

ANTINOMIANISM (Greek ἄντι- [anti]—against; νόμος [nomos]—custom, moral law)—a heretical Christian doctrine that rejects the law of the Old Testament (the decalogue); in a broader sense, a position that undermines the basis of ethical norms or denies their universality.

The term antinomianism was used for the first time by M. Luther to describe John Agricola's position on the role of the decalogue in the Church (the antinomian controversy in the years 1537–1540). As Agricola explained matters, love for Christ rather than a norm should a Christian's only motive for acting, and since this is so the law is unnecessary; the state of grace is opposed to the order of law (the law of the Old Testament). Antinomianism in this sense was theoretical in character and had nothing in common with amoralism (practical antinomianism). However, a doctrine that rejected moral law (the decalogue, natural law, and the law of custom) on the basis of a pseudo-Christian doctrine appeared much earlier.

Antinomianism appeared first in apostolic times among groups that had an anti-Judaistic attitude. It arose from a false explanation of St. Paul's words (St. Peter writes of this—2 Pet 3, 15–16), which would seem to suggest a rejection of the Law of the Old Testament (“Without the Law, sin was dead” Rom 7, 8). The Apostle was merely showing that the law (or norm) makes man aware of evil (it does not evoke evil). St. Paul was showing rather that the Law was imperfect and explained that the performance of the deeds commanded by the Law does not assure man of salvation if this is not accompanied by the action of God's grace (Rom 5, 20; 6, 14; 7, 5–25, and 1 Cor 15, 56, and Gal 3, 1). The followers of antinomianism wrongly interpreted these words and began to teach that man plays no part in salvation, but salvation is the result of divine intervention (revelation-knowledge, action-grace). A consequence of this conviction was the rejection of the existing law of the Old Testament, including the decalogue. The Nicolaitans, disciples of the deacon Nicholas, are mentioned by St. John in the Apocalypse (2, 6; 15) and were among of the first to reject the Law. They added to their arguments for antinomianism the postulate of contempt for the body (“the body should be abused”, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, II 118, 4), which they interpreted in the spirit of hedonism.

Some Gnostics of the second and third century were also antinomians. Gnostic antinomianism also found support in the theory of the existence of two Gods that followed from their dualism (the opposition of the elements of spirit-good and matter-evil). The Gnostics thought that there was a good God who created the spiritual world, and an evil God who created the material world. They explained their acceptance of two causes or principles by saying that from the Good only good may result, and from Evil only evil. Many Gnostics identified the demiurge who created the world with the Old Testament God Yahweh (these Gnostics included Carpocrates, Saturninus, Marcion, the Cainites, and the Ophites). They recommended the rejection of the law established by God as a condition of salvation and purification (e.g., Carpocrates believed that Yahweh established the law to enslave man and subordinate man to himself; Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, I, 25, 6). A consequence of the Gnostics' rejection of the Law was their dissolute customs (Carpocratians, Basilidians, Antitactae, and Cainites) which were justified by a peculiar theory of catharsis (man can purify his soul of passions only by yielding to them—Epiphaneus and Isidore; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* II 113, 3; III 2, 2–3)—another consequence was the asceticism (Marcion, Saturninus) of some Gnostics, just as the “biblical” antinomians appealed to the idea of grace and to human nature (to which sin is alien).

The Manicheans also proclaimed antinomianism (third to sixth centuries). In theology and philosophy they continued the Gnostic tradition and like the Gnostics rejected all law—natural and revealed—regarding it as the work of Satan; Manichean antinomianism was theoretical in character and the Manichean way of life was marked by radical asceticism. The Priscillians in the fourth century proclaimed similar views. In the Middle Ages the followers of antinomianism came from Manicheanism and included the Bogomili (tenth century), the Paulicians (seventh to fourteenth century), and the Albigensians. In the sixteenth century the disciples of John Agricola, the Eislebians and the English Puritans, proclaimed the so-called theory of predestination. In the nineteenth century antinomianism was reborn in a secular version in the philosophy of F. Nietzsche: the end to which man should strive is the ideal of the superman (this category recalls Anthropos, the divine man of the Gnostics), but someone could come close to this ideal by rejecting Christian ethics (this ethics only makes man's status as a slave stronger); no objective foundations for moral norms exist.

H. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, T 1949, 117–218; R. Rogers, *The Moral Philosophy of Nietzsche*, *The Personalist* 46 (1965), 18–38; R. Gronemeyer, *Zur Frage nach dem paulinischen Antinomianismus*, H 1970; F. Drączkowski, *Niektóre tendencje i zasady pierwszych wspólnot heterodoksyjnych na podstawie "Stromatów Klemensa Aleksandryjskiego* [Certain tendencies and principles of the first heterodox communities on the basis of the "Stromateis" of Clement of Alexandria], *RTK* 23 (1976) n. 4, 55–84.

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