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John Cotton Reconsidered: Law and Grace in Two Worlds

by DAVID PARNHAM
Malvern, Australia
E-mail: dparnham@tpg.com.au

Scholarly accounts of John Cotton's pre-migration divinity focus upon its legalism. Cotton's Old-World voice speaks with the law-mindedness of the 'precisianist' and the 'experimental predestinarian'. Cotton, moreover, is said to have made a 'radical change' when, in Massachusetts, he renounced the law's 'power'. Legalist therein becomes solifidian. Such a view fails to account for the very particular nature of Cotton's Old-World evocations of the moral law. Cotton was a diffident legalist in old Boston. A flirtation with the covenant of works momentarily roused the power of the moral law, but this was atypical of Cotton's English divinity. It was in Massachusetts that Cotton made bold pastoral use of the law's power. And, with this, he coupled a theological revision that cut through the roots of Old-World piety: placing unusual stress on the passivity of faith, he rejected the 'evidentiary' value of the Puritan holy walk.

John Cotton commands a fair claim to be considered the Proteus of his generation. His soteriology was, and is, a difficult thing to pin down. Yet few among the steely breed of Puritan pastors and teachers could rival the man's eminence. Converted by Richard Sibbes, he would serve as the instrument in the calling of John Preston, who, subsequently, would repay the favour by relaying to Cotton's domestic seminary a steady stream of 'near fledg'd Pupils'.[1] Cambridge studies had readied Cotton for a ministerial career, and in 1612 he began a lengthy and fruitful appointment as vicar of the Lincolnshire parish of St Botolph's, Boston. Trouble with William Laud opened his mind to the possibility of migration, and in October 1633, having crossed the Atlantic in the company of fellow

This article is a thank offering for Michael McGiffert, a scholar as generous as he is learned. I also gratefully acknowledge the thoughtful comments offered by this JOURNAL's referee.

[1] Tom Webster, *Godly clergy in early Stuart England: the Caroline Puritan movement, c. 1620–1643*, Cambridge 1997, 24. For Cotton's living of a Puritan life see Larzer Ziff, *The career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American experience*, Princeton 1962.

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renegade and future antagonist Thomas Hooker, Cotton was inducted into the teaching eldership of Boston, Massachusetts, shortly to become the epicentre of what has been dubbed 'the free-grace controversy'.[2] The learned Cotton put forth a prolific flow of words addressing matters technical as well as devotional, and his corpus of published works – sermon collections, theological, exegetical and ecclesiological treatises, and controversial pieces – contributed powerfully, and provocatively, to the self-comprehension of the Puritan church militant. For all his celebrity as a Puritan churchman, however, there is a sense in which John Cotton remains a shadowy figure. Crystal clarity was not always a high priority for Cotton. One of his singular gifts was the theological side-step. Whether by accident or design, Cotton proved himself an accomplished eluder of the explicators of his thought.

Gnomic utterances serving the needs of a slippery mind in possession of a forked tongue: this kind of appraisal of Cotton's devotional and doctrinal work has held steady across the passing centuries. An occasional transgressor of technical proprieties, Cotton could become fodder to the reactive weaponry of scholastic intelligences. He was caught, at times, in the glare of heresy hunters. The Puritan controversialist William Twisse, animadverting upon a manuscript that Cotton had written in the 1620s, endured the unnerving experience of poring over the language of a learned man and watching, helplessly, as apparent edifices of meaning collapsed upon the crumbling base of a self-dissolving lexicon. Cotton, it appeared to Twisse, was culpably obscure, deliberately resistant to 'plaine termes', contemptuous of 'sober' speech.[3] His 'phraseologies' were such as would 'raise unto our selves a mist'; he spoke a language that was 'strange' and 'troubling' to the reader, in whose place Twisse inserted himself – appearing defeated by the strain to make 'any tolerable construction' of Cotton's 'words'. As Twisse would have it, the man was walking in the 'clouds' of his own 'mysteries'.[4] But the self-subversion of Cotton's text served only to sharpen Twisse's resolve to expose the heresy that must,

[2] See Michael P. Winship, *Making heretics: militant Protestantism and free grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641*, Princeton 2002. On Cotton's place in the stormy political and ecclesiastical world of old Boston see Jesper Rosenmeier, '"Eaters and non-eaters": John Cotton's *A brief exposition of Canticles* (1642) in light of Boston's (Lincs.) religious and civil conflicts, 1619–22', *Early American Literature* xxxvi (2001), 149–81. For disagreements with Hooker see Frank Shuffelton, *Thomas Hooker, 1586–1647*, Princeton 1977, 168–70, 254–8, 289–91; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The precisianist strain: disciplinary religion and antinomian backlash in Puritanism to 1638*, Chapel Hill–London 2004, 259–60; and David Parnham, 'Redeeming free grace: Thomas Hooker and the contested language of salvation', *Church History* lxxvii (2008), 915–54, esp. pp. 926, 942, 948–52.

[3] William Twisse, *A treatise of Mr. Cottons, clearing certaine doubts concerning predestination*, London 1646 (Wing T.3425), 89, 92, 95, 227, 252–4, 269.

[4] Ibid. 87, 229, 263–5.

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perforce, lie embedded in the endlessly circulating false turns of Cotton's language. Twisse could not abide what he took to be treacherous ambiguity, and others, with a mind to the heresy-spawning potential of ambiguous speech, bristled at the vagaries of Cotton's tongue. New-World interlocutors concurred with Twisse in deploring Cotton's impenetrability; Cotton had not 'plainly' expressed himself, the New England elders protested, and 'sundry' of his public utterances 'were darkly and doubtfully delivered'.[5] Cotton, it has been shown, was expansionary in his deployment of biblical imagery, so much so that meanings become fragmented as images undergo continual metamorphosis. At the level of practical divinity, Teresa Toulouse avers, Cotton dwelt upon 'mysterious transformations' and spiritual 'growth', and herein the fluidity of verbal manoeuvre, the dissolution of stable points of reference, must erase any gestures at practicality. Seemingly, the mystagogue supersedes the spiritual physician; the direction of Cotton's biblical expositions leads not 'forward to mechanically extractable uses, but back to the mystery of a *Deus Absconditus* – the true Logos – whom language will never be entirely able to reach'.[6]

Given such apophatic predilection, how are historians of religion likely to fare when they turn their attentions to John Cotton? If they acknowledge their man's virtuosity, they know its effects to be proverbially enigmatic. Michael McGiffert, plotting Cotton's anomalous contributions to the Perkinsian strand of divinity, remarks upon a residue of 'ambiguities and obscurities', of 'straddlings and switches', of 'persistent oddities' and 'conceptual fuzz', and takes comfort in the observation that 'a historian is not required to succeed, where contemporaries often failed, in making John Cotton speak plainly'. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, training sights upon a 'mind in motion' – a mind ever straining to contain the pull of oppositely directed dispositions – aligns Cotton with antinomian contemporaries, and sounds out the 'deep equivocations' that riddle his theological journey: Cotton 'offers a far more elusive and intriguing problem in interpretation', since his 'antinomian tendency was peculiarly ambivalent, limited in range and contained by larger loyalties both social and theological'. And David Como, concluding his exhaustive evocation of the antinomian controversy of the early Caroline period, comes warily upon Cotton, whom he considers no 'genuine' antinomian but, more hazily, as someone whose arguments – at least in the New England phase of his career – tended 'to replicate in form and tone

[5] Ibid. 264; *The antinomian controversy, 1636–1638: a documentary history*, ed. David D. Hall, 2nd edn, Durham, NC 1990, 62–3.

[6] Teresa Toulouse, *The art of prophesying: New England sermons and the shaping of belief*, Athens, GA 1987, 32–3, 39, 42.

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those that had been made by the likes of Everarde, Eaton, and Traske in the preceding years'.[7]

Cotton, then, presents challenges. He fascinates and frustrates. If Cotton was something like an antinomian in New England in the mid-1630s, what sort of shape did his theology take prior to this? Twisse armed himself with a ready answer: for all the impediments to intelligibility that Cotton had strewn about his discourse, the man was clearly an 'Arminian' and a 'Pelagian', intent on demeaning the doctrine of regeneration by inflating the spiritual 'power' of the reprobate will.[8] We may seek to take a longer view than Twisse was able to take, and ask about the theological consequences of the passage from England to New England. Was the theology of Cotton's ministry in old Boston, Lincolnshire, somehow, or to some degree, continuous with that of his ministry in the new Boston of Massachusetts? According to R. T. Kendall, Cotton 'repudiated' his legalism in the 1630s – Cotton, that is to say, took a 'radically different line' in the New World from that which he had pursued in the old. Theodore Dwight Bozeman offers a more nuanced alternative. Alert to signs both of continuity and of reconsideration within a questing yet traditionalist mentality, Bozeman catches the 'eclectic and ambivalent' Cotton in 'adumbration' of a partially formed New-World antinomianism.[9] The English deposit of Cotton's divinity might usefully be reconsidered in light of the differing points of emphasis of Kendall and Bozeman. I therefore propose, in what follows, to look anew at the form of Cotton's soteriology of the 1620s, and then to reflect on the question of the transition from Old World to New.

Cotton's Old-World divinity: law as grace and as covenant

John Cotton presents himself in the extensive remains of his Lincolnshire pastorate as a man actuated by the sorts of concerns, commitments and yearnings that might reasonably be expected of a Puritan divine of his day. Though seemingly reluctant to apply heavy preparatory rods to the sinners in his care, Cotton, in his own way, honoured the grand ideal of communal

[7] Michael McGiffert, 'The Perkinsian moment of federal theology', *Calvin Theological Journal* xxix (1994), 117–48, quotations at pp. 142, 144–5; Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 286, 241; David R. Como, *Blown by the spirit: Puritanism and the emergence of an antinomian underground in pre-civil-war England*, Stanford 2004, 442.

[8] Twisse, *Treatise of Mr. Cottons*, esp. pp. 45–8, 51, 69–70, 81, 87–92, 145, 147, 208–12, 215–20, 228, 233–44, 248, 257, 270–2.

[9] R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford 1979, esp. pp. 110, 117; Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 211, and ch. xi for 'adumbrations' and pp. 230, 242, 257–9, 266–7, 280, 282–90, 293–305 for Cotton's 'semi-antinomian' theology and his catalytic role in the antinomian insurgency.

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purification. He enforced a pietistic regime, though its base was less solidly legalistic than recent scholarship contends.[10] Hearts were in need of vigilant oversight and corrective governance; faith was charged with the responsibility of being constantly 'active' – an important solifidian qualifier for the English Cotton – in bringing forth 'fruits' to Christ; sin was, it seems, omnipresent and recalcitrant, and must be conquered by the disciplines of mortification. The humbled heart, for Cotton, was a pious heart; it had been 'cleansed' and 'fitted' by 'preparative graces', and, inspired by Christ's Spirit and subjected to faith's tuition, it was sufficiently stocked with resources to live 'the life of sanctification'. A life thus lived would write itself as a living script; it would become a cluster of 'signs' conveying evidences of, and bearing witness to, a higher purpose.[11] The variegated 'ordering and framing' effected by sanctification would issue forth in 'comfortable signes'. 'You may read your comfort in the sorrow that it hath left behind', Cotton aphorised in *Christ the fountaine of life*, 'for there is as much cause of comfort in this sorrow, as in the joy when you had it'.[12]

Faith, inspecting the significations of the godliness that it nurtures, could read the living marks of regeneration by which grace inscribes its perdurable presence. With faith's message absorbed, assurance of salvation comes to work its wonder, 'pacifying' the care-worn soul and 'inlarging' its joy. Broadly considered, the narrative script of the holy life surrenders its significative blessings in two acts of inference: believers are called to descend into the 'closet' of their 'spirits' to find evidence that sin has been pardoned, and then they must range over the newly framed heart in search of 'habits and gifts' and 'duties' supplying evidence of holiness.[13] Faith, then, purifies as well as pacifies, works 'joy' by sanctification as well as by justification: 'The Sun-shine of Gods favour will not shine upon a dunghill soule, it will shine upon the garden onely, where the seeds of his grace are sowne.' The harvesting of inseminated graces would send faith into indefatigable motion, keeping wayfarers 'in a fruitfull and growing frame';[14] and the body of Cotton's Lincolnshire divinity can be thought of as a massive dilation upon faith's tending of its garden.

[10] For an eloquent account of Cotton's 'disciplinary religion' see Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 212–21. Bozeman fits Cotton too tightly into the mould of his 'precisianist' template, and so does not pick up on the subtle yet saturating equivocations that softened Cotton's legalism.

[11] See, for example, John Cotton, *Christ the fountaine of life*, London 1651 (Wing C.6418), 40–1, 45, 109, 111, 126; *A practical commentary, or an exposition with observations, reasons, and uses upon the first epistle generall of John*, London 1656 (Wing C.6451), 29, 60, 108, 236–8, 345, 362, 368; and *The way of life*, London 1641 (Wing C.6470), 12, 161–2, 325–6, 426, 438.

[12] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 126, 123.

[13] Idem, *Way of life*, 139, 422, 424, and *Christ the fountaine*, 107, 109–12.

[14] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 29; *Way of life*, 426, 434; and *Practical commentary*, 120.

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But, in England, Cotton was sowing practical theology with two minds, injecting into a 'religion' that 'loves to lye cleane and sweet' a relentless loathing of 'lust'.[15] Saints, he knew, would strive unceasingly to slip the 'cage of uncleane lusts', so mortification of sin becomes a central discipline in the life of sanctification.[16] But if the sanctified are sinners, what value their deeds? Such as to make them 'ashamed', no less; concerning 'the garments of our Sanctification', Cotton once put it, 'the best whereof is like *filthy raggs, and menstruous cloathes, Esa.*64.6. so bespotted and besmeared with much filthinesse'. The imagery – antinomian stock-in-trade – startles all the more intensely for its infrequent use in Cotton's works.[17] But the suspicion of sanctification that it articulates held firm in Cotton's mind, and by the time he was preaching free grace in Massachusetts he had put a rake through the garden of Old-World affectivity.

Received wisdom holds forth the English Cotton as a legalist. R. T. Kendall argues that Cotton had championed the 'power' of the moral law in old Boston but that, in New England, as his spirituality became more markedly solifidian, he relinquished his erstwhile legality. Theodore Dwight Bozeman finds Cotton, in England, pushing 'the claim of the law to a typically precisianist extreme'.[18] Such assessments, Kendall's in particular, impoverish Cotton's appreciation of the active agency of Christ. They also misjudge the playing out of his legal interests. Certainly, the case for Cotton's legalism can readily be made, as will be seen. But what is interesting about the English Cotton is the diffidence, equivocation, hesitation with which he applies the law to humbling and sanctified hearts. The expression of Cotton's English legalism is qualified by grace-borne prevarication. And so, with remarkable constancy, Cotton would deplete the power of the law even as he acknowledged its presence. Such was the lightness of tread with which he approached the law–grace dichotomy that his manner was to avoid acknowledgement of 'the law', or, if acknowledging it, to disarm its dangers, interrupt its proceedings, surrender its virtues to the hand of grace.

[15] Idem, *Way of life*, 303 (mispaginated as 273), and, for obsession with lust at pp. 12, 115, 232, 238, 247, 257, 260–1, 263, 265, 269, 278–9, 284, 301, 318, 352, 366, 479; *Christ the fountaine*, 18–19, 41, 68, 147, 150, 153; and *Practical commentary*, 60, 99, 104–5, 108, 111–37, 368, 384–5, 408.

[16] Idem, *Way of life*, 12, and, on mortification at pp. 129–30, 218–19, 224–5, 238, 255–7, 260–7, 352–3, 360, 385, and *Practical commentary*, 60, 112–13, 122.

[17] Idem, *Gods mercie mixed with his justice*, London 1641 (Wing C.6433), 41. See also *Way of life*, 318. For antinomian use see, for example, John Eaton, *The honey-combe of free justification by Christ alone*, London 1642 (Wing E.115), 10, 17, 47, 77, 87, 154, 323–4, 349, 371–2, 374–5, 405, 447, 468.

[18] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, chs viii, xii; Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 212.

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Cotton dealt softly and evasively with the language of Puritan legality during his Lincolnshire ministry. It was in Massachusetts that he encountered a law-governed community and sounded an alarm that identified the law as cause of the colony's swelling hypocrisy. There, in the midst of false saints parading virtues more Mosaic than Christian, Cotton took it upon himself to articulate the danger, and the duplicity, of the moral law. Herein was a spectacular exhibition of the law's power. It had, however, been anticipated in England, though in a way that lacked the sophistication of the explosive New England performance. One section of text from an English work speaks, with proleptic significance, to the question of Cotton's evolving legality. What distinguishes this brief English rumination on the law is its covenantal complexion. As will be seen, the coupling of the moral law with the covenant of works produced a muscular legality, but this was an atypical and short-lived episode. The moment of the law's covenantal virility soon passed, leaving the preacher to resort to the more suppressed legal hues that are characteristic of the English writings. Cotton's law, in England, has a sapling quality; in Massachusetts, where a revivified covenant of works takes root, his law becomes thick of trunk and copiously branched.

The law is somewhat a fugitive in Cotton's Lincolnshire works. Here and there it shimmers, fleetingly, and then vanishes. 'Law' is not a word that hangs upon Cotton's English lips, for all that one frequently senses its unspoken presence in his discourse. We happen, for example, upon vestiges of law in *The way of life*, a collection of sermons that Cotton delivered in England. The law is summoned for penitential, regulatory and punitive purposes in *The way of life* – how, in a nearly-500-page Puritan sermon collection, could it not? But capturing the Cottonian law is somewhat akin to grasping with bare hands at water. The law, in Cotton's English sermons, is so malleable, impressed so thoroughly into Christ's conversionary enterprise, that it seems scarcely distinguishable from grace. The hard arts of humbling, thus graced, tend not to exploit the sort of hell-fixed vulnerability to which Cotton's more legalistic contemporaries were inclined to subject their charges. And nor, moreover, need humiliation – when brought under faith's management – be expected to prolong the soul's passage to purity.

Cotton took a consequential step in softening the points and edges of the moral law. His parishioners, seemingly, were not required to endure a protracted conversionary experience. To be sure, 'sharp opposites' would test contrite resolve: mortification of sin would 'sting' and 'inflame like venome'; God's wrath would engender 'piercing sorrow'; the heart's cleansing required that 'we must needs be pricked and wounded'. Christ, however, is proximate, offering the comfort of his own example of suffering, readying himself for mystical marriage with

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co-sufferers.[19] And whenever Cotton kindled hellish flames, he quickly fixed focus on heavenly comforts. God might 'scourge' his children, but he does not withdraw his 'loving kindness'. Upon 'striking us with shame and horrour for our sins', God will draw grieving penitents 'to the suburbs of hell'; but the upswing towards heaven is not delayed by brimstone terrors: 'then he shews us the glad tidings of salvation, and withal gives us a believing heart to long after them, to embrace them, and to assure our selves of them'.[20] Likewise, the 'fire of Gods wrath' would set at anguish the 'tender raw conscience', but this was the route to heaven via 'hell gates', and Cotton is soon drawing attention to the 'unmeasurablenesse of ease', the 'mercy' and 'healing' that attend the confessing of sins to God.[21] The soul mourns 'exceedingly' for sin, but this is to experience 'an evident work of the spirit of Grace'.[22] 'We are accursed' for the least breach of the moral law, yet in this there is comfort: the curse prompts Cotton to an image of Christ nailed by our sins to the cross and bearing the wrath of God on our behalf.[23]

Hell then heaven, curse preceding Christ, 'bitternesse' before 'consolation':[24] the trade in contraries is a characteristic mark of Cotton's eagerness to pass, quickly if not effortlessly, from a legal affectivity to a gracious. Other members of the Puritan brotherhood were less inclined to mantle law in grace when turning to the task of humbling the sinful. Puritan masters of preparatory divinity found uses of large moment for law-authored terrors. Duties, threats and curses marshalled from Sinai might usefully superintend the soul's contrition and humiliation – its penitential abjection and self-loathing, its repugnance at the vile spectacle of self-induced torrents of sin, its grief at knowing itself to have become a provocation to an offended God, its realisation that a squalid capacity for improvement of manners was unequal to the objective of deep and durable purification.

Not that Cotton retracted penitential pursuits, nor did he turn the cold shoulder to divine 'threatnings' and 'commandements'.[25] Humbling hearts were to be 'bruised to dust before God'. Promises and pardons, Cotton advised Archbishop Ussher, were to be proclaimed to 'the broken'

[19] Cotton, *Way of life*, 129–30, and, on this kind of penitential affectivity at pp. 8, 29–32, 36, 40–1, 54–5, 127–8, 135–7, 161, 174, 264, 364, and *Practical commentary*, 336, 398–400.
[20] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 153, 336.
[21] Ibid. 325–6, and *Way of life*, 62.
[22] Idem, *Way of life*, 8, 29–30, 39–40, 54–6.
[23] Ibid. 32.
[24] Ibid. 69.
[25] On 'threatnings' and 'commandements' see idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 12–13, 120, 136–7, 189; *Practical commentary*, 60–71, 106–7, 112, 138, 160, 234–6, 269–75, 277–8, 338–43, 350, 354; and *Way of life*, 105, 225, 238, 244, 323–6, 330–3, 359, 371, 393–400.

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and 'the bruised'; just as Christ preached repentance 'before' faith, so must the law be preached 'before' the Gospel.[26] But, crucially, Cotton conceived the painful elements of the Sinaitic bequest as constellating around faith, which was well qualified to pacify their intrusions and medicate their afflictions. Look at Christ 'with an eye of faith', Cotton exhorted his flock. This 'doth heale mightily'.[27] And when faith meets law, it is the former that discharges a 'mighty power' – it being faith's 'nature' to make of the commandments 'an easie yoak, a delightsome and a welcome burthen'.[28]

Cotton had been exposed to antinomian preaching while still in England. David Como's *Blown by the spirit* permits us to appreciate that Cotton was addressing a matter of some urgency when he spoke of 'a generation of Preachers that would now have no Law preached, but now onely to draw men on to Christ, by the love of Christ'. Cotton had hit upon the marrow of the moment's pastoral enterprise, and he proceeded to acknowledge the core of truth that motivated antinomian commitment: 'It is true, this we should labour to doe, but how must we doe it?'[29] And with the question posed, Cotton encapsulated the challenge of a life's work. Chosen souls must indeed be drawn to Christ; the drawing would be undertaken by a loving, merciful, grace-giving, self-sacrificing saviour. The vectors of controversy were surely right: this was no work for the law.

And yet, for all the theoretical attraction of antinomianism, Cotton held fast to a penitential norm. Love operates transitively; the lover affects the beloved, and does so in perceptible ways, in ways that serve to certify the efficacy of the act of loving. 'Unlesse the sinfull hearts of men be pricked, unlesse the proud, wanton, and stubborn heart be pierced and wounded to the death' – unless such mortification had been effected in consequence of the outpouring of divine love – there could be, Cotton admonished, 'no hope of salvation'.[30] Given this penitential inflection of his English ministry, how was Cotton to straddle two worlds without radicalising himself? Surely, as Kendall would have it, the depowering of the law is a New England achievement. But Cotton's question about the manner of our pastoral 'labour', about 'how' we go about the task of drawing sinful souls to Christ, complicates an initial impression of law-mindedness. For, invariably in Cotton's English discourse, the key agency in the enterprise of drawing the sinner to Christ is the *love of Christ himself*, not the bruising discipline of the schoolmasterly law.

[26] Idem, *Way of life*, 174; *The correspondence of John Cotton*, ed. Sargent Bush, Jr, Chapel Hill–London 2001, 111.

[27] Cotton, *Way of life*, 107, and also pp. 16–18, 21, 328.

[28] Ibid. 359, 397–8, and also pp. 405, 473. See, similarly, Richard Sibbes, *Works*, ed. Alexander Grosart, Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862–4, i. 59.

[29] Cotton, *Way of life*, 134.

[30] Ibid.

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It was Cotton's keenness to embed salvation wholly in the gracious demeanour of Christ that triggered his acknowledgement of the truthfulness of antinomian purpose. But his wariness at the antinomians' estrangement from penitential protocol took its rise, too, from a Christocentric base. For Christ's love is itself an agent of regulated piety; it frames the disciplines of the holy walk, which accommodates the preparatory purging and self-loathing of the humbling heart and the rounds of dutiful righteousness enacted by the sanctified believer. Our own love, accordingly, 'must be ruled by the commandement of God' – an observation armed as a cautionary tale for the law-loving orthodox: 'There is a licentious love, which is lawlesse.'[31] Cotton does not travel with the likes of Thomas Hooker – endlessly battling and bemoaning sin in the excruciating terrain of a fully ramified preparationism – but nor does he endorse the antinomian call to forsake preparatory disciplines and abandon the pains of the holy walk. Christ saves by loving, let the preparationists take note; but the act of loving is itself an economy of painful cleansing, so be not deluded by antinomian laxity. For Christ sets a 'stamp' upon the heart, and in so doing inflicts a 'wound'.

The Gospel, then, may cause the heart to 'bleed'. A wound is opened by the preaching of the Gospel's 'duties' rather than its 'promises'. The conviction of sin pierces the heart. In fact, the law is operative here, fulfilling an evangelical office. The 'preaching of the Gospel legally', Cotton insists, is 'a speciall meanes to pierce the hearts of men'. It is also a means of assurance – a torrent of blood turned into a blessing.[32] The Gospel, by such lights, 'establisheth obedience to the Law'; God's 'commandements' and his 'promises' together 'rule' in the Christian heart. Law and Gospel govern affective and behavioural dispositions, enabling faith to work assurance, to purify the heart, to make 'roome for the Spirit'.[33]

Yet in fashioning these clean couplets of law and grace, Cotton compounds the enigma of his discourse of conversion. For, in Cotton, the conversionary confluence of law and Gospel is seldom advertised as the joint operation that it appears to be. Cotton's expository manner in *The way of life* is fluid, even evasive; invariably, the articulation of legal matters will be smothered by Cotton's diffidence. If the law operates upon the affective crust of the humbling heart, it generally releases anonymous tremors. That is to say, Cotton tends not, when investigating the elements of conversion, to call the law by its name nor to depict it as operative by itself. Rather, he conceals it behind the splendour of Christ's love. When he speaks its name and grants it operational potential, his custom is to disavow its potency.

[31] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 274.
[32] Idem, *Way of life*, 134–9, 161–2.
[33] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 338, 354, and *Way of life*, 323–6.

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Thus, Cotton will acknowledge a venerable conversionary technique, namely, the Deuteronomic interrogation of sin. 'It is true indeed', he submits, 'by the preaching of the Law, and the application thereof to the conscience, a mans heart may be made sensible of sin, and of his dangerous estate.' But there follows an immediate unravelling of a seemingly useful office: the preaching of the law as described 'may, and many times doth, end in utter despaire'. The convincing of sin is better performed by faith than by law, for although faith, too, may 'end in despaire', it deploys persuasive powers unavailable to the bare law: faith convinces us not only 'of sin and danger, but … also of the truth and goodnesse of all the promises offered to us in the Gospel, and satisfies the soule that there is pardon with God'.[34]

'Ordinarily', Cotton concedes in *Christ the fountaine of life*, 'some word of the Law' will provoke awareness of sin and questioning of salvation. But this is a superficial provocation: the law's humbling 'reach' is restricted to the 'reformation' of the 'outward man' and the 'alteration' of 'his former courses'. Cotton's law operates on reformable surfaces, not on regenerable interiors. No inward breakage here, no bruising of the heart: the 'law' that Cotton names will simply prod the wayfarer into improved civility. And a sighting of Christ's promises throws into relief the comparative inadequacy of legal discipline. Christ cuts through to the heart, stimulating the 'yearning' and 'desire' that occasion the awakening of 'spiritual life'; and the Christian, thus kindled, 'doth stand poring and plodding, and wistly gazeing' upon the promises, 'till in the end the very sight of a promise, hath so seasoned us with a spirit of faith, that we begin not only to long after that promise, but to cleave to it', eventually finding 'our happinesse, and life, and comfort to bee wrapped up in it'.[35]

If the law cannot constructively apprise the soul of its sin, and has no means of alerting the sinner to the promise of pardon, what chance its presiding over the union of sinner and saviour? This offered Cotton another opportunity to diminish the law's conversionary claim. 'The Law of it selfe', he counsels, 'would never lead us to Christ, were not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon our hearts, so as that the soule cannot rest, untill it find something of Christ dispensed to it.'[36] Cotton's manner is to identify the humbling soul as a believer, thus offering implicit challenge to the notion that preparation embraces a set of incipient stages in the transit from nature to grace. His way is to introduce law into an already erected enclosure of grace, but he hesitates to unleash Moses upon the faithless. Humiliation need not bear the force of a wrathful pounding of the unconverted; it brings sight of mercy, not apprehension of irremediable

[34] Idem, *Way of life*, 306–7 (mispaginated as 276–85), and also pp. 313–20, 323–4, 326–7, 329.
[35] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 97–8.
[36] Idem, *Way of life*, 247.

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self-incompetence. And this is the work of faith, which consoles by first making 'a man see himselfe, of all sinners the chiefe and most miserable, and of all creatures the most unworthy of mercy'. Crushed by faith's activation of a legal affectivity, the soul will be delivered in short order. Having immiserated the sinner, faith hastens to displace the contribution of the law, instantly embarking upon the task of affective elevation. Faith, Cotton continues, 'lifts up low hearts, that were sunke downe like valleys, to beleeve there is hope in Christ; and so faith in time by this meanes brings on a soule to see the salvation of God, and so come to lively assurance of the precious promises of God to become ours'. 'Faith in time': this is no protracted suspension of assurance. Cotton did not, with Thomas Hooker, stretch out the 'seed time', and disqualify the humbling soul from knowing 'the times and seasons'.[37]

Proceeding under faith's tutelage, humiliation quickly exhausts its stock of uses. There is need neither for prolonged pains nor for intimate dealings with thunder from Sinai; Christ, rather than Moses, precipitates humiliation, the happy consequence being that mercy need not long be kept out of range to the searching eye of faith. Humiliation is readily interruptible once mercy activates its flow of blessings. Cotton opens his subject by gathering numbered paragraphs that begin and end with Christ, the focal point of faith's eye:

> First, Faith will helpe the soule to looke upon Christ, and to grieve as much for crucifying him, as for mine owne wofull estate, *Zach.* 12.10. We looke upon him by an eye of faith, and so it helps us to mourne bitterly, that we have sinned against him, and that is humiliation enough to find mercy; If I can mourne for my sins against Christ, and the meanes of grace, as well as for mine owne miserable estate, I have humiliation enough, and faith will perswade me so.
>
> Secondly, If I be so farre humbled, as to come off with self-loathing, that my heart is broken, because I have broken Gods heart; this is humiliation enough to find pardon.[38]

Cotton had heard enough from the preparationists. Clamouring curses did not propel him into the arms of the antinomians, but he was willing to make a stand on behalf of grace, lest the godly become so 'stuck' in penitential sorrows, in 'secret cleaving to the Works of the Law', as to blind themselves to the promise of pardon.[39] Little surprise, then, that the law is slippery and subordinate, even when its appurtenances are clearly and unforgettably visible, within the mixed legal-evangelical frame of Cotton's conversionary tableau. Thus, at one point infernal flames scorch a track

[37] Ibid. 326–7; Thomas Hooker, *The soules preparation for Christ*, London 1632 (*RSTC* 13735.5), 198, and *The poor doubting Christian drawn unto Christ*, in *Thomas Hooker: writings in England and Holland, 1626–1633*, ed. George H. Williams, Norman Pettit, Winfried Hergert and Sargent Bush, Jr, Cambridge, MA 1975, 158.

[38] Cotton, *Way of life*, 328.

[39] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 190.

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that ought not be taken, and penitent affections bubble to the surface in the course of the avoidance of punishment; but such signatures of the law are becalmed by a gracious atmospheric. Cotton, leading the soul momentarily to 'the nethermost hell', and evoking the 'piercing sorrow' that attends the consciousness of divine wrath, presents the mortification of the sinful soul as a consequence more of grace than of law.[40] And though he credits antinomian motivation, he does so in the course of accommodating the preparatory regime that it was one of the avowed purposes of antinomians to scuttle.

Certainly, Cotton shared a fragment of negating mind with the law-haters. The law, in and of itself, does not loom large in areas of Cotton's discourse that might otherwise, if written by another hand, give latitude to dedicated and sharply worded – and, no doubt, numbingly prolonged – displays of the means and ends of penitential legality. Cottonian law appears a beggarly thing, its powers attenuated, its name muffled, its catalytic agencies cherry-picked by 'grace' and 'mercy', by 'love' and 'Gospel'. The law itself, when directly addressed, is shrivelled into a clear and clean statement of solifidian negativity: 'we cannot have a spirit of life wrought in us by the workes of the Law, nor by the words of the Law'.[41]

Law and grace have been knotted together, much to the advantage of grace. Were Cotton inclined to unravel the knot, it may be that he would do so in a moment of stress, in response, perhaps, to a perceived degradation of law or to an unwarrantable inflation of grace. At such a moment, means will be needed to coordinate the unmixing of soteriological modes. Interestingly, Cotton invokes the divine covenants in *The way of life* with some suddenness. He has been wary of setting legal snares, of encumbering his parishioners with pains and curses. No spacious room has been provided for the law to work its singular effects, and so, when provision is finally made, it comes as an abrupt departure of manner. Hard words have been spoken, for antinomians are on the scene. And while Cotton might mobilise the covenant of works against those who thought too little of the law, he would also, later in his career, turn the power of that covenant upon those who thought too much of it.

There is a point, then, at which Cotton – prodded into polemic by antinomians – ventures to garb the law in positive as well as negative qualities, and therein to release himself from his customary elliptical approach to its uses and effects. The moment is brief but portentous, for Cotton can be seen overriding a well-rooted legal inhibition. A turn to double-covenant theology requires him to environ law and grace in a setting more schematic, and more discriminatory, than we have hitherto had cause to notice.

[40] Idem, *Way of life*, 129–30.
[41] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 96, and *Practical commentary*, 397.

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It is from covenantal soil, and in the vicinity of antinomian preachers, that we see budding forth the showiest English blossoms of Cotton's legalistic capability. As Michael McGiffert has shown, the covenantal demarcation of law and grace applied particular pressures to Puritan minds. Once the moral law has been assigned its reprobative credentials by means of its partnering with God's mechanisms of wrath, there emerges such a tension between law and grace as to vitalise the temptation to antinomianism.[42] The moral law, as executor of God's curse, arms the covenant of works with its corrective and punitive gear, its rods and whips and hellish fires. The covenant vouchsafes a route to salvation, but this is propagated as nothing less than indefectible obedience to the law's commands; more crushing still, to those thus burdened, is the realisation that the precepts by which compliance is to be measured convey no means of effecting satisfaction of their requirements. The law prods and harms, but it does not save. Salvation is contingent upon the dispensation of grace, which tenders its blessings by way of its own covenant.

What point, then, the moral law – is it not the venomous remnant of a superseded economy of works? A vestige of Hebraic drudgery and doom? Cotton, in England, felt the pull of the path to antinomian grace, but mobilised the law in an act of self-correction. It was too simple a solution to the problem of spiritual anxiety to abandon the law in its entirety, or to call upon the love of Christ to erase the law of Moses. A sighting of the covenant of works, flush with its terrors for the troubled soul, might render such erasure irresistible. Cotton, however, found stomach to withstand the tempting balm of antinomian affectivity, though he was not one to rhapsodise on the law's virtues. Time and again, he embrittles its efficacy and delimits its reach. At least, however – and at last – he honours its name and grants it a covenant, therein leading it out from the shadow cast by the glory of Christ's love.

The legal covenant is a self-contained space, a custom-made instrument of interrogation and punishment. Corralled off from grace's sphere of influence, it tends to override opportunity for the sort of mixing of legal and gracious modes that characterises much of Cotton's conversionary discourse. During student days at Cambridge, Cotton had not esteemed the instruction of William Perkins, but in *The way of life* he summoned a Perkinsian relish for division and dichotomy in severing law from Gospel. This turn to double-covenant divinity was not without danger; indeed, it momentarily warped Cotton's pastoral voice, spoiling his habitual submission of law to love. Parallel lines of law and grace might encourage discrimination in the imputation of value or in the distribution of

[42] See the insight in Michael McGiffert, 'From Moses to Adam: the making of the covenant of works', *Sixteenth Century Journal* xix (1988), 129–55, esp. p. 153, fleshed out in his 'Perkinsian moment', 130–6, 148.

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expository effort. Focus upon the covenant of works was likely to arm the pen and the tongue for penitential and punitive work; the resultant lexicon will orbit around such central terms as 'bondage', 'rigour', '(dis) obedience', 'sin', 'curse', 'wrath', 'sorrow', 'mourning', 'death'. Adam and Moses will be sighted and heard, and too precipitate a commitment to the preaching of grace will provoke alarm about concessions to easy living and wanton ways. The giddy flight of the antinomian alternative was so deeply suspected by Perkinsian pastors because its proximity to sure-footed legal observance was so keenly felt. For antinomians lived within a Perkinsian system; and they threatened, always, to shatter the system by pushing upon the logic that prized apart God's legal and gracious operations. Cotton responded in admonitory register, as might befit an heir of Perkins. And he endowed the law with plenary power.

Autonomous spheres, the one moral and the other gracious, can disrupt settled rhythms of being. If ambiguity raises a mist (to speak with Twisse's tongue), autonomy sanctions imbalance: too many burdens deaden spiritual effervescence in the one sphere; too much liberty overturns customary sociability in the other. Papists were advocating salvation via 'the works of the Law', prompting Cotton to imagine a retributive application of legal power: 'if they look for righteousnesse by their keeping of the Law, they must expect death by their disobedience to the Law'.[43] Others, preaching liberty, were wrongfully dismantling discipline. Lifting the lid on the vessel of grace, they presumed to enjoy the blessings of Christ in the absence of moral restraint. Order, now, was threatened by 'licentiousness', so it behoved Cotton, as a preacher of grace, also to disclose the power of the law. The problem was that, in setting aside genial ambiguity for dogmatic rigidity, he needed somehow to bridge a dichotomy, to enable the law, in some degree, to colonise the gracious covenant. The solution resided in the law's perpetuity not as a route to salvation but as a rule of life. The 'command' of the law – as distinct from the 'covenant' of the law – continued to oblige the graced.

Cotton was admonishing antinomians to correct their dissolute ways, and in so doing erected a set of behavioural standards from which no wayfarer, regardless of covenantal affiliation, could be excused. This was useful as far as it went, but now that Cotton was speaking a covenantal idiom he needed to be clear that law and grace could stand opposite each other and be linked for prudential purposes, but could not undergo merger and integration. Galatians ii.19 spoke of death to the law, which Cotton took as an evangelical blessing: by virtue of our being crucified with Christ, we are dead to the moral and ceremonial laws – insofar as these dispensations offer a way to justification. A legal killing brings liberation from further

[43] Cotton, *Way of life*, 235–6, and *Practical commentary*, 242.

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legal harms, and since Christ underwent legal sacrifice as a public person, the liberation that he wins by the price of his blood becomes available to the members of his body.[44] Thus, 'the Covenant of the Law, or the Covenant of Works, ... is that which the Apostle here saith we are dead unto'.[45]

Following on the heels of this glad tiding is a recounting of the legal covenant's office and complexion. Cotton passes through territory thoroughly worked over during the 'Perkinsian moment'.[46] The covenant, sprung from Eden and propagated by way of Mosaic 'ordinance and statute', requires 'perfect obedience' as the condition of eternal life. Anticipating non-compliance, God 'did inflict a curse, and eternall death upon every transgressor of this Law, *Gal.*3.10'. And to put beyond doubt the need for a punitive economy, the law is said to give neither 'grace nor strength, for the performance of this Covenant, ... it is impossible for the Law to give life, because it gave no grace to heale our sin'. These are the harms that prevent the merging of the covenants. The message is plain: keep away from the legal covenant, and do not presume that the moral law is a frivolous instrument. Preachers must 'press' the law – 'as that which would kill us' – until such time as redemption renders our hearts 'dead unto the law of sin'; but still the law bears upon the converted, for having driven us to Christ it 'may mortifie our corruptions'.[47] The gracious covenant, then, absorbs means of restraint from the legal, producing an amalgam designed to hedge promise with order. To this amalgam, the 'carnal' apostles of disorder have no legitimate claim: they remain domiciled in the covenant of works.

New England hypocrites, like English heretics, would hear from Cotton that their covenantal affiliation was not as they presumed. Another viewing of the legal covenant – to which Twisse took exception – finds grace within its bounds: God, Cotton had taught, will be accepting of repentance for breach of the covenant's terms, and the covenant itself vouchsafes to its members 'fruites' of the redemptive blood, as well as 'common graces' and 'helps and means' for the keeping of its terms.[48] This perception that a seam of grace ran through the legal covenant would also find a future in New England, though it cannot easily be reconciled with the sheer cursedness that Cotton wishes, in *The way of life*, to bring forward against antinomians. If antinomians remain in the legal covenant, they will surely die; if they truly aspire to the blessing of grace, they must accept the directive influence of the law.

[44] Idem, *Way of life*, 227, 229–34, 246–7, 260–2.
[45] Ibid. 228.
[46] See McGiffert's seminal article on this subject.
[47] Cotton, *Way of life*, 228–9, 238.
[48] Twisse, *Treatise of Mr. Cottons*, 62–3, 109–10, 259–61.

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The surety that the law was unable to give is made available in the covenant of grace. Death to the legal covenant disobliges us from looking for salvation 'from the Law in regard of our best performances'; rather, we look for it 'by promise made to us in Christ'.[49] We have been set free from the law as executor of destiny: no longer do we expect life by 'obedience' to the law, nor fear death 'by the breach of it; wee are free from the *curse* of the Law, and from the *provoking power* of it, as also from the *rigour* and *exaction* of the Law'.[50] But 'enemies of the Law' were putting it about that the justified were no longer 'subject to the Commandement of the Law', that they were 'freed from obedience to the Law', and that 'no man ought to have the Law prest upon him, but only the Gospel, & the promises thereof to be expounded and applied unto him'. Cotton, assailed by antinomians, responded with a display of nomistic credentials. He offered a clear statement of his case. The moral law obliged the graced not as covenant, but as command; it stood in undiminished vigour as *regula vitae*.[51]

But commands require judicious handling. Even if the law were to succeed in transporting the soul to Christ, its very success would hasten the occlusion of its ministry: 'when the sentence of the law hath once driven us to seeke unto Christ, then the terrors of the law are not to be prest to such a soul'. Antinomians got this right, but note Cotton's rider: 'thinke not that all Christians that are baptized, are freed from the Law, and know that carnall men, even in the time of the Gospell, are under both the covenant and curse of the Law'.[52] Cotton went about his business by lauding the cleansing effects of being 'dead to the law'. Death to the law imports 'the death of our own lusts'. Moreover, 'the Law doth kill sin in us, and thereby kils us, it kils all our former jollities and comforts in this world'. Cotton goes on to speak of a legal ministry that, arriving as a 'Spirit of bondage' to 'blast' the worldly, mortifies sin by darkening and deadening superfluous comforts. And, invoking the Pauline 'schoolmaster', he attributes to the law an uncharacteristic degree of muscularity.[53]

It remained for Cotton to show the antinomians how 'the law of liberty' was not incompatible with devotion to the commandments, and even how Christ himself, for the sake of honouring the holy walk, had endorsed the Mosaic code. Moses, doubtless, bore little appeal for such as made of Christian liberty 'a cloake to flesh and blood' and opened 'a doore to licentiousnesse'.[54] Cotton needed to make the point that although legal obedience in a Christian dispensation was not to be considered meritorious – as though God offered eternal life as a reward in exchange

[49] Cotton, *Way of life*, 235.
[50] Ibid. 229, and also p. 230. See also *Practical commentary*, 234.
[51] Idem, *Way of life*, 235–6.
[52] Ibid. 238.
[53] Ibid. 232–3, 239.
[54] Ibid. 240–1.

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for faultless obedience – there were, nevertheless, blessings attendant upon the pursuit of our 'best endeavours'. With this, Cotton nestles back into a mixed legal-evangelical register, but with the intention not, as usual, of obscuring the contribution of the law, but of thrusting it forward in hopes that antinomians would take notice, confront their sins and resume their stride. 'Though wee expect not everlasting life by our obedience to the law', Cotton begins,

> yet our obedience to it may procure us many blessings, though not from our desert, yet from Gods acceptance, ... we should walke even as Christ hath walked, and because he hath ratified the rule of righteousnesse, given by *Moses* law, it comes to passe that though we be freed from the Covenant of the law, yet by the Covenant of grace, we are bound to keepe the Commandement of the law, so as to doe our best endeavours that way; and hence it is, that the Apostle *Iames* presseth obedience to the law, *Iam.*2.8,9,10,11. so that we to this day are subject to the law, bound to take heed we transgresse it not, and this law of liberty must judge us at the last day.[55]

Ultimately, Cotton's enchantment is not with the law. Rather, it is with Christ, and Cotton, making Christ once more the point of his focus, returns to his mixed modes, with Christ determining the manner in which the law operates in subordination to grace. It is not long before Cotton is recovering with one hand what he had given with the other. The law, for example, is redescribed in minimal scale: it no longer blasts our lusts, for Christ does this; it no longer sets us running to Christ, for he does this too. And our best endeavours present themselves in a different guise, not as works of the law but as fruits offered to Christ: we are dead to the law, which loses its dominion over us, and so 'we should be married to Christ, ... now all the fruits we bring forth are to the Lord Jesus, we depend upon his grace for guidance, and upon his word for warrant, and his Ordinances we frequent, the seeds of his grace we conceive, and so bring forth fruit unto God'.[56]

In the course of a few pages in *The way of life*, then, Cotton added terrifying claws to the moral law – an upsurge in menace serving as an index to the insecurity that antinomians were capable of provoking. In New England, hypocrites would be dispensed similar covenantal medicine; the claws of the law would scratch at godly surfaces in order to determine which colonists were genuine beneficiaries of free grace, and which were not. But, in *The way of life*, the interlude on the covenants stands out as an unfulfilled departure. Cotton seized the covenant of works, unleashed a few claps of its thunder, and then dropped it cold.

[55] Ibid. 237.

[56] Ibid. 246–7, and *A brief exposition of the whole book of Canticles*, London 1642 (Wing C.6410), 92, 97.

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In England, Cotton was generally dwelling upon the ways of grace when speaking the language of law. What the law frequently does, in the Lincolnshire works, is establish directives for faith as the principal 'act' of grace. In page after page of these works we see the 'work' and 'activity' of faith constituting the focal point for, and therein qualifying and enriching, Cotton's uses of the law. The purpose is not to empower the law; rather, Cotton harnesses the law's energy and transfuses it with grace, his intent being to maximise the depth and width of the Gospel's sphere. That sphere, in New England, would contract when Cotton settled upon a covenantal solution to the problem of hypocrisy.

Once again, though, the English divinity contains an ominous prolepsis. The pre-eminence of faith prodded Cotton to interrogate the value of other 'graces'. In both Englands, Cotton invested much significance in the word 'confidence'. Confidence could be overly permissive in assigning worth to, and in deriving 'comfort' from, sanctified human acts.[57] Promiscuous confidence, along with comfort too easily won, were likely to deceive the godly, whose good works proceed, under steam of a prideful zeal, to become the building blocks of their own hypocrisy. Confidence emanating from zeal for holiness devolves into a comfort that engenders presumptuousness and complacency. Saint, then, is shown to be swine. In New England, Cotton would respond to the crisis of hypocrisy by stripping from his value scheme the fruits of faith's activity; such fruits were not to be despised, but nor should the saint use them as hooks upon which to hang the assuring marks of justification. The semiotic of the holy walk fell victim to Cotton's intensifying suspicion of faith-borne activity. Cotton did not reap this whirlwind in England, but he was, there, sowing its seeds.

The bringing forth of 'fruit' was a crucial devotional motif for Cotton. His Lincolnshire divinity devoted much of its labour to the inspection of fruits offered to Christ. How else, other than by apprehending the fructification of his presence, were the saints to know that Christ was, in fact, present savingly in their hearts? The law would play an important though subservient role in this evidentiary project, and the Holy Spirit would speak assuring words to the godly; but priority would rest with the perceptibility of evangelical blessings. It was, then, a move of no small significance that Cotton made when he began directing suspicions at

[57] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 21–2, 24, 26–8, 30, 141; *Gods mercie*, 69; *Practical commentary*, 385–6; and *Way of life*, 308, 311–12, 347, 356–7. For New England treatments dating from the period of the free-grace controversy see *Antinomian controversy*, 56, 96, 100, 122–3, 137, 178, 402, and John Cotton, *A treatise of the covenant of grace*, London 1671 (Wing C.6467), 16, 18, 28, 34, 36, 39, 43–5, 53, 71–3, 99, 110, 115–19, 126–9, 132, 141, 200–2.

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saintly graces. If graces diminish in importance, so too must the law that sets standards to measure their rectitude; but equally, fraudulent graces can be dealt with by inflating the law's interrogatory competence, and by wielding an instrumentality, such as a covenant of works, to identify the pure-seeming vile. We have noticed Cotton's covenantal interlude in the 1620s; we need now to turn to his treatment of faith and its fruits.

Cotton was not doing anything unusual in casting doubt upon the human outworkings of grace. It was a professional duty to problematise the perspective from which wayfarers came upon their deeds. Even Thomas Hooker, that formidable semiologist of the strenuous deeds of preparation, delivered fierce warnings against the danger of 'resting in' – relying upon – hard-won spiritual accomplishments. Hell's mouth stood agape for misbegotten pietists captivated by 'rotten indeavours'.[58] Cotton would eventually take the view that a promissory beneficence could not compromise itself by interacting with the conditioned output of human zeal – even if the zeal was no less than a derivative of grace. Faith, the gracious 'habit' that must forever be putting itself into 'act', would become an utterly passive grace in New England – a receptacle for the all-doing supervention of Christ and Spirit. What happened to Cotton's 'active' faith, and what became of its fruits?

Cotton, as experimental predestinarian, must play the semiologist. God reveals our estates to our enquiring selves in the many 'signes of grace he gives us', in the 'profitable fruits' of our devotion. Lines of assuring knowledge are therein strung from signs to Christ. For God gives 'certaine signes, by observing of which you may know, whether you have the Lord Jesus Christ or not'. The law, in soliciting effort, is a prolific purveyor of signs, so commandment-keeping is knowledge in the making: 'If God give us conscionable care to keep his Commandments, we know that we know him'; likewise 'if God give us hearts to *purge and cleanse our selves from all such sins* as hang about us'.[59] A 'conscionable care' to comply intimates adjustability of standards in lieu of indefectibility, though Cotton could, at times, run with any precisianist in demanding due rigour. God was not to be short-changed. Fraud would be rewarded in kind. 'If we cut a scantling with God', Cotton warned, 'and will part with some lusts and corruptions, but not with others, then will God cut you short of all your hopes of eternall life.'[60] But the results are effusive when Cotton loosens his tongue to address the delights and benefits of grace-enabled piety. 'Hearty obedience', he once put it, 'is a true and sincere, and reall sign' of worship of Christ; even more, 'true sincere obedience to him is a true having of him'. 'Every Commandement of Christ' thus becomes willingly taken

[58] Hooker, *Soules preparation*, 122, and *The soules humiliation*, London 1638 (*RSTC* 13729), 9–11, 18, 21–2, 40, 49–51. [59] Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 188–9.
[60] Ibid. 19. See also *Practical commentary*, 384.

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up; 'every one' of the commandments holds the wayfarer's voluntary submission, and 'there is none of them but he greatly delights in it'.[61]

'Commandements' and 'threatnings' maintained a tenacious hold on Cotton's mind. But Cotton was forever mitigating their Sinaitic provenance; they were most 'delightfully' applied to human lives in the course of faith's cultivation of its fruits. The law's powers are depleted in the overlap with grace, but its devotional usefulness is enhanced. Legal pressures help to perpetuate faith's activity, and to expand the sphere of pious endeavour. Reading, meditation, prayer, sacramental devotion, personal purification, familial and communal edification: such pursuits are the products of commands issued to a faith that delights in being marshalled for duty. In acting, faith maintains a prerogative to dissipate the law's harms. Cotton's preference was to bring the Gospel's promises, as expeditiously as possible, before wayfaring sights. Those sights, when operative as 'the eye of faith', would become fixed upon the blessings of mercy and love. In their thankfulness, the faithful would lovingly make their own returns. They would send fruits to Christ.

Faith's fruits may function as value-drenched signs. Their value consists neither in their inherent worth nor in their rewardability – for Cotton is alive to Paul's estimation of human doings as 'losse and dung'[62] – but in the knowledge unlocked by their felt presence. To work was to be wrought upon; the fruits of faith's activity were significations of a higher purpose: their very existence, the very fact that they could be apprehended and interrogated, bore witness to God's purposive beneficence. The believer's assurance of salvation, then, was grounded upon due attention to the commandments. The law, in and of itself, is powerless in the economy of grace; as a directive to faith's activity, it becomes an estimable resource.

Cotton, however, came to cast suspicion upon interrogatories that give rise to 'lying words'.[63] Knowledge conveyed by a sign may linger after the sign itself has passed out of being or become debased, leaving the wayfarer's affectivity flawed because animated only by the memory of an absence, or by the 'trust' and 'confidence' reposed in a corruptible and mendacious presence. Signs, by nature impermanent, may deceive; to depend upon them is to become vulnerable to pride and complacency. In the course of time, as confidence builds and zeal cools, sign-fixed souls become presumptuous. 'Therefore', Cotton admonished, 'take not all for gold that glisters.' The spiritually gifted and illumined may be 'much deceived, in presuming vainly of their good estate'.[64]

[61] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 12. See also *Practical commentary*, 131, 351, and *Way of life*, 397–8.

[62] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 8–9, 22, 115; *Practical commentary*, 190, 204, 206, 385; and *Way of life*, 147, 275.

[63] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 24.

[64] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 27, and *Christ the fountaine*, 26.

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New England's hypocrites would impress their vanity upon Cotton's sights, but already in Lincolnshire he was ruminating on the fakeries of the presumptuous, warning of broken anchors and of gifts that shipwreck and destroy, of 'some veine of pride, and hypocrisie, and covetousnesse, that cleaves fast to your hearts', of 'counterfeits' beholden too much to 'common' gifts and graces and to their 'owne strength', investing unwarrantable confidence in the sparkling signs of their devotion, or seeking to win praise and glory for themselves.[65] He directed similarly unequivocal distrust at the misalignment of graces. For Cotton's deity, like Sibbes's, tended to place the sweet in the company of the bitter. Thus, if vivifiers are not attended by mortifications, take care to interrogate: 'if God yoake not spirituall joy with spirituall mourning, then suspect your joy, for it doth not accompany salvation unto life'.[66]

Gifts and fruits, for all their likely grounding in Christ's grace, are created things: perishing 'loaves' rather than 'meate which endureth to eternall life'.[67] Graces that adorn the sanctified soul are transient embellishments – at worst case, things that the hypocrite 'spins out of his owne bowels'[68] – and, as such, may speak lies in the passage of time. This seems to be what Cotton was getting at when said that the Christian life should be a 'life of faith' rather than a 'life of grace'.[69] Faith profits from the sort of immediacy with Christ that is denied its derivatives – the fruits of its activity. Derivatives, though degradable, may be recalled by pious minds and relied upon, filling memories with soiled inventory. Care must therefore be taken in the disposition of trust. 'When you come to the *Ordinances*', Cotton told his fellow worshippers, 'and though you find Christ there, yet trust not upon them unlesse you trust upon Christ, and seeke him to give you a meeting there.' Failure to seek out Christ in the means of Christian worship propels a lesson on piety's self-subversive

[65] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 25–7, and *Practical commentary*, 65, 241. For pride and hypocrisy see *Christ the fountaine*, 22, 27–8, 43, 52, 96, 113, 128, 131, 147; *Gods mercie*, 41, 71; *Practical commentary*, 26, 113, 116–18, 134–5, 153, 158–60, 230, 266, 385, 388, 405; and *Way of life*, 38, 55, 132, 145–6, 191, 193, 215, 219, 224, 237, 263, 279, 301, 339, 435. For 'common' gifts and graces see Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 25–8, 115, 130; *Practical commentary*, 26–7, 164, 205, 352, 385; and *Way of life*, 38; and Twisse, *Treatise of Mr. Cottons*, 259–61. For godly cultivators of their 'owne strength' see Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 2, 30, 130, 132–3; *Gods mercie*, 69, 72; *Practical commentary*, 98, 105, 134–5, 201, 345, 386; and *Way of life*, 270, 280, 341–2.

[66] Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 123, and also pp. 110–13, and *Practical commentary*, 398–400. For Sibbes see, for example, *Works*, i. 46–8, 53, 58–9, 157–8, 216, 235; ii. 117; iii. 467; iv. 285; vii. 371–6.

[67] Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 47.

[68] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 230.

[69] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 29, 50, 93, 111–12, 119, 131, 141–2, 150; *Practical commentary*, 386; and *Way of life*, 218, 227, 303 (mispaginated as 273), 357, 451.

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potential: 'you have trusted but upon lying words', Cotton continues in *Christ the fountaine of life*,

> you went out full, and come empty home; you heare much, and profit little; and all that you learne you *put into a broken bagge*, into crackt memories, and all because you did so trust upon the meanes; . . . if you put trust and confidence in [spiritual gifts], you will loose all the blessings that you desire and hope to finde in them . . . we come not to the Ordinances for the Ordinances sake, but for Christs sake to finde him there.[70]

We might detect an antinomian ring to this sort of Christ-wrought supersession of devotional 'means', except that Cotton, double-minded as he frequently seems to have been, gives us pause. He persists in putting the means to use. Even while declaiming upon the dangers of misplaced worship, he summons the worshipper to prayer, to petition God for cleansing, and to call for a blessing upon means whose 'strength' may not be trusted even while their usefulness in addressing God must not be doubted. One wonders how the life of faith, playing patron to seemingly suspect fruits, manages to restrain the debased means of the life of grace, whose gifts and graces seem indistinguishable from the fruits of faith. And, if faith's fruits are indeed to be identified with the gifts and graces that are now disqualified from bearing our trust and sustaining our confidence, does it therefore follow that Cotton would excuse faith from plying its 'work', from maintaining its 'activity'?

The answer is 'no', for all that Cotton ventured, in New England, to stress the passivity of faith and the importance of the Spirit as 'actor' of the saints' otherwise vaporous piety. But Cotton made plain that New-World saints must be schooled by the law, and that the Spirit would 'enable' the production of holy duties. Cotton, by the mid-1630s, needed to speak like this, for at that time he was in the business of defusing allegations of antinomianism.[71] His clerical colleagues were unconvinced, and it can be imagined that his parishioners, in both Bostons, found themselves impaled on the horns of a dilemma. We should live the life of faith, but can we give good esteem to anything that faith does? The conundrum would become acute during the free-grace controversy; and the Lincolnshire divinity is not without ambiguity.

Cotton, in England, did not surrender the venerable doctrine that faith takes hold of Christ. This was too precious a blessing to renounce; it kept alive the close link between activity and knowledge, between fruit and certitude, between purity and mystical marriage. It is characteristic of Cotton's English divinity that an outpouring on self-abhorrence should authenticate its motive by stressing the connection between mortification

[70] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 24–5. See also Rosenmeier, '"Eaters and non-eaters"', 171–4.

[71] Cotton, *Treatise*, 155–6, 87–98, 103, 106–7.

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and mystical union. Cotton sights a soul panting, in 'hunger' and 'thirst', for Christ. The preacher, paying dues to an important Perkinsian motif,[72] is on song in opening up 'desire', calling upon the efficacy of interior signs: 'in so affecting of him', in hunger and thirst, 'we have him'.[73] Does desire solemnise marriage? In New England, Cotton would not think so; he would then put aside 'thirst' for the sake of life-giving 'water' – he would go directly to Christ himself.[74] But, in England, affective states and activities of the heart counted for more than subsequently they would – in England, they were truly more significant.

And, fittingly, further significations follow. What if Christ, though desired, is not found? Cotton counters with Christ's prevenience, which causes the soul once more to recoil upon itself and to take stock of its graces. Sins are called to view, but a 'hearty' love of Christ prevails in the midst of a 'deep' disaffection of the self. To humiliate is to mortify, which is to deny the self for the sake of Christ. Which, in turn, bears out the governing inference to emerge from a pious sighting of faith's activity: had not Christ first loved the desiring soul, the latter 'could neither have loved him nor have sought him, nor have so known the worth of him'. The heart must be cleared of the needless distraction of self-affection. Cotton shared voice with Preston and Sibbes in teaching that faith may 'go out to Christ' only if it 'hath emptyed thee of thy self'.[75] 'There is no soul that hath any high esteem of God, or any strong affection to him', Cotton declares, running a line from mortification to mystical union,

> but the more highly and deeply he affects him, the more he disaffects himselfe and loathes himselfe, as unmeet to come into the presence of the Lord, ... the more deeply he affects Christ, the more inwardly he loaths himself, he looks at himselfe as fit rather to be swallowed up of Judgment then capable of any mercy, not only

[72] See, for example, William Perkins, *Works*, Cambridge 1631, i (*RSTC* 19652.5), 79–80, 285, 732; ii (*RSTC* 19653), 243; iii (*RSTC* 19653a), 363–4; John Preston, *The new covenant, or the saints portion*, London 1629 (*RSTC* 20241.3), 411, 413–14; *A liveles life: or, mans spirituall death in sinne*, London 1633 (*RSTC* 20235), 43–4, 73–5; *Sins overthrow: or, a godly and learned treatise of mortification*, London 1633 (*RSTC* 20275), 24, 77, 146; *The breast-plate of faith and love*, London 1634 (*RSTC* 20212), pt i, 14, 27, 69; pt iii, 17; *The saints qualification*, London 1634 (*RSTC* 20264), 378–9; *Foure godly and learned treatises*, London 1636 (*RSTC* 20223), 173; *The golden sceptre held forth to the humble*, London 1638 (*RSTC* 20227), 262; and *A heavenly treatise of the divine love of Christ*, London 1640 (*RSTC* 20240.3), 9–10.

[73] Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 10, and also pp. 134–5; *Way of life*, 11–12, 300, 365; and *Practical commentary*, 382–3, 410.

[74] *Antinomian controversy*, 85, 96–7, 121–2, 136–7.

[75] Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 10, and *Practical commentary*, 190, 383. See also *Antinomian controversy*, 37–8, 40, 55, 196–8; Cotton, *Treatise*, 109, 122–3, 217; Preston, *New covenant*, 475–6, 511; *Breast-plate of faith and love*, pt i, 39, 64–7, 70–2; *Foure godly and learned treatises*, 199; and *Golden scepter*, 102, 268; Sibbes, *Works*, iii. 399, 518; and Hooker, *Soules humiliation*, 110–11, 145.

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grieve for his sin against Christ or not only the more fear his sin, or the more be ashamed of his sin, by how much more he sees the glory of Christ, but he so much the more loathes himself, as one cleane out of heart, he abhors himself as an unclean & abominable thing.[76]

The abjection and self-hatred proceed further, until Cotton – sending the soul to a pinnacle of apprehension of its unfitness for Christ – matter-of-factly documents the unlikeliest of unions. 'And so loath our selves for our sins', he implores his audience, 'as they make us unmeet to be joyned to so glorious an head as Christ, and then we have him.'[77] A chasm is crossed in an eye's blink, or a heart's beat. Christ, too pure for the having, is 'had'.

This passage illustrates an important trend of Cotton's pre-migration divinity. Union with Christ is contingent upon penitential effort. The mystical marriage is solemnised in succession to suitable acts of purging and cleansing. Grief for sin, as Cotton presents it, is invariably stimulated by consciousness of offence done to Christ.[78] This tends to place the sinner out of the reach of Sinaitic harm, beyond the wrathful glare of the Deuteronomic deity; for Cotton's humbling sinner is a believer, and if the law is deployed in the mortification of sin it is a law that strikes in service of love – a law that is powerless to damn.

Faith, in such a setting, would surely orchestrate the soul's 'desire'. Covenant with Christ is founded on a 'hearty desire' that Cotton likens to the mutual affection of husband and wife. Do you desire, Cotton asks, to meet Christ 'in the bed of loves', do you desire 'to have the seeds of his grace shed abroad in your hearts, and bring forth the fruits of grace to him, and desire that you may be for him, and for none other, . . . and desire to doe nothing but as he shall counsell and direct you?' God will give 'the heart to agree with him', but this gift is a beginning, not an end. There is much for faith to do: it must make 'preparation' for Christ's coming, must 'smooth the way for him' by rendering the soul 'fit' to receive him. Lusts and 'crooked wayes' must be laid aside, 'all sinfull and uncleane matter' must be removed, a 'comely' place must be readied for Christ – trimmed up 'for an habitation for him'. 'It is your faith', Cotton announces, 'by which you do thus receive him.'[79]

For all the uncertainty about how the phenomena of holiness ought to be esteemed when 'the life of faith' overtakes 'the life of grace', Cotton's English divinity is clear on one crucial point: it is for faith to take hold of

[76] Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 11.

[77] Ibid. 11–12, and see also, on self-abhorrence, Cotton, *Practical commentary*, 135, 382–3, and *Way of life*, 5, 8, 120, 127–8, 169–70, 310, 328.

[78] Idem, *Way of life*, 15–65, 328, 364.

[79] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 36–7, 40–5; *Practical commentary*, 29, 388; and *Way of life*, 330, 426.

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Christ.[80] Gifts and fruits may or may not supply evidence of divine favour; good works may or may not bear assuring witness to spiritual security. Certainly, such signifiers are not worthy of 'trust'; they should not be 'rested in'.[81] But faith's humbling activity appears to be valuable on two counts: it causes self-abomination of such profundity as to stifle the swelling of pride, and it effects the union of soul and saviour. Of all graces, the 'grace of faith' was 'chiefly' to be desired.[82]

In England, Cotton wrestled long and hard with the problem of assurance. The technique of inferring from signs was put under pressure from various quarters. Popery remained troublesome; the English Church cradled legalistic blemishes that might deceive the credulous.[83] It was 'a Popish error' to deem it presumptuous and dangerous 'to think we may have assurance of Gods favour'. Cotton returned fire in the name of a spiritist commitment destined for a heady future: 'wee see we may know it by the witness of the Spirit'.[84] Not only did the Spirit pacify the conscience by means of an 'immediate work', but it 'speaks more clearly and fully, than the created graces of God in us'.[85] Papists were pedlars of 'gawdie and theatricall' impurity; not so hypocrites, who spin a 'thread' of fake holiness 'so fine' as to imperil the Church by stealth.[86] Accordingly, gifts, graces and fruits could not be authenticated without due interrogation; and strong enough suspicions, when fortified by the word of the Spirit, might obviate the need to authenticate them at all. We must 'take heed of sticking' to legal works; better to 'look at' what we believe than what we do.[87] We might 'thirst' and 'hunger' for Christ, and 'desire' him. Such affections counted as evidence of Christ's prevenient love, but Cotton, later in his career, would become suspicious of such a view. Self-abhorrence, if sufficiently 'deep', could certainly be credited, but this was hardly a gift from which to infer immediate blessing: the lesson of self-abomination pointed in a contrary direction, telling the soul that its sins were so egregious as to disqualify its candidature for union with Christ. In retrospect, of course, the pains of self-denial were both necessary and beneficial, but only in light of the solemnised union would this become apparent.

'Sanctified graces', 'fruits of saving grace', 'workes and acts of grace that we have performed': these are perilous gifts if 'trusted upon' for the sake of

[80] Faith 'receives' and 'lays hold on' Christ, 'conveys' him and 'cleaves to' him, and 'applies' his blessings: idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 45; *Practical commentary*, 190, 236, 238, 276, 280, 355, 417; and *Way of life*, 278, 288, 300, 311–13, 320, 331–5, 339, 346–9, 360–1, 365, 368–70, 400–2, 423–4, 454.

[81] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 22, 24, 27–8, 46, 56; *Practical commentary*, 190, 385–6; and *Way of life*, 159–60, 239.

[82] Idem, *Way of life*, 359.

[83] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 189–90, 235, 242, and *Way of life*, 235–6, 368.

[84] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 200, and also pp. 362–4.

[85] Ibid. 198–9.

[86] Idem, *Way of life*, 368, and *Practical commentary*, 249.

[87] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 190.

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judging spiritual estates. 'Faith, hope, love, patience, humility, and every other grace of God which flowes from our fellowship with the death of Christ': each is to be esteemed a 'precious tallent', but none may be 'looked to' as a trustworthy witness to justification or sanctification.[88] Complacency loomed; trust in graces would bring a 'dead Christ' to a 'dead heart', thus making 'but dead work of zeal and humility'. Saints 'spend of the stock of grace' in walking 'by the strength' of it; Cotton, turning to 'the life of faith', readjusted saintly priorities. Why walk by the strength of a grace when Christ may 'live in you' and 'shew his life in you'? Justification must be looked for 'by faith in Christ', and sanctification 'from Christ by faith'.[89] Controversy in New England would test the mettle of Cotton's Old-World distrust.

Christ is the object of faith's eye. Cotton used this insight to problematise piety in old Boston. He mystified sanctification in order both to 'enliven' it and to detach it from creaturely causes. Duties ought not be powered by 'love, and zeale, and humility'; rather, 'go about them all in faith in Jesus Christ, that is by comming to him' in awareness 'that unlesse he put new life into us, and make new worke in our soules, we may have but a dead businesse of it'.[90] Between soul and saviour there is a sense of immediacy in Cotton's conception of the life of faith that cannot be said to prevail when he turns his attentions to fruits and gifts. The pastoral difficulty bedevilling this distinction was the narrowness of the scantling that divided hypocrite from true saint; suspicions about misesteemed graces would not easily be confirmed. How is it to be verified that some, wallowing in hypocrisy, seek Christ 'not so much for himself, as for the benefits we have by him'? 'Judge your selves', Cotton told his parishioners, whether you be 'living or dead Christians'; the estimation of estates depended on knowing the difference between Christ and his graces. Christ is given first, and graces follow as 'attendants' upon the primary gift of Christ.[91]

Cotton's 'eye of faith' simplified the matter – until others objected that mysterious simplicity was obliterating evident graces. Objections would ring through the air in Massachusetts. But Cotton was content to push a solifidian barrow against English papists and hypocrites. Faith might simply know that Christ is savingly present, that it is he upon whom the heart is set. Fruits, gifts and graces can thereupon be dropped from view – if not dropped from the repertoire of devotion. Faith, which looks straight to Christ for resources of living, tenders its own evidence that the soul 'has' its saviour. As it turned out, *this* was a view with a future. And with it, Cotton coupled a move destined also to make way, and waves, in Massachusetts,

[88] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 28–9, and *Practical commentary*, 386.
[89] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 28–9, and also p. 51.
[90] Ibid. 29, and also pp. 132–3, and *Way of life*, 218–19.
[91] Idem, *Christ the fountaine*, 52, 55, and also pp. 51, 56, 58.

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namely, the audacious presentation of fellowship with Christ whose self-sufficient signifier is none other than the Holy Spirit.[92]

Old World and New: survivors of a Christocentric turn

Unless animated by Christ, pious souls would make a 'dead businesse' of their piety. Such was the business of Massachusetts, whose resolute semiologists of the soul Cotton likened to a man who finds his hunger and thirst satisfied 'by hearing that hunger and thirst is a sign of a healthfull body'. The New-World godly were settling sights and affections upon the 'way' to the journey of assurance in the misapprehension that they had reached the 'end'. No, Cotton rejoined, seek 'mistress', not 'maid'; drink 'consolation' out of Christ, not out of 'thirst'.[93] The 'ground of our comfort' is union with Christ, as revealed to faith; and union with Christ must be prior to, and may supersede, the resort to 'conditions' and 'qualifications' and 'works' wherein the signs of sanctification are elicited and rendered visible.[94] In both Englands Cotton declaimed against the wrongful 'trust' through which godly souls connived with their pious performances, against the inclination of wayfarers' 'owne strength' to deaden and dampen regions of being that, if left fallow for Christ, would be brought savingly to life.[95] Cotton was making unconventional use of a conventional lexicon. Thomas Hooker spoke a similar kind of discourse in noting that a man needs more than a 'bucket' to quench his 'thirst', in cautioning those who 'rest' and 'trust' in their 'gifts' and 'duties', who rely upon their 'owne strength', who cultivate a 'carnall confidence'. Hooker, like Cotton, stressed the need to rely upon Christ, and he relished – more so than did Cotton – the imprecation of hellish horrors awaiting works-mongers; but Hooker tempered his distrust before it reached the Cottonesque point of severing the essential connection between a

[92] See, for example, ibid. 61–2, and *Practical commentary*, 198–200. Cotton's spiritist discourse needs no elaboration here. For detailed and elegant commentary on the writings from Old World and New see Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 225–9, 257–9, 269–78.

[93] *Antinomian controversy*, 96, and also pp. 85, 97, 99–100, 121–4, 136–7, 186–7; Cotton, *Treatise*, 43–4.

[94] *Antinomian controversy*, 91–3, 96–100, 110–11, 121, 123, 136, 175–6; Cotton, *Treatise*, 19–20, 34–5, 37, 56, 61, 65–7, 86, 133–4.

[95] For the English works see nn. 81 ('trust'), 65 ('owne strength') above. On wrongful 'trust' in New England see Cotton, *Treatise*, 15, 34, 66, 91, 99, 102, 104, 106, 131, 133; on the saints' dependence on their 'owne strength' see *Antinomian controversy*, 103, and Cotton, *Treatise*, 43–5, 108–10, 119–20, 126, 128, 132. For Cotton's personal agonies provoked by the resort to pietistic signs see Cotton to Samuel Stone, *Correspondence of Cotton*, 273.

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conditional promise and faith's extraction of assuring evidence from a store of gracious 'qualifications'.[96]

Cotton's Christocentric turn had its origins in England; in New England, it would have a tumultuous denouement. There are two threads of theological continuity marking Cotton's career in two worlds: two elements of his practical divinity – one legal in complexion, and the other evangelical – that journeyed, with climactic effect, from England to New England. Cotton's doctrine of 'the life of faith' germinated from a Christocentric seed, and concerned itself with the fortification of purity. And the same, perhaps surprisingly, may be said of the legal element – the covenant of works – that crossed the Atlantic with Cotton.

The persisting threads contributed to the task of erecting defences against inroads into godly living that 'confident' hypocrites, plying the dead business of their counterfeit zeal, were in course of making in old Boston and in new. The stakes were higher in new Boston, where an experiment in transplanted godliness was being jeopardised by an exquisitely disguised malaise of its own invention. Living in 'the strength of their own gifts' rather than in 'the strength of Christ', and presuming upon the rewardability of their works, colonists were making a debtor of God.[97] Cotton addressed the New England elders as a man wishing to deliver the Gospel message from peril of obsolescence. Christ must be returned to the centre. The promise of Christ was 'free', not 'conditional', for he himself had fulfilled the conditions of salvation.[98] Nevertheless, good works must be called forth in answer to God's commandments, for 'sanctification is not bed-rid'.[99] But trust must not be reposed in works; and if works are to be treated as signs they belong far down the pecking order of consolation – they become ancillary to the soul's knowledge of its union with Christ and to the words of comfort vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit.

Cotton was an embattled pastor in the mid-1630s. Wishing to arrest the spread of a collective corrosion of the heart, he presided over a fragmentation of coreligionists. He became a fence builder, at once a source of light to the faithful remnant and a reverberant admonisher of the hypocrites in the holy mount. His conceptual gaze imposed lines of division on the colony's depths and surfaces: hearts as well as deeds became subject to a pastoral enterprise that had as its effect the contraction of the

[96] See, for example, Hooker, *Soules preparation*, 55–6, 122; *Soules humiliation*, 7, 9–11, 18, 21–2, 43, 45, 49–51; *The soules ingrafting into Christ*, London 1637 (*RSTC* 13733), 2; *The soules vocation or effectual calling to Christ*, London 1638 (*RSTC* 13739), 179–81, 306, 464–8; and *The application of redemption, by the effectual work of the Word, and Spirit of Christ, for the bringing home of lost sinners to God: the first eight books*, London 1656 (Wing H.2639), 28–30, 43–4, 219–20.

[97] *Antinomian controversy*, 88–9, 98, 127, 186; Cotton, *Treatise*, 83–5, 89, 164, 174.

[98] *Antinomian controversy*, 98–9, 137, 139; Cotton, *Treatise*, 4, 13, 25–6, 67, 193, 213–14.

[99] Cotton, *Treatise*, 107.

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sphere of grace. In winnowing mood, with discriminatory intent, Cotton unleashed the law upon a stiff-necked people.

And yet the efficacy of Christ was never more clearly displayed than during the free-grace controversy. In place of the alloyed life of grace, Cotton commended a more Christ-fixed alternative: the life of faith.[100] This evangelical element survived Cotton's passage, and the suspicions that it cultivated, and the passivity to which it resorted, would together intensify the odium that his New-World colleagues cast upon his teaching. Saints, strong of faith and comforted by the Spirit's voice, no longer had need, in Cotton's Massachusetts, to calibrate their pious deeds in order to pass judgement upon their spiritual estates. Christ is given in an 'absolute promise', whereupon faith is wrought in the soul.[101] The absoluteness of the gift obviates the need to summon works in testamentary answer to God-given conditions. But the New-World godly, esteeming promises made to 'conditions' and 'qualifications', and proceeding therefrom to 'gather' their justifying faith, vested unwarrantable trust in the way of 'works'. Cotton sounded out the arrogance of this position. It placed self before saviour. And he spoke with penetrating clarity in evaluating the error: it 'derogates' from free grace to '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'.[102] Cotton delivered an imperative made solid by years spent in cultivation of distrust: 'Do not trust upon *gifts*, nor upon duties performed by those gifts, to reach the blessings; so look not for your justification from thence at all.' Such trusting and looking, perversely, was to ground faith upon its own fruits, to inflate the worth of 'dross and dung', to make a 'signe' serve as 'a false and sandy foundation'.[103]

Cotton needed means of articulating the maladroitness of colonial obsessions with the evidentiary purchase of holy signs. That is, he needed to distinguish the livers of the life of grace from those among his flock who lived the life of faith. The former took notice of gifts and graces before apprising themselves of the blessing that answered the 'condition' of obedience; the latter turned directly to Christ and his 'free promise' in order to assure themselves of their interest in a conditionless beneficence.[104] To live the life of grace was to inspect and activate the qualifications that put wayfarers to the toil of their sanctification, and so

[100] Ibid. 25, 50.

[101] *Antinomian controversy*, 50–1, 91–5, 147, 188–9; Cotton, *Treatise*, 19–20, 37–8, 133, 179.

[102] *Antinomian controversy*, 57, 84, 86–7, 98, 121, 126.

[103] Cotton, *Treatise*, 104, and also p. 20. See also *Antinomian controversy*, 54, 178.

[104] *Antinomian controversy*, 55–7, 93–4, 108, 126, 137–9, 178–9, 196; Cotton, *Treatise*, 19, 21, 60–1.

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to the emission of 'the Holinesse of their owne Workes' upon which they grounded their 'faith of assurance'; to live the life of faith was to empty the heart for Christ, the inimitable 'Foundation' for assurance of justification.[105]

The colony must therefore be conceptualised in dichotomous terms. It became necessary for Cotton to erect a legal barricade in order to quarantine the livers of the life of grace in a space at once remedial and punitive. English law had carried marks of grace; New-World graces are soiled by legality. Hypocrites needed to be sorted, and then sorted out.

In England, Cotton had wielded a discriminatory instrument when handling challenge from antinomians, but its day in the sun belonged elsewhere. Cotton, adrift in a sea of New-World hypocrisy, put forth the covenant of works. He empowered the legal covenant in new Boston; paradoxically, he beefed up its stock of troubles by infusing it with Gospel-like blessings, thus enabling him to enunciate with renewed vigour the deceptions that plagued the life of grace. Cotton needed to do this for the very good reason that he was no longer dealing with heretics, with the obviously errant. His enemies were the godly orthodox, people with Christ on their lips and zeal in their hearts – committed devotees of the holy walk. These were people very much like himself. He needed, therefore, an instrument of considerable sophistication in order to do the business of distinguishing sheep from goats (and swine).[106] So conceived, Cotton's covenant of works was ripe for an apotheosis.

That apotheosis depended on the ability of the covenant of works to ambiguate, to unsettle.[107] It needed to be sufficiently adaptable an instrument to perform several functions of pastoral management. It needed to be able to acknowledge the 'real' blessings that had been bestowed upon the fraudulently godly, but also to intimate that those blessings were in fact, at worst case, concealed curses; it needed to insinuate hope at the same time that it inspired terror, for the mystery of God's purposes was such that a regenerative hand may yet be extended to the pure-seeming vile; it needed, then, to admonish and terrify, but not in such a way as to overwhelm a more encouraging pastoral register. In order to do these things, Cotton worked into his legal covenant a set of resources of Lincolnshire provenance: the preparatory purgation tendered by 'the Spirit of bondage', the fallible 'common' graces esteemed by the hypocritically godly, the wrongful 'confidence' with which the latter

[105] *Antinomian controversy*, 56; Cotton, *Treatise*, 35.

[106] Cotton, *Treatise*, 30–2, 45–6.

[107] For Cotton's covenant of works and its pastoral application see ibid. esp. pp. 14–59, 89, 161–5, 200, and *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, in *John Cotton on the churches of New England*, ed. Larzer Ziff, Cambridge, MA 1968, 48, 57–9; *Antinomian controversy*, 53, 55–6, 85, 98, 117–18, 123, 125, 128, 132, 137.

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debased their affective lives.[108] To these, Cotton added a further preparatory device, 'the Spirit of burning',[109] along with a suite of sub-evangelical blessings, each non-saving yet framed in deceptive mimicry of efficacious equivalents: redemption, union with Christ, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification. Also available was a 'taste' of the Spirit and of Christ.[110] Hypocrites were to be teased and cajoled out of their looming apostasy. Their blessings were to be credited even while the godliness that they confected was to be 'blasted' and 'dashed'.[111] They might yet be saved, though some, certainly, would perish as irremediable apostates.[112]

The evidentiary deceptions of the legal covenant laid bare the dead business of New-World piety. Cotton, putting a purging but also a killing law within the covenant of works, was imprecating doom by way of admonishing the false saints to change their ways. 'You and your Covenant will fail together', he warned, should you trust 'upon conditional Promises' and so 'build upon a *Covenant* made upon a *work*'.[113]

Cotton was designedly putting souls on edge, spawning an anxiety that, under the circumstances, was simply unavoidable. New Englanders needed to review the way in which they arrived at assurance. In Cotton's rendering of a venerable protocol, their method was vitiated by the presumption of a claim to holiness, compounded by a further presumption that the claimed holiness served to signify an estate. We presume ourselves to have been 'humbled for sin', and proceed to find 'promises made to humble and heavy laden sinners'; thereupon, matching 'promise' to 'condition', we infer our interest in Christ. This is the 'way of the Law': a motion 'from Works to find grace', a 'legal humiliation'.[114] Trial by double covenant damns the plausible inference: 'to seek our first Assurance of our Justification by Christ, or to seek the Assurance of Faith of our

[108] For the Spirit of bondage in New England see *Antinomian controversy*, 54, 178; Cotton, *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, 57, 60–3, and *Treatise*, 14–17, 34, 41, 45, 98, 114–20, 169; and in England see Cotton, *Way of life*, 3, 21, 26, 42, 233, 257. For 'common' graces see *Antinomian controversy*, 92, and *Treatise*, 48, 59, 156, 202 and n. 65 above for English uses. For confidence see n. 57 above.

[109] Cotton, *Treatise*, 15–17, 34, 36, 114–20.

[110] For temporary blessings see ibid. 26–7, 30, 32 (redemption), 27, 89 (union with Christ), 27, 30, 41–4, 53; *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, 54 (faith); and *Treatise*, 29 (justification and adoption), 26–32, 38–40, 42–3, 45–9, 161–5 (sanctification), 40–1, 52, 59; *Antinomian controversy*, 406 (taste of the Spirit and of Christ). See similarly, on mercies extended to the reprobate, Perkins, *Works*, i. 106, 109, 358, and Hooker, *Soules vocation*, 465–70.

[111] Cotton, *Treatise*, 15–17, 34, 43, 53, 118.

[112] Ibid. 27, 40–1, 48, 51–2, 99.

[113] Ibid. 66, and also pp. 37–9, 179–80. See also, on Cotton's legal covenant, John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible*, Oxford 1970, 103–4, 111–12, and David Parnham, 'John Cotton's bequest to Sir Henry Vane the younger', *Westminster Theological Journal* lxxii (2010), 71–101, esp. pp. 74–88.

[114] *Antinomian controversy*, 148; Cotton, *Treatise*, 134.

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Justification in Christ by our works of Sanctification is to make such an use of Works as for which the Lord hath not sanctified them in the Covenant of Grace, but is peculiar to the Covenant of Works'.[115]

The power of Cotton's covenant of works lay in its capacity to deceive. Its blessings were 'real'[116] – dispensed by Christ and Spirit – yet lacked the indefectibility of those tendered in the saving covenant. False confidence readily settled upon the glimmering collateral of a merely 'common' species of grace. Even the faith and justification on offer in the covenant of works were conditional and temporary. And those who, having experienced the first step of the covenant's preparatory 'blasting' of their holiness, may never proceed to the next step, superintended by 'the Spirit of burning'; nor, if they get this far, will they necessarily proceed to the higher grace wrought by 'the Spirit of adoption'. The heart's 'root and branch' burns in incipient cleansing, yet the soul finds itself 'in a damnable condition'.[117] One's preparation may begin, but never end; the purgation of one's hypocrisy may start, but then stall, making one look and feel like any contrite saint in anxious search of grace.

But that was the crux of Cotton's case. Visible signs and affective states were now debased currency. The deportment of hypocrites could not easily be distinguished from that of true saints: what one set of eyes will see as signs, another will recognise as symptoms. Cotton speaks of a 'near resemblance between legal and evangelical holiness'. Perseverance belongs to the truly graced: this was the key. Legalists are but momentarily blessed; they repose 'confidence' in their 'temporary Faith'.[118] The Spirit of bondage works 'reformation' and the Spirit of burning consumes our 'confidence' and our Pharisaical piety, 'but if the Lord loves a man, he will not let him stay there; but goeth further with him, and sheweth him that his prayers and fastings are all empty, and fall short of the life and power of Jesus Christ'.[119] Christ looks after his own by guiding them through the increments of preparation and regeneration, but one met a sad end, in the covenant of works, by neglecting Christ in order to play the saint. 'Those that are under the Law', Cotton thunders, 'are cursed indeed' for their shortcomings. For the non-elect, purging law in the covenant of works becomes killing law.[120]

Two elements of Cotton's practical divinity that acquired new life from the experience of migration and settlement have thus been identified: a revised view of faith and its fruits, and a reapplication of the – newly

[115] *Antinomian controversy*, 132, and also pp. 53–4, 56, 85, 98–9, 117–18, 123, 126, 133. [116] Cotton, *Treatise*, 48, 110. [117] Ibid. 114–20.
[118] Ibid. 51–3, and also pp. 39–43. The temporarily blessed may, nevertheless, maintain their hypocritical holiness for a lifetime (pp. 39, 46, 51–2).
[119] Ibid. 117, 127–31. See also *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, 62, 65.
[120] Idem, *Treatise*, 84, and also *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, 48, 58–9.

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strengthened – covenant of works. These, as it were, constituted Cotton's bequest to himself, carry-overs from Old World to New. Such a view challenges Kendall's thesis of 'radical' discontinuity between Old-World legalist and New-World solifidian. Besides a lone blistering evocation of the legal covenant in *The way of life*, Cotton, *pace* Kendall, emaciated the law in Lincolnshire and applied its potency in Massachusetts. Bozeman, who catches the English Cotton in halting, almost reluctant, 'adumbration' of 'his later semi-antinomian position', brings out elements of the English Cotton that also, by implication, challenge Kendall's thesis – namely, Cotton's Christ-fixed shrinkage of human agency and the affiliated misgivings over 'behavioral tokens of certitude'.[121]

Bozeman sensitively excavates Cotton's ongoing spiritism and his New England recall and refinement of the English covenant of grace.[122] But if Kendall exaggerates and misplaces the 'radical change' distinguishing New World from Old, Bozeman, in three respects, downplays the extent of Cotton's New-World departures from Old-World bases. First, he misses the import of the covenant of works, both in its brief but pregnant deployment against English antinomians and in its purposeful ambiguation of the life of grace as lived by New England hypocrites. This dark side of Cotton's pastoral management shows him subtle as well as resolute in the face of prideful provocation. Second, he passes over Cotton's appreciation of the gracious motivation of errant anti-legalists: it conceals Cotton's recognition of the evangelical drive of English antinomians to say that 'contemporary criticism of legal religion drew no sympathy from Cotton' and that he 'flatly denounced free grace'.[123] Cotton loathed antinomian licentiousness, but he willingly credited the antinomian evangel, and saw cause to preach free grace to English audiences. And third, he over-draws the passivity of faith as Cotton had expressed it in England, thus creating the impression that little changed, on faith's front, between old Boston and new. To say that the fruits of faith are to be perceived, by the faithful, not as products of their 'own exertions, but of transcendental power acting within',[124] is to diminish the importance that Cotton's English divinity attached to the 'work' of faith, to faith's accommodation of its grace-given obligation to put itself into 'act'. Union with Christ does not undo faith's capacity to do. And Bozeman's citations from Lincolnshire writings do not clinch his case: where Cotton would 'lean on' Christ and 'rowl towards' him, he is evoking

[121] Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 224–5.

[122] For the covenant of grace see ibid. 252–4, 258–9. For spiritism see n. 92 above.

[123] Ibid. 223, 229, and also p. 230.

[124] Ibid. 224. Though see pp. 264–5 where Bozeman notes the activity of Cotton's Old-World faith and speaks of Cotton's 'generous appeals to human volition and effort' in Lincolnshire. Bozeman valuably shows (p. 257) how divine agency in New England, for Cotton, is 'less directly tied to the pietist system of moral and ritual mediation'.

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the active potency of faith, not gesturing at the nullification of human agency.[125] Cotton was quite explicit about this. Faith, as an 'act', 'hath a power *to establish and fixe* the heart upon Christ, so as the heart relies on Christ for pardon, and upon him alone'. In this justifying 'act', faith – 'an act of a mans will' – discharges an array of competencies in brokering union with Christ.[126] Faith, in maturing passivity, continues to 'wait' upon Christ in New England, where the derivativeness of its activity, its dependence upon the Spirit, is more insistently noticed. Wayfarers do not initiate the waiting upon Christ;[127] nor does faith 'make up' the union with Christ 'by Actuall Believing on Him', but rather says 'Amen to what God hath done'. The union, in New England, is not 'constituted' by the 'acting' of graces.[128] This is Cotton's radical change.

In new Boston, Cotton pursued the Christological trajectory of the life of faith. This sent him in an antinomian direction, if not into full-blown antinomianism. A well-worked appreciation of the need to apply informed suspicion to pious outputs developed into admonitions against seeing by the 'borrowed' lights of infused graces and building assurance upon the 'Hey and Stubble' of legal works.[129] Cotton no longer expected faith to interrogate the harvest of its own activity in order to settle an enquiry with an inference; instead, he sent it directly to Christ. Christ himself, or his Spirit, would inform faith on a point of destiny. In England, Cotton had not taken faith's passivity beyond this evidentiary realm; he had not divested faith of the 'instrumental' capability of seizing and applying Christ. The retraction was made in Massachusetts, where 'laying hold' becomes principally an act of Christ upon us and only consequentially an act – essentially 'receptive', for we must know our 'poverty' and 'insufficiency' – of us upon him.[130] Likewise, it is Christ who 'applies' the promises, not faith.[131] Cotton severely qualified the language of faith's activity; during the free-grace controversy, he found himself needing to insist that the 'faith of adherence' is a gift of the Spirit's 'begetting', of its 'coming and breathing in absolute promises'. Faith, Cotton will also say, is 'wrought' in the soul when Christ is given 'in an absolute promise'. Such is the faith 'whereby we receive Christ and our first union with him'. Faith

[125] Ibid. 224.
[126] Cotton, *Way of life*, 311, 445, and *Practical commentary*, 273.
[127] *Antinomian controversy*, 30, 50, 55, 57, 91, 103, 124; Cotton, *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, 63, 65, and *Treatise*, 120–1, 221. In the English works, 'waiting' tends to bear an active connotation, and even incorporates faith's laying hold on Christ and laying hold of the promise of pardon: Cotton, *Christ the fountaine*, 33, and *Way of life*, 285, 304, 311–13, 317, 355, 402, 415, 430.
[128] *Antinomian controversy*, 37–8, 40, 42.
[129] Ibid. 56–7, 130, 138; Cotton, *Treatise*, 40.
[130] *Antinomian controversy*, 37–8, 196; Cotton, *Treatise*, 22–3, 174–5, 218–19, 221.
[131] Cotton, *Treatise*, 134.

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does not effect this union, but is a 'fruit' of it; 'flowing' from the union, faith is posterior to it and activated by it.[132]

It is for faith, moreover, to make good the lesson of its own contingency. If faith is granted knowledge of the union with Christ in which it takes its beginning, what point its turning its eye to 'created' graces? Faith need not see past its creator when light is shed by the 'immediate' witness of the Spirit.[133] Beware, then, the 'settling' of justification upon 'works of the Law'. Cotton's life of faith disqualifies the 'resting' upon any object other than 'the Lord and his free grace and mercy to us in Jesus Christ; and this revealed to us in some Divine testimony'.[134] The semiotic of the holy walk becomes inadmissible.

The New-World life of faith is derivatively active because principally passive: Christ is 'active' in the gifts that he gives, so that 'it is not we that are first active in any duty of spiritual life, but he first stirreth up our faith that our faith might fetch in from him continual supply of spiritual life to all our holy actions'. Prevenience shores up holiness and purity, and so deflects the antinomian slur – so long as it is understood that faith's eye, in seeking assurance, pays scant respect to the 'strength or weakness' of human 'holiness'.[135] Thus, a tree is made good, Cotton explained, not by calling forth fruit to adorn its branches; rather, it is because the tree has already been blessed that it becomes capable of bearing fruit.[136] In England, the metaphor had served a different purpose, namely, to legitimate the activity of the saint, who not only 'brings forthe fruit' but who, in so doing, 'strikes his root' more deeply in Christ. Fruit, on this view, certifies a progressively secured rootedness, a security achieved in the application of the effort of faith;[137] but Cotton came to a realisation that this could honour neither Christ's primacy nor faith's passivity. 'Rootedness' in Christ, indeed, may describe the defective sanctification of hypocrites,[138] a state of affairs that imperilled the evidentiary deployment of sanctified signs in even an auxiliary role, in subordination to the Spirit's witness. The 'fruits of faith' must be cultivated, but Cotton effaces their affective contribution: they are

[132] *Antinomian controversy*, 91–2, 95, and also pp. 37, 41–2, 57, 79–80, 141; Cotton, *Treatise*, 18, 22, 24, 35–7, 40, 171, 178, 184–9, 218. See also the helpful treatment in William K. B. Stoever, '*A faire and easie way to heaven': covenant theology and antinomianism in early Massachusetts*, Middletown 1978, esp. pp. 41–4, 64–7, 172. More generally on the theology of habits and acts see Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's caress: the psychology of Puritan religious experience*, New York 1986, 96–8.

[133] *Antinomian controversy*, 49, 80, 105, 114, 135, 141, 223, 230, 232, 238, 263–4, 337; Cotton, *Treatise*, 191–2.

[134] *Antinomian controversy*, 128, 141. For wrongful 'resting' see also Cotton, *Treatise*, 123, 137.

[135] *Antinomian controversy*, 144, 89, 127. See also Cotton, *Treatise*, 108.

[136] *Antinomian controversy*, 40, 92, 176, 193; Cotton, *Treatise*, 133–4.

[137] Cotton, *Practical commentary*, 138, 415, and *Way of life*, 360.

[138] Idem, *Treatise*, 40–1, 46.

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but 'works' and 'creatures', and they 'have no power at all to beget faith'.[139] The Spirit testifies to 'Gods acceptance' both of the dutiful and of their deeds, and it is within the Spirit's discretion to bear witness to a soul's justification 'without sight of any work of ours foregoing as any way preparing us thereunto'.[140]

Yet it was 'needful' that salvation be 'accompanied' by gifts of grace, 'that we may grow up to abound in fruitfulness'. God's commandments must be kept; saints, spiritually enabled, will 'act and keep Holinesse'.[141] In Massachusetts, Cotton continues to observe rigorist standards, but these jostle in glaring tension with the predestinarian's insistence that spiritual estates have nothing to do with obedience or disobedience: not even a 'fall into gross sin' need dislodge the wayfarer's assurance.[142] An unsympathetic audience might wonder at Cotton's ways, and ask if a quietist 'waiting' upon 'free grace' had eclipsed the obligations of devotion. In England, Cotton had danced carefully around 'free grace': he both appreciated its orthodoxy and lamented its antinomian perversion.[143] It is given ringing endorsement in Massachusetts. Stressing Christ's prevenience and faith's passivity, and proclaiming Spirit-borne 'free grace' as the *sine qua non* for assurance, Cotton made himself seem to the elders of New England as nothing so much as a dark-speaking antinomian.[144]

He remained, however, true in his own way to a very non-antinomian yearning. He sought purity: the 'purer holiness' of a 'stronger faith'. Christ both renews the moral law and gives 'his *Spirit* unto his servants, enabling them to keep it'. The law, here, plays a preparatory role, giving knowledge of sin, terrifying, humbling, cleansing, driving to Christ. And we hear once more of the law as 'commandment' rather than 'covenant', serving as a rule of life for beneficiaries of free grace.[145] Cotton, moreover, cherished Christ's exemplarity. Christ's image was to be 'engraven' on the soul; his acts of death and resurrection would replicate themselves in the soul's

[139] *Antinomian controversy*, 85, 134.

[140] Ibid. 126, 87, and also pp. 49, 87–8, 107, 109–11, 114–15, 119, 126, 136, 149–50, 189; Cotton, *Treatise*, 172–3.

[141] Cotton, *Treatise*, 92, 194, and also pp. 50, 68–9, 74–9, 87–98; *Antinomian controversy*, 51, 86, 103–4.

[142] *Antinomian controversy*, 89; Cotton, *Treatise*, 81–91. See also Cotton, *Way of life*, 229–30, and *Practical commentary*, 234. For rigorism see Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 242–3.

[143] For orthodoxy see Cotton, *Practical commentary*, 189, 377, and *Way of life*, 320, 455; and Twisse, *Treatise of Mr. Cottons*, 135. For antinomian perversion see Cotton, *Practical commentary*, 285.

[144] *Antinomian controversy*, 50–1, 85, 94–5, 99, 110–12, 115, 117, 119, 123–6, 136, 141, 149–50, 188, 191; *Treatise*, 20–1, 61, 87, 89–91, 134–5, 172–3, 179, 186, 190–1.

[145] *Antinomian controversy*, 88–9; Cotton, *Sermon deliver'd at Salem*, 51, and *Treatise*, 69–79, 88–98.

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'mortifying of Sin, and in living unto righteousnes'.[146] The *imitatio Christi* was another survivor from old Boston, and it offered Cotton one more blade with which to sever the New-World saints from their hypocritical co-congregants. Purity was in need of protection; in both of Cotton's worlds, pure Christianity was achievable, but at cost. 'Lust' had been a preponderant impurity in England – a capacious stimulant of 'distemper', it had saturated Cotton's English ruminations on sin. Hypocrites populated potentially pure spaces in the Old World, and seized an opportunity in the New to etch their own image on a space dedicated to their own fellowship. That image was cast in a legal mould, Cotton discovered; its template for holiness was a law of works.

If, in the Old World, Cotton would purify by 'expulsion of noysome lusts',[147] he targeted more fine-grained corruptions in the New: presumptuousness, self-regard, confidence, complacency – the affective collateral of a religiosity animated by dedication to forms of penitence and piety. The self-trained eye of the self-righteous prevented them from averting their attentions beyond themselves to their redeemer, and so they masked their impurity by refining their obedience. They might 'bless' themselves 'as having found Christ' in their duties, but their very dutifulness counted against their saintliness – for no true saint would seek out Christ in a duty, nor a promise in a work – and so their estate 'may be no better than is the estate of many an hypocrite now in Hell'.[148] Incapable of 'emptying' themselves, because too fixated upon the formal clutter that conditioned the righteousness that they presumed themselves to possess, hypocrites dispossessed themselves of opportunity to have Christ's pure image etched upon their souls.

Battling iniquity

In New England Cotton seems, as never before, to have locked horns with the mystery of iniquity. Over-determined pietism threatened the integrity of Cotton's Christocentric turn; its fraudulent observances would depreciate godly living by making divine promises hang upon human works. Godliness appeared in duplicate – pure and impure: the life of faith claimed partisans in new Boston, and so too did the life of grace. These were distinguishable tribes, but the art of sorting them called for

[146] *Antinomian controversy*, 81–2, 104, and also pp. 41–2; Cotton, *Treatise*, 67, 187–8, 192–3. On this dimension of Cotton's Old-World spirituality see Bozeman, *Precisianist strain*, 213–18.

[147] Cotton, *Practical commentary*, 408.

[148] *Antinomian controversy*, 122.

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singular skill. Angelic intelligences, Cotton surmised, would be better placed than ministerial to do the discriminatory work.[149] But Cotton pushed on. And he yoked double-covenant divinity to a new calling.

The blessings of the covenant of grace are 'truly saving' for 'the faithful seed'.[150] Regenerative grace does not forsake its beneficiaries, nor is it swayed by foresight of duties and qualifications. Not so the covenant of works. Its blessings, conditional and revocable, are contingent upon foregoing deeds of compliance. It deflects pious sights from Christ, requiring them to settle upon a corruptible stock of gifts and graces. It is porous; its boundaries are permeable. This is because its denizens are caught in a holding pen, their destinies not yet manifest: they are regenerable, but their hypocrisy marks them out for the attentions of divine scrutiny, and possibly of divine wrath. For, in the interstices of the covenant of works, justice negotiates with mercy, and purgative discipline may – if justice has its way – be displaced by punitive. Cotton's legal covenant engenders hope of remediation even as it entertains the prospect of damnation. It remains open to New-World hypocrites, having experienced the humbling intervention of the Spirit of bondage and the Spirit of burning, to be taken beyond the region of common grace, to be led by the Spirit of adoption to everlasting blessedness. But, equally, they may harden their hypocrisy and perish with the damned.

The covenant of works came forth as a horrifying instrumentality, and Cotton intended that it should be so. The societal uses of his New-World discourse were not designed to be unitive, nor was he seeking to give comfort where comfort should not be had. Cotton contended that even ministers and magistrates might lodge in the covenant of works.[151] And means were available to the laity for the identification of ministerial false covenanters: it had long been Cotton's view that the Spirit, breathing as it lists, 'is not limitted to publick persons or Ministers, but to all generally that are the Members of Christ'.[152] Covenant and Spirit: for Anne Hutchinson, John Wheelwright and their kind, these survivors from old England were tools with which to asperse the credentials of the colony's power base, to articulate disenchantment with the order of things, to set a frame for ministerial discomfort. It was another survivor from old England – faith grown increasingly passive, faith decoupled from its active virtues – that opened a channel between comfort's giving and receiving.

[149] Cotton, *Treatise*, 39. [150] Ibid. 200–1, 221. [151] Ibid. 30, 110, 157.
[152] Idem, *Practical commentary*, 197.

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