

David Como. *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. xiii + 513 pp. \$65.00.

Theodore Dwight Bozeman. *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. xv + 349 pp. \$49.95. Review by WILLIAM J. SCHEICK, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN.

The antinomian crisis in New England between 1636 and 1638 is too often scrutinized *in vacuo*, as if it had emerged *ex nihilo*. Sometimes the cause of the crisis is attributed to John Cotton's doctrinal ambiguities and his possible duplicity during a time when colonial Puritanism was essentially a yeasty mix of competing discourses. Sometimes the cause is attributed, far less probably, to the proto-feminist disposition of Anne Hutchinson, considered by some to be a cultural heroine martyred by powerful elite male persecutors. Oddly, not enough has been made of the connection between antinomianism and the Reformation roots of Calvinism, so insistent on the complete powerlessness of the human will in its unmediated, free-grace, *sola fides* relationship with its creator.

The Reformation uprooting of the Roman Catholic understanding of visible signs, especially of sanctified and sanctifying action, proved utterly radical. The insistence upon justification by faith alone effectively disqualified external signifiers, including works, as an aid, a measure or a comfort concerning an individual's spiritual status. As a result, it is indeed hard to fathom just what, at the very core of Calvinism, could be the *real* function of such a human contrivance as church government. To be sure, pastors serve in a certain educated ambassadorial capacity following the example of Jesus's apostles; and Reformed theology elevates the function of their spoken word in the inauguration of the conversion process. Yet, given all ministers' powerlessness even in the matter of their own spiritual destiny, how authoritative, how necessary, how useful are they finally in a belief system that emphasizes each

individual's personal, direct relationship with a deity who has already predetermined the fate of everything for reasons beyond human understanding? The Calvinist claim that ministers, whether or not they are themselves redeemed, serve as divine instruments in the working out of the saints' predestination only goes so far—and not very far at that—in making a case for church oversight.

It is understandable, then, that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Calvinist denominations such as Puritanism struggled again and again with the place of the visible church and pious works. It was not merely due to the need for social management or governmental order that a pietistic scheme, under the guise of methodical steps toward and through the course of conversion, found a place in various developments in Puritan theology. The laity understandably desired hopeful external indicators of their spiritual situation. If, on the one hand, a certain liberation from personal responsibility ensued from an unmediated, free-grace, *sola fides* relationship with the deity, so too a certain terror ensued from such personal blindness and powerlessness concerning salvation. Some gave way to suicide, albeit doctrinally designated a damning expression of despair. Many needed reassuring signs on which to anchor their hope for eternal life, the only thing that mattered ultimately.

Hence various Puritan denominations drifted into legalistic morphologies of conversion. Such stages of conversion, however, were to be assessed *a posteriori* as possible clues to sanctified actions rather than approached *a priori* as a regimen of assured sanctifying behavior. Nevertheless, while this distinction was intended to instate works or “duties” in ways that did not replicate the Roman Catholic elevation of human will, it always resisted clear definition and so easily mutated to meet various individual and communal needs. Moreover, the *a posteriori* model tended to value the rational over the emotional in religious experience. There was, as well, always the vulnerability of effectively inclining toward a pre-Reformation program of pious works.

It is curious that deep feelings relating to personal salvation encouraged a conversion morphology that elevated reason over

affections. The problem was not a theological one: the Calvinistic distinction between justification and sanctification remained clear enough. The problem was a human one. Puritans, it seemed, could never resolve the *human* dilemma posed by the comforts of sanctified action (visible signs) in a theology that, instead, stressed justification by (invisible) faith *alone*. Even as late as the Great Awakening of the 1740s, this very same lingering issue marked one divide between Old and New Light divines.

That such contrary vectoring characterized English Puritanism from the outset is David R. Como's well-made point in *Blown by the Spirit*. Como highlights diverse theological disputes of the 1620s through the 1640s, when sporadic English antinomian groups sought to live closer to a more radical understanding of Reformation piety. While antinomians during these encounters cannot be codified to a precise system of belief, most thought of themselves as reformers of Puritanism rather than as break-away groups. They were, in short, a subculture within an already pluralistic Puritan community where clear boundaries concerning belief and practice simply did not exist. The acrimony between the competing parties on these occasions stemmed precisely from this fact of close association. Their debates were like fierce arguments among members of the same family. Moreover, Como argues, these ongoing religio-political encounters anticipate and explain the infighting that led to the later breakdown of the Long Parliament.

In general, antinomians insisted on the direct, immediate and unmediated work of saving grace. Human effort, the exertion of post-lapsarian will, counted for nothing. An emancipating spiritual assurance, not progressive stages of conversion assessed through *a posteriori* self-examination, mattered above all else. Theirs was an all-or-nothing claim that sometimes elevated the antinomians over those fellow Puritans who were following an emerging stress on imperfect faith and fluctuating affections. Even so, there were significant differences among antinomians. The Familist version envisioned earthly perfection, whereas more restrained claims characterized the opposite "imputative" version.

Como provides rich, in-depth profiles of the careers of John Traske from 1617 to 1620, John Eaton during the 1620s, John Everarde during the 1620s and 1630s, and Roger Brearley during the 1640s. Eaton emphasized an “imputative” understanding of conversion, Everarde stressed perfectionism, and Brearley highlighted some middle ground between these two. Whatever their differences, however, they each maintained that Christians must fully live in the spirit, free from the inhibiting formalities and legalisms of Mosaic Law. Freed from the external guide of the Law, they argued, personal government and piety would emanate solely from within their divinely enlightened souls, as directly inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Saved for last is the *piece de resistance* of Como’s study: a close consideration of Edward Howes’s drift into antinomianism. With his longtime friend John Winthrop, Jr., Edward Howes delved into alchemical mysteries, especially as they informed Everarde’s mystical teachings. Later, during the 1640s, Howes would become a Familist extremist maintaining that the deity exists within the believer. In lieu of Scripture, then, revelation emanated from the believer’s own spiritual experience. Particularly noteworthy is Howes’s sense of still being a Puritan, so much so that he contemplated settlement in New England as if his views would not be problematic there. Como rightly suggests that Howes’ case indicates the blurred boundaries among competing doctrinal positions within Puritan culture.

Whereas Como delves into the lineage and beliefs of English antinomians, in *The Precisianist Strain* Theodore Dwight Bozeman primarily examines the development of federal Puritanism. This pietist strain, linking “faith alone” dogma and Scriptural rule, originated in Henrician times. Elizabethan Presbyterians, in turn, significantly advanced the case for church regulation and individual duty. Richard Greenham (1535-1594), Bozeman convincingly shows, exerted a major influence on the development of this pietist emphasis on the letter of the law over the spirit. Greenham inaugurated a scheme of spiritual exercises designed to aid pious self-examination. By Stuart times, such methods defined what Bozeman

calls mainstream Puritanism, which required self-scrutiny without offering any promise of spiritual completion or comfort. In this precisionist model, the penitent effectively remains suspended between presumption and despair, the Scylla and Charybdis of the soul's tempest-tossed life-journey.

Bozeman refers to Como's work (in its dissertation stage) once and in a footnote: "Como's critique of my earlier description of the first-wave antinomians as 'post- and contra-puritan' persuades me that the language is too unqualified, and I revise the emphasis here" (210). In fact, however, Bozeman is still inclined toward his earlier approach. In his introductory comments he speaks of the 1620s as a time when "the level of disciplinary demand had risen so high as to generate a virtual counter-Puritanism" (7). In the last third of his book Bozeman addresses what he calls the "theological insurgency" of the "antinomian backlash" (181, 183)—in short, the "counter-Puritanism" of his earlier phrasing. In his concluding comments he directly speaks of antinomianism as "Puritanism's ideal 'other'" and as "a charter for *post*-Puritan" Christianity (334). He is careful to include a reservation aligned with Como's argument: "Non-separatists of a sort, [antinomians] did not aim to secede from the larger godly community, but to reform it from within" (184). He likewise acknowledges that the early antinomians "remained children of the Puritan movement in several respects" (207). "In several respects," however, effectively registers a qualification within a qualification. Despite the footnote, then, Bozeman seems inclined to read antinomians as break-away groups, rebels against a "despotic" federal theology (185).

Bozeman's proclivity in this matter may be encouraged by his tendency to reify the *precisionist strain* as a mainline Puritanism with an essentially monolithic identity. He never makes such a claim, it should be clearly said. But the thrust of his language and rhetorical strategies slants in that direction, as if positing a genuinely definable, stable mainstream Puritanism. Puritanism was hardly systematic, and within the more dominant pietistic sects, not to mention within the antinomian groups, there existed a considerable spectrum of doctrinal possibilities. The spectral doctri-

nal bands of one group would at one or another point overlap various bands of another group. That is why, as Bozeman says, "There was a surprisingly large cast of antinomian characters" (186). But the number is not so surprising if we recall that Puritanism, early and late, remained essentially a yeasty mix of competing discourses, even among the emergent pietists. There is no end of examples of Puritanism's unconsolidated character even in the eighteenth century, including the exchanges between Increase Mather and Solomon Stoddard, the so-called Pope of the Connecticut Valley, and the numerous issues addressed by Stoddard's grandson, Jonathan Edwards.

Bozeman indeed identifies such "contrary tendencies" in the teachings of John Cotton (211), the subject of four chapters. He finds that as Cotton struggled to negotiate a middle way between pietist and antinomian inclinations, elements of his thought coalesced with elements of antinomian thinking. But Bozeman never quite applies Cotton's experience to his own representation of mainstream Puritanism itself. He seems uncomfortable with the numerous contrary tendencies of Puritanism, so polymorphous that the antinomians perhaps should be considered "children of the Puritan movement" much more than (as Bozeman hesitatingly and somewhat disqualifyingly puts it) merely "in several respects." Is it not possible, given the radical nature of the Reformation break from Roman Catholic practical piety, that antinomianism might have been at heart a spontaneous development firmly within Puritanism from the outset, and not necessarily a "theological insurgency" or "backlash"? Bozeman's separatist inclination may hamper his case—his prose (repetitively dependent on weak *was/were* constructions) can also be off-putting—but his consideration of the rise of English pietism significantly deepens our understanding of that school of Puritanism.

Both Bozeman's *The Precisianist Strain* and Como's *Blown by the Spirit* are restricted to English Protestantism. This is a reasonable boundary, given the complexity of their subject. But it would be interesting to place both of their findings in the context of developments in Reformation theology elsewhere in Europe. To what

extent, in other words, did antinomian expression in England parallel or depart from certain diverse, extreme religious discourses arising from within other European Christian denominations devoted to Reformation theology?

David J. Rempel Smucker and John L. Ruth (eds.) and James W. Lowry (intro. and trans.). *Hans Landis: Swiss Anabaptist Martyr in Seventeenth-Century Documents*. Millersburg: Ohio Amish Library, 2003. xi + 233 pp. + 18 illus. \$14.95. Review by NILES S. ILLICH, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY.

In 1614 Hans Landis, a leader of the Swiss Anabaptists, became a martyr. His execution by the Swiss catalyzed a Landis mythology, which as the author indicates had at least two general schools: "Hans Landis as a civilly disobedient leader of a troublesome sect; and Hans Landis as a sturdy hero of the Christian faith" (2-3). The purpose of this book is to provide "a useful tool to those who want to carry research forward in the areas that these documents touch [the life and death of Hans Landis]" (12). While this goal appears to justify the book's publication, a reader may quickly develop misgivings that other, less-scholarly motives inspired the editors. Such suspicion may be piqued early on when the author asks, "What kind of society would deem a Hans Landis as an intolerable presence?" (4). Following a broad and sometimes clumsy introduction that provides background information on the Swiss, Hans Landis, and (only briefly) the issues of early modern conflict between church and state, are twenty-five documents that are otherwise generally unavailable to scholars.

The twenty-five documents, which constitute the heart of the text, are published on opposing pages in both German and English, providing capable scholars the unusual opportunity to interpret them without the hindrances of another's translation. The final document (in the appendix) is the *Ausbund* song; composed to memorialize the interrogation and execution of Landis, it is especially interesting because instead of transcribing the document into contemporary German, the translator elected to leave this en-