

COMO, David — *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. Pp. xvi, 513.

The 1640s have traditionally been seen as a tremendously creative period in English religion and politics, as the breakdown of the system of censorship that had previously limited the flow of ideas, coupled with the outbreak of civil war, ushered in an explosion of ideas on the printed page. In such an environment, all sorts of heterodoxies found their voices. Many of the alternative religious outlooks in that chaotic conversation have been labelled “antinomian” (holding the view that Christians are at least free from the Law of the Old Testament and perhaps from the possibility of Sin itself), and historians of a radical mindset such as Christopher Hill have celebrated them as part of the revolution that might have been, if not for the shift back toward authority under the Protectorate in the 1650s.

David Como regards this as a misapprehension. While he agrees that there were antinomians about in the 1640s, he argues that they were nothing new. Rather, they had developed within the “fractured landscape” of English Puritanism (unlike some, Como is not shy in his use of the p-word) in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Some of their ideas also came from the Family of Love, a Dutch offshoot of Anabaptism founded by Hendrik Niclaes, which had found a foothold in England in the late sixteenth century. All that changed in the 1640s was that England’s antinomians no longer had to remain underground. It is certainly true that antinomians such as Roger Brearly, the early Grindletonian, and John Everarde, sometime preacher at St. Martins-in-the-Fields, had come to the attention of England’s ecclesiastical authorities before 1640. Como takes the relative leniency with which Brearly was treated in 1617 (he was given many opportunities to discuss his views with orthodox clerics and eventually accepted the Thirty-nine Articles) as evidence of the relative openness of the Jacobean Church (pp. 278–279). In contrast, the Laudian regime imprisoned Everarde and fined him £1,000 for his pantheistic views in 1639. He recanted a year later and soon died (p. 225). Interestingly, one person who had been for a time fascinated with Everarde’s teachings was John Winthrop Jr. (pp. 418–419); such connections are critical to Como’s argument.

While Patrick Collinson has presented Puritanism as order-obsessed and authoritarian, Como’s version of the phenomenon is much more fissiparous. Just as he sees antinomianism developing out of Puritanism, he sees the two as needing each other. First of all, antinomianism offered solace for those driven to despair by a sense of their own sinfulness and unworthiness, thus providing a release for puritans who never felt godly enough (p. 137). Additionally, antinomians provided targets for puritan critics in the 1630s who wanted to demonstrate their own orthodoxy to the authorities. In the late 1620s, “[attacking] antinomianism ... became a means through which mainstream puritans could prove to the authorities that they were not in fact the subversive radicals of Laudian slander” (p. 79). But William Laud and his bishops were happy to let these two versions of “godliness” fight it out amongst themselves, with antinomians tarring orthodox puritans as “legalists” while the latter attacked the antinomians as libertines. Both were regarded as enemies of the Caroline Church. For

Como, Henry Burton is emblematic of the godly, railing against antinomians on the one hand and Laudians on the other, while being put in the pillory for his enthusiasms. In such a situation, “the godly community stood ready to implode. This implosion would come in the 1640s, leaving in its wake civil war and sectarian proliferation” (p. 414).

Como’s methods are prosopography and traditional intellectual history. In painstaking detail he traces the personal connections between antinomians (and, in some cases, their mainstream puritan associates). This has required trawling through many court cases, sermons, tracts, and letters. Surprisingly, though, he does not put much flesh on those connections; readers are not given much sense of the nature of antinomian sociability, for example. Como also identifies two major strands of antinomian doctrine — the perfectionist view, heavily indebted to the Family of Love, which held that believers had merged with God and that God saw no sin in believers; and the imputative view, closer to the ideas of Martin Luther and mainstream Puritanism, which saw Christ’s sacrifice as freeing believers from the burden of sin (pp. 38–40). While Como labours bravely to elucidate patterns in antinomian thought, much of it defies categorization, with preachers such as Brearly taking ideas from both strains. If nothing else, antinomians were consistently inconsistent, and some of the ink Como spills in trying to make them look consistent might have been better used in giving the reader signposts connected to his general thesis.

This highlights the major weakness of this book — it reads too much like a PhD thesis (out of which it grew) and not enough like a monograph. Certainly it is based on a great deal of research, and the topic is important due to the light it sheds on the impact of Laudianism and the religious context of the English Civil War. But Como could have used a good editor. In general, he writes thematically rather than chronologically, and there is nothing wrong with that, except that several of his themes overlap to the extent that he ends up repeating himself, making this book much longer than it needed to be. Perhaps it is good that each chapter can stand on its own, but it makes the book a bit of a plod for those who read it cover to cover. The author of a work such as this, which includes a prologue and an introduction, as well as an epilogue followed by a conclusion and five appendices, seems determined to include every possible element. Unfortunately, such determination may blunt its impact.

Michael Graham  
*University of Akron*

COOK, Hera — *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800–1975*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. xiii, 412.

This book is about “contraception and sexuality”: “[T]he relevant physical sexual event is heterosexual penetrative penile-vaginal intercourse. For variety, this act is also referred to as coitus, intercourse, penetrative intercourse, sexual intercourse, and sex” (p. 5). Hera Cook approaches the subject by arguing that one can — indeed, one must — begin the discussion by referring to demographic statistics: “alterations in