

Comments on Antinomianism and Hyper-Calvinism

As there is much confusion of thought respecting these two epithets, both of which have been levelled at John Warburton and his fellow-minister of the Gospel, William Gadsby, it is to be hoped that some able Reformed scholar, deeply taught and spiritually minded, with a pen free from prejudice and preconceived notions, will be raised up to define these subjects and to defend those godly men who are falsely charged with these names. Meantime it is hoped that a few comments may help to "clear the air."

Dr. Robert Hawker (1753 to 1827), an eminent divine of irreproachable life and conduct to whom the very thought of licentiousness was abhorrent, states:

"The word antinomianism is well known to be formed from a Greek compound, antinonios; the nearest translation of which is against law. And the meaning when applied to any person in relation to religion is, that he who is antinomian is looking for justification before God solely on the footing of Christ's person, blood, and righteousness, without an eye to the deeds of the law; yes, even against them." (Robert Hawker's Works Vol. 9, page 542.) But Dr. Hawker is quick to explain that this does not give any license to evil conduct and adds "Some affirm (saith Paul) that we say 'Let us do evil that good may come.' But saith the Apostle of such 'whose damnation is just.'"

While several ideas are generated by the words Antinomianism and Hyper-Calvinism, the most serious thought is that which connects the lives of godly men with professed Christians whose lives and conduct are evil—in other words, libertines. Why this suitable word is not generally used to describe such characters is strange. To come to the point as it affects John Warburton of Trowbridge and William Gadsby, we are at once faced with the fact that both men lived blameless lives. Certainly neither could be justly charged with flouting the moral law in their conduct. On the contrary, the testimony of J. C. Philpot concerning John Warburton and (believe it or not) that of the Wesleyan Conference as to William Gadsby's character is that they were men of outstanding uprightness. It would then seem that the situation is brought about by loose terminology on the one hand, and by prejudice on the other, and not infrequently by a combination of both!

By far the most helpful work that I have come across is the excellent treatise by Robert Traill (1642-1716). The extent to which misunderstanding can lead to unjust charges is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in this eminent author's work "A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine Concerning Justification And of Its Preachers and Professors from the Unjust Charge of Antinomianism." (Select

Practical Writings, Free Church of Scotland E'boro 1845.) This work may be borrowed from The Evangelical Library, 78-a Chiltern St., London W 1, England; or from The Gospel Standard Library, Mr. S. F. Paul, 91 Buckingham Road, Brighton 1, Sussex, England.

Readers who are interested in this subject are strongly urged to read Robert Traill. It will help to disabuse the mind of much of the nonsense concerning Antinomianism and Hyper-Calvinism. It is significant that more time and effort has been expended in an attempt to drag men of known upright walk under the obliquy of a charge of Antinomianism (meaning here libertinism) than has been used to expose those who say "Let us do evil that good may come," of whom the Apostle says "whose damnation is just."