra theologia, sive veritas quae est secundum pietatem* (Geneva, 1585).

Fisher, Edward, *Faith in five fundamentall principles, strongly fortified against the diabolical, atheistical, blasphemous batteries of these times Serving for the conviction of opposers, the satisfaction of doubters, and the confirmation of believers. In a conference which a godly independent minister and a godly Presbyterian minister had with a doubting Christian. By E.F. a seeker of the truth* (London, 1650).

-----, *The marrow of modern divinity touching both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace : with their use and end, both in the time of the Old Testament, and in the time of the New ... : in a dialogue betwixt Evangelista, a minister of the gospel, Nomista, a legalist, Antinomista, an Antinomian, and Neophytus, a young Christian* (London, 1645).

Flavel, John, *Vindiciae legis & foederis: or, A reply to Mr. Philip Cary's Solemn call Wherein he pretends to answer all the arguments of Mr. Allen, Mr. Baxter, Mr. Sydenham, Mr. Sedgwick, Mr. Roberts, and Dr. Burthogge, for the right of believers infants to baptism, by proving the law at Sinai, and the covenant of circumcision with Abraham, were the very same with Adam's covenant of works, and that because the gospel-covenant is absolute,* (London, 1690).

-----, *The method of grace, in bringing home the eternal redemption contrived by the Father, and accomplished by the Son through the effectual application of the spirit unto God's elect, being the second part of Gospel redemption : wherein the great mysterie of our union and communion with Christ is opened and applied, unbelievers invited, false pretenders convicted, every mans claim to Christ examined, and the misery of Christless persons discovered and bewailed,* (London, 1681).

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Goodwin, Thomas, *A discourse of the true nature of the Gospel demonstrating that it is no new law, but a pure doctrine of grace: in answer to the Reverend Mr. Lorimer's Apology* (London, 1695).

Grantham, Thomas, *Presumption no proof, or, Mr. Petto's arguments for infant-*

*baptism considered and answered and infants interest in the covenant of grace without baptism asserted and maintained : whereunto is prefixed an answer to two questions propounded by Mr. Firmin about infants church-membership and baptism, (London, 1687).*

-----, *The infants advocate against the cruel doctrine of those Presbyterians who hold, that the greatest part of dying infants shall be damned : in answer to a book of Mr. Giles Firmin's entituled, Scripture warrant, &c., (London, 1688).*

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-----, *A commentarie vpon the fiftene Psalmes , called Psalmi graduum, that is, Psalmes of degrees faithfully copied out of the lectures of D. Martin Luther ; very frutefull and comfortable for all Christian afflicted consciences to reade (London, 1577).*

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Manton, Thomas, *A practical commentary, or, An exposition with notes upon the epistle of James delivered in sundry weekly lectures at Stoke-Newington in Middlesex, neer London, by Thomas Manton (London, 1657).*

Maresius, Samuel, *Collegivm theologicvm, sive Systema breve vniversæ theologiæ; comprehensium octodecim dispvationibus, collegialiter olim habitis in Academia provinciali ... ordinum Groninae & Omlandiae ... Editio sexta ivxta exemplar qvartae & quintae ab avthore ultimo recognitae, excusa*

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Marshal, Stephen, *A defence of infant-baptism: in answer to two treatises, and an appendix to them concerning it; lately published by Mr. Jo. Tombes. Wherein that controversie is fully discussed, the ancient and generally received use of it from the apostles dayes, untill the Anabaptists sprung up in Germany, manifested. The arguments for it from the holy Scriptures maintained, and the objections against it answered* (London, 1646).

Mather, Increase, *An essay for the recording of illustrious providences wherein an account is given of many remarkable and very memorable events which have hapned this last age, especially in New-England,* (Boston in New-England, 1684).

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Owen, John, *A continuation of the exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews viz, on the sixth, seventh, eight, ninth, and tenth chapters : wherein together with the explication of the text and context, the priesthood of Christ ... are declared, explained and confirmed : as also, the pleas of the Jews for the continuance and perpetuity of their legal worship, with the doctrine of the principal writers of the Socinians about these things, are examined and disproved* (London, 1680).

-----, *A sermon preached to the Honourable House of Commons, in Parliament assembled: on January 31. A day of solemne humiliation. With a discourse about toleration, and the duty of the civill magistrate about religion, thereunto annexed. Humbly presented to them, and all peace-loving men of this nation. / By John Owen, pastor of the Church of Christ, which is at Coggeshall in Essex* (London, 1649).

-----, *An humble testimony unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations, or, The only way to deliver a sinful nation from utter ruine by impendent judgments, in a discourse on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Luk. 13, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5* (London, 1681).

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-----, *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews also concerning the*

*Messiah wherein the promises concerning him to be a spiritual redeemer of mankind are explained and vindicated, his coming and accomplishment of his work according to the promises is proved and confirmed, the person, or who he is, is declared, the whole oeconomy of the mosaical law, rites, worship, and sacrifice is explained: and in all the doctrine of the person, office, and work of the Messiah is opened, the nature and demerit of the first sin is unfolded, the opinions and traditions of the antient and modern Jews are examined, their objections against the Lord Christ and the Gospel are answered, the time of the coming of the Messiah is stated, and the great fundamental truths of the Gospel vindicated : with an exposition and discourses on the two first chapters of the said epistle to the Hebrews (London, 1668).*

-----, *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews also concerning the Messiah wherein the promises concerning him to be a spiritual redeemer of mankind are explained and vindicated, his coming and accomplishment of his work according to the promises is proved and confirmed, the person, or who he is, is declared, the whole oeconomy of the mosaical law, rites, worship, and sacrifice is explained: and in all the doctrine of the person, office, and work of the Messiah is opened, the nature and demerit of the first sin is unfolded, the opinions and traditions of the antient and modern Jews are examined, their objections against the Lord Christ and the Gospel are answered, the time of the coming of the Messiah is stated, and the great fundamental truths of the Gospel vindicated : with an exposition and discourses on the two first chapters of the said epistle to the Hebrews (London, 1668).*

-----, *God's presence with a people, the spring of their prosperity; with their speciall interest in abiding with Him. A sermon, preached to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, at Westminster, Octob. 30. 1656. A day of solemn humiliation. / By John Owen, D.D. a servant of Jesus Christ, in the work of the Gospel. Printed by Order of Parliament (London, 1656).*

-----, *God's work in founding Zion, and his peoples duty thereupon. A sermon preached in the Abby Church at Westminster, at the opening of the Parliament Septemb. 17th 1656 (London, 1656).*

-----, *Of communion with God the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly in love, grace, and consolation, or, The saints fellowship with the Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost (Oxford: 1657).*

-----, *Of the death of Christ, the price he paid, and the purchase he made. Or, the satisfaction, and merit of the death of Christ cleered, the universality of redemption thereby oppugned: and the doctrine concerning these things formerly delivered in a treatise against universal redemption vindicated from the exceptions, and objections of Mr Baxter (London, 1650).*

-----, *Pneumatologia, or, A discourse concerning the Holy Spirit wherein an*



*account is given of his name, nature, personality, dispensation, operations, and effects : his whole work in the old and new creation is explained, the doctrine concerning it vindicated from oppositions and reproaches : the nature also and necessity of Gospel-holiness the difference between grace and morality, or a spiritual life unto God in evangelical obedience and a course of moral vertues, are stated and declared (London, 1676).*

-----, *The advantage of the kingdome of Christ in the shaking of the kingdoms of the vworld: or Providentiall alterations in their subserviency to Christ's exaltation. Opened, in a sermon preached to the Parliament Octob. 24. 1651. a solemne day of thankesgiving for the destruction of the Scots army at Worcester with sundry other mercies, by John Owen minister of the Gospell (Oxford, 1651).*

-----, *The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, explained, confirmed and vindicated (London, 1677).*

-----, *The stedfastness of promises, and the sinfulness of staggering: opened in a sermon preached at Margarets in Westminster before the Parliament Febr. 28. 1649. Being a day set apart for solemn humiliation throughout the nation (London, 1650).*

-----, *The true nature of a Gospel church and its government (London: 1689).*

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-----, *A commentarie or exposition, vpon the fiue first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians: penned by the godly, learned and iudiciall diuine, Mr. W. Perkins. Now published for the benefit of the Church, and continued*

*with a supplement vpon the sixt chapter, by Rafe Cudworth Bachelour of Diuinitie (Cambridge, 1604).*

-----, *A discourse of conscience wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to get and keepe good conscience (Cambridge, 1596).*

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Pierce, Thomas, *The new discoverer discover'd by way of answer to Mr. Baxter his pretended discovery of the Grotian religion, with the several subjects therein contained : to which is added an appendix conteyning a rejoynder to diverse things both in the Key for Catholicks, and in the book of disputations about church-government and worship, &c. : together with a letter to the learned and reverend Dr. Heylin, concerning Mr. Hickman and Mr. Bashaw (London, 1659).*

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-----, *The nev v covenant, or the saints portion A treatise vnfoldng the all-sufficiencie of God, and mans uprightnes, and the covenant of grace. delivered in fourteene sermons vpon Gen. 17. 1. 2. Wherevnto are adioyned foure sermons vpon Eccles. 9.1. 2. 11. 12.* (London, 1629).

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*Taylor, the Belgick Arminians, Socinians, and other authors contending for lawlesse liberty, or licentious toleration of sects and heresies, (London, 1649).*

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