

Whitney G. Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

The publication of the *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, 1643–1653* (MPWA), edited by Chad Van Dixhoorn (2012), marked a watershed moment in the study of early modern religion in the transatlantic world, providing scholars with a wealth of new manuscript material. Until its appearance, the main preoccupation of Westminster studies was undoubtedly the heated debates on ecclesiology, and for good reason. Not only were these debates better documented, but these studies generally emerged from a Presbyterian confessional tradition—for whom these issues provided ongoing practical concern, and not just academic interest. However, the documents edited by Van Dixhoorn have opened the door to a more nuanced assessment of the divines' work, offering a richer contextualization of their labors and a growing understanding of less-studied polemical battles that arguably mattered more to those men than the ideological heirs who retold the narrative of the Assembly in subsequent centuries.

In this fine study, Whitney Gamble offers the first thorough assessment of one of the most important of these battles—the battle over antinomianism—which she judges to have been “the primary concern of the Assembly from its first meeting” (6). Drawing extensively from the MPWA and the newly discovered journal of Assembly divine John Lightfoot, she shows that the perceived threat from this quarter was so significant that the divines' response to antinomian teaching framed not only their early debates, but the very shape of the Westminster Confession's classical formulations on justification, saving faith, and good works.

Dr. Gamble begins with the little-known background to these debates, ably charting the rise of seventeenth-century English antinomianism. A useful survey of the work of John Eaton—and prominent disciples such as Tobias Crisp, John Saltmarsh, John Simpson, and the Baptists Robert Towne, Henry Denne, and Hanserd Knollys (39–64)—reveals a theological pendulum swing away from both Laudian Arminianism and the perceived “legalism” of the Reformed, but a swing much too far for the majority of English clergy. English antinomianism was hardly monolithic, and Gamble patiently leads the reader through the notorious complexities and diversities of the multifaceted antinomian dogma, condensing their tenets helpfully into several distinct theological commonalities. These include their sharp dichotomy between the Old and New Testaments (a rigid binary corresponding to the covenant of works and grace respectively); their rejection of

the “third use of the law” for anyone clothed in the imputed active obedience of Christ; their articulation of eternal justification, with its concomitant downplaying of the covenant conditionality of saving faith and repentance in conversion; and their conflation of justification and sanctification, which resulted in a species of perfectionism. These were hardly peripheral matters of Christian doctrine; as such, the Antinomians questioned the very fabric of Reformed theology and threatened to rewrite established norms of Puritan experiential spirituality. The lifting of Laudian censorship on the eve of the Assembly in 1641 brought a flood of antinomian publications and preaching in London, creating a panic among Reformed divines, and setting the stage for the heart of Gamble’s study, namely how the Westminster Assembly used its parliamentary commission to reform the Church of England’s Thirty-nine Articles to stem this tide.

The author’s sure-footed treatment of these debates offers compelling new windows into how the divines delimited the boundaries of their official remit, and how they sparred with the parliament and with one another. For instance, with parliament pushing hard for a swift judgment for antinomian preachers, many divines balked at being called to function as a church court with authority to penalize those they had largely concluded were guilty of serious error, not heresy. Their efforts to persuade erring theologians by conference before moving to censure reveals their pastor’s hearts, but neither do they emerge from Gamble’s study as soft on false doctrine. The publication of error in print and pulpit was considered a case of *fama clamosa*, rather than a personal injury to be treated with the first steps of Matthew 18 (71–72). Ultimately, the divines’ final *Humble Advise...for Preventing the Mischiefs...of Antinomianisme & Anabaptisme* is a hard-fought seven-point document sent to Parliament distilling antinomianism’s “dangerous opinions,” that would land recalcitrant Antinomians in prison. However, as Gamble intriguingly points out, it also would open a new theological can of worms: three of the seven censured “dangerous opinions” were ecclesiastical proclivities shared by Westminster’s handful of Independents like Thomas Goodwin (80–82), who in many debates had ironically helped carry the day against key antinomian errors. Thus, while there was a general consensus over the soteriological issues addressed by the *Advise*, a famous cadre of five “no” voters emerged: the eponymous “Dissenting Brethren,” whose *Apologeticall Narration* (1643) set a collision course with the new agenda-setting *Solemn League and Covenant* that same year. Gamble thus asserts a crucial but overlooked connection in Westminster studies: that the Assembly’s under-studied antinomian debate actually played a significant role in

kindling its more famous ecclesiastical debate, which has spilled considerably more scholarly ink.

Perhaps the strongest scholarly contribution of Gamble's study lies in its groundbreaking exploration of how antinomianism dramatically impacted confessional formulation at Westminster (chapters 4–6). By wading through the often-dense weeds of internecine debate in the Jerusalem Chamber now available in the *MPWA*, she reveals how many of the Westminster Standards' classical statements on the cardinal Reformed doctrines of justification, saving faith, repentance unto life, and good works were painstakingly crafted as polemical broadsides against the theological hydra of antinomianism. The controversy touched on so many theological loci that this volume helpfully addresses a whole host of current topics of scholarly discussion, such as the development of the bicovenantal structure of redemption, the republication of the covenant of works at Sinai, the two-fold obedience of Christ, Puritan preparationism, and the relation of law and gospel.

Christ and the Law will also be of value to address contemporary issues facing confessional churches in the Westminster tradition. For example, it offers a compelling counterpoint to ministers and ministry candidates who might be tempted to stretch their subordinate standards to accommodate questionable "exceptions" and seek vindication from the fractious debates of the divines who composed them. For example, Gamble carefully explains Thomas Gataker's heated arguments against the active imputed obedience of Christ as an over-correction to the contemporary antinomian abuse of that doctrine (94–108). The diversity of opinion at Westminster this exemplifies—along with the alleged consensus language of the imputation of Christ's "whole obedience" rather than "active and passive obedience"—has sometimes been over-stated as an argument for a similar latitude toward definitions of justification within confessional churches today. In this case, Gamble demonstrates that Gataker's dissent was an outlier shared by only three others in the Assembly, and the term "whole obedience" was unanimously understood by the divines as shorthand for the imputation of both active and passive obedience (128–31, 141–42). Thus, she reminds us that while new manuscript discoveries have revealed a much broader array of opinions at Westminster than hitherto assumed, and that the Confession it spawned was thus very much a consensus document, neither should the *MPWA* become a kind of "Ur-text" to the plain words of the Confession for those seeking to evade subscription on cardinal points. *Christ and the Law* exposes the irony that a Confession of Faith so painstakingly crafted

as an exclusionary document to seventeenth-century Antinomians should be increasingly interpreted as an inclusionary consensus document that might accommodate proponents of comparable antinomian tenets in the twenty-first.

All in all, a most welcome contribution to Westminster studies that mines the manuscripts and brings out treasure that will be of great value to both the church and the academy.

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Richard A. Muller, *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Grace and Freedom, like many academic books, represents the continuation of an important and ongoing dialogue among scholars. During the past decade, Richard Muller, Paul Helm, Antonie Vos, and others have discussed the relationship between grace and freedom in early modern thought in books such as *Reformed Thought on Freedom* (2010), *Divine Will and Human Choice* (2017), and *Reforming Free Will* (2020), as well as in journals such as the *Journal of Reformed Theology*. Muller, Helm, and others have debated not only the relationship between grace and freedom but also the applicability—and indeed at times even the definition—of terms such as compatibilism, libertarianism, determinism, synchronic contingency, and diachronic contingency to describe the views of early modern Reformed thought. *Grace and Freedom* provides another contribution to this important discussion by focusing on debates over grace (or divine sovereignty) and freedom (or human free will) involving the English theologian and pastor William Perkins (1558–1602), other Protestants, and Roman Catholics.

Throughout *Grace and Freedom*, Muller makes a few key arguments—five of which deserve brief summation. First, Muller argues that the use of terms such as compatibilism, determinism, and libertarianism to analyze early modern theology (including the views of William Perkins) is anachronistic and inaccurate (4–6, 187–93). Muller’s contention that these terms do not describe the general views of Reformed Orthodoxy is a point Muller also emphasizes in his previous work, *Divine Will and Human Choice* (Baker Academic, 2017). Second, Muller proffers that Perkins’s understanding