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Nicolas Bourgès



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Defining Heresy: the Controversy between James Foster and Henry Stebbing (1735- 1737)

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Nicolas Bourgès

- 1 Eighteenth-century Britain was the scene of many religious debates. The controversies of Exeter or Bangor saw many searing comments exchanged, and the dispute between James Foster and Henry Stebbing was no exception. James Foster (1697-1753) was a Baptist minister who recognized reason and morality as two key features to understand religion.¹ Henry Stebbing ([1687]-1763) was a high Church Anglican divine who engaged in many heated arguments with Dissenters, Freethinkers and Methodists.²
- 2 Every title page of Stebbing's pamphlets displays his position as Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty³ and Preacher to the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn. Both titles are evocative of authority, since they remind the reader of his attachment to the established Church through his function in the service of the monarch - who was granted the title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England through the Act of Supremacy (1559). Gray's Inn was one of the four Inns of Court which brought together the barristers of England and Wales. From the start, Stebbing asserts his prominent role and underlines his orthodox position as a representative of two powerful and recognized institutions of the country. Indeed, the Church of England, through the dogmas enunciated in the Thirty-Nine Articles, claimed to be the guardian and protector of the Christian faith. In other words, the source of religious authority in Britain was to be found in the established Church; the Dissenters, whose Puritan ancestors had refused to subscribe to Anglican dogmas and ceremonies at the Restoration (1660), did not enjoy the same legitimacy. In this respect, Foster's position on the Trinity, which he considered not to be '*one of the Fundamentals of the Christian Religion*', stood in opposition to the Church of England's First Article.⁴

- 3 From the perspective of the State, the Clarendon Code had imposed harsh conditions on Nonconformists – the Act of Uniformity (1662) making the Book of Common Prayer compulsory for Church services, and the Conventicle Act (1664) forbidding the gathering of more than five people who did not belong to the established Church were but two instances of legal measures aimed at preventing dissenting groups from practising their faith. Furthermore, as a result of the Test Act of 1673, communion according to the Anglican rite was imposed on anyone seeking public office. The Toleration Act of 1689 authorized Dissenters to worship freely in exchange for taking the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy (thus recognizing the monarch's authority), subscribing to the Trinity and rejecting transubstantiation. But this act did not prevent Dissenting meetinghouses from being destroyed in 1710, after Dr Sacheverell had denounced them in his famous sermon of November 1709. Thus the authorities resorted to legal measures which underscored the close ties between, and mutual acknowledgement of, Church and State. In 1736, at the time of the Foster-Stebbing controversy, the repeal of the Test Act was discussed in Parliament, an indication that the debate about the status of Dissenters was still vivid at the time.
- 4 Another historical aspect that needs to be taken into account is the renewed vigour, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, of Arianism and Socinianism,⁵ both of which were denounced by several authors.⁶ Obviously, the issue of orthodoxy and heresy was part of the preoccupations of the time. Many Anglican ecclesiastics wanted to reassert the pre-eminence of their Church. Thus, Henry Stebbing's implicit goal is to denounce Foster's misreadings of the Bible in order to prove that the prerogative of interpretation lies with the Church of England. The confrontation between the Baptist preacher and the Anglican churchman crystallizes around two antagonistic methods of Bible interpretation which will be analyzed through a fourfold outline. First, Foster's initial position on heresy, which is at the origin of the controversy, will be delineated. Foster's and Stebbing's contrasting views and definitions of this notion will then be tackled, before addressing the way both ecclesiastics try to get the better of each other through an examination of their rhetorical strategies. The last section will study how Stebbing argues to preserve the legitimacy and authority of the Church of England from what he looks upon as the danger of Dissent, and how Foster reacts.

James Foster's initial sermon

- 5 The controversy between Foster and Stebbing hinges upon conflicting definitions of the word 'heresy'. Originally the word has a neutral sense in Greek. The root, '*haires*', means 'choice', and the meaning evolved to signify 'constitution of a group' or 'sect', without any negative connotation. It was only at the time when the Christian Church was forming that the word was used with a pejorative meaning: that of a dogma running counter to the official creed of the Church. Thus the term was used to promote one form of belief against the others, which were deemed heretical because they endangered society.⁷ The first centuries of the Christian Church were marked by persecutions and executions of martyrs, especially in the Roman Empire, until the Edict of Milan, signed by Emperors Constantine and Licinius in 313 AD, enforced religious toleration.
- 6 What could be the meaning of heresy in eighteenth-century Britain? James Foster delivered a sermon on this subject, which was published in 1732.⁸ His preaching is

based on a quotation from the Pauline epistle to Titus, who christianized the Roman province of Crete during the first century AD after becoming a convert himself. Along with the two epistles to Timothy, the letter to Titus is part of Paul's pastoral epistles since all of them address the relationship between Christians within their own community. Paul explains to Titus that Christians, being gifted with the visit of the Holy Spirit, have to live accordingly. Foster quotes the following verses: '*A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself*'.⁹ Foster explains what has nurtured the development of controversies around the notion of heresy in the history of the Church: it has '*divided, and consequently weaken'd, the interests of our holy religion, and expos'd it to the scorn and insults of unbelievers*'.¹⁰ Thus he suggests that heresy became synonymous with condemnation and opprobrium, sparking divisions within the Christian Church.

- 7 To try and define the term more precisely, Foster adopts a historical perspective, saying that the word initially had '*an indifferent sense*'.¹¹ In earlier times, the word 'heresy' was a statement of fact, hinting at the existence of various groups with no reference to dogmatic differences. Foster remains faithful to the etymological sense, thus conforming to a literal interpretation of the Bible typical of Baptists.¹² His definition of 'a heretic' is as follows: '*One that sets up to be the head, or choses to join himself to a particular religious sect*'.¹³
- 8 According to Foster, sinning comes down to acting with an ill intention.¹⁴ The moral and religious dimensions are inseparable in his discourse. The emphasis is laid upon individual responsibility and the attitude consisting of willingly and deliberately performing actions to further one's ambition – hence his denunciation of pride. He takes care to make a distinction between 'heresy' and 'a heretic', between the sect and the individual. This distinction is important: while heresy is devoid of negative connotations, the heretic is represented as evil by Foster. He embodies the glorification of the self, personal ambition valued above everything else. Foster's sermon provoked Henry Stebbing to make a reply, which paved the way for a controversy over the meaning of heresy.

Divisions over the definition of heresy

- 9 Stebbing's answer flatly contradicts Foster. For the Anglican divine, the meaning of words depends on the intention of the person who uses them.¹⁵ Therefore Stebbing draws a distinction between Foster's intention (when using the word 'heresy') and what he calls the latter's '*Inventions*'.¹⁶ He underlines the methodological problem at stake with Foster's way of reading the Bible and, to make his point, summons three instances taken from the New Testament which stand at the core of the controversy:
- 10 - 'For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you' (1 Cor 11:19),
 - 'For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes'(Acts 24:5),
 - 'But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against' (Acts 28:5).
- 11 According to Stebbing, the word 'heresy' can only have a negative meaning in these contexts.¹⁷ Foster's reading is inappropriate because it is too literal and discards the criticisms of heresy that the above quotations contain. Stebbing historicizes the Biblical

text by considering that it can be properly analyzed only by taking into account all the relevant contextual elements, as evinced in the following question: *'But how is it possible, Sir, that a Word should retain its general Meaning, when it is distinguished by Circumstances which limit it to a particular State?'*¹⁸

- 12 Stebbing points out Foster's contradictions.¹⁹ To Stebbing, the discourse of his adversary contains a number of flaws and inaccuracies which make his argumentation invalid and detrimental to the Church. Stebbing, as an orthodox member of the Church of England, staunchly defends its authority. He relies on a historical precedent: *'For the separating Hereticks from Christian Fellowship was a standing Power in all Churches at that time, as it has been from that time to this Day'*.²⁰ Here he assumes that the established Church is the direct heir to the primitive Church, and, as such, has a right to exert the same rule as in apostolic times. He refers to other Pauline epistles to show that the Church he belongs to can identify those who distort the truth and dispose of them to protect itself.²¹
- 13 Stebbing keeps reiterating that meaning is context-dependent. Text and history inform the precise meaning that can be attributed to words. Thus Stebbing implicitly accuses Foster of arbitrarily giving an *'indifferent'* – or neutral – meaning to a word that has traditionally been endowed with negative associations. Stebbing adopts a broader perspective, since, rather than focusing on the words used by Paul to define who a heretic is, he concentrates on the general notion of heresy. Thus a comparison of those approaches suggests a discrepancy between an individual-oriented definition (Foster) and a conceptual one (Stebbing), which may explain why the controversy dragged on for such a long time.
- 14 Going back to Paul's verses in the epistle to Titus, Foster sets up a threefold definition of 'a heretic', arguing that the latter falls prey to subversion, sin, and self-condemnation.²² He defines the process of subversion as *'turning aside from the true faith'*.²³ Sin is attributable to the will, not the understanding: the heretics' minds *'are perverted [from an honest and impartial pursuit of truth] by irregular dispositions and appetites; and [...] have resolv'd to sacrifice Truth, and Virtue, to the gratification of their sensual desires'*.²⁴ Foster pinpoints the essential role of the conscience by stressing that man can only fall a victim to temptation knowingly. Hence his comments on the subject in a specific section about the meaning of the phrase *'condemned of himself'*. Here, Foster reminds the reader of Stebbing's analysis, according to which an outside judge must intervene to condemn the heretic (*'to condemn or pass sentences against a person, as a Judge doth'*).²⁵ The Baptist preacher offers a counter-analysis, asserting that *'the person of whom that word is spoken, does himself perform the action, express'd by it'*.²⁶ Therefore there is no outside agent forcing a man to prove himself wrong; it is a case of self-condemnation. This section in Foster's letter is a way for him to denounce Stebbing's arbitrary stance. This controversy underlines the diverging conceptions of truth that both men have, since each of them is convinced to hold the true account of the meaning of heresy. Where Foster puts forward a vision of truth based on a personal interpretation, Stebbing reminds him that it is the collective body of the Church that is ultimately responsible for defining who a heretic is: *'Who are Hereticks in such a Sense, as will justify the Church in excluding them from the Privileges of visible Communion?'*²⁷ Foster answers with another question: *'Who are the Heretics spoken of and condemned in the New Testament, and whom St. Paul hath particularly described, and directed Titus to reject?'*²⁸ Both

men share the idea of identifying the heretics as a necessity, but Stebbing calls attention to the ultimate purpose: preserving the cohesion of the Church.

- 15 Foster finally defines what self-condemnation is in his view: *'The knowledge of mens hearts, [i.e. of their inward Sentiments and Intentions] communicated to them by the Holy Spirit'*.²⁹ He equates the spirit and the heart, quoting the Acts of the Apostles as evidence that they themselves exercised this gift to spot falsehood. Foster's methodology relies on cross-references: he endeavours to show that this gift already existed in the apostolic age thanks to an accumulation of scriptural instances. Stebbing retorts that such a rule is inapplicable because no human being can understand the heart of man – only God can.³⁰ Therefore he rejects Foster's argument concerning discerning spirits because it deprives the Church of its power to excommunicate. This argument shows Stebbing's orthodox vision of the Church whereby it exerts the ultimate ecclesiastical authority. Foster is interested in the moral purport of the word 'heresy', whereas Stebbing asserts its dogmatic aspect. Both men stand firm. This controversy about the meaning of heresy reveals not only two differing visions of the notion, but also a ruthless battle of two clerics vying for the truth through fierce attacks.

Arguing about heresy: rhetorical strategies

- 16 Foster and Stebbing criticize each other's methods and personalities. The former blames the latter for his *'groundless insinuations'*³¹ and for being *'captious and litigious'*.³² He also finds fault with his *'petulance, dictatorial airs, and academic pertness and puerility'*,³³ as well as his *'arrogant airs'*.³⁴ Meanwhile Stebbing reproaches Foster with taking on *'an Air of great importance'*.³⁵ He also takes him to task for his lack of intellectual rigour: *'There is a great deal yet to be done before your Interpretation can be made to stand upon firm ground'*.³⁶
- 17 These attacks exemplify the scathing nature of their exchanges. Their dispute hinges on the status of error. They both claim to hold and defend the truth about the definition of heresy and its implications for the Christian community. Foster and Stebbing state that they have the public's interests in mind, and the vehemence of the confrontation enables each writer to establish that his adversary is no credible interpreter of the Bible. The debate reaches a deadlock because each polemicist uses the same arguments treatise after treatise to defend his point of view. The personal and dogmatic aspects of the controversy are interlocked. This dispute offers the instance of a battle of words based on personal convictions which are used to depict the adversary's claims as mere conjectures.
- 18 Still related to the matter of interpretation, another feature of Stebbing's method consists in calling for evidence. When Foster tries to put forward an argument, it is shaky at best in his opinion. Stebbing constantly challenges him to produce arguments based on strong grounds. In addition to being a challenger, Stebbing comes off as the one invested with authority, when he writes for instance: *'When you will produce better, it may be considered'*.³⁷ Foster replies by deploring a *'loose'*³⁸ and *'ambiguous'*³⁹ discourse on Stebbing's part, suggesting that the latter's rationale is inconclusive. The Anglican cleric is presented as refusing to provide any precise definition of faith and heresy, which means that the reader is at a loss to understand his position.
- 19 Another reason that accounts for such an endless controversy is the main question around which each reply revolves. In the second series of letters, Stebbing writes: *'For*

the point here is not, Whom, or how far the Laws of the Church bind; but, Whom the Church is to reject'.⁴⁰ The focus is not on Church polity but on membership: who must be part of the religious community? This notion is important to Stebbing since it implies the acknowledgement of a number of values shared by all members. Foster's rejoinder is as follows: *'I repeat it again, that the single question, which we are debating, is, who are these heretics, not who are to be debarred from the communion of the church*'.⁴¹ From the very first pages, the debate starts off from two different perspectives, which makes it impossible for Foster and Stebbing to reach any common ground, since they have two different visions of the problem at hand.

Anglicanism versus Dissent

- 20 Stebbing's definitions of heresy are deemed too loose by Foster, which paves the way for his defence of Dissenting Churches: *'Can any man be really a Sinner by offending against Church order and discipline, if he is not oblig'd to believe in all points as the Church believes, and to submit to her authority and discipline implicitly?'*⁴² Through this comment Foster lambasts the attitude of the established Church towards Dissenters. The latter cannot be marginalized and dealt with as though they were heretical.⁴³ They are also Protestant Churches which should not be precluded from worship because they favour a personal interpretation of the sacred texts. On the other hand, Stebbing clearly accuses Foster – and Dissenters at large – of undermining the authority of the established Church:

I cannot therefore perceive to whom Mr. Foster has done a pleasure by these his worthy Labours, unless it be to the common Enemies of the Gospel, who may find Cause enough to triumph, when they see those who profess themselves Preachers of the Gospel pulling down the Fences and Outguards of Christianity with their own Hands.⁴⁴

- 21 Here, Stebbing is portraying them as heretics for usurping interpretative authority and conveying wrong messages about the Bible, especially the New Testament.
- 22 In 1735, during the controversy between Foster and Stebbing, two men published essays to vent their views about the meaning that the word 'heresy' should be given, which enabled them to take sides in the dispute. In *A Critical Dissertation on Titus iii.10,11*, Tipping Silvester (1700-1768), the vicar of Shabbington (in Buckinghamshire), explains that the Church, as a constituted society, is entitled to protect its dogma by ridding itself of men who profess erroneous ideas. The scriptural basis is an important argument in his demonstration, and he defends the Church of England, thus implicitly Stebbing. For Silvester, the word 'heresy' carries a negative meaning.⁴⁵ Likewise in his *Letter to Mr. Foster*, probably published the same year, he defends the univocal way in which heresy is defined by Stebbing.⁴⁶ The message sent to Foster is that of a united Church determined to protect itself from heretics who would defile Christ's legacy. Foster is accused of resorting to passions, in contrast to Stebbing, the representative of the Anglican Church who uses reason and scripture, thus making his arguments unassailable. According to Silvester, the heretic, who is fully responsible for his attitude, deliberately takes the risk of being excluded from the Church:

For if they profess Jesus Christ, and maintain and endeavour to propagate Opinions, contrary to his Doctrines, whatsoever they may think of those Opinions thro' Errors, contracted by Sins of any kind, Delusions of Satan, or Infirmities, they plainly blaspheme that Name, which they profess to acknowledge; and by their

Inconsistency in themselves, are condemn'd of themselves: Which is according to our former Explication an Act, by which they lay themselves under that Penalty, in which the Church would have condemn'd them. For they separate themselves. Thus being subverted from the Faith, having once embrac'd it, they may therein sin, tho sincere in their Delusion, and be self-condemn'd: Which particulars complete the Character of the Apostle's Heretick.⁴⁷

- 23 On the other hand, Caleb Fleming (1698-1779), a Dissenting minister who preached at the Independent church of Pinner's Hall in London, thinks that the word 'heresy' as used in the New Testament bears no negative meaning, thus concurring with Foster⁴⁸. To him the heretic's attitude has moral implications, as it questions the truth of religion and traditional conceptions of vice and virtue.

Conclusion

- 24 The controversy between James Foster and Henry Stebbing proved to be extremely intense while growing acrimonious as time went by. It appears as a lesson in exegesis combined with a criticism of each other's Churches. From three Pauline quotations they discuss what a heretic and heresy are without ever agreeing on the meaning of these words. Noticeably, orthodoxy is never clearly defined in the course of the controversy, except in reference to the authority of the Bible, the main problem being its interpretation. These clerics' texts are replete with repetitions and personal attacks. Stebbing acts as a mouthpiece for the Church of England, evincing his will to proclaim and protect the authority of the institution he belongs to. No clear victor emerges from this textual battle, which illustrates the tensions between the established Church and Dissenters during the eighteenth century.

NOTES

1. An account of Foster's life can be read in William TURNER, *Lives of Eminent Unitarians: With a Notice of Dissenting Academies*, London: The Unitarian Association, 1840, pp. 164-200. See also Leslie STEPHEN & rev. Jim BENEDICT, 'Foster, James (1697-1753), preacher and General Baptist minister', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9958?docPos=21>>. About the history of Baptists during the eighteenth century, see Raymond BROWN, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986.
2. For biographical details, see B.W. YOUNG, 'Stebbing, Henry ([1687]-1763), Church of England clergyman and religious controversialist', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26335?docPos=1>>.
3. Stebbing was appointed to that position in 1732.
4. James FOSTER, *An Essay on Fundamentals, with a Particular Regard to the Doctrine of the Ever-Blessed Trinity*, London, 1720, p. 4. The First Article reads: 'There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost'.

5. Arianism appeared during the fourth century AD. Holding the idea that the Son of God is subordinate to the Father, it was condemned as a heresy at the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). Socinianism is a sixteenth-century heresy according to which Christ is not consubstantial with God, thus denying the Son's divinity. For details about the evolution of each doctrine, see Herbert John McLACHLAN, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951; Maurice WILES, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism Through the Centuries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996; Sarah MORTIMER, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
6. ANON., *A Brief History of the Revival of the Arian Heresie in England since the Reformation*, London, 1711; ANON., *A Vindication of the Orthodox Faith and Doctrine of the Church of England, Against the Arrian [sic] and Socinian Heresies*, London, [1718?]; Sir Richard BLACKMORE, *Modern Arians Unmask'd*, London, 1721.
7. For details about the acceptation of the word and its evolution in the first centuries, see Paul ASVELD, « Orthodoxie et hérésie », in Christiane d'HAUSSY (ed.), *Orthodoxie et hérésie*, Paris : Didier Érudition, 1993, pp. 17-24; Harold O. J. BROWN, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998, pp. 1-5; Alister McGRATH, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth*, London: SPCK, 2009, pp. 37-39.
8. James FOSTER, 'Sermon XI. Of Heresy', in James FOSTER, *Sermons on the Following Subjects*, London, 1732, pp. 283-309.
9. Titus 3:10-11.
10. FOSTER, *Sermons*, p. 286.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
12. Ernest Gordon RUPP, *Religion in England: 1688-1791*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 129.
13. FOSTER, *Sermons*, p. 290.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
15. Henry STEBBING, *A Letter to Mr. Foster on the Subject of Heresy*, London, 1735, p. 7.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
18. Henry STEBBING, *A Second Letter to Mr. Foster on the Subject of Heresy, in Answer to his First*, London, 1735, p. 12.
19. STEBBING, *A Letter to Mr. Foster*, p. 12.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
21. He quotes 2 Thess 3:14, Rom 16:18 and 2 Tim 2:17. There is an implicit hint at the Thirty-Nine Articles which are the founding principles of the Church of England. Article XXXIII is especially relevant to the context: 'Of Excommunicated Persons, how they are to be avoided. That persons which by open denunciation of the Church is rightly cut off from the unity of the Church and excommunicated, ought to be taken of the whole multitude of the faithful as an heathen and publican, until he be openly reconciled by penance and received into the Church by a judge that hath authority thereto'.
22. James FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Letter on the Subject of Heresy. In a Letter to the Doctor*, London, 1735, p. 21.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
27. Henry STEBBING, *A Second Letter to Mr. Foster*, p. 4.
28. James FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Second Letter on the Subject of Heresy. In which the Whole Controversy is Fairly Stated and Re-Examined*, London, 1736, p. 2.
29. FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Letter*, p. 38.
30. STEBBING, *A Second Letter to Mr. Foster*, p. 50.
31. FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Letter*, p. 3.

32. James FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's True State of the Controversy with Mr. Foster, On the Subject of Heresy*, London, 1737, p. 38.
33. FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Letter*, p. 2.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
35. Henry STEBBING, *A True State of the Controversy with Mr. Foster, On the Subject of Heresy; in Answer to his Second Letter*, London, 1736, p. 2.
36. STEBBING, *A Letter to Mr. Foster*, p. 26.
37. STEBBING, *A Second Letter to Mr. Foster*, p. 54.
38. FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's True State of the Controversy with Mr. Foster*, p. 8.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
40. STEBBING, *A Second Letter to Mr. Foster*, p. 72.
41. FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Second Letter*, p. 8.
42. FOSTER, *An Answer to Dr. Stebbing's Letter*, p. 61.
43. Dissenting Churches were losing members as some of them decided to join the Anglican Church. See Michael R. WATTS, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, vol. 1 ('*From the Reformation to the French Revolution*'), pp. 384-386.
44. Henry STEBBING, *A Reply to Mr. Foster's Answer to The True State of the Controversy on the Subject of Heresy*, London, 1737, p. 21.
45. Tipping SILVESTER, *A Critical Dissertation on Titus iii. 10,11. Wherein Mr. Foster's Notion of Heresy is Consider'd, and Confuted. And the Power of the Church to Censure Hereticks is Vindicated*, London, 1735, p. 9.
46. Tipping SILVESTER, *A Letter to Mr. Foster, Occasioned by His Second Letter to Dr. Stebbing, On the Point of Heresy*, London, [1735?].
47. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
48. Caleb FLEMING, *St. Paul's Heretic: or, Several Characteristics of an Heretic. Collected from St. Paul's Epistle to Titus: Address'd to the Reverend Dr. Stebbing, and the Reverend Mr. Foster*, London, 1735, p. 24.

ABSTRACTS

From 1735 to 1737 the Baptist preacher James Foster (1697-1753) faced the orthodox Anglican Henry Stebbing ([1687]-1763) in a controversy over the definition of heresy. Their dispute reveals two distinct methods of Bible interpretation and throws light on the tensions prevailing in the eighteenth century between the established Church and Dissent, which is represented as a danger to Anglican orthodoxy by Stebbing.

Le prédicateur baptiste James Foster (1697-1753) et l'anglican Henry Stebbing ([1687]-1763), partisan de l'orthodoxie, s'affrontent sur la définition de l'hérésie au cours d'une controverse qui a lieu entre 1735 et 1737. Celle-ci met en évidence deux méthodes d'interprétation biblique distinctes et illustre les tensions qui règnent au XVIII^e siècle entre l'Église établie et les dissidents, que Stebbing présente comme un danger pour l'orthodoxie anglicane.

AUTHOR

NICOLAS BOURGÈS

Université Paris-Sorbonne