

**The Antinomian Controversy and the Decline of
American Puritanism:
The Revaluation of “Heresy” from the Perspective of Luther’s
Reformation Theology**

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I . Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the Antinomian Controversy of 1636-1638 from the perspective of Luther’s reformation theology, so that the theological implication of “heresy” to stigmatize the Antinomians by their puritan opponents may be revaluated in the church history of protestantism.

The Antinomian Controversy, the earliest major theological conflict in colonial New England is, according to David Hall, “one of those events historians speak of as crises or turning points. Coming at a time when the new society was still taking shape, it had a decisive effect upon the future of New England” (Hall 3). Along with the Quaker persecutions of the late 1650’s and the witchcraft hysteria of 1692, this incident is the attempt by the puritans in New England to clarify their theological position in the

experimental society based upon puritan orthodoxy. The issues raised during this period were so basic to the future of the colony that the controversy which developed around them has been described by historians as “a turning point in the life of Massachusetts Bay” (George 16).

This historic event has been examined many times within the context of various disciplines such as theology, politics, sociology, economics, laws and feminism, because this incident can be regarded as crucial to an understanding of religion, society, and gender in early American history. There have been numerous researches in the context of theological issues, which are divided into two opposing groups in a broad sense: one group is sympathetic to the theological position of the puritan leaders who castigated the Antinomians as heretics, the other group of scholars takes a critical position against the colony’s authorities from the perspective of religious freedom.

The traditional view of the controversy belongs to the first group, which adopted the viewpoint common among the opponents of Antinomians. This group includes Edward Johnson, John Gorham Palfrey, Perry Miller, Norman Petit, and Ronald D. Cohen. Charles Francis Adams was the first to reverse this traditional view in his *Three Episodes of Massachusetts History* (Boston, 1892), in which antinomians were extolled as champions of liberty and conscience. Subsequent generations of historians followed Adams’ direction and this trend reached a peak at the time of the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of Massachusetts. Winnifred Rugg, Edith Curtis, and Helen Augur contributed to “the myth of Ann Hutchinson as a crusader who battled the narrow-minded bigots of the Bay in the cause of religious freedom”(Bremer 150).

My study belongs to the second group in its attempt to reevaluate the controversy in the broad context of protestantism initiated by Luther’s reformation theology. There have been some researches on the Antinomian Controversy in the field of theology examined from the viewpoint of Calvinism, especially in the context of puritanism in conflict with the Anglican Church in England. However, the reevaluation of the controversy from the perspective of Luther’s reformation theology has yet to be attempted so far. The puritanism both in England and her colony, or in any parts in

Europe, belongs to the movement of protestantism in a broader sense which had been ignited by Luther's reformation theology in his fight against Roman Catholicism. This "protest" was succeeded in the next generation by the puritans in England against the Anglican Church to "purify" her of the Catholic Elements on the theological foundation of reformation.

In terms of theological issues and the process of the controversy, the Antinomian Controversy in many ways echoes the theological warfare between Luther and the Roman Catholics. Antinomians and Luther share the fundamental doctrines of reformation theology such as *sola fides* (only faith), universal priesthood, *sola scriptura* (only scripture) and finally the separation of church and state. Even the reaction and process of excommunication from the church authorities in response to the Antinomian's challenge remind me of those from the Roman Catholics in the face of Luther's criticism of the papacy in several significant ways. Stigmatizing the minor religious opponents as "heretics" by the major ruling parties in the process of excommunication is found both in New England in 1638 and in Germany in 1518, bridging the gap of time and place by the same spirit of protestantism based upon reformation theology.

II. The Church in the Plymouth Colony and the Church in the Bay Colony

The traditional belief about the Antinomianism shared by many Americans and historians alike is that Anne Hutchinson was the origin, cause, center, and progenitor of this religious dispute called the Antinomian Controversy. Up until recently, there has been referential interchangeability between the person "Ann Hutchinson" and the heresy "Antinomianism". However, according to David Hall, who collected the most comprehensive data about the controversy and published *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638* (Duke University Press, 1990), the major figure is not Hutchinson but John

Cotton.

In the traditional view of the Antinomian Controversy, Ann Hutchinson assumes the leading role as the chief antagonist of the orthodox party. But in the new documents, the major figure is John Cotton. Strictly speaking, he was not an Antinomian, yet the evidence gathered here clearly indicates that his differences of opinion with the other ministers in Massachusetts were at the heart of the Controversy. (4)

Hutchinson is a serious disciple of John Cotton, who “was acknowledged to be the best theologian”(George 28) in New England at that time. She put into practice what she learned from him in an unsophisticated manner, which resulted in the tragic end. Thus Hutchinson herself was not the source of all the heterogeneous doctrines in the Bay Colony but rather the spokeswoman and active participant for “a strain of radical separatism partially constitutive of the Puritan’s ecclesiastical experiment in North America” (Traister 138).

Therefore, when we approach the controversy from a theological perspective, we should focus on the theological conflict between John Cotton and his opponents, especially, Rev. Thomas Shepard, the leading theologian in their party, rather than on the tragic episodes involved in the Massachusetts Court in 1638, whose verdict was to expell Ann Hutchinson as a heretic from the Bay Colony. Actually, nothing written by her own hand concerning the movement survives, making it difficult to determine what she actually believed and what was erroneously attributed to her, because all the information about her has been recorded by her enemies. But there are ample resources of written documents concerning the theological treatise to defend his theological position written by the hand of John Cotton, her spiritual mentor.

When Ann departed England in 1634 to follow her spiritual leader Rev. John Cotton, she had high expectations of the new life in the new world, because she finally had the freedom to express her puritan beliefs, released from the confines of the Episcopal Church in England, which has yet to be purified. To her disappointment,

however, the situation in the churches of New England was not so different as it had been in old England in terms of reformation theology she had learned from Cotton. This is the irony of history in light of the fact that “dissenters were merely declining to conform to the Puritans, as the Puritans had declined to conform to the Church of England” (Andrew 478).

After the religious fervor of the first generation died down, Puritanism became formalized into the dominant church government ready to crush any dissenters, forgetting its own history of being victimized by the dominant Church of England. Puritanism in the Bay Colony became a “problematic anachronism”(Bailyn 91). The Bay Puritans represented similar views found in the religious and political situation in England several decades previously. Puritanism soon lost its original purpose to purify and make holy the Church of England on the theological basis of reformation, transforming into another oppressive, structured form of Christianity like the Anglican Church or the Catholic Church in its hostility toward its dissenters. John Cotton’s remark on the sad reality of the church in New England might have been shared by Ann Hutchinson: “Here members of the Church have suffered whippings for having a whim of their own”(As quoted in Crawford 88).

The first generation of Puritan immigrants to America were “Separatists” in a literal sense when they separated themselves from the Anglican Church after realizing the hopelessness of purifying her according to their reformed standards. They dreamed a form of church government which would be free from the evils of episcopacy which was not significantly different from the Roman Catholics in terms of church government. The Church in Plymouth tried to retain the original message of free grace uncontaminated by their false brothers in England. The ideal form of the Congregational Church was established in Plymouth, whose theological presupposition was based upon the doctrine of “universal priesthood” of Luther’s reformation theology against the hierarchical priestly orders in the Catholic and the Anglican Church.

We must keep in mind the polemical context when Luther developed the Universal priesthood. Statements about the universal priesthood always “serve to counter the

resistance of the Catholic hierarchy and especially the papacy to demands for reform” (Lohse 289). Luther was challenging the medieval idea of the hierarchy of estates, according to which the spiritual is above the temporal, with the pope at the apex. His point in the concept of the universal priesthood is clear enough: no mediation is required between God and humanity. The believer’s salvation is not dependent on mediation through a particular priest. All the baptized are priests in the New Testament sense, thus all in faith have free access to God. As priests they can promise forgiveness of sins to other Christians and thus have all the blessings of the gospel, without resort to the “professional” priests.

In his treatise *To the Christian Nobility* Luther protested that the “Romanists” had built three walls around themselves: “Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result, the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably” (Luther, vol.44, 126). Lohse, one of the greatest contemporary Lutheran scholars, explains “these walls” as following:

The first wall signifies that when pressed by the temporal power, the Romanists respond that it has no jurisdiction over them, that the spiritual power is above the temporal. The second wall signifies that when attempt is made to reprove them with the Scriptures, they object that no one is suited to interpret the Bible but the pope. Finally, the third wall signifies that when threatened with a council, they invent the idea that none may summon a council but the pope. (289)

Against this dogma of Roman Catholicism Luther developed his ideas of universal priesthood: “It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office” (Luther vol.44, 127). There is the unmistakable polemical tone in the following words: “For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope,

although of course it is not seemly that any body shall exercise such office” (Lohse 289).

The position toward the Anglican Church, taken by the “Pilgrims”, the radical reformists who first arrived at Plymouth in 1620, is very similar to that of Luther toward the Roman Catholics. Both challenged the monopolized priestly hierarchy of the church and both were excommunicated by the church authorities. In response to the excommunication, Luther established the reformed church in Germany by excommunicating the Roman Catholics in return, and pilgrims built the Congregational Church by separating themselves from the Church of England. Both of them claimed the right to have a direct access to God and the Scriptures, which used to have been reserved for the professional priests exclusively. The first group of puritans in America agreed with Luther’s statement that “thus only those are the holy and spiritual priesthood who are true Christians and are built on the stone who believe in Christ” (Luther vol 30, 53).

However, the second group of puritans who arrived in Massachusetts in 1630 were not the monolithic separatists in their relation to the Church of England. These people sought not to separate but to purify church and state, even though they share with their Plymouth neighbors the same goal of religious freedom from the pressure to conform to the hierarchical order of the Church in England. While the primary concern for the first settlers was the religious freedom of individual believers influenced by the doctrine of universal priesthood, the latter group’s ultimate concern was to establish a commonwealth based upon puritan theocracy, which was similar to the experimental theocracy John Calvin had tried to establish in Geneva a century before, but only in vain.

It is necessary to distinguish between the founders of the Plymouth colony and the founders of Massachusetts Bay to understand the theological climate in which the Antinomian Controversy developed. John Cotton and Ann Hutchinson arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1633 and 1634 respectively, when the puritan theocracy was beginning to shape its form of government. Professor Stout pointed out the resemblance

of puritan theocracy in Massachusetts to that of Israel in the Old Testament in his “Words and Order in Colonial New England”:

The individual could not earn his salvation, but he could “prepare” for it by attending to the preaching of the word and by being a loyal citizen in the society. He could find assurance in the realization that New England was God’s chosen nation.... With respect to biblical interpretation, the revamped and expanded covenant theology meant that the leaders must read the Old Testament with a closer eye to historical and literal implementation. The only historical model directly relevant to their enterprise was ancient Israel. Of all the peoples who preceded them, only Israel stood as they in a special redemptive covenant with God. For this reason, the “Jewish Commonwealth” enjoyed a normative status even greater than that ascribed to classical Greece and Rome. (28)

The identification of America with the New Israel was understood by the leaders not as a denial of the doctrine of *sola gratia* but as its culmination. The new doctrine was about to be mixed with the existing message of free grace, and Puritan ministers began to preach “unconditional individual election and conditional corporate rewards and punishments at the same time and with equal enthusiasm”(Stout 30). Sacvan Bercovitch describes the new exegesis as the result of the identification of America with Israel :

Unmistakably the New World, like Canaan of old, belonged wholly to the history of salvation. Other peoples, the colonists explained, had their land by providence; they had it by promise. Others must seek their national origins in secular records and chronicles; the story of America was enclosed in the scriptures, its past postdated and its future antedated in prophecy.(9)

However, some puritans, influenced by Luther’s reformation theology, whose whole theological system stood on *sola gratia* (only grace), could find no justification for a conditional covenant in personal or national terms. Believing that the national covenant

had ended with Christ, they could only understand New England's public corporate identity as a "covenant of works" that jeopardized one's personal relationship with Christ.

We do not know how many people throughout the colonies opposed the newly formed orthodoxy. But it can be postulated that there must have been a significant number of dissidents under the influence of Rev. John Cotton, Ann Hutchinson, and her husband's brother-in-law, Rev. John Wheelwright. They were the first organized party of dissenters in opposition to the official ideology of the Bay Colony.

The complex theological issues which surrounded the ensuing Antinomian Crisis become much clearer when we understand the fact that the ruling party identified their colony with Israel in the Old Testament, thus allowing the gospel of free grace in the New Testament to be mixed with the law of the Old Testament, while John Cotton and his followers were determined to maintain the doctrine of *sola gratia* in the personal relationship with God in its purest form. The shift of emphasis from individual relationship with God to the corporate body of the puritan commonwealth posed a theological dilemma to the Puritans in the Bay Colony:

Questions of personal and corporate regeneration could not be separated and the leaders could ignore questions of corporate duty and national covenant only at the expense of undermining all social order. For the first time puritan leaders experienced the responsibility of power. And this responsibility placed them on the horns of a dilemma they would never escape. Their personal faith rested firmly on the doctrine of *sola fides*, while their social doctrine was modeled directly after the Old Testament theocracy. (Stout 28)

John Cotton and his followers seemed to be influenced by Luther's reformation doctrine of *sola fides*, which emphasizes the individual relationship with God by the Covenant of Grace rather than the collective relationship with God as was the case of Israel in the Old Testament by the Covenant of Works.

According to Luther's understanding of the Scriptures in the context of this

distinction between law and gospel, he made it clear that the Old Testament is applicable only to the Israelites and not to Christians. The Old Testament contains not only the Decalogue but also Israel's national law. It is irrelevant to Christians. Against the legalists of Rome Luther said, "all such Mosaic teachers deny the gospel, banish Christ, and annul the whole New Testament. I now speak as a Christian for Christians. For Moses is given to the Jewish people alone, and does not concern us Gentiles and Christians" (Luther vol.40, 92). If Luther attacked the Israelites in the Old Testament and papacy in Rome, it was because he accused both of striving for their own righteousness, or, in his later terminology, of work-righteousness:

The chief reproach that Luther raised against the observants was that they imitated the Jews and strove to secure their own righteousness. Or he said that they followed their own righteousness before God. Just like the Jews or the heretics, the observants were "much too holy," trusting more in their merits than in the word of the Lord. At times Luther could warn against works in any form and emphasized that every thing depends on the imitatio Christi through faith and hope in him. Ignoring the works of Christ results in the many deeds that people believe they must perform themselves. (Lohse 65)

The various theological issues of the Antinomian Controversy evolve around the precarious relation between the "Covenant of Grace" and the "Covenant of Works", which is the core of Luther's reformation theology.

III. The Antinomian Controversy

Ann Hutchinson was a leader of the first organized attack on Puritan orthodoxy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630's. This became known as the Antinomian Controversy--"antinomian" meaning "against the law." To be antinomian was generally understood by the orthodox clergy "as meaning one who was against or opposed the

law and although Hutchinson protested against being defined in such terms, she and her followers were so regarded by those who found her views dangerous and heretical”(George 14). The puritan leaders intended to remind the listeners of the Familists, the notorious heretics in the early history of the Reformation for their sexual licentiousness by calling them in the same name, “antinomians”.

In New England this meant the difference between obedience to the law (works) and the grace (faith) given by the Holy Spirit. John Cotton was an early exponent of this view, shared by his follower Anne Hutchinson, who became the spiritual leader of the colony’s women. She criticized the pastors by saying that “the ‘legal’ ministers, with the exception of Cotton and Wheelright, were arguing for a connection between a person’s own works and the redemption by Christ; that outward evidence of ‘sanctification’ meant that Christ had redeemed, or ‘justified’ a person’s soul”(King 445). Her complaint began to divide the whole puritan community into two groups, those who stood for her and against her: on her side were Rev. John Cotton, Rev. John Wheelwright, her husband’s brother-in-law, and Governor Henry Vane, while Rev. John Wilson, the minister of Boston Church, Governor Winthrop, and all the other ministers in the Bay Colony belong to the opposite party.

The ministers retaliated, first by forcing Cotton to disavow his theological agreement with Hutchinson, then by frustrating the election of Wheelwright as minister, and finally causing the resignation of Henry Vane from the office of Governor of Massachusetts. Later, in the Massachusetts Court she was found guilty of making religion too personal, of claiming that God’s saving grace took precedence over legal forms or acts commonly called good works, and was excommunicated to be banished.

The first battle for public authority took place in 1637 when Wheelwright preached an inflammatory Fast Day sermon from Mathew 9:15. The sermon was characteristically Christocentric in theme, disdainful of all efforts to do good works as a preparation for personal salvation. He attacked the prevailing preachings by saying:

No, no, this is a covenant of works, for in the covenant of grace, nothing is revealed but Christ for our righteousness...not by the works of

righteousness, they are layd aside, and the Lord revealeth only to them
righteousness of himselfe given freely to the soul.... (Stout 32)

The following three questions, according to Hall, are the ultimate concern for the puritans in the Massachusetts Colony, for the conviction of salvation is the only sure compensation for what they risked their lives in coming to the wilderness: 1. How could they tell if they were saved or not? 2. What evidence could they rely upon? 3. How could they gain assurance of salvation and escape from anxiety about their spiritual estates? (15). One episode illustrates how desperate these question were in the colony:

A woman of Boston congregation, having been in much trouble of her spiritual estate, at length grew into utter desperation, and could not endure to hear of any comfort, etc., so as one day she took her little infant and threw it into a well, and then came into the house and said, now she was sure she should be damned, for she had drowned her child. (Winthrop 281-82)

The preachers could not deal with this concern by simply declaring that anxiety was inevitable. They had to provide some objective measure of grace, some outward sign of inner holiness. One such sign was sanctification, the daily course of living a godly life. Outward behavior could therefore be taken as a sign--albeit confusing one--of justification.

In the beginning there were only two issues involved in the controversy, according to Winthrop's reckoning: "1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2. That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification"(Winthrop 239). Answering a question about sanctification, Cotton warned that if taken wrongly as evidence of justification it amounts to a "Covenant of Works": "...evidencing Justification by Sanctification would be a building my Justification on my Sanctification" (As quoted in Hall 12). Mrs. Hutchinson was more decisive: she claimed without hesitation that all the preachers except Cotton and Wheelwright were preaching "works", not "grace".

There is a striking theological consistency among Cotton, Hutchinson and Luther, when we compare them in the context of faith and works. Luther's definition of faith in relation to works is clearly represented in his "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans":

Faith is not what some people think it is. Their human dream is a delusion. Because they observe that faith is not followed by good works or a better life, they fall into error, even though they speak and hear much about faith. "Faith is not enough," they say. "You must do good works, you must be pious to be saved." That is what they think true faith is. But, because this is a human idea, a dream, the heart never learns anything from it, so it does nothing and reform doesn't come from this 'faith', either.... Instead, faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God (John 1:13).... It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone ask, it already has them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words. (Luther Vol.63, 124-25)

The theological issue in relation with faith and works was the axis of the Antinomian Controversy as was the case of the conflict between Luther and the Roman Catholics. Ann Hutchinson and John Cotton challenged the leading pastors with Luther's reformation theology of "*sola fides*", while the preachers, like Catholic priests, relied upon works as the evidence of salvation.

Ann Hutchinson's argument seems to be a simplified version of Cotton's idea by a lay christian woman who had no access to sophisticated theological education. Her point was simple: those who turned for comfort to the performance of "duties" were resting their assurance on "sandy foundations"(Hall 17). Taking up Cotton's warning against confidence in "works", she turned his denunciation of moralism into the specific charge that the other ministers in the colony were preaching a "Covenant of Works." By this

term she meant that the ministers were letting people “thinke [themselves] to be saved, because they see some worke of Sanctification in them” (Wheelwright 164). The position taken by Hutchinson and Cotton was not only contrary to accepted doctrine, but also divisive among the unified efforts to establish a commonwealth on the basis of collective moral behavior.

Their viewpoints on the evidence of justification have touched on another important theological issue; that is, the ministry of the Holy Spirit on the christian. Both believed that “the evidence of justification was consistent with his assertion of the Spirit’s immediate operation in sanctification, and with his devaluation of gracious human activity”(Stoever 28). Cotton maintained that “regeneration is so exalted a transformation that it can be discerned only by an equally exalted means; namely, by the Spirit’s own testimony ‘without sight of any work of ours’” (Bremer 35)

Here again, they share with Luther the ministry of the Holy Spirit for the Christian’s entire journey. According to Luther, Holy Spirit is the active agent who applies the message of Christ to individual believers both in justification and in sanctification:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knows of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. Therefore, to sanctify is nothing else than to bring us to the Lord Christ, to receive this blessing, which we could not obtain by ourselves. (Luther, *Book of Concord* 415-16)

Luther, Cotton, and Hutchinson shared Pauline doctrine about the ministry of the

Holy Spirit in the process of salvation. According to Dockery, “it is a fundamental assumption of Paul’s theology that all believers are the possessors of the Spirit. In other words, no one can respond to the claims of Christ without being activated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit”(60). The immediacy of devotion to God does not come forth from innate human capacity but from the Spirit. According to Paul, the term sanctification can be used comprehensively to describe the overall process by which the new believer moves toward a life of holiness. Good works are not regarded as the result of the exercise of innate human free will, but as the fruits of the Holy Spirit who works through the regenerated soul (Gal. 5:22). Therefore, the merit is not attributed to man’s righteousness, but to Holy Spirit. In addition to that, the standard of sanctification is a holiness acceptable not to the human eye but to God’s; that is, a holiness in line with the Spirit’s own character (Rom. 15:16; 1Cor. 6:11). In this sense, all the efforts of puritan authorities who tried to establish a certain standard of moral behavior as evidence that one is saved, seemed to John Cotton and Hutchinson legalistic and even anachronistic in their imitation of old Israel.

IV. The Court Trial and the Revaluation of the Antinomian Controversy

Hutchinson was called before the Court in November 1637, to offer her own defence to the charges laid against her. But they could not find any legitimate legal charges to bring against her; she had not signed the illegalized petition for Wheelwright and she had not preached sedition. She had a good reputation among neighbors for helping the poor and the women in labor, raised 12 children successfully as a faithful wife of Mr. Hutchinson. As Winthrop struggled to find a specific cause, he managed to develop two: “disturbing the peace and continuing her proscribed weekly Bible meetings”(George 27). The court accused her of being “one of those that have troubled the peace of the commonwealth and the churches” and of continuing a “meeting and an assembly in your house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing

not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex”(Hall 312). She was a good match for them in all theological discussions, and over and over again in their trial they had no choice but to resort to the issue of women speaking and teaching.

Against this accusation, she defended her actions on several grounds: “the Bible justified the practice of elder women teaching younger ones; the custom of convening religious gatherings in the home had been established in the colony before her arrival; the activity was one Winthrop himself was involved in; and the weekly gatherings at her home were separated by sex, with the men meeting apart from the women” (George 28).

She claimed that she taught nothing her beloved teacher John Cotton, the great theologian of the colony, had not first asserted as proper doctrine. Many scholars, including Hall, agreed that Hutchinson learned from Cotton:

Anne Hutchinson came to trust one minister, John Cotton. Before he left England for New England in 1633, Cotton preached in Boston (Lincolnshire) not far from the town of Alford where the Hutchinsons lived. It may have been from Cotton that Mrs. Hutchinson learned to question the significance of the “law” and the “covenant of works”. He may also have encouraged her to conceive of the Holy Spirit as “indwelling” in the elect saint. Once they reached New England she and Cotton shared the same dissatisfaction with the spirituality of the colonists.... Together, the minister and the lay woman challenged this reasoning, reminding those who used it that the performance of moral duties was unrelated to divine mercy. To think otherwise, the two warned, was to proceed in the way of “works” and not of “free grace”.
(Hall x)

Therefore, Cotton was cast in the role of chief inquisitor, which was later represented in a version of Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* when Rev. Dimmesdale is called for as an inquisitor to persuade Hester to confess the partner of her adultery. They brought Cotton to the court, “primarily because he was acknowledged to be the best theologian among them, but also because they may have assumed that as her former teacher he would have an advantage in ‘reducing’ her errors”(George 32).

“With careful diplomacy he soothed the injured pride of the other ministers and brought his speech to a dramatic close by declaring: ‘I must say that I did not find her saying they were under a covenant of works, nor that she said they did preach a covenant of works’”(Morgan 56). According to Professor George, “he tried to walk a theological tightrope, first leaning toward the Hutchinsonians and then toward the defenders of orthodoxy. It was an impossible position, but in the end the ministers seemed satisfied that he was at one with them”(22).

Although John Cotton deserted Hutchinson in the fall of 1637 when she claimed to be acting on the basis of immediate revelation, he never really abandoned his conviction that outward and visible circumstances provide no evidence whatsoever of individual and spiritual grace (Stoever, *A Fairie...* 34-57). On the premise that “two so opposite parties could not contain in the same body, without apparent hazard of ruin to the whole”(Hall 10), Winthrop and a majority of the colonists determined to adopt a sterner policy. At the General Court session, which began on November 2, 1637 the leaders of the Antinomian party were excommunicated as heretics and banished from the colony.

With the removal of Anne Hutchinson, the issue of heresy and orthodoxy seemed to be settled irrevocably, and the orthodox party was unified to construct their own unique meaning of America on the foundation of their own interpretation of Scripture. When we are faced with the original purpose of this study, that is, “the revaluation of the heresy from the perspective of Luther’s Reformation Theology”, the question raised by Professor Stoever may be relevant to the theme of this essay: “Taking account of the foregoing, how are the principals in the controversy, especially Cotton and the other ministers, to be located in the history of Reformed Protestantism?” (25).

When Hutchinson declared that only Cotton and Wheelwright among the ministers of the Bay were “walking in a covenant of grace”, alluding that others all preached a “covenant of works”, she was touching on a very sensitive theological issue in reformation theology. This doctrine of “Covenant of Grace” played a crucial role in the early history of the Reformation when Luther challenged the Roman papacy. When the first generation of reformers challenged the authority of Rome, they argued that “the

formal structure of the Catholic Church--its regulations, its formulae, its alms and dispensations--were really a throwback to the forfeited covenant of works, because the Church seemed to be teaching that men could earn their way to heaven by observing a few simple rules..."(Erikson 80). If grace is an intimate exchange, a personal communication between God and individual believers, then any class of priests interceding in their behalf between God and lay Christians lose their absolute authority over the believers in church.

While the colonists remained in England, they lived in the fear that the government would deprive them of their religious freedom based upon reformation theology. When Archbishop Laud in the Church of England made that fear a reality by driving the puritan preachers out of the church, Puritan laymen risked their lives to found a new society in which their beliefs of reformed doctrines might be freely proclaimed without the persecution by church authorities.

However, Puritan theory had been modified to the new soil of New England, when "the credo of a minority group had become the platform of a ruling party" (Erikson 80). Once they had crossed over the Atlantic and managed to establish a self-sufficient commonwealth, the New England Puritans had been transformed from the opposition party into a ruling elite. Professor Erikson describes the gradual changes that took place in the New England as follows:

As the commonwealth slowly took form, the Puritan magistrates began to operate on the basis of a political theory which borrowed most of its metaphor from English Congregationalism but which represented something of a departure from at least the mood of that earlier doctrine. In its first stages, as we have seen, Puritanism can be said to have contained a strong note of individualism, if only in the sense that it appealed directly to the individual conscience and promoted a respect for private religious expression and experience. Now this sense of individuality fit naturally into Puritan thinking so long as it was voiced by a people protesting against the authority of Rome or Canterbury, but when these protesters themselves moved into power and became the

custodians of their own church, a rapid shift in emphasis was necessary.... Thus a new brand of Puritanism was taking shape in the forests of New England: the piety and self-expression which had dominated the original tone of the movement was gradually being transformed into the loyalty and obedience necessary for a civil establishment. (Erikson 98)

Therefore, the key idea of the revised version of reformation theology was that an individual's relationship to God needed to be screened by some intermediate authorities. This seems to be an anachronistic return to the papal system of intermediary priests in the old Church in England or Rome from the perspective of Luther's doctrine of "universal priesthood", the corner stone of Luther's reformation theology.

When Martin Luther first rebelled against Rome, he justified his action on the ground that he had an equal right to have a direct access to God and Scriptures as the Pope did. Once the minor sect of protestantism had grown enough to establish their own church in New England, they began to adopt the same strategy of the Episcopal Church they criticized in "old" England. The experimental commonwealth built on the strict reformation theology of John Calvin in Geneva became a case of failure, when the Calvinists tried to take hold of power both in church and state.

Throughout the early history of the Reformation, this dilemma had appeared repeatedly, and the people of New England were no exception. They had confronted the Anglican church by arguing that "each man should be free to negotiate his way to heaven without interference from the central church hierarchy"(Erikson 98). But by the time they had enough land to settle on and enough population to govern, the tone of the protestant voice began to shift to that of the oppressive voice against the minorities.

When the Massachusetts authorities called the religious dissenters "Antinomians", the familiar cycle seemed to be repeating itself, "for this was the name given to the desperate heretics of Luther's day and a name many ministers in the Bay had heard applied to themselves in old England" (Erikson 97). To stigmatize the minor dissenters as "heretic" by the party of the ruling majority is as old as the history of christianity

itself. But once the controversy of heresy belongs to the history of the past, the reevaluation of heresy or orthodoxy is given over to the hand of the later generations with a historical perspective. When the Antinomian Controversy is reexamined from the perspective of Luther's reformation theology, the "heretical" antinomians seemed more faithful to the tradition of orthodox protestantism than the puritan leaders whose standard of heresy was similar to that of the church in Rome or England, which were labelled as "heretical" by Luther and the puritans themselves at that time.

Key words: antinomianism, Reformation, puritanism, Covenant of Grace, Covenant of Work

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도덕률 폐기론 논쟁과 미국 청교주의의 쇠퇴:

루터의 종교개혁신학의 관점에서 본 “이단”의 재평가

국문초록

임창건

본 논문의 목적은 1636년 미국의 매사추세츠 식민지에서 발생한 도덕률 폐기론 논쟁을 루터의 종교개혁신학의 관점에서 접근하여 당시의 종교지도자들이 앤 허친슨을 위시한 도덕률 폐기론들에게 내린 이단 판정을 재평가하는 것이다.

도덕률 폐기론 논쟁은 1650년대의 퀘이커 교도의 박해, 1692년의 마녀사냥 열풍과 함께 “매사추세츠 역사의 새로운 전환점”으로 간주되어왔다. 이 논쟁은 초기 미국 청교도 사회의 종교, 정치, 문화, 법률을 이해하는데 있어서 중요한 논점을 제공하였을 뿐 아니라, 그 후 미국 문화의 발전과정에 지대한 영향을 미친 사건이기에 다양한 영역에서 여러 각도로 연구되었다. 그러나 아직까지 종교의 영역에서 루터의 종교개혁 신학의 관점에서 이 논쟁을 재평가한 연구는 보지 못한 바 없다.

이같은 관점에서 당시 청교도 지도자들과 도덕률 폐기론자들과의 논쟁을 관찰해 보면, 이 논쟁은 여러 면에서 로마 카톨릭과 루터 사이에 벌어졌던 신학적 논쟁과, 그 후 영국에서 되풀이 되었던 국교도와 청교도 간의 종교적 충돌과 유사점을 보여주고 있다. 필자는 이 유사성을 신학적으로 규명하기 위해, 루터의 종교개혁의 핵심사상이라고 볼 수 있는 “신앙만의 구원”, “만인 제사장주의”, “은총의 계약” 등의 개념을 통해 도덕률 폐기론자들의 주장과 당대의 청교도 지도자들의 신학적 입장을 비교하였다. 동시에 플리머스 식민지에 도착한 분리주의자들의 신앙공동체와 10년후 매사추세츠에 도착한 청교도들이 건설하고자 했던 신앙공동체의 신학적 배경의 차이점을 분석하여, 종교개혁적 신학전통에서 출발한 미국 청교도의 교리적 변화의 배경과 원인을 조명하였다.

미국의 청교도들은 영국에 있을 당시 소수종파로써, 영국 국교회의 박해의 대상이었으나, 식민지에서의 성공적인 정착과 인구의 증가로 인해, 종교적 다수파로 변모하게 되며, 이 과정에서 교회에 비판적인 앤 허친슨과 같은 소수파는 “도덕률

폐기론자”라는 낙인과 함께 추방된다. 하지만 이같은 과정에서 종교지도자들이 채택하는 전략은 카톨릭교회와 영국 국교회가 청교도들에게 사용했던 방식과 구조적 유사성을 떨 뿐만 아니라, 그 신학적 내용에 있어서도 초기 청교도들이 지녔던 개혁신앙의 교리적 순수성을 상실하기 시작하면서 그들 자신이 개혁하고자 하였던 영국 국교회와 유사한 제도 교회로 회귀하는 모순을 보여주고 있다.

주제어: 도덕률 폐기론, 종교개혁, 청교주의, 은혜언약, 행위언약

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