

John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Battle for Calvin in Later-Seventeenth-Century England¹

TIM COOPER

Tim Cooper is Associate Professor of Church History in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He earned his PhD from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. He is the author of *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Ashgate, 2011) and *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Ashgate, 2001).

In 1985 J. Wayne Baker offered an account of “the battle for Luther in seventeenth-century England.” That battle did not go well. By the end of the century “the very idea of justification *sola fide, sola gratia* was in bad repute.” Residual support for his soteriology existed mainly in small pockets within Nonconformity. Luther’s influence “slowly but surely had been eroded among the English clergy in the space of one century.”² If Baker had focused on John Calvin the story would have been just as bleak. As G. R. Cragg famously put it, there was no more striking change in English religious thought than what he called “the overthrow of Calvinism.” “At the beginning of the century, it had dominated the religious life of England; by the end its power had been completely overthrown.”³ While the reality was not quite as stark as that, the downward trajectory is undeniable.

It is easy enough to trace the main outlines of Calvin’s decline. Nicholas Tyacke has long since demonstrated that an initial Calvinist dominance within the theology of the Church of England faced the challenge of a rising

Arminianism during the 1620s and 1630s. The chaos of the 1640s together with the failure of Puritan rule during the 1650s served to discredit Calvinism, which was, ever after, associated in the minds of many with sedition, disorder, impiety, fanaticism and rebellion.⁴ At the same time Socinianism came increasingly to the fore within intellectual circles. Socinians read the Scriptures in a uniformly flat way to dissolve what they perceived as an imposed doctrinal overlay of Trinitarian Christology, all of which had ominous implications for soteriology.⁵ The glimmerings of an early Enlightenment appeared in a new confidence in human reason—illustrated by the Cambridge Platonists with their “quiet Arminianism”—and a broad shift of emphasis from grace to nature. Latitudinarians focused on human reason, natural truths and moral duties in preference to obscure points of doctrine.⁶ Thus growing numbers of English thinkers and theologians felt that it was improper and distasteful to pry into hidden mysteries such as predestination and election, and preferred to leave in the past any memory of religious enthusiasm. We should not be surprised, then, to find that Calvinist doctrine was marginal to England’s national, religious and intellectual life by the later seventeenth century.⁷ As Dewey Wallace explains, the “Reformed or Calvinist consensus generally acknowledged to have prevailed in the Reformation Church of England up to the time of Charles I and Archbishop Laud had faded by the era of the Restoration, partly discredited by the putative disorder of Puritan rule, as Calvinism lost prestige and authority.”⁸

What interests me is that Calvinism declined not just among the population at large but also among those whom we might expect to hold them fast: the Puritans. They did not reside some intellectual backwater where they were immune to these more general developments. Thus Calvinism declined even among the Puritans. To quote Wallace once more, the Calvinist view of predestination, “apparently so plausible to an earlier generation [of Puritans], was a rock of offence to many by the middle of the seventeenth century,”⁹ and they had to confront that reality. In response, Puritans evolved and adapted their own positions in at least three ways.

First, they could, like the London Puritan minister, John Goodwin, abandon Calvinism altogether and go over to Arminianism. In *Redemption Redeemed*, published in 1651, he argued the case for a universal atonement. He could no longer accept that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination as it had been developed was consistent with either Scripture or God’s nature,

and he disliked its inclination towards Antinomianism.¹⁰

A second response was to moderate one's Calvinism. Here Richard Baxter "contributed significantly to the changing theological climate in the middle of the century."¹¹ Tying into an earlier tradition of English hypothetical universalism he reshaped Calvinism in a more rational, synergistic, moralistic direction by introducing a central place for human responsibility and covenant conditions alongside God's infallible election.¹² Baxter was central to a circle of Puritan figures such as Roger Morrice, William Bates, John Howe, and Daniel Williams who have come down to us as "Baxterians," Nonconformists who accommodated human agency and obedience in the economy of salvation.¹³ Mark Goldie sees this as a Presbyterian "retreat from Calvinism."¹⁴ By the end of the century the Presbyterians were taking steps towards Arminianism and even Socinianism, and that was largely due to Baxterian influence.¹⁵

A third response was to hold the line and to defend Calvinism for all it was worth, though not without some inevitable adaptation. This has come down to us as "high Calvinism." Here "John Owen was the foremost expositor of high Calvinism in England in the second half of the seventeenth century."¹⁶ But, like Baxter, he was not alone. The Westminster Assembly served to codify and partly revivify Reformed theology in England; and that fed into the Congregationalist Savoy Confession of 1658, and the Particular Baptist Confession of 1677 (and 1689). More generally, the demise of Calvinism triggered a significant number of defenses and rich restatements of Reformed theology, many of them prefaced by Owen.¹⁷

So a range of responses lay open. In this article I want to suggest a few of the mechanisms that might account for the internal dynamics of those responses. I will begin in the mid-1670s, when the writings of William Sherlock and George Bull triggered an extended moment of particular controversy. To give some sense of perspective, Christopher Haigh has been doing some counting:

By now it was open house on justification and everyone joined in: between 1675 and 1680 fifty-three works relating to the justification controversy were published, by thirty-four different authors, including our old friends Baxter (six books), Owen (three), [Simon] Patrick (two), [Vincent] Alsop (two) and [Edward] Fowler ... The debate was at its hottest in 1675 and 1676, with eighteen and

eleven books respectively, and then things cooled down, with six in 1677, eight in 1678, two in 1679, and a late burst of eight in 1680.¹⁸

I have no intention of dealing with all of those authors, let alone all their books. Instead, I will focus only on John Owen and Richard Baxter and only on a very small number of their works. I would like to borrow from Tony Lane the language of “concerns,” which he uses in the context of contemporary Catholic-Protestant dialogue. “It is important to pay attention not just to the doctrines put forward by each side but also to the *concerns* that underlie those doctrines. If each side can be brought to understand and value the concerns of the other, considerable progress can be made.”¹⁹ It is too late now, of course, to orchestrate some sort of ecumenical dialogue between Owen and Baxter, but it will help us to understand their part in this controversy if we appreciate the concerns that compelled them. I will argue that each man’s concern was quite different from that of the other. And I would like to go further still and to ask why each man had the concern that he did. In other words, I hope to push past concern to get to motivation. To some degree the exercise will inevitably involve a degree of speculation, but it is also potentially helpful, and certainly interesting.

IDENTIFYING THE CHIEF “CONCERNS” OF RICHARD BAXTER AND JOHN OWEN

It is not difficult to identify Baxter’s chief concern when he published *Catholick Theologie* in 1675, since it is right there on the title page: *Richard Baxter’s Catholick Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable: For Pacification of the Dogmatical Word-Warriours*. The title page signals a work in three parts: pacifying principles, pacifying praxis, pacifying disputations. Thus the book is a testament to Baxter’s consistent concern over the previous three decades for unity and concord, and testament to the apparent fruitlessness of all his efforts. The Preface to *Catholick Theologie* opens with this truth: “That the Churches of Christ are dolefully tempted and distracted by Divisions, no man will deny that knoweth them.”²⁰ The problem, as he had come to discern, was that the doctrinal controversies among Protestants were “far more about *equivocal words*, than *matter*.”²¹ All words are merely signs, and ambiguous ones at that. If the disputants could but see into each other’s minds they would

realize that they agreed in the substance of things even if they disagreed about the human language in which to express those shared truths. “And so taking *Verbal* differences for *Material*, doth keep up most of the wretched Academical and Theological Wars of the World.”²²

Baxter’s solution to this problem was twofold. First, he consistently advocated a minimalist creed as a test of orthodoxy: only the baptismal covenant and the Apostles’ Creed.²³ In doing so he avoided the multiplication of words that came with extended confessions and elaborate statements of orthodoxy. The fewer words involved and the more general their nature the less chance there was of misunderstanding over the sense of things those words were intended to convey. The second part of Baxter’s solution was this: if one really did have to use words, be very precise about how one was using them. So the first part of *Catholick Theologie* carefully dissected a long list of terms integral to the debate in an intricate philosophical discussion replete with Latin phrases and innumerable logical distinctions.

But this introduced a tension, if not an outright contradiction. In his Preface, Baxter complained that “humane formalities of wisdom have prevailed to bring the Scripture . . . into disesteem . . . as if Logical, Physical and Metaphysical trifling, were a higher matter.” He criticized “Scholars with *forms* and *notions* instead of knowledge.”²⁴ Yet so much of his book dealt in forms and notions. If the problem lay in a multiplication of words, it is difficult to see how anyone else in seventeenth-century England multiplied words more than Baxter, not least in *Catholick Theologie*. This is a blind spot of spectacular proportions but before we condemn him for it we should seek to understand his concerns. He entered into soteriological debate for essentially ecclesiological reasons: his overriding concern was Christian unity. He admitted at the end of his Preface that “I have meddled much with Controversies in this Book: but it is to end them.” There was never any hope of that, and certainly not with the self-defeating methods he chose to employ, but we can acknowledge his aim, which was genuine enough.

John Owen entered into soteriological debate for essentially soteriological reasons. In 1676 he published *The Nature of Apostasie from the Profession of the Gospel*. In explaining why he wrote the book, Owen opened with this truth: “That the state of Religion is at this day deplorable in most parts of the Christian World, is acknowledged by all.”²⁵ These opening words parallel those of Baxter but Owen’s frame of reference was quite different. Rather than fretting over

Christian division, he deplored England's retreat from the Protestant Reformation. His book was an exposition of Hebrews 6 with its stern warning to those who had once been enlightened now tempted to fall away. He lamented the "woeful declension from the Power and Purity of Evangelical Truth."²⁶ All around him people "grow weary of the Truths which have been possessed ever since the Reformation."²⁷ In his recollection of history the 39 Articles and the Book of Homilies encased Calvinism at the heart of the Church of England, where it stayed for the next sixty years until the Arminians came along to erode it. A new Pelagianism "did secretly and gradually insinuate it self into the Animal and vital Spirits of the Body of the Church in those dayes," followed by "the Leprosie of Socinianisme."²⁸ As a result, the Reformation "hath visibly and apparently lost its force, and gone backwards on all Accounts." Those to blame included not just the Catholics and Socinians but Reformed Protestants. "I shall instance onely in the known Doctrines of the Reformed Churches, aiming especially at what is of late years fallen out among our selves."²⁹ Here "Reformed Religion . . . is by not a few, so taken off from its old foundations, so unhinged from those Pillars of important Truths, which it did depend upon, and so sullied by a confused medly of Noysom Opinions, as that its loss in Reputation of Stability and Usefulness, seems almost irreparable."³⁰ There is a touch of the jeremiad about Owen's lament. As we have seen, in certain quarters there was a notable profusion of Calvinist publications. But we have also seen that he was right to be worried. Trinitarian orthodoxy in England was passing into eclipse. Thus he injected himself into the controversy over justification to try to haul England back from the brink of abandoning the Reformation altogether.

I am not suggesting that Baxter and Owen were targeting each other in their respective publications. Neither man mentioned the other explicitly and there were numerous other authors involved in the controversy. It is scarcely credible that Baxter did not have Owen at least partly in mind when he wrote his books, and the same can be said for Owen, but that is unimportant. What I am saying is that Baxter and Owen came into the controversy with different *concerns* in mind. And those different concerns shaped quite different lines of argument.

Let me illustrate what I mean. In 1677 Owen published *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed and Vindicated*. The book worked its way out from

Romans 11:6: if salvation “is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”³¹ Salvation rested either on what humans can show for themselves, their own repentance, obedience and works of righteousness, or on the obedience, righteousness and merit of Jesus Christ that is imputed to them.³² For the purposes of one’s justification before God they do not mix. Yet, as Owen observed, various authors had tried to blend them together. In doing so they had moved away from the clear truths of Scripture.³³ What they had done was to place human reason over Scripture, and make it the judge of Scripture.³⁴ As well as mixing human righteousness and Christ’s righteousness, they had mixed divine revelation with philosophical speculation.³⁵ The result was division, a point that echoed Baxter’s own concern, and “the truth for the most part, as unto the concernment of the souls of men therein, is utterly lost, and buried in the rubbish of senseless and unprofitable words.” “[N]o proposition can be so plain . . . but that a man ordinarily versed in *Pædagogical Terms* and *Metaphysical Notions*, may multiply distinctions on every word of it.” Such men construct an elaborate, tangled thicket, or as Owen put it, “they consider principally how they may entangle others, scarce at all how they may get out of it themselves.”³⁶

For that reason Owen resolved as far as possible to avoid “*Philosophical Terms and Distinctions*.”³⁷ At one point, in a moment of extended irony, he caricatured seven distinctions said to be necessary for understanding justification aright. For each distinction there were several more, the actual grounds of which only the most well-educated could discern. In Owen’s view, this led the poor, bewildered seeker away from the saving truths of the Bible into a set of impenetrable distinctions they could not possibly understand, and a set of distinctions that could not save. “My Enquiry,” says Owen, “is how I shall come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? how shall I escape the wrath to come? what shall I *plead in judgment* before God”? Those were questions of the greatest urgency, but if “I should be harnessed with a thousand of these *distinctions*, I am afraid they would prove Thorns and Briars, which [God] would pass through and consume.”³⁸

So where others, in Owen’s view, subjugated Scripture to the dictates of human reason, he appealed to Scripture alone, reinforced by experience. It is his emphasis on experience that I find so interesting. We have already seen how little help intricate philosophical distinctions were to the humble seeker. In his turn, Owen appealed only to “the Authority of God in Scripture;

rejoicing only in this, that we can set our seal unto his Revelations by our own Experience.”³⁹ “Every true Believer who is *taught of God*, knows how to put his whole trust in Christ alone, and the Grace of God by him.”⁴⁰ To suggest that salvation rests in the understanding of certain philosophical distinctions “answers not the *Experience* of them that truly believe.”⁴¹ It would avoid a great many problems “if men would attend to their own Experience in the application of their Souls unto God, for the pardon of Sin and Righteousness to Life.”⁴² Owen’s advice: keep to the Bible alone.

All other disputes about qualifications, conditions, causes, ... any kind of Interest for our own Works and Obedience in our Justification before God, are but the speculations of *men at ease*. The Conscience of a convinced sinner, who presents himself in the presence of God, finds all *practically* reduced unto this one point, namely, whether he will *trust* unto his own personal inherent Righteousness, or in a full Renuntiation of it, *betake* himself unto the Grace of God, and the Righteousness of Christ alone.⁴³

The only answer that could satisfy was the saving truth of the Bible; anything else was but the complacent “speculations of *men at ease*.”

To repeat my point, Owen could have had any number of authors in mind when he offered this extended critique, but it has to be said that Richard Baxter fitted the bill pretty well. In his first publication, the *Aphorismes of Justification*, published in 1649, Baxter had laid out a system of soteriology that distinguished between the “Legal Righteousness” that God supplies and the “Evangelical Righteousness” that the believer provides. This Evangelical Righteousness involved the sincere but imperfect performance of the gospel conditions, namely faith, which encompassed repentance, obedience and perseverance.⁴⁴ Right from the beginning Baxter blended Christ’s righteousness with the believer’s righteousness; and this was just the first of countless distinctions that Baxter offered up in the course of his long career, not least in *Catholick Theologie*, where they came thick and fast. In the course of that work Baxter tendered a typically half-hearted apology for minor infelicities in the *Aphorismes of Justification* but he stood by the doctrine it delivered.⁴⁵ Moreover, in 1676 Baxter engineered an affirmation of reason in *The Judgment of Non-conformists of the Interest of Reason in Matters of Religion*, signed by 15 men within his circle. Baxter seemed to be reinforcing those trends that

so worried Owen, not standing against them.

We are beginning to see that the two men were governed by quite different instincts. At the risk of being too simplistic, Owen's instinct was either/or. That is why Romans 11:6 sat so well with him. In his view, "every thing in and of ourselves under any consideration whatever, seems to be excluded from our Justification before God, Faith alone excepted whereby we receive his Grace and the Attonement."⁴⁶ But Baxter's instinct was not either/or, it was both/and. The second book in *Catholick Theologie* is a fascinating, fictional exchange that takes place over 13 days and 299 folio pages. It is a series of long discussions that traverse every aspect of the doctrine of justification. It is for the most part a discourse between A, B and C. A is an Arminian, C is a Calvinist, and B is, of course, Baxter, who styles himself throughout variously as the Reconciler, the Conciliator or the Peacemaker. He is determined to show A and C that there is no material difference between them. So one of B's earliest responses is this: "These are words of confusion, which, when opened, will appear nothing, and that we are all of a mind."⁴⁷ "My understanding is this," he says, "in the points of Predestination and Redemption, there is no difference between moderate men of each Party." At the surface level there may appear to be differences but look below that and "there is no real difference." Look below that again and there is "either no difference at all, or else . . . such as is not worthy to be insisted on."⁴⁸ Once again we see Baxter's overriding concern to bring about peace and concord. It is essential for him to show that despite their disagreement over words the moderates on both sides agree in the sense of things. In the wake of yet one more distinction, B says this to A: "If you understand the distinction aright, they say the same as you."⁴⁹ That is why the tools of philosophy were so important for Baxter's project. They helped to understand distinctions aright, and if that were possible the antagonists would see that they were in broad agreement. They would settle on a truce. At the beginning of the second day's conference, now between C and B, B explains how

these *factions*, and Church-dividing Contentions, come from a false conceit that each side is so dangerously erroneous, as that all good men must stir up their zeal, and with all their disputing-skill and contending-fervency must arm, to defend the Truth against them, and to save the Church and the Souls of men from the infection of their Error.⁵⁰

He might have been describing Owen at that point. Whatever the case, here B spoke of taking up arms in metaphorical terms, but elsewhere he was much more literal. Right at the beginning of the book he listed the “Calamitous consequents” of contention between Arminians and Calvinists: “this very Controversie,” he explains, “was a grand part of the difference, which on both sides was prosecuted, till it brought us to our doleful War.”⁵¹ Continued contention and controversy risked not just a war of words but another war on the ground. To forestall that possibility, Baxter stepped in as a Peacemaker. He tried to show each side that there was a spacious middle ground in which they all could stand in concord.

In sum, therefore: Owen held on to his Calvinism because his frame of reference was either/or. Baxter moderated his Calvinism because his frame of reference was both/and. If there was a battle for Calvin in later seventeenth-century England, Owen wanted to win it. Baxter wanted to end it.

But to return to my earlier point, the really interesting question is *why*. Why did each man possess this different frame of reference? I have no wish to offer a naive, reductionist answer to the complex question of why people believe what they believe, but I do want to say something that might form part of an answer. I want to take my lead from Owen and to think for a moment about experience. I am now going to leave the 1670s behind and take the story back several decades to the formative experiences that shaped Owen and Baxter in their different ways.

IDENTIFYING WHY RICHARD BAXTER AND JOHN OWEN DIFFERED IN THEIR CONCERNS

During the 1640s Baxter went through a soteriological transition in which his theology of salvation was entirely inverted. He went into the decade holding a set of doctrines that were not just Calvinist, but Antinomian. As he admitted in the *Aphorismes*, he had “remained long in the borders of *Antinomianisme*, which I very narrowly escaped.”⁵² In 1645 he had visited friends in the New Model Army after its victory at Naseby, only to find that bad doctrine was rife: Arminianism on one side and, far more prevalent and concerning, Antinomianism on the other.⁵³ He began to see where his own doctrines might take him. Two years of contending against heresy and error as an army chaplain came to an end deep in the winter of early 1647 in a crisis of ill health. The severe cold brought on a bleeding nose. Baxter concluded

that he needed to reduce his body's evident surfeit of blood by opening four veins. That treatment very nearly killed him.⁵⁴ During his recovery he had a profound experience that precipitated the inversion of his soteriology: it became anti-Antinomian.⁵⁵ In a moment of dazzling clarity the system he outlined in the *Aphorismes* fell into place.

I would argue that Baxter's civil war experience left him in some measure traumatized: for the rest of his life he lived in the shadow of that trauma. Even before the fighting began he was chased out of Kidderminster by a mob that threatened to kill him. He was on hand to witness the first physical skirmish of the wars, the ambush at Powicke Bridge; a month later he surveyed the field on which lay around a thousand corpses, men killed during the battle of Edgehill the previous day; and in his tenure as an army chaplain he witnessed several battles and sieges. Though it may seem a small thing now, a bleeding nose can be a symptom of intense stress.⁵⁶ It is a dangerous thing to try to assess the psychology of an individual in the past; even so, the wars left Baxter with a deep and abiding desire for order and stability. In *A Holy Commonwealth*, published in 1659, Baxter reviewed how the civil wars had changed him.

The experiences of War, and the evils that attend and follow it, hath made me hate it incomparably more than I did before I tried or knew it: and the name of Peace, much more the Thing, is now exceeding amiable to me... I think that all of us did rush too eagerly into the heat of Divisions and War, and none of us did so much as we should have done to prevent it: And though I was in no capacity to have done much, yet I unfeignedly Repent that I did no more for peace in my place, then I did, and that I did not pray more heartily against Contention and War before it came, and spake no more against it than I did; and that I spoke so much to blow the Coals. For this I daily beg forgiveness of the Lord, through the precious blood of the great Reconciler.⁵⁷

Baxter was determined never to make the same mistake again, and always to speak for peace and concord, in order to prevent a recurrence of that earlier trauma. I think that quote is quite revealing. We might note how he paired "Divisions and War" and "Contention and War" in a way that suggests both are similar in kind even if division and contention do not involve any physical fighting. There was a part of Baxter that wanted all wars to end.

Owen's temperament was quite different, or at least, his temperament was not chastened by the wars as Baxter's had been. We can see that in Owen's first book, *A Display of Arminianism*, published in 1643. The Gospel was simply too important to allow it to be obfuscated in the interests of maintaining peace and harmony: "surely these are not things . . . about which we may differ, without losse of peace or charitie, *one Church* cannot wrap in her communion, *Austin* and *Pelagius*; *Calvine*, and *Arminius*. . . . We must not offer the right hand of fellowship, but rather proclaime . . . an holy warre, to such enemies, of *Gods providence*, *Christs merit*, and *the powerfull operation of the Holy Spirit*."⁵⁸ There it is again, right at the start of his publishing career, that instinct for either/or: do not try to sit Calvin and Arminius in the same pew, do not ask Augustine and Pleagius to take communion together. Even the Church's peace is not sufficient grounds to justify the smallest dilution of the Gospel: "give but the least admission, and the whole [Arminian] poison must be swallowed."⁵⁹ Where Baxter yearned for peace, Owen declared a holy war.

Why was Owen prepared to forsake peace and harmony if that was required to preserve the Gospel? To find a possible answer we might venture back in his experience to the 1630s when, in the words of John Asty, one of his earliest biographers, Owen fell into

a deep melancholy, that continued in its extremity for a quarter of a year, during which time he avoided almost all manner of converse, and very hardly could be induced to speak a word, and when he did speak, it was with such disorder as rendered him *a wonder to many*. Tho' his distress and melancholy did not abide in that violence, yet he was held under very great trouble of mind, and grievous temptations for a long time, and it was near five years before he attained a settled peace.⁶⁰

The peace that mattered most to Owen, then, was not the peace of the world around him, it was that inner peace only the Gospel could provide. "His very great troubles and distresses of soul were succeeded with a great degree of lasting serenity and joy."⁶¹ I realize this is a stylized and second-hand account written some eighty years after the event. Even so, faced with some sort of crisis, it is plausible to imagine the sense of relief Owen might have felt to be assured that the resources for his own salvation did not lie within himself but were fully provided by Christ. "How shall I escape the wrath

to come?" may have been for him a question of genuine urgency, and the answer a source of lasting relief and assurance.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

I am very aware of the danger of patronizing both Owen and Baxter. I am not presuming on any ability of mine to look from the lofty heights of the present down upon these two men from the seventeenth century and to discern motives that were hidden even from them. I am not for one moment thinking that the thesis I have put forward explains everything about their contribution to soteriological controversy. I am not suggesting that a person's theology is merely the sum of their experience, merely contingent, with no purchase in what is real. What I am suggesting—with humility, I hope—is that each man's experience is not irrelevant to the concerns that lay behind his theology. Experience conditions theology, even if it does not determine it.

Therefore, by working backwards from the 1670s we have come to a fascinating set of contrasts in the formation of Owen and Baxter. Baxter experienced "almost five years" of trauma and upheaval,⁶² but the violence he experienced took the form of physical conflict, displacement and itinerancy. Owen experienced "near five years" of trauma and upheaval, but the "violence" he experienced took the form of "very great troubles and distresses of soul."⁶³ As far as I know there is no evidence linking the eventual resolution of Owen's internal distress to a Calvinist understanding of the Gospel but that is not an unreasonable assumption. If that is the case, it helps to explain why he held on to it so tenaciously. His extended season of inner distress may have left him with a felt need to look outside himself for the resources in his own salvation. In contrast, the ruinous experience of the wars gave Baxter little confidence in the external world. His pastoral success at Kidderminster involved the right ordering of his physical and social environment, which is one reason why he was so devastated when it was all dismantled at the Restoration. That need to control his environment may have facilitated a style of soteriology that put such a premium on human behavior, and the continuance of human behavior across a whole lifetime.

Baxter's experience may shed a little light on the broader demise of Calvinism in England and, in particular the place of the civil wars in that development. Historians do not concern themselves with what might have happened, but it is plausible that without the wars Baxter might never have

been shaken out of his Antinomianism; he might, indeed, have come to us as one of the foremost defenders of Calvinism. But that is not what happened. In the mid-1640s Baxter had been trying to ward off the Antinomians while still sharing their doctrinal predispositions. That was no longer tenable and he moved quickly to a new shape of things. In similar terms the wars seemed to discredit Calvinist speculation, which left people open to alternatives that emphasized human moral responsibility, moderation, and good behavior. Orthodox Calvinism became unviable for a great many English Puritans—in large part because of Baxter’s influence—and within the population at large. If so, this is further evidence that ideas are not pristine; biography matters. The demise of Calvinism in England is not unrelated to Richard Baxter’s bleeding nose.

-
- 1 I am indebted to John Coffey, Neil Keeble and Andrew Ollerton for their generous advice on this article. For a reworking of similar ideas see Tim Cooper, “Calvinism Among Seventeenth-Century English Puritans” in *The Oxford Handbook to Calvin and Calvinism* (ed., Carl R. Trueman and Bruce Gordon; New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
 - 2 J. Wayne Baker, “*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*: The Battle for Luther in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985): 115, 133. For a discussion of Luther’s fortunes in the sixteenth century, see Alec Ryrie, “The Strange Death of Lutheran England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53:1 (2002): 64-92; and David Scott Gehring, “From the Strange Death to the Odd Afterlife of Lutheran England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57:3 (2014): 825-44.
 - 3 G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England 1660 to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 13.
 - 4 Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 127.
 - 5 See Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. ch. 8.
 - 6 For a good discussion of the intellectual context of the Restoration period, see Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 1. See also, W. M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993); and Nicholas Tyacke, “From Laudians to Latitudinarians,” in *The Later Stuart Church, 1660-1714* (ed., Grant Tapsell; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 46-67. An older work, though still useful, is C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London: SPCK, 1966).
 - 7 Though Stephen Hampton argues for Calvinist continuity into the Restoration period in *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
 - 8 Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 237, 169. I use the term “Calvinism” very loosely, to capture a set of convictions that can be attributed not just to Calvin but also to the early Luther and to the Reformed tradition in general: that the resources for our salvation do not lie within ourselves; that justification really is by grace alone through faith alone; and that this is achieved only by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer. In dealing with Owen I do not intend to equate him simply with Calvin or Calvinism. By the 1670s he defended these convictions on a biblical basis, not a confessional basis, and I accept Carl Trueman’s contention that he “should be taken seriously as a leading proponent not simply of English Puritanism ... nor simply of Reformed Orthodoxy, but of the ongoing Western anti-Pelagian

- and Trinitarian tradition stretching back from the seventeenth century, past the Reformation, through the Middle Ages, and back to the writings of the early church Fathers." See Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 33.
- ⁹ Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 132.
 - ¹⁰ John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in 17th Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 207-14.
 - ¹¹ Isabel Rivers, *Reason Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660-1780: Volume I Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 100. See also *ibid.*, 163.
 - ¹² *Ibid.*, 126, 144; Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 169, 174-7; Mark Goldie, ed., *The Entering Book of Roger Morrice 1677-1691*, vol. 1, *Roger Morrice and the Puritan Whigs* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 261. See also, Jonathan Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), ch. 7.
 - ¹³ Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 142. For the example of John Howe's moderate Calvinism see David P. Field, *Rigide Calvinisme in a Softer Dress: The Moderate Presbyterianism of John Howe, 1630-1705* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2004), 18-33.
 - ¹⁴ Goldie, *Entering Book*, 254, 257.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 254-5. See also, Allison, *Rise of Moralism*, 192; and Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 189.
 - ¹⁶ Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 150.
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 149, 182.
 - ¹⁸ Christopher, Haigh, "'Theological Wars': 'Socinians' v. 'Antinomians' in Restoration England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 67 (2016): 341. For discussion of the writings of Sherlock and Bull, see pp. 337 and 339, and 341, n. 67.
 - ¹⁹ Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 12.
 - ²⁰ Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Catholick Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable for Pacification of the Dogmatical Word-Warriours* (1675), Preface, sig. a1. For seventeenth-century publications the place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.
 - ²¹ *Ibid.*, Preface, sig. [a3].
 - ²² *Ibid.*, Preface, sig. [b3]. See also, sig. [d1].
 - ²³ *Ibid.*, Preface, sig. c1v-c2v.
 - ²⁴ *Ibid.*, Preface, sig. [b3].
 - ²⁵ John Owen, *The Nature of Apostasie from the Profession of the Gospel and the Punishment of Apostates Declared, in an Exposition of Heb. 6. 4,5,6* (1676), To the Readers, 14 (*Works*, vii.3).
 - ²⁶ *Ibid.*, To the Readers, 14 (*Works*, vii.7).
 - ²⁷ *Ibid.*, To the Readers, 12 (*Works*, vii.7).
 - ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 157, 162, 164 (*Works*, vii.74, 76-77).
 - ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 153 (*Works*, vii.72-73).
 - ³⁰ *Ibid.*, To the Readers, 12 (*Works*, vii.7).
 - ³¹ This translation is the *New Revised Standard Version*.
 - ³² John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed and Vindicated* (1677), 3, 4 (*Works*, v.9).
 - ³³ *Ibid.*, 7 (*Works*, v.11-12). See also, pp. 38, 49 (*Works*, v.33, 41).
 - ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59 (*Works*, v.48).
 - ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 (*Works*, v.10).
 - ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 (*Works*, v.10-11).
 - ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 (*Works*, v.8).
 - ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-35 (*Works*, v.30-31).
 - ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67 (*Works*, v.55).
 - ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7 (*Works*, v.12).
 - ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 110 (*Works*, v.83).
 - ⁴² *Ibid.*
 - ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 325 (*Works*, v.230).
 - ⁴⁴ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, 103-111, 238-248, 286.
 - ⁴⁵ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, Book I, Preface, sig. a2v.
 - ⁴⁶ Owen, *Doctrine of Justification*, 33-35 (*Works*, v.30-31).
 - ⁴⁷ Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, Book II, 12.

- ⁴⁸ Ibid., Book II, 3.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., Book II, 55.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., Book II, 24.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., Book II, 2.
- ⁵² Baxter, *Aphorismes*, Appendix, 163.
- ⁵³ Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness, in Two Books (1676)*, Book I, 22.
- ⁵⁴ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (1696), i.58 §85.
- ⁵⁵ Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2001), 73.
- ⁵⁶ See Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 43-48.
- ⁵⁷ Richard Baxter, *A Holy Commonwealth, or Political Aphorisms, Opening the True Principles of Government (1659)*, 485-6.
- ⁵⁸ Owen, *Display of Arminianisme*, Dedicatory Epistle, sig. A1v-A2r (*Works*, x.7).
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., Dedicatory Epistle, sig. A2r (*Works*, x.7).
- ⁶⁰ John Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen ... And to the Whole are Prefixed Memoirs of His Life*, ed. John Asty (1721), iv. See also, [Anon.], "The Life of Owen the Late Reverend and Learned John Owen," in [Anon.], *Seventeenth Sermons Preach'd by the Late Reverend and Learned John Owen (1720)*, viii-ix.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Richard Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest: Or, a Treatise on the Blessed State of the Saints in their Enjoyment of God in Glory (1650)*, 563.
- ⁶³ Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," iv.