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John Owen

JOHN OWEN

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Editorial: Learning from John Owen

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Why should we study people from the past, especially the distant past? Why not merely focus on current issues that the church faces, for after all, what do people from a previous era have to teach us today? Two responses can be given to these questions, one from Scripture and the second from experience.

First, as we study Scripture, it is significant to note how often we are told to learn from past people, events, and history. Many places teach us this, but probably the best place is Hebrews 11. In order to encourage the church to remain faithful to Christ and the gospel, the author unpacks the glory of Christ and his work from the OT, and then exhorts the church to run the race set before them with perseverance like the saints of old. That is why in chapter 11, the author walks through the great “hall of fame” of faithful OT saints, who persevered under unbelievable pressure as they took God at his Word, believed his promises, and lived their lives looking forward to the fulfillment of those promises centered in the coming of Christ. The author appeals to the example of these saints to encourage the church to do likewise in their day. From the examples of past individuals, the church is to learn

how to be faithful in the present era.

In fact, the author not only encourages present-day Christians from past examples, he also exhorts and challenges them to walk by faith *in a greater way* since now that Christ has come, we, who live post-resurrection, see more clearly how God has kept all of his promises in Christ, something OT saints never witnessed. Scripture's appeal to people from the past, then, is for our instruction and as such, it gives us warrant and incentive to learn from those who have already run the race, kept the faith, and serve as examples of how we ought to live today.

Second, if we are honest, we know that to ignore the past and not to learn from it causes more harm than good. The famous statement is true: If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat its mistakes. As Scripture reminds us, "there is nothing new under the sun," and the study of past people and events helps correct our myopic vision, challenges us to learn from those who have thought deeply about God's Word, and who have applied it to their lives in challenging circumstances. We often learn by example.

For these reasons (and many more), we are devoting this issue of *SBJT* to an historical figure who has much to teach us today, namely theologian and pastor, John Owen (1616-1683). Although Owen lived over 300 years ago, his life and writings have much to teach us. Owen was a remarkable individual. During his 67 years of life, he wrote numerous volumes on biblical exposition and theology of the highest caliber. He served as a theologian at Oxford University, a pastor, and statesman under Oliver Cromwell. The 17th century was a unique time in history, which witnessed many changes, and Owen addressed these changes well.

On the one hand, Owen sought to work out faithfully the insights of the Reformation, especially in responding to the ongoing challenge of Rome. Like the Reformers, Owen stood against the theology of the Roman Catholic Church and sought to defend the great *solas* of the Reformation. He wrote treatises on Scripture, justification, the Holy Spirit, and the atoning work of Christ. He warranted what he wrote from Scripture, and he grounded Reformation theology in the sovereign, triune God of Scripture who has taken the initiative to save, and apart from him there is no salvation.

On the other hand, Owen also battled the growing rise of views that denied the Christian faith. His day saw the rise of Socinianism and other views that denied the orthodox view of the Trinity, undermined the uniqueness of

Christ, and rejected retributive justice as central to understanding the nature of the cross. Owen's era saw the beginning of the Enlightenment, and in his work, along with other post-Reformation theologians, Owen wonderfully defended "the faith once delivered to the saints." Think for example about his volumes on Christology. In ways that the Reformers did not fully develop, he argued for an atonement that was *necessary* if God is going to save us, thus providing strong biblical and theological support to viewing the cross as a penal substitutionary sacrifice for us. Owen was convinced that Christ's work was effective and that it accomplished all that the triune God had planned from eternity. In standing against various heresies and challenges to Reformation theology, Owen valiantly defended the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ in his day, something we must equally do today.

However, as much as we think of Owen as a theologian, he was also a pastor. He labored faithfully in the church and in his own life experienced much adversity and suffering. Of his eleven children, ten died in infancy. He also experienced the loss of his first wife. Yet, in the midst of such difficulties, Owen wrote much about the practical outworking of the gospel in the Christian life. He not only articulated the great truths of the gospel, he worked out the implications of justification, communion with the triune God, the nature of sin and temptation, in very practical ways. Owen was a theologian and pastor who longed to see the church grow in Christ, and he sought to see continual reform among God's people according to the truth. In a day plagued by nominal Christianity, Owen called the church to doctrinal and practical fidelity.

In truth, what motivated Owen more than anything else was his God-centered focus and his desire to see Christ magnified. In every discussion, whether in its specific details and fine theological nuance, or his teaching Scripture to people in the local church, Owen always sought to point people to the glory of the triune God in the face of Christ. For Owen teaching theology was more than a mere vocation; theology was to transform our lives, which is what it did in the life of Owen. Many have noted that reading John Owen is not an easy task. His writing is not only voluminous but it is very difficult. It takes time to get used to his very long sentences and his rich vocabulary, but working through his writings pays great dividends.

In this issue, we have sought to capture something of the depth and breadth of Owen's contribution to theology and his understanding of the Christian

life. After situating Owen's life and thought vis-à-vis his time period, other articles think through Owen's defense of the great doctrine of justification, his disagreements with other Protestant pastors such as Richard Baxter, his defense of historic Christianity over against the heresy of Socinianism, and his robust defense of Scripture. All of these discussions are helpful for us today as we are called to be faithful to God's Word and to proclaim the gospel in our generation. In addition, our *SBJT Forum* rounds out the discussion by answering such practical questions as: Why has Owen made a comeback in theological discussion today? How does Owen help us think about sanctification in terms of the mortification of sin? How does Owen help us think about assurance? How does a theology of the incarnation work itself out in Owen's understanding of the Christian life?

The articles and forum discussions in this issue only begin to scratch the surface of the rich life and theology of John Owen. It is my prayer that in studying the work of this giant of the faith, it will help us be better theologians and exegetes of God's Word. Also, it is my prayer that in thinking through Owen's life and work, we will be more committed to seeing sound theology worked out in our lives and in the church, and it will lead us to a greater proclamation and defense of the truth of the Gospel in our day.

John Owen Timeline¹

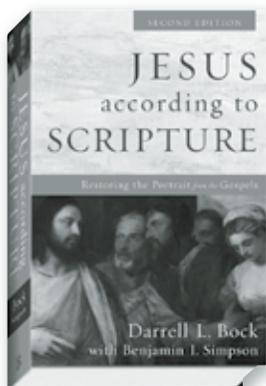
- 1616** Birth of John Owen to Rev. Henry Owen and his wife Hester.
- 1625** James I succeeded by Charles I.
- 1626** Owen begins grammar school.
- 1628** Owen enters Oxford University.
- 1629** Charles I dissolves Parliament.
- 1630** William Laud becomes Chancellor of Oxford.
Puritans leave for New England and are led by John Winthrop.
- 1632** Owen graduates B.A.
- 1633** Laud appointed Archbishop of Canterbury.
- 1635** Owen awarded M.A.; begins 7-year B.D. program.
- 1637** Owen leaves Oxford University.
- 1640** Long Parliament (1640–1653) convenes.
- 1642** The start of the English Civil War; Owen moves to London and gains assurance of salvation.
- 1643** Owen takes up pastorate in Fordham, Essex; Owen marries Mary Rooke (c. 1618–1676); Westminster Assembly convenes.
- 1645** Laud executed; decisive Battle of Naseby.

- 1646** Owen preaches before Parliament (April 29).
Inducted as vicar of Coggeshall, Essex.
Owen becomes a congregationalist.
- 1647** *Westminster Confession of Faith* completed.
- 1648** First Civil War comes to an end.
- 1649** Charles I executed; England is declared a commonwealth.
As Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, Owen travels to Ireland.
- 1650** Owen appointed preacher to the Council of State and a chaplain
to Cromwell with the expedition to Scotland.
- 1651** Owen appointed Dean of Christ Church, Oxford University.
- 1652** Owen appointed Vice-Chancellor of Oxford.
- 1653** Cromwell dissolves Parliament and is appointed Lord Protector.
Owen awarded an honorary D.D. from Oxford.
- 1657** Owen opposes the offer of the crown to Cromwell.
- 1658** Owen takes a leading role at the Savoy Assembly.
Death of Cromwell (September 3).
- 1660** Monarchy restored under Charles II.
Owen leaves Christ Church and Oxford (March); lives
at Stadhampton.
- 1662** Act of Uniformity seeks to impose Anglican uniformity; two
thousand Puritan ministers ejected on St. Bartholomew's Day
(August 24); Owen moves to Stoke Newington.
- 1664** Conventicle Act prohibits Nonconformist pastors from preaching.

- 1665** The Great Plague kills many in London; Five Mile Act prohibits Nonconformist ministers from returning to parishes.
- 1666** The Great Fire in London destroys much of the city.
- 1672** Limited religious freedom granted by declaration of indulgence.
- 1673** Union of Owen's church with that of Joseph Caryl; congregation now meets in Leadenhall Street, London.
- 1675** Death of Owen's first wife, Mary.
- 1676** Owen marries Dorothy D'Oyley.
- 1683** Death of Owen (August 24); buried in Bunhill Fields (September 4).

¹ From Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen and the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), used by permission.

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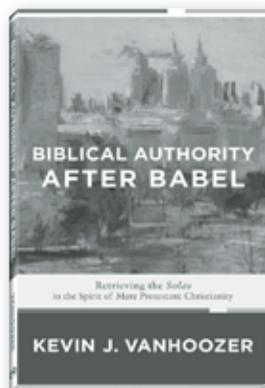
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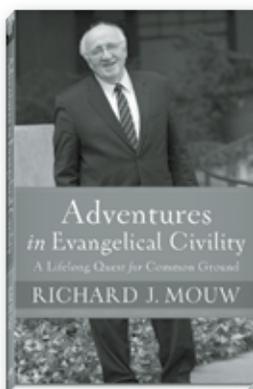
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Being John Owen

MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN

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“The Puritan John Owen . . . was one of the greatest of English theologians. In an age of giants, he overtopped them all. C. H. Spurgeon called him the prince of divines. He is hardly known today, and we are the poorer for our ignorance.”¹

“I WOULD GLADLY RELINQUISH ALL MY LEARNING”

Charles II (r. 1660–1685) once asked one of the most learned scholars that he knew why any intelligent person should waste time listening to the sermons of an uneducated tinker and Baptist preacher by the name of John Bunyan (1628–1688).² “Could I possess the tinker’s abilities for preaching, please your majesty,” replied the scholar, “I would gladly relinquish all my learning.” The name of the scholar was John Owen (1616–1683), and this small story—apparently true and not apocryphal—says a good deal about the man and his Christian character. His love of and concern for the preaching of the Word reveals a man who was Puritan to the core. And the fragrant humility of his reply to the king was a virtue that permeated all of his writings, in which he sought to glorify the triune God and help God’s people find that maturity that was theirs in Christ.³

In his own day some of Owen’s fellow Puritans called him the “Calvin of

England.”⁴ More recently, Roger Nicole has described Owen as “the greatest divine who ever wrote in English,” and J. I. Packer says of him that during his career as a Christian theologian he was “England’s foremost bastion and champion of Reformed evangelical orthodoxy.”⁵ Despite his theological brilliance, it needs noting that Owen’s chief interest was not in producing theological treatises for their own sake, but to advance the personal holiness of God’s people.⁶

“BRED UP FROM MY INFANCY”: OWEN’S EARLY YEARS

John Owen was born in 1616, the same year that William Shakespeare died. He grew up in a Christian home in a small village now known as Stadhampton, then called Stadham, about five miles southeast of Oxford.⁷ His father, Henry Owen, was a Puritan and the minister of the parish church there. The names of three of his brothers have also come down to us: his older brother, William, who became the Puritan minister at Remenham, just north of Henley-on-Thames; and his two younger brothers: Henry who fought as a major in the New Model Army of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), and Philemon, who was killed fighting under Cromwell in Ireland in 1649.⁸

Of Owen’s childhood years only one reference has been recorded. “I was bred up from my infancy,” he remarked in 1657, “under the care of my father, who was a nonconformist all his days, and a painful labourer [that is, diligent worker] in the vineyard of the Lord.”⁹ If we take as our cue the way that other Puritans raised their children, we can presume that as a small boy Owen, along with his siblings, would have been taught to pray, to read the Bible, and to obey its commandments. At least once a day there would have been time set aside for family worship when he would have listened to his father explain a portion of God’s Word and pray for their nation, his parishioners, and for each of his children.¹⁰ It needs noting that this is the only personal remark about his family that Owen makes in any of his published works. There was clearly a reticence on Owen’s part to open up his life to his readers. As James Moffatt remarked at the turn of the twentieth century: “Owen never trusts himself to his readers . . . Hence his private life and feelings remain for the most part a mystery.”¹¹

At twelve years of age, Owen was sent by his father to Queen’s College, the University of Oxford. Here he obtained his B.A. on June 11, 1632, when he was 16. He went on to study for the M.A., which he was awarded on

April 27, 1635. Everything seemed to be set for Owen to pursue an academic career. It was not, however, a good time to launch out into world of academe. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573–1645), had set out to suppress the Puritan movement, which was seen as radical, even revolutionary, by the leadership of the state church. Laud thus began a purge of the churches and universities. By 1637 Owen had no alternative but to leave Oxford and to become, along with many other Puritans who refused to conform to the Established Church, a private chaplain. He eventually found employment in the house of Lord Lovelace, a nobleman sympathetic to the Puritan cause. Laud's policies, supported by the monarch Charles I (r. 1625–1649), alienated the Puritan cause and pushed the Puritans to the point where many of them believed they had no choice but to engage in a civil war against their sovereign. In the early stages of the English Civil War, which broke out in 1642, Lord Lovelace decided to support the King, and Owen, whose sympathies were with Parliament, left his chaplaincy and moved to London.

A “CLEAR SHINING FROM GOD”

The move to London was providential in a couple of ways. First of all, it brought him into contact with the some of the leading defenders of the Parliamentary cause, Puritan preachers who viewed the struggle between the King and Parliament in terms of the struggle between Christ and anti-Christian forces. Moreover, it was during these initial days in London that he had an experience he would never forget. By 1642 Owen was convinced that the final source of authority in religion was the Holy Scriptures and, moreover, that the doctrines of orthodox Calvinism were biblical Christianity. But he had yet to personally experience the Holy Spirit bearing witness to his spirit and giving him the assurance that he was a child of God.¹²

Owen found this assurance one Sunday when he decided to go with a cousin to hear Edmund Calamy the Elder (1600–1666), a famous Presbyterian preacher, at St. Mary's Church, Aldermanbury. On arriving at this church, they were informed that Calamy was not going to preach that morning. Instead a country preacher (whose name Owen never did discover) was going to fill in for the Presbyterian divine. His cousin urged him to go with him to hear Arthur Jackson (c. 1593–1666), another notable Puritan preacher, at nearby St. Michael's. But Owen decided to remain at St. Mary's. The preacher took as

his text that morning Matthew 8:26: “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” It proved to be a message that Owen needed to hear and embrace. Through the words of a preacher whose identity is unknown, God spoke to Owen and removed once and for all his doubts and fears as to whether he was truly regenerate or not. He now knew himself to be born of the Spirit.¹³

The impact of this spiritual experience cannot be over-estimated. It gave Owen the deep, inner conviction that he was indeed a child of God and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that God loved him and had a loving purpose for his life, and that this God was the true and living God. In practical terms, it meant a life-long interest in the work of God the Holy Spirit that would issue thirty years later in his monumental study of the Holy Spirit, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*.¹⁴ As he later wrote: “Clear shining from God must be at the bottom of deep labouring with God.”¹⁵

PASTORAL MINISTRY AND PREACHING BEFORE PARLIAMENT

In 1643 Owen was offered the pastorate in the village of Fordham, six miles or so northwest of Colchester in Essex. Owen was here till 1646, when he became the minister of the church at the market town of Coggeshall, some five miles to the south. Here, as many as two thousand people would fill the church each Lord’s Day to hear Owen preach.¹⁶ Thus, although Owen would later speak slightly of his preaching to King Charles II—as seen in the anecdote with which this article began—it is evident that he was no mean preacher.

It is also noteworthy that this change in pastorates began an ecclesiological shift to Congregationalism. Up until this point Owen had been decidedly Presbyterian in his understanding of church government. However, Owen began to change his mind after reading *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* by John Cotton (1584–1652), which had been published in 1644, and by 1648 he was a confirmed Congregationalist. It was also at Coggeshall that he wrote the classic work on particular redemption, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647).¹⁷ The backdrop for these early years of Owen’s pastoral ministry was the English Civil War when England knew the horrors of bloody fields of battle, and father was ranged against son and neighbour against neighbour on the battlefield. Well has this period been described as “the world turned upside down.” It needs to be noted, though, that little of the early fighting actually took place in Essex or remotely near Coggeshall;

hence at this point in time, Owen saw little of the bloody horrors of civil war.¹⁸

During these tumultuous days Owen clearly identified himself with the Parliamentary cause. Like others who ardently supported Parliament in their struggle against the king, Owen would look back on some of the decisive Parliamentary victories in the 1640s as a clear vindication of their cause by God.¹⁹ He also developed a friendship with the rising military figure Oliver Cromwell and was frequently invited to preach before Parliament. By late 1648 some of the Parliamentary army officers had begun to urge that Charles I be brought to trial on charges of treason since he had fought against his own people and Parliament. Charles was accordingly put on trial in January, 1649, and by the end of that month a small group of powerful Puritan leaders had found him guilty and sentenced their king to death. On January 31, the day following the public execution of the king, Owen was asked to preach before Parliament.

Owen used the occasion to urge upon the members of Parliament that for them, now the rulers of England, in order to obtain God's favor in the future they must remove from the nation all traces of false worship and superstition and wholeheartedly establish a religion based on Scripture alone. Owen based his sermon on Jeremiah 15. He made no direct reference to the events of the previous day, nor did he mention, at least in the version of his sermon that has come down to us, the name of the king. Nevertheless, his hearers and later readers would have been easily able to deduce from his use of the Old Testament how he viewed the religious policy and end of Charles. From the story of the wicked king Manasseh that is recorded in 2 Kings 21 and with cross references to Jeremiah 15, he argued that the leading cause for God's judgements upon the Jewish people had been such abominations as idolatry and superstition, tyranny and cruelty. He then pointed to various similarities between the conditions of ancient Judah and the England of his day. At the heart of the sermon was a call to Parliament to establish a reformed style of worship, to disseminate biblical Christianity, to uphold national righteousness, and to avoid oppression. He assured the Puritan leaders who heard him that day that God's promise of protection to Jeremiah was also applicable to all who in every age stood firmly for justice and mercy.²⁰

IRELAND AND OXFORD

Later that same year, Owen accompanied Cromwell on his campaign in Ireland,

where he stayed from August 1649 to February 1650. Though ill much of this time, he preached frequently to “a numerous multitude of as thirsting a people after the gospel as ever yet I conversed withal.”²¹ When he returned to England the following year, he confessed that “the tears and cries of the inhabitants of Dublin after the manifestations of Christ are ever in my view.” Accordingly, he sought to convince Parliament of the spiritual need of this land and asked:

How is it that Jesus Christ is in Ireland only as a lion staining all his garments with the blood of his enemies; and none to hold him out as a lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends? Is it the sovereignty and interest of England that is alone to be there transacted? For my part, I see no farther into the mystery of these things but that I could heartily rejoice, that, innocent blood being expiated, the Irish might enjoy Ireland so long as the moon endureth, so that Jesus Christ might possess the Irish. I would there were for the present one gospel preacher for every walled town in the English possession in Ireland ... If they were in the dark, and loved to have it so, it might something close a door upon the bowels of our compassion; but they cry out of their darkness, and are ready to follow every one whosoever, to have a candle. If their being gospelless move not our hearts, it is hoped their importunate cries will disquiet our rest, and wrest help as a beggar doth an alms.²²

Although Owen’s pleas were heeded and this period saw the establishment of a number of Puritan congregations—both Congregationalist and Baptist—in Ireland, Crawford Gribben has shown that the inability of the Puritans in Ireland to work together with like-minded brethren for the larger cause of the Kingdom of Christ hindered their witness.²³

By the early 1650s, Owen had become one of Cromwell’s leading advisors, especially in national affairs to do with the church. There is little doubt that Owen was a firm supporter of Cromwell in this period. As Owen told him on one occasion in 1654, for example: “The series and chain of eminent providences whereby you have been carried on and protected in all the hazardous work of your generation, which your God hath called you unto, is evident to all.”²⁴ Two years later, though, when Cromwell was urged to become the monarch of England, Owen was among those who opposed this move. As it turned out, Cromwell did not accept the crown. But Owen’s friendship with Cromwell had been damaged, and the two men were nowhere near

as close as they had been.²⁵ This would have distressed Owen since he had viewed Cromwell with enormous admiration. This rupture in his friendship with Cromwell may well have reinforced a tendency in Owen's character to be self-reliant.²⁶

Cromwell had appointed Owen to the oversight of Oxford University in 1652 as its Vice-Chancellor. From this position Owen helped to re-assemble the faculty, who had been dispersed by the war, and to put the university back on its feet. He also had numerous opportunities to preach to the students at Oxford. Two important works on holiness came out of his preaching during this period. *Of Temptation*, first published in 1658, is essentially an exposition of Matthew 26:4. It analyzes the way in which believers fall into sin. A second work, *The Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), is in some ways the richest of all of Owen's treatises on this subject. It is based on Romans 8:13 and lays out a strategy for fighting indwelling sin and warding off temptation. Owen emphasizes that in the fight against sin the Holy Spirit employs all of our human powers. In sanctifying us, Owen insists, the Spirit works

in us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.²⁷

Not without reason does Owen lovingly describe the Spirit in another place as "the great beautifier of souls."²⁸

Oliver Cromwell died in September of 1658 and the "rule of the saints," as some called it, began to fall apart. In the autumn of that year, Owen, now a key leader among the Congregationalists, played a vital role in drawing up what is known as the *Savoy Declaration*, which would give the Congregationalist churches fortitude for the difficult days ahead. Only a few days after Cromwell's death, Owen met with around two hundred other Congregationalist leaders, including men like Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Philip Nye (c. 1596–1672), and William Bridge (c. 1600–1671),²⁹ in the chapel of the old Savoy Palace in London. One of the outcomes of this synod was a recommendation to revise the *Westminster Confession of Faith* for the Congregationalist churches. Traditionally Owen has been credited with

writing the lengthy preface that came before the *Savoy Declaration*. In it he rightly argued, anticipating a key issue over the rest of his life:

The Spirit of Christ is in himself too *free*, great and generous a Spirit, to suffer himself to be used by any human arm, to whip men into belief; he drives not, but *gently leads into all truth*, and *persuades* men to *dwell in the tents of like precious faith*; which would lose of its preciousness and value, if that sparkle of freeness shone not in it.³⁰

The following year Owen preached again before Parliament. But the times were changing, and this proved to be the last of such occasions.

“THE CHURCH IN A STORM”: OWEN, A LEADER IN A TIME OF PERSECUTION, 1660–1683

In 1660 a number of Cromwell’s fellow Puritan leaders, fearful that Britain was slipping into full-fledged anarchy, asked Charles II, then living in exile on the continent, to return to England as her monarch. Those who came to power with Charles were determined that the Puritans would never again hold the reins of political authority. During Charles’ reign and that of his brother James II (r. 1685–1688), the Puritan cause was thus savagely persecuted. After the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which required all religious worship to be according to the letter of *The Book of Common Prayer*, and other legislation enacted during the 1660s, all other forms of worship were illegal.

A number of Owen’s close friends, including John Bunyan, suffered fines and imprisonment for not heeding these laws. Although Owen was shielded from actual imprisonment by some powerful friends like Lord Philip Wharton (1613–1696), he led at best a precarious existence till his death. He was once nearly attacked by a mob, which surrounded his carriage.³¹ Between 1663 and 1666 he was tempted to accept the offer of a safe haven in America when the Puritan leaders in Massachusetts offered him the presidency of Harvard.³² Owen, though, recognized where he was needed most and he wrote prodigiously in defense of Nonconformity.

This polemical defense, though, took its toll. In 1672, he told the New England Puritan John Eliot (1604–1690) that “there is scarce any one alive in the world that hath more reproaches cast upon him than I have” and that, as he was experiencing “a dry and barren spirit,” he begged Eliot to pray for him

that God would “water me from above.”³³ Two years later, in a letter to Charles Fleetwood (c. 1618–1692), one of Cromwell’s sons-in-law, he described himself as a “poor withering soul” and he expressed his fear that

we shall die in the wilderness; yet ought we to labour and pray continually that the heavens would drop down from above, and the skies pour down righteousness—that the earth may open and bring forth salvation, and that righteousness may spring up together [see Ps. 85:10–11]. ... I beseech you to contend yet more earnestly than ever I have done, with God, with my own heart, with the church, to labour after spiritual revivals.³⁴

Owen’s fears were not unfounded: he would die without seeing any turning of the tide for the Nonconformists, and the spiritual state of England would continue to decline until the revivals of the mid-1730s.

Owen’s first wife, Mary, died in 1676. When Owen remarried the following year, his second wife, Dorothy D’Oyley, was the widow of a wealthy Oxfordshire landowner whom Owen would have known from his connections to his home village of Stadhampton.³⁵ Added to the toil, distresses and anxieties of these years were physical challenges, especially asthma and kidney stones. But these years were also ones of prodigious literary fruitfulness. His exhaustive commentary on Hebrews appeared between 1668 and 1684, which he regarded in many ways as his *magnum opus*.³⁶ A *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* came out in 1674 and an influential work on justification, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in 1677. Owen’s *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, what Robert Oliver has rightly termed “incomparable,”³⁷ was written under the shadow of death in 1683 and represents Owen’s dying testimony to the unsurpassable value and joy of living a life for the glory of Christ.

He fell asleep in Christ on August 24, 1683. His final literary work is a letter to his friend, Charles Fleetwood, written but two days before his death. “Dear Sir,” he wrote to his friend,

I am going to him whom my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love; which is the whole ground of all my consolation. The passage is very irksome and wearysome through strong pains of various sorts which are all issued in an intermitting fever. All things were provided to carry me to London

today attending to the advice of my physician, but we were all disappointed by my utter disability to undertake the journey. I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but whilst the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poore under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live and pray and hope and waite patiently and doe not despair; the promise stands invincible that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee.³⁸

He was buried on September 4 in Bunhill Fields, where the bodies of so many of his fellow Puritans were laid to rest until that tremendous Day when they—and all the faithful in Christ—shall be raised to glory.

¹ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 191.

² This article is used with permission from Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen and the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

³ For the story, see Andrew Thomson, *Life of Dr. Owen (The Works of John Owen [1850 ed.; repr. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965], 1:xcii)*; Allen C. Guelzo, "John Owen, Puritan Pacesetter," *Christianity Today*, 20, no. 17 (May 21, 1976): 14; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971), 162. Subsequent references in this article to the works of Owen are cited according to the title of the work, as well as the volume and page numbers of *The Works of John Owen*, 23 vols. (ed. William H. Goold [1850–1855]; ed.; repr. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–1968). References to Owen's commentary on Hebrews are cited in the same fashion: the title of the work will be given, then volume and page numbers in the *Works*, the Hebrews volumes being volumes 17–23 of the *Works*.

⁴ Guelzo, "John Owen," 14; Richard L. Greaves, "Owen, John (1616–1683)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., May 2009 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/view/article/21016>]).

⁵ Guelzo, "John Owen," 14; Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 81.

⁶ Guelzo, "John Owen," 15–16.

⁷ For a good account of Owen's life, see Toon, *God's Statesman* and now Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For his theology, the best study is undoubtedly Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), and now Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* (Farnham, Surrey/Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2012). See also Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); and Robert W. Oliver, ed., *John Owen—The Man and His Theology* (Darlington: Evangelical Press/Phillipsburg, NJ: Evangelical Press, 2002).

⁸ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 2.

⁹ *A Review of the True Nature of Schism (Works, 13:224)*.

¹⁰ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 2.

¹¹ James Moffatt, *The Golden Book of John Owen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), 19–20.

¹² Toon, *God's Statesman*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13. It also meant Owen would write on the doctrine of assurance. See Owen, *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm 130 (Works, 324–648)*.

¹⁵ Cited Peter Barraclough, *John Owen (1616–1683)* (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1961), 6.

¹⁶ Robert W. Oliver, "John Owen (1616–1683)—His Life and Times," in his ed., *John Owen*, 16.

¹⁷ For a study of this work, see Jack N. Macleod, "John Owen and the Death of Death," in "Out of Bondage" (London: The Westminster Conference, 1983), 70–87.

¹⁸ Tim Cooper, "Why Did Richard Baxter and John Owen Diverge? The Impact of The First Civil War," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 61, no. 3 (July 2010): 507–511.

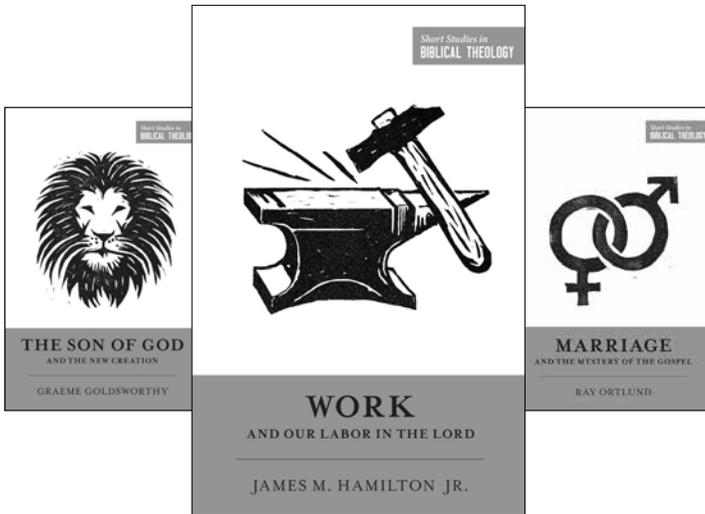
- ¹⁹ As he once stated, “Where is the God of Marston Moor, and the God of Naseby? is an acceptable expostulation in a gloomy day.” Cited Moffatt, *Golden Book of John Owen*, 112.
- ²⁰ *Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection* (Works, 8:133–162); Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 33–34.
- ²¹ *Of the Death of Christ* (Works, 10:479).
- ²² *The Steadfastness of the Promises, and the Sinfulness of Staggering* (Works, 8:235–236).
- ²³ Crawford Gribben, *The Irish Puritans: James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church* (Darlington, Durham: Evangelical Press, 2003), 91–115.
- ²⁴ *The Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* (Works, 11:5).
- ²⁵ Oliver, “John Owen (1616–1683),” in his ed., *John Owen*, 26; Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 97–101.
- ²⁶ See the remarks on Owen’s friendships by Moffatt, *Golden Book of John Owen*, 19–20 and Tim Cooper, “Owen’s Personality: The Man Behind the Theology” in *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, ed. Kapic and Jones, 215–226.
- ²⁷ Works, 6:20. See also the comments of J. I. Packer, ““Keswick” and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (1955): 156.
- ²⁸ *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers* (Works, 6:188). For further discussion of this area of Owen’s teaching, see Michael A. G. Haykin, “The Great Beautifier of Souls,” *The Banner of Truth*, 242 (November 1983): 18–22.
- ²⁹ For biographical sketches of these three men, see William S. Barker, *Puritan Profiles: 54 Influential Puritans at the time when the Westminster Confession of Faith was written* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 1996), 69–94, *passim*.
- ³⁰ “A Preface” to *The Savoy Declaration in The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff and rev. David S. Schaff (1931 ed.; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), III, 709; emphasis original. For a recent edition of this confession, see *The Savoy Declaration of Faith* (Millers Falls, MA: First Congregational Church, 1998).
- ³¹ Barraclough, *John Owen*, 15.
- ³² Greaves, “Owen, John (1616–1683),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.).
- ³³ Letter to John Eliot [1672], in *The Correspondence of John Owen*, ed. Peter Toon (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970), 154.
- ³⁴ Letter to Charles Fleetwood, July 8 [1674], in *Correspondence of John Owen*, ed. Toon, 159. Owen was not the only Puritan leader urging prayer for revival in the 1670s. Four years after Owen wrote this letter, John Howe (1630–1705) preached a series of sermons based on Ezekiel 39:29 in which he dealt with the subject of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In one of these sermons he told his audience (*The Prosperous State of the Christian Interest Before the End of Time, By a Plentiful Effusion of the Holy Spirit: Sermon IV in The Works of the Rev. John Howe, M. A.* [New York: John P. Haven, 1838], I, 575):

When the Spirit shall be poured forth plentifully I believe you will hear much other kind of sermons, or they will, who shall live to such a time, than you are wont to do now-a-days ... It is plain, too sadly plain, there is a great retraction of the Spirit of God even from us; we not know how to speak living sense [i.e. felt reality] unto souls, how to get within you; our words die in our mouths, or drop and die between you and us. We even faint, when we speak; long experienced unsuccessfulness makes us despond; we speak not as persons that hope to prevail . . . When such an effusion of the Spirit shall be as is here signified . . . [ministers] shall know how to speak to better purpose, with more compassion and sense, with more seriousness, with more authority and allurements, than we now find we can.

For the explanation of “living sense” as “felt reality,” see J. I. Packer, *God In Our Midst: Seeking and Receiving Ongoing Revival* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1987), 33.

- ³⁵ Oliver, “John Owen (1616–1683),” in his ed., *John Owen*, 35.
- ³⁶ See John W. Tweeddale, “John Owen’s Commentary on Hebrews in Context” in *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, ed. Kapic and Jones, 52, 54–55.
- ³⁷ Oliver, “John Owen (1616–1683)” in his ed., *John Owen*, 35
- ³⁸ *Correspondence of John Owen*, ed. Toon, 174.

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Justification by Faith Alone: The Perspectives of William Kiffen and John Owen

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INTRODUCTION

All theology is historical theology. That is to say, all human attempts to make sense of God and his revelation of himself and his ways in Scripture are done, as one of my teachers put it, by particular people who lived in particular times and who thought in particular ways. That simple (but not simplistic) observation opens up vistas as we study various aspects of the church's past. It allows us to see how brothers and sisters in the past struggled both to make sense of the Bible and also to apply it in their contexts. As we observe them doing this—seeing both their victories and their defeats—we can better learn what it means to be faithful to the Lord in our day.

On the eve of the 500th celebration of the start of the Protestant Reformation, it is very appropriate that we think together about the great bedrock of the Protestant faith—the doctrine of justification by faith alone—*sola fide*. Sinners are declared to be in a right standing before God, the holy Judge, not on the basis of anything they have done or ever would accomplish. They have nothing good to offer God in themselves. Everything good had to be done

for us *extra nos* (to use one of Martin Luther's favorite expressions), outside of us. What we are talking about in this doctrine is memorably defined by the Westminster Shorter Catechism in this theologically-packed manner: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, by which he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." William Kiffen and John Owen both agreed with this statement.

Both of these men were giants in their own day, non-Conformists who lived long lives—Kiffen was born in 1616 and died in 1701; Owen also was born in 1616 and passed away in 1683. They both provided ecclesiological and theological acumen leadership to the non-establishment movements in England during the tumultuous era of the middle and second half of the seventeenth century. This was the period of the English Civil War, parliament's rule, the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell and his not-so-talented son, Richard, the Restoration era of Charles II (1660-1685) whose reign was marked by increased pressure on non-Conformists, and finally the reign of James II (1685-1688) whose goal was to restore England to Catholicism. Kiffen (the Baptist) and Owen (the Presbyterian-turned-Congregationalist) were, arguably, the two most important non-Conformists leaders of the century.

In this article, I want to explore Kiffen's and Owen's views of justification by faith alone as a means of seeing what contextual forces were at play as they formulated their doctrines. This is a worthy task, especially as they agreed with each other on almost all the contours of this doctrine. In one sense, this makes for a bit of a difficult journey because we aren't going to contrast Kiffen's and Owen's views; instead, we're going to compare and contrast the contexts in which they wrote. In other words, I am asking the question of purpose. What drove these busy men—busy in business, busy with families, busy in pastoring churches and providing leadership to larger ecclesiastical movements—to focus as they did on the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone?

Their context encompassed at least five elements. They were anti-Catholic (i.e., Protestant), anti-Socinian, anti-Antinomian, anti-Arminian (i.e., Calvinistic), and evangelical. These five horizons—sometimes stronger in one than in the other, and sometimes more pressing in one of their lives than at other times—were what they had in mind as they formulated their doctrine of justification by faith alone. Let's look at these contexts a bit.

First was their on-going concern about Catholicism (with its teaching that one would ultimately be justified before the holy God on the basis of faith combined with good works and love, all flowing from an infusion of grace at baptism, and resulting in the reality that one could rarely have assurance of salvation in this life).

A second was a powerful new heresy, Socinianism, which promulgated auto-soterism based on the false teaching that Jesus was not divine but rather gave to humans an example they should strive to follow. Socinianism was a growing concern throughout the seventeenth century, making its presence felt by the 1630s, and becoming more vocal in the 1640s, due in large part to the labors of John Biddle.¹ “By the end of the [1640s] the Socinian threat loomed large in the minds of many English divines,” according to Tim Cooper.²

Antinomianism was the third error they controverted; it was a varied movement, which among other things downplayed the necessity of personal Christian obedience.³ At its core, antinomian adherents, according to Robert McKelvey, “so zealously sought to guard the free grace of God in salvation that they denied faith any involvement at all in the actual justification of sinners.”⁴ Antinomians charged “that the [Puritan] obsession with sanctification and holy duties compromised the Protestant message of free grace and seduced the people of God back into works righteousness and legalism.”⁵

A fourth error Kiffen and Owen opposed was Arminianism. Dewey Wallace notes that there “three different though sometimes overlapping kinds of Arminianism” in England in the seventeenth century. First, there was a liberal brand that foreshadowed Socinianism. The second type was Laudianism, fueled by Charles I’s ascendancy in 1625 and William Laud’s appointment to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1633.⁶ It was revived after the 1660 Restoration of the monarchy when it “became widespread in the Church of England, with Calvinists, especially after the ejection of many Puritans in 1662, remaining an embattled minority.” The third Arminian group consisted of those on the fringes of the Puritan movement, “freewillers” like the General Baptists and the London pastor, John Goodwin.⁷

Finally, and most significantly of all, Kiffen and Owen shared an evangelical context, meaning that they both believed the gospel of Jesus Christ and thought that apart from someone trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins that person would go to an eternity in hell. This evangelical context was fueled by their common Protestant context.⁸ If we don’t understand

that this was the bedrock reason for their discussions of justification, we will misunderstand them.

I disagree, then, with George Hunsinger who, in an essay on Owen's work on justification critiques him in this way: Owen's "arduous, quasi-scholastic method of disputation," Hunsinger avers, "might drive even the most hardened anti-pietist to yearn wistfully for anything by which the heart might be strangely warmed."⁹ Hunsinger has failed to come to grips with this pastoral thrust in Owen's doctrine of justification.

Catholicism, Socinianism, Antinomianism, Arminianism—these were the four errors Kiffen and Owen chiefly had to combat. What unified their efforts in this *mélange* of various contexts, though, was their pastoral concern. The overriding concern of both Kiffen and Owen was the simple answer to the questioner, What must I do to be saved? They both believed that what one believed and did in this life determined one's eternal destiny.

Our course in the remainder of the article is simple and straightforward. We will first notice how William Kiffen developed his doctrine of justification in a confessional statement in 1644. Second, we will take a quick glance at two confessional statements—the second dependent on the first—in whose production and dissemination both Owen and Kiffen played a part, the first from 1658, the second 1677/1689. Third, we shall consider a lengthy 1677 treatise of John Owen devoted to justification. The thing that animated both Owen and Kiffen in all their theological contexts was not primarily logic or polemics. The unifying factor in all their efforts was the gospel. More than anything, they wanted their readers to go to heaven.

THE FIRST LONDON CONFESSION OF FAITH (1644)

The mid-seventeenth century was not an easy time to be a Baptist, as William Kiffen knew all too well. Baptists were accused of a variety of errors by many Anglicans and some Presbyterians.¹⁰ They accused Baptists of publishing "seditious pamphlets, the tumultuous rising of rude multitudes, the preaching of the cobblers, felt-makers, tailors, grooms, and women; the choosing of any place for God's service but the church; the night-meetings of naked men and women; the licentiousness of spiritual marriages without any legal form," etc.¹¹

This contextual setting has much to do with the publication of the First London Confession in 1644. Though the Confession was issued in the name

of seven Particular Baptist churches in London, it “is generally admitted to have been written under Kiffen’s guiding hand,” according to Paul Fiddes.¹² Here we see Kiffen’s theology laid out in full.

The full title—*The Confession of Faith, of Those Churches Which are Commonly (though Falsly) Called Anabaptists*—reminds us of its goal to distance English Calvinistic Baptists from the continent’s Anabaptists. In addition, the Confession has three major contexts we should note: it was strongly Calvinistic, staunchly opposed to the error of Antinomianism, and gospel-saturated. We will look at each of these three contexts in turn.

In the first place, the Confession is decidedly Calvinistic.¹³ The preface to it laments that Baptists were often charged “both in Pulpit and Print . . . with holding Free-will, Falling away from grace, denying Originall sinne.” Therefore, as Barry White notes, “the leaders of their congregations had determined to publish their *Confession* in order to manifest their substantial agreement with the prevailing forms of Calvinistic orthodoxy.”¹⁴

Its Calvinism is apparent. In his providence, the Confession states “God hath decreed in himselfe from everlasting touching all things, effectually to work and dispose them according to the counsell of his owne will, to the glory of his Name.” It also asserts predestination: “God had in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to the good pleasure of his will, fore-ordained some men to eternall life through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of his grace, leaving the rest in their sinne to their just condemnation, to the praise of his Justice.”¹⁵

All persons are born dead spiritually due to original sin. God alone acts to redeem “the elect, which God hath loved with an everlasting love.” These ones are “redeemed, quickened, and saved, not by themselves, neither by their own workes, lest any man should boast himselfe, but wholly and onely by God of his free grace and mercie through Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ Christ died only for these elect ones: Jesus “hath fully performed and suffered all those things by which God, through the blood of that his Crosse in an acceptable sacrifice, might reconcile his elect onely.”¹⁷

Second, Kiffen staunchly opposed the Antinomian error in the Confession. Chapter 26 explicitly denies it. “The same power that converts to faith in Christ,” it says, “the same power carries on the soule still through all the duties, temptations, conflicts, sufferings” and whatever else accompanies the Christian life. Christians have duties they must perform. Chapter 29 further

joins together justification and sanctification as graces of God for his elect. The Confession asserts “That all beleevvers are a holy and sanctified people, and that sanctification is a spirituall grace of the new Covenant, and effect of the love of God.” Kiffen deftly avoids the charge of any antinomian tendencies in his teaching, even though he maintains the absolute sovereignty of God to save his elect through his irresistible working alone.

It’s the third context—the evangelical context—that encompasses the doctrine of justification. What is essential, according to Kiffen, is that persons go to heaven. They can only do this by seeing Jesus and his gospel, and trusting in the Christ portrayed there.¹⁸ Every good—past, present, and future—is found in Christ alone. Believers in Christ now possess peace with God through justification by faith. This the climax of all spiritual good. Christ is the centerpiece of salvation, which is epitomized in justification.¹⁹

Chapter 28 articulates the doctrine of justification: “those that have union with Christ, are justified from all their sinnes, past, present, and to come, by the bloud of Christ; which justification wee conceive to be a gracious and free acquittance of a guiltie, sinfull creature, from all sin by God, through the satisfaction that Christ hath made by his death; and this applyed in the manifestation of it through faith.” Christ’s blood, his satisfaction on the cross, is the ground of justification. This justification consists fundamentally in the remission of sin.

The next chapter displays the evangelical and pastoral heart of this doctrine. Justification is not an esoteric belief to be occasionally dusted off for debate. Rather, it’s the life of the Christian and the message of Christians to a lost world:

the tenders of the Gospel to the conversion of sinners, is absolutely free, no way requiring, as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, terrors of the Law, or preceding Ministry of the Law, but onely and alone the naked soule, as a sinner and ungodly to receive Christ, as crucified, dead, and buried, and risen againe, being made a Prince and a Saviour for such sinners (ch. 25).²⁰

The 1644 London Confession highlights the Arminian, Antinomian, and evangelical context of William Kiffen. Supremely his hope was in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary labor of the Lord dying in the place of his people, to be received by faith. This was what motivated Kiffen as he

protected this precious, life-giving, zeal-producing doctrine from Arminian and Antinomian encroachments.

OWEN AND KIFFEN IN THE SAVOY DECLARATION AND THE 1689 CONFESSION

Next we shall briefly note a text that John Owen and William Kiffen had in common: the Savoy Declaration of Faith of 1658 and the Second London Confession of 1677 (issued in 1689).²¹ Two introductory matters are relevant. In the first place, they both mirrored almost exactly the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith. Both the Congregationalists and the Baptists wanted to distance themselves from various sectarian groups, showing they were in line with each other and agreed in the main with historic Christian and Protestant doctrine.²² Savoy used Westminster, which was published over a decade prior to the latter's composition. And the Second London Confession used both of them. In the second place, Owen was the primary author of Savoy. We see his theology here, especially where Savoy differs from Westminster.²³ And Kiffen was a signatory of the Baptist Confession, approving of its theology.²⁴

Westminster's theology of justification was decidedly Protestant, but Robert Letham notes the Assembly's major concern was less with Catholicism and Arminianism and more with Antinomianism.²⁵ Alan Strange concurs: "the main theological error among Protestants, at least as far as the Assembly was concerned, and which it determined to oppose, was antinomianism."²⁶

This may account for one of the main additions that Savoy and the Baptists made to the Westminster Confession. They both added chapter 20, "Of the Gospel and the Extent of Grace Thereof," in four paragraphs. After the fall into sin, they asserted, "God was pleased to give unto the elect the promise of Christ . . . in this promise the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and [is] therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners" (20.1). The gospel-centeredness of Savoy and the Baptists is clear.

Chapter 11 in each of the three confessions—"Of Justification"—consists in six points, among which there is almost total agreement. There are, though, a couple of significant dissimilarities. The first concerns exactly what was imputed to believers in their justification. Savoy and the Second London Confession remark that justification occurs "by imputing Christ's active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for

their whole and sole righteousness,” clarifying Westminster’s statement that this occurred merely “by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them.” There is development after Westminster.

Two factors seem to account for the change. First, there was a development, as Carl Trueman has noted, in theologians’ and pastors’ abilities in articulating their theology due to growth in the formulation of covenant theology, specifically the *pactum salutis* and the particular role of Christ as Mediator of the covenant of grace. This accounted for some of the new stress upon Christ’s active and passive obedience being imputed to believers.²⁷ Second, this period had seen a growth in Socinianism, along with its denial of Christ’s deity and federal headship. In response, both Savoy and the Baptists proclaimed that the only hope for sinners was that Christ had lived a perfect life for the elect and this active obedience was accounted for their gross disobedience. This active obedience, along with the Lord’s obedience in dying for sinners the righteous for the unrighteous—the misnamed “passive obedience”—were both counted to the elect. By this deft stroke one of Socinianism’s chief teachings was overturned.

The second change is a minor one probably directed towards the antinomians. The fourth paragraph in Westminster, which was certainly directed against the wrong-headed doctrine of eternal justification, said: “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins and rise again for their justification; nevertheless they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.”²⁸ Savoy and Second London add one word—“personally”—so that we are told that prior to the Spirit’s application of Christ to believers “they are not justified *personally*,” presumably stressing the individual’s need to personally exercise faith in order to be justified, even though one might not be able to conceptualize how this integrates with God’s eternal decree to justify the elect.

The two additions to both Savoy and the Second London Confession, then—along with the addition of the chapter on the gospel—demonstrate once again Owen’s and Kiffen’s commitment to guarding the gospel from wrong-headed assaults. Socinianism and antinomianism were grave errors because they impinged on the life-giving message of the promise of life in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

JOHN OWEN AND JUSTIFICATION

As Crawford Gribben has reminded us, the latter years of Owen were among his most productive ones.²⁹ In 1677, six years prior to his death, Owen published his *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ; Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated*. Justification, faith, imputation—these are key ideas Owen circles around to time and again over the course of 562 pages in the first printing in 1677 and approximately 400 pages in the nineteenth-century Goold edition.

Owen's context is essential to understand the contours of this work. Dewey Wallace reminds us how precarious the latter seventeenth century was for conservative Protestants. He comments that “the emergence of a new intellectual world that challenged many of the traditional religious assumptions of an earlier time was particularly relevant to the shaping of English Calvinism during the Restoration and its immediate aftermath.” Specifically, Wallace notes several “aspects of later seventeenth-century culture in Restoration England that were religiously unsettling were the demand for greater rationality, new discoveries in science (or ‘natural philosophy’), awareness of other religions, scoffing at religion, denial of such a central pillar of orthodox Christianity as the doctrine of the Trinity (often referred to at the time by a kind of shorthand as ‘Socinianism’), Deism, and atheism.”³⁰

Owen himself pinpoints three errors that will fall under his gaze: Catholicism, Socinianism, and Antinomianism.³¹ We should note, however, the issue which actually serves as the driving force of the entire treatise. This is Owen's evangelical context. *The* question, *the* pressing issue, Owen asks and answers in this work is, How can a desperately wicked sinner hope to stand before the holy God at the final day? Everything in the treatise—whether it's his eighty pages of biblical exposition, his interaction with the Catholic controversialist Robert Bellermino, his lengthy interaction with the thought of Faustus Socinus, or his pressing the claims of obedience upon those who have been justified—everything is related to this question of eternity for Owen. How can a sinner go to heaven, and how can he have certainty in this life that he will go there?

Michael Haykin and Matthew Barrett have recently helped us understand the Socinians, who “viewed the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which Reformed theologians like Owen believed to consist of Christ's active obedience (i.e., his fulfilling the law on our behalf) and passive obedience (i.e.,

his taking the penalty for our sin), as an ‘impossible’ doctrine.”³² Cooper helpfully notes the reason that Owen vehemently defended orthodoxy from Socinianism:

For Owen, his nonconformist upbringing combined with his university learning and his experience of encroaching Laudianism at Oxford to forge an understanding of doctrine that precluded anything that might look like human merit in the process of salvation. He did this in a phase of intense political developments, at a time when Laudian influence in England peaked and then receded [in the latter 1640s] ... at just that moment the new fact of human autonomy—the Socinians—began to emerge as an increasingly significant marker in the mind of Owen and others of a growing independence in human thought and aspiration ... this is not to reduce Owen’s soteriology to mere pragmatism, only to recognize that he crafted his belief in a particular context under identifiable pressures and with discernable aims.³³

Haykin and Barrett also point out that for Catholicism “justification, regeneration, and sanctification were intertwined so that justification was understood not as an instantaneous legal, forensic declaration, but as a process of inner renewal and transformation.”³⁴ Owen had much to do to overthrow their polemic.

The bulk of Owen’s book consists of twenty chapters. The first six chapters are a general overview of the nature of faith and justification. Chapter seven turns to a discussion and defense of imputation, which Owen considers the heart of the biblical and Protestant doctrine. This—along with a related discussion of faith, the relationship between the covenants in redemptive history, and the necessity of personal obedience in the redeemed—covers chapters seven through fifteen. Chapters sixteen through eighteen—totaling almost eighty pages, or twenty percent of the entire treatise—are a detailed biblical exposition of justification by faith alone through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. The treatise concludes with two chapters, the first of which answers remaining objections to Owen’s doctrine. The final chapter proves how essential Owen believed obedience was for justified Christians; here he has a thirty-page-long discussion of the relationship between the apostles Paul and James on the matter of justification. This reminds us how dangerous Owen felt the Antinomian threat was to evangelical living.

We are not going to look at these twenty chapters. Instead, we shall notice Owen's two lengthy prefaces to *Justification by Faith*. In these two prefaces Owen answers our Why? question, telling us exactly why he was motivated to write this lengthy treatise.

In the first preface, "To the Reader," Owen proclaims that the seemingly-intricate doctrine of justification in reality is exceedingly practical. "It is the practical direction of the consciences of men, in their application unto God by Jesus Christ for deliverance from the curse due unto the apostate state, and peace with him, with the influence of the way thereof unto universal gospel obedience," Owen writes, "that is alone to be designed in the handling of this doctrine."³⁵ That is the whole point of this 400 page treatise! Hunsinger's earlier-noted critique of Owen seems to have failed to deal with this pastoral thrust in Owen's work on justification.³⁶ The relief of men's burdened consciences is the supreme goal, then, of the entire work, along with Owen's corresponding concern that those who are forgiven should strive for "universal gospel obedience." Indeed, Owen notes how often skeptics charge this doctrine "with an un-friendly aspect towards the necessity of personal holiness, good works, and all gospel obedience."³⁷ Catholics and Socinians continually accuse Protestants of this, even though the entire Reformation encompassed the effort to aid "the souls of men, being set at liberty from their bondage unto innumerable superstitious fears and observances, utterly inconsistent with true gospel obedience, and directed into the ways of peace with God through Jesus Christ, were made fruitful in real holiness."³⁸ Burdened sinners' fears of judgment can only be relieved by someone outside of themselves saving them; this is the burden of Owen's treatise.

The overarching purpose of relieving burdened consciences continues in the second preface, the sixty-four page-long "General Considerations." Having noted that the twin ultimate goals of justification are the glory of God and the obedience of Christians, Owen urges several reflections regarding this doctrine, which we shall summarize in three ways.

First, only justification *sola fide* can assure of salvation. He says his first consideration is "the proper relief of the conscience of a sinner pressed and perplexed with a sense of the guilt of sin."³⁹ Owen's evangelical emphasis follows in his discussion where he recounts the burden of wondering how one can be forgiven, and realizing that it can only be by what one does himself or what Christ does for one; it cannot be both.⁴⁰ Owen argues that "in no

other evangelical truth is the whole of our obedience more concerned; for the foundation, reasons, and motives of all our duty towards God are contained therein.” That gets to the heart of justification’s conscience-assuaging significance. “To satisfy the minds and consciences of men,” Owen avers, “is this doctrine to be taught.”⁴¹ We will not understand Owen aright if we fail to see his reason for controverting justification. It is the only way one can know he will go to heaven.⁴²

Second, Owen observes that God is holy and we are all sinners. The one with whom we have to do is the holy Judge. Catholic teaching does nothing to relieve our consciences before God the Judge.⁴³ In denying imputation, Socinians offer no solace to those who are aware of the depths of their own sin.⁴⁴ In fact, Owen teaches that a large part of justification is holding to imputation. Imputation, he declares, is “a commutation between Christ and believers, as unto sin and righteousness; that is, in the imputation of their sins unto him, and of his righteousness unto them.”⁴⁵ This is no an esoteric teaching; after all, Luther and others found solace here.⁴⁶ Without believing it, one cannot have assurance of forgiveness before God. The imputation of our sin to Christ and his righteousness to us “is represented unto us in the Scripture as the principal object of our faith,—as that whereon our peace with God is founded.”⁴⁷

Third, Owen stresses Christian obedience. Socinians argue that Christians will be lax in righteousness due to a belief in imputation. Their root problem is their commitment to follow their straying logic instead of the teaching of Scripture, even though the Bible is on both truths—i.e., that imputation and the requirement for evangelical obedience are true, even if we can’t understand how.⁴⁸

What matters, Owen declares, is not the word (“imputation”) but the clear teaching of the Bible. Reiterating again the evangelical thrust of the entire treatise, he announces that there is only one way for men to have faith “when they come to die, and . . . [when they] are exercised with temptations whilst they live.” “The substance of what is pleaded for [in the entire book, is] that men should renounce all confidence in themselves, and every thing that may give countenance thereunto; betaking themselves unto the grace of God by Christ alone for righteousness and salvation.”⁴⁹ The imputation of the perfect righteousness of Jesus matters because heaven is in the balance.

Owen’s close to the General Considerations shows the weight he attaches

to the doctrine. Echoing John Calvin's teaching that justification is the main hinge on which true religion turns, Owen remarks that "the doctrine of justification gave the first occasion to the whole work of reformation, and was the main hinge whereon it turned."⁵⁰ Justification as he understood it—based on the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the corresponding necessity of evangelical obedience—was the centerpiece of the Protestant Reformation precisely because it was the only truth able to ease men's consciences before God.⁵¹ Eternity awaits all persons, and outside of Christ's righteousness only God's wrath awaits us all.⁵²

CONCLUSION

Perhaps Crawford Gribben is correct and John Owen's life was ultimately an experience of defeat. Certainly both William Kiffen and John Owen ended their lives not feeling like they had "won." All around them things in the culture and the churches seemed to be drifting further and further away from God and godliness. Yet, they continued teaching justification by faith alone as the only hope for sinners. May we do the same, brothers and sisters, knowing that the gospel alone is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Whatever goes on around us, eternity is yet to come for each individual.

¹ Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "Anti-Trinitarianism," in *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2 (Francis J. Bremer and Tom Webster, eds.; Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2006), 309-10.

² Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 65. He also suggests that in Socinus's scheme, "Men and women were saved by [Christ's] teaching and moral example, not by his death on the Cross. Like any Roman ruler, God had the right to punish sinners but could choose not to use it, so the Cross of Christ was not the basis of forgiveness and reconciliation. For religion to be praiseworthy it had to be a matter of choice, not of an inner inclination or instinct tied to a universal natural law embedded in all people, much less the result of God's own choice and election ... Christ was merely a historical figure who revealed a new way" (Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 64).

³ Antinomians, as Paul Schaefer points out, were "preachers who used the rhetoric of sola gratia in such a way as to turn it into a teaching of absolute passivity, whereby little or no discussion of sanctification formed part of the discourse on the life of the Christians" (Paul R. Schaefer Jr., *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011], 244). In addition, John Spurr notes that, "The 'antinomianism' mentioned by several contemporaries was a strain of mystical puritan theology and piety. . . . In place of the arid piety of constantly searching for signs of election, they offered a bolder confidence in the mercy and goodness of God. They were willing," he insists, "to 'listen to the Spirit' and critical of those they saw as 'formalists'" (John Spurr, *The Post-Reformation: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain 1603-1714* [London: Pearson, 2006], 107). "At times, antinomian theorists were so extravagant in their claims for the effects of divine grace and the inhabitation of God's spirit that they implied that believers were in some sense rendered perfect, indeed divine, in this life" (David Como,

- "Antinomianism," in *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America* [Bremer and Webster, eds., 2:306].
- 4 Robert J. McKelvey, "That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism: Eternal Justification," in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversy: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 239-40; however, David Como might be correct that "antinomian" was "primarily a hostile term of abuse, often used imprecisely, sloppily or maliciously for polemical purposes" (David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004], 33, in McKelvey, "That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism," 224).
 - 5 David R. Como, "Radical Puritanism, c. 1558-1660," in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 249-50. "Antinomians thus positioned themselves as the only true defenders of free grace at a moment when many English Puritans and Calvinists were fretting over the ascendancy of churchmen who were seen as crypto-popish works-mongers (which was apparently what gave the movement traction)" (Como, "Radical Puritanism," 251).
 - 6 There was a very real concern that Laud was seeking to turn the Church away from its hard-won Reformed heritage. As Kevin Sharpe notes, "significant contemporaries did perceive Laud to be the spawn of a papist and an Arminian threat and did fear dangerous innovations in the Caroline church" (Kevin Sharpe, "Religion, Rhetoric, and Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England," *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 57 [1994]: 263, in Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 36).
 - 7 Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "Arminianism," in *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America* (Bremer and Webster, eds.; 2:312-13). He perhaps overstates his case in saying that "John Owen made the refutation of Arminianism his theological lifework" (Wallace, "Arminianism," 313).
 We might add one more context. Both Kiffen and Owen lived much of their adult lives as dissenters from the established church of their nation. These two monumental figures—as different as they were in background, education, and personality, and even though Owen never completed his move from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism by becoming a Baptist—were united (at least for decades) as religious outsiders in their country. One thing that meant was that they had regularly to distance themselves from the various sects that were rampant in the seventeenth century, in a world turned upside down, when sects like "Fifth Monarchy Men, Ranters, Baptists, Quakers, and others – 'swarmed,'" according to Spurr, *The Post-Reformation*, 131.
 - 8 As heirs of the Protestant Reformation, Kiffen and Owen would agree with the views of Martin Luther and John Calvin on justification. Carl Trueman notes that "On justification, Calvin is at one with Luther both in the anti-Pelagian framework within which he understands salvation and in the punctiliar, declaratory nature of justification as being by the imputation of Christ's righteousness through faith" (Carl R. Trueman, "Justification," in David M. Whitford, ed., *T & T Clark Companion to Reformation Theology* [London: Bloomsbury, 2012], 66).
 - 9 George Hunsinger, "Justification and Mystical Union with Christ: Where Does Owen Stand?" in *The Ashgate Companion to John Owen's Theology* (Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, eds.; Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 204.
 - 10 Stephen Wright notes that "The growth of sects and antinomianism was a recurrent theme in the [Presbyterian Westminster] Assembly between July and September 1644; it was revealed that even some ministers who had been examined and passed 'prove Anabaptists and antinomians,' and in the discussion which followed this disturbing news, the vote on whether dipping be permitted as a baptismal form resulted in a tie. The debate was conducted with Baptists in mind" (Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* [Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2006], 129).
 - 11 In William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought: With Special Reference to Baptists in Britain and North America* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 27. Barry White has suggested that mid-seventeenth century English people feared the radical ideas—political and religious—that seemed to be tearing their country apart. "Many people felt profoundly insecure during this period and those, such as the Baptists, who challenged the most vital traditions of Church and State increased their unease," he observes. "Infant baptism had tied church and community neatly together. Believer's baptism sundered the church, the company of the committed, both from other groups with churchly pretensions and from men's 'natural' social context – the parish" (B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* [London: Baptist Historical Society, 1983], 26). The Levellers, for instance, had successfully recruited quite a few General Baptists to their cause. In the public's eye, there was no difference between General and Particular Baptists, so the latter were also viewed suspiciously. This was such a concern to Kiffen that in 1649 he led a group that petitioners to the House of Commons, insisting "that our meetings are not at all to intermeddle with the ordering or altering civil government (which we humbly and submissively leave to the supreme power),

- but solely for the advancement of the Gospel" (White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 76).
- ¹² Paul S. Fiddes, Foreword, in Larry J. Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and his World (Part 1)* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, Oxford, 2010), xi.
- ¹³ Collier notes that the statement explicitly denied such Arminian and General Baptist doctrines as free will, losing one's salvation, and the denial of the devastating effects of original sin on unbelievers (Jay T. Collier, in James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009], 53).
- ¹⁴ B. R. White, "The Doctrine of the Church in the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 2 (1968): 571. Almost fifty years later, in 1692, Kiffen along with three others identified the reason that called forth this influential Baptist confessional statement. They were charged with making "the Truth of Christ contemptible," especially by being "corrupt in the Doctrines of the Gospel." The Confession was written to show the error of the charge (William Kiffen, et al, *A Serious Answer to a Late Book Stiled, A Reply to Mr. Robert Steed's Epistle concerning Singing*. [London: n.p., 1692], 16-17). All was not well in many people's minds over the publication of the 1644 Confession. Many were alarmed over Baptists' "breach with ordinary rites of passage" in the publication of the Confession. "Daniel Featley, long an apologist for the Church of England, published, in 1645, an account of the Baptists based partly on notes of a disputation he had undertaken against William Kiffin three years earlier. Called *The Dippers Dipt*, the book identified the new body with the continental Anabaptists and tarred them all with the brush of the crimes of Munster. The volume was extremely popular, reaching a sixth edition by 1651. Likewise, Thomas Edwards, a Presbyterian spokesman, was severely critical of the Baptists in his work *Gangraena* (1646), an anatomy of contemporary sects. Kiffin, according to a correspondent whom Edwards quoted, 'hath by his enticing words seduced and gathered a schismatical rabble of deluded children, servants and people without either parents' or masters' consent'" (David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010], 48).
- ¹⁵ *First London Baptist Confession*, article 3, in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 157.
- ¹⁶ *First London Baptist Confession*, article 5, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 158.
- ¹⁷ *First London Baptist Confession*, article 17, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 160.
- ¹⁸ Chapters 21 through 32 are the central section of the 53-chapter long statement of faith. They have no known source outside of the First London Confession, surely displaying Kiffen's thought. As Barry White has pointed out the key twelve articles (articles 21 to 32), which are an articulation of "the life of the believer as one of God's elect," have no known literary source. Kiffen apparently authored these points which "contained or implied the five points of limited atonement, unconditional election, total depravity, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints, although unconditional election had been asserted somewhat earlier" (White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 64). Murray Tolmie suggests Kiffen was the principal author the Confession, as seen by his being the first signature to the document (Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 57-58).
- ¹⁹ A "new feature in 1644 was the section of twelve articles (XXI-XXXII) dealing with the life the believer as one of God's elect. It is evident from these (for which no literary source has yet been discovered) that for the men of 1644 the other most significant theological event since 1596 [the year of the publication of the Separatists' *A True Confession*], alongside the restoration of believer's baptism, had been the Synod of Dort where the new definition of Calvinistic orthodoxy had been promulgated. The twelve articles of 1644 contained or implied the five points of limited atonement, unconditional election, total depravity, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints, although unconditional election had been asserted somewhat earlier. This whole section . . . was introduced . . . by men who took the Calvinistic orthodoxy of their day with great seriousness" (White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 64).
- ²⁰ Tom Nettles sees the influence of John Goodwin—both linguistically and methodologically—in this statement, which is significant given the role that the Arminian Goodwin's preaching had on Kiffen's experience of assurance. See Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity, Vol. One: Beginnings in Britain* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2005), 130-31, 142-43). Michael Haykin says that Goodwin was used by God to bring Kiffen to salvation (Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach: Rediscovering Our English Baptist Heritage* [Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1996], 43). We have no indication that Kiffen was reflecting on the so-called Antinomian Controversy in colonial Boston some seven years earlier. But if so, he had just agreed with the beleaguered John Cotton who barely survived the controversy unscathed, and whom many of his fellow pastors struggled to trust afterwards.
- ²¹ White notes that "The easing of persecution in the late 1670s enabled the Calvinistic Baptists in 1677 as

- a community 'in London and the country' to publish their new Confession" (White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 119).
- 22 The preface to the Second London Confession demonstrates this when it says, "finding no defect in this regard in that fixed on by the Assembly, and after them by those of the Congregational way, we did really conclude it best to retain the same order in our confession . . . making use of the very same words with them both, in those articles (which were very many) wherein our faith and doctrine is the same as theirs" ("To the Judicious and Impartial Reader," in Brackney, *Genetic History*, 32).
- 23 For Owen's role at the Savoy conference, see Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (1893; rpt. Boston: Pilgrim, 1960), 349. Walker notes that Savoy added an entirely new chapter, "Of the Gospel, and of the extent of the Grace thereof," chapter. 20. Of this chapter, which the 1689 adopted as its own as well, Walker argues it is "a pleasing token of that readiness, always characteristic of Congregationalism, to hold for the more gracious aspects of the religion of Christ" (Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 351). It seems more likely that in context this new chapter instead represents an attempt to counter the growing threat of hyper-Calvinism among Congregationalists and Baptists, an attempt that would prove prescient in the next century.
- 24 We see this, for example, in that Kiffin was one of seven Particular Baptist pastors who sent out a letter urging Particular Baptist churches to send representatives to the assembly that adopted the Confession (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 238). A question raises itself before we look at these confessions. Why didn't the Baptists just use the 1644 Confession, and its 1646 revision, instead of issuing a new one? Several reasons have been suggested. The First London Confession had been out of print for several years and was hard to come by. Obviously, though it might have initially influenced Baptists greatly, it was not so much a part of their DNA that a new statement would be viewed suspiciously by them (Brackney, *Genetic History*, 31-32; James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705* [Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008], 17-18). Also, there was the very real desire in the post-Glorious Revolution era of the Act of Toleration for Baptists to show that they were overwhelmingly united with their dissenting brethren the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists by issuing a confession that agreed with these other dissenting denominations (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 236-37). Additionally there was the growing threat of hyper-Calvinism in Particular Baptist church life as evidenced in the need for Kiffin and other London Baptist pastors in 1675 to publish a letter in opposition to one tenet of hyper-Calvinism, the denial of issuing the call to repentance and faith to all persons indiscriminately (see Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach*, 64-65, and Nettles, *The Baptists*, 1:137-38).
- 25 Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 251. Letham argues that antinomianism "probably arose due to an excessive stress in Puritanism on self-examination and precise directives for godly living, for 'antinomians offered a relief from the perceived tyranny of puritan practical divinity'" (*Westminster Assembly*, 251 fn. 17, citing Jeffrey K. Jue, "The Active Obedience of Christ and the Westminster Standards," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint [Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2007], 110-11). Later he notes that the Assembly had three major foes in view: the Roman doctrine of justification ("There was no place for any element in the believer contributing even in an instrumental sense to his justification. All positions that included inherent righteousness in this sense were excluded" (Letham, *Westminster Assembly* 262), antinomianism's eternal justification, and Arminianism's doctrine of justification (Letham, *Westminster Assembly* 263). Of Arminianism's doctrine, he notes that "contrary to Arminian teaching, faith itself is not imputed, neither is any other evangelical obedience involved. This would simply be another form of the Roman Catholic doctrine, for justification would then be related to something present in the one believing, albeit the consequence of grace" (Letham, *Westminster Assembly* 270).
- 26 Alan D. Strange, "The Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ at the Westminster Assembly," in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 38.
- 27 Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 101-13. "Christ's appointment as mediator in the covenant of redemption means that all his works are those of voluntary condescension in the ordained economy of salvation, not necessary to his being, and as such their significance and value is determined by the covenant which the defining ground of the work of incarnation. In addition, the position of Christ as federal sponsor means that he always acts in a public, not a private or personal capacity, and that strict comparison with any other individual is not legitimate. His whole life, having its causal ground in the covenant of redemption, is that of the sponsor of the covenant of grace, and thus in its entirety it has a significance which embraces all of the objects of the covenant of grace"

- (Trueman, *John Owen*, 110).
- ²⁸ Letham avers that “The insistent theme of the antinomians was that the crucial center of gravity of justification was that the crucial center of gravity of justification was the eternal decree and the historical accomplishment of Christ. To counter this position, which the divines saw would under the doctrine of sanctification, the section goes on to assert that the elect are not *actually* justified until the Holy Spirit applies Christ to them through faith. This means that our receiving Christ in our own life-history is the Archimedean point of justification, not the decree of God in eternity. However, the sovereign decree of God is asserted, and the application of salvation to the elect is maintained. The Confession will have nothing to do with antinomianism; neither will it make concessions to Arminianism” (Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, 272). According to Cooper, “Chad van Dixhoorn suggests that Antinomianism was a much greater and more immediate fear in the Assembly even than Catholicism” (Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 198).
- ²⁹ Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 234-235. Unfortunately, other than briefly mentioning Owen’s *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, Gribben does not interact with this work in any substantial way.
- ³⁰ Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27, 30.
- ³¹ “The seventeenth century was a period where antinomianism was on the rise, and the pendulum swung hard in the opposite direction and yielded a neonomian direction” (J. V. Fesko, “John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification,” *Themelios* 37.1 [2012]: 8).
- ³² Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 186.
- ³³ Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 222. Cooper also perceptively notes this: “Ironically, both Owen and Baxter shared a concern for excessive human freedom. Owen disliked the autonomy the Arminians and Socinians granted to the human will. Baxter condemned the liberty allowed by the Antinomians, which reflected itself in practical rebellion and disobedience” (Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 223). Even more generally, Wallace has pointed out that even though technically Socinians were doctrinally heterodox on issues like the atonement, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, God’s grace, and original sin, there were other reasons for Owen and others to be alarmed by them. Socinianism’s “rejection of ‘mysteries’ that could not be warranted before the bar of reason has been claimed as a major source of English radicalism, political and religious, throughout the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. With its rejection of mysteries it blended with Deism” (Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 47-48).
- ³⁴ Barrett and Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life*, 186. They also note the challenge posed by Arminianism, antinomians’ doctrine of “eternal justification,” and Richard Baxter, though Owen does not address those in *Justification by Faith*. See Barrett and Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life*, 186-89.
- ³⁵ John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* in *The Works of John Owen* (ed., William H. Goold [1850-1853]; rpt. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 5:4. Myers correctly notes that this “work is structured polemically rather than systematically and thus Owen’s attention to any given doctrinal point often is spread over different sections and set within nuanced discussions of different issues and objections” (Stephen G. Myers, “God, Owen, and Justification: The Role of God’s Nature in John Owen’s Doctrine of Justification,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, 2 (2016): 70, fn 1).
- ³⁶ However, Hunsinger’s previous comment on Owen’s writing style seems apropos: “No one has accused John Owen of making matters easy for his readers. Every sentence he wrote could be exhausting. A complex syntax, which constantly nested one relative clause within another, time after time within the same sentence, was compounded by his penchant for using three words where one word would do.” See Hunsinger, “Justification and Mystical Union with Christ: Where Does Owen Stand?” 204. On the other hand, Tom Schreiner is surely right to note that “What leaps out at the reader in these writings [of Owen’s *Justification by Faith*] is the pastoral character of Owen’s understanding” (Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015], 70). Similarly Beeke and Jones aver that “It should be remembered that there is a deep pastoral intent in Owen’s writings, especially on the issue of justification” (Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012], 493).
- ³⁷ Owen, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *Works* 5:4.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

- ⁴² Later Owen noted that “In my judgment, Luther spake the truth when he said, *Amisso articulo justificationis, simul amissa est tota doctrina Christiana*,” which means “The loss of the doctrine of justification involves the loss of all Christian doctrine” (Owen, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *Works* 5:67; the English translation is found in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 491).
- ⁴³ Owen, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *Works* 5:14. Beeke and Jones helpfully summarize the Catholic teaching on double justification: “The first justification, according to Rome, is the infusion of grace through baptism, which operates infallibly (*ex opere operato*), whereby original sin is extinguished and the habits of sin are expelled. The second justification is a consequence of the first, namely, justification by good works done is the exercise of the infused habits of grace” (Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 496-97; see Owen, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *Works* 5:138.) Also note Fesko’s treatment in “John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification,” 14-15.
- ⁴⁴ Owen, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *Works* 5:21.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 34. Myers summarizes Owen’s teaching here: “For Owen, imputation had two constituent parts. First, imputation involved ascribing, or reckoning, something to someone; and secondly, it involved treating that person as if he possessed the thing in question” (Myers, “God, Owen, and Justification,” 71). Owen stood in common ground with the later-seventeenth-century Reformed tradition here. “Justification was defined in forensic terms as the remission of sin and the imputation of righteousness, all of which in later Reformed theology was set in the context of a federal structure including a covenant of redemption, a covenant of works, and a covenant of grace. Just as the sin of Adam was imputed to all those whom he represented in the covenant of works, on the basis that he was their federal head, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all those whom he represents as federal head in the covenant of grace.” “Imputation is at the very heart and center of the Reformed understanding of justification” (A. T. B. McGowan, “Justification and the *ordo salutis*,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* [Bruce L. McCormack, ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006], 153, 154).
- ⁴⁶ Owen, *Justification by Faith Alone*, in *Works* 5:35-40.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40. Surely, then, Stephen Myers is correct to argue that Owen “offers distinctive insights into how the doctrine of justification is to be located within, and shaped by, a larger dogmatic system. Most specifically, within Owen’s theological system, God’s nature demands that justification include the imputation of Christ’s active obedience” (Myers, “God, Owen, and Justification,” 70).
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-49.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 65. For Calvin, see *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed., John T. McNeil, trans., Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.
- ⁵¹ “Imputation as the formal cause of justification is crucial to Owen’s argument as a whole. For a sinner to stand before God, two things are required: first, his iniquities must be forgiven; and second, he must possess a righteousness that will meet the requirements of God’s justice. Our own inherent righteousness at best is imperfect and cannot meet the demands of God’s law” (Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 500).
- ⁵² Owen, *Works* 5:85.

Socinianism and John Owen

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One of the surprising features for modern readers of the works of John Owen (1616-1683), especially his commentary on Hebrews, is his constant and detailed interaction with a group known as the Socinians. In his context, however, it is neither unusual nor eccentric, and it makes good sense in the light of Owen's previous career and contemporary agenda. In this article, we will put his conversation with the Socinians into historical perspective, and particularly assess the way he links the Socinians with others, especially Richard Baxter and Hugo Grotius, and the often political motives behind this.

THE GREAT HERESY OF SOCINIANISM

For seventeenth-century theologians, the anti-Trinitarian theology known as Socinianism was, as Willem van Asselt put it, "the very nadir of heresy."¹ Many British and Continental divines wrote in great and earnest detail against the insidious errors of the so-called Polish Brethren and other Socinians. Their roots went back into the previous century to those considered heretics by the magisterial Reformers, such as Michael Servetus (1511–1553), but

they eventually became associated with the unorthodox Italian émigré to Poland, Faustus Socinus (1539–1604).

Gerard Reedy helpfully outlines two related ways in which the term Socinianism was used. First, theologically, it described those who followed Socinus' teaching in various ways, e.g., "rationalistic scriptural interpretation; the accordance to Jesus of a high place in the divine order but not of divinity; the limiting of Jesus' role in the drama of human redemption principally to one of moral exemplarity; the advocacy of a wide tolerance for believers of all creeds." Second, methodologically, "Socinian" often meant placing a greater accent on human reason and a spirit of free enquiry than was felt to be proper, so that "taken thus, the term may apply to those who actually held Socinian doctrines; it may also be used of those who did not hold them, and even attacked them, who in some way accentuated reason to a degree thought unorthodox by others."² Socinianism became the subject of particularly passionate debate during the Trinitarian controversy in England during the 1690s, but was closely scrutinized from the very beginning of the century. Yet Sarah Mortimer asserts that "the intense engagement with Socinian writing that is evident in so many scholarly works of the period has been largely overlooked,"³ except in the cases of a few leading lights such as John Locke, John Milton, and Isaac Newton.

Refutations of Socinianism across the Confessions

Socinianism's influence can however be detected throughout the seventeenth-century academic community and across the confessional divides. Roman Catholic polemicists, commentators, and theologians, particularly Jesuits such as Adam Contzen (1573–1635),⁴ Cornelius à Lapide (1567–1637),⁵ and Denis Petau (1583–1652),⁶ wrote against the Socinians.⁷ Lutheran theologians also took up their pens in defense of Trinitarian orthodoxy against them,⁸ none more so than Abraham Calov (1612–1686) who was from the East Prussian border with Poland (where Socinianism was strongest), which "made this conflict a priority within his polemical oeuvre."⁹ Willem van Asselt claims that amongst the Reformed, "one can notice a response to Socinian theology in almost every locus of the systems of high orthodoxy."¹⁰

Works dedicated to refuting the Socinian heresy came from French, Transylvanian, and especially Dutch Reformed theologians,¹¹ as well as from the

English, both conformist and non-conformist.¹² Dewey Wallace claims that “Socinianism, with its denial of the Trinity and the atonement as well as its grace-denying moralism, was a more complete challenge to Calvinist orthodoxy than Arminianism had been.”¹³ It is no surprise then that the word “Socinian” became “a stock part of the abusive rhetoric of much religious debate” in the seventeenth century,¹⁴ as it was singled out for attention by various polemicists and heresy hunters.¹⁵ Opponents disagreed among themselves of course, yet there was a strikingly broad agreement on the pernicious nature of Socinian heresy.

Reasons for Opposing Such a Small Group

Yet for all this scholarly and polemical energy, the surprising thing, as Klaus Scholder puts it, “is that at no time did Socinianism represent a real force. Simply in numerical terms its adherents were a tiny little group in comparison to the great confessions.”¹⁶ Indeed, Scholder estimates that “in its heyday in Poland, including foreigners the Socinian movement did not comprise more than a thousand families.”¹⁷ Their main center of influence was Poland, but their academy in Raków was deliberately destroyed in 1638. They were expelled from the country twenty years later, and persecuted almost everywhere they were found in Europe.

This discrepancy between the political insignificance of the Socinians as a group and the amount of time and energy spent by theologians in every denomination refuting them has not gone unnoticed by scholars of the period. It was apparently nothing to do with their morality for, writes Stanislas Kot, “in spite of the fact that they were hated and passionately opposed by all the confessions, we find no complaints against their morals whether collective or individual.”¹⁸ At the time, Roman Catholics like Edward Knott (1581–1656) frequently insinuated that Socinianism was the logical progression of Protestantism.¹⁹ As he wrote in 1636, “the verie Doctrine of Protestants if it be followed closely, and with coherence to itself, must of necessitie induce Socinianisme.”²⁰ Others called Protestants back to Rome since the doctrine of the Trinity could not be proven *sola scriptura*.²¹ Presbyterians and Episcopalians even excoriated Baptists and Congregationalists, whose ecclesiology they thought would inexorably end up in a denial of the Trinity.²²

Anti-Trinitarianism may have been opposed simply as a foil or as a form of virtue signaling, to demonstrate orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity

against the aspersions of enemy theologians. Hans Blom recently traced Reformed antipathy to a fear of God's wrath and a forfeiting of his benevolence should Reformed divines be soft on heresy.²³ Evidence for such a motive in opposing Socinianism might be found in the 1666 Bill against Atheism, which was introduced into Parliament in the wake of the Great Fire of London and particularly targeted those who denied the Trinity.²⁴

Yet there was more to the widespread opposition to Socinianism than simply "God will show his displeasure against all heresy and so must we." After all, there were many heretical sects in the seventeenth century which escaped without attracting the attention Socinianism did, while both Jews and Muslims denied the Trinity. It may be partly true that traditionally orthodox clergy felt their power base to be under threat if their training and expertise were no longer needed to explain the grand mystery of the Trinity, as anti-Trinitarians alleged.²⁵ And perhaps some Reformed polemicists were simply desperate to find useful polemical targets and opponents against whom to demonstrate their scholarly prowess.²⁶ But there was often more to it than that.

JOHN OWEN'S INTERACTION WITH THE SOCINIANS

Publishing against the Socinians

In the Preface to the 1721 posthumous collection of Owen's sermons and tracts, the editors note the attention he paid to the Socinians. "This great champion," they wrote, "made it his business to rase the foundation of the Socinian scheme, and to enervate their main strength, chiefly bending his studies to that controversy."²⁷ They list several of his works as evidence of this particular focus on the heterodox Socinians, including his commentary on Hebrews. His opposition to the Polish Brethren had begun in his first book (now lost) on Christ's priesthood.²⁸ His first extant published work, *Θεομαχία Ἀντεξουσιαστικὴ* or *A Display of Arminianisme* (1643) condemned a certain idea as "a wicked Pelagian Socinian heresie,"²⁹ and he continued to regard the Socinians as heretical for the rest of his publishing career. He wrote against their views of justification, atonement, divine justice, and especially the Trinity,³⁰ because there was not one city, town, or village without a drip of this satanic poison, he claimed.³¹

In 1655, at the request of the Council of State, Owen devoted a large volume called *Vindiciae Evangelicae; or The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated*

*and Socinianism Examined specifically to refuting these errors.*³² This unpacked the thought of English anti-Trinitarian writer John Biddle (1615/16–1662) as well as the Polish Brethren.³³ As Paul Lim avers, Owen “latched onto sola scriptura as his main cudgel to fight against Biddle.”³⁴ His prodigious polemical output against the Socinians coincided with the rise in demand for their works. Thomas Edwards reported in 1646 that there was a flourishing trade in the books of Socinian authors Ostorodius, Oniedinus, Crellius, and Socinus amongst English and Dutch merchants.³⁵ Holland was seen by many as the bridgehead for Socinian influence to spread into England.³⁶ The translation of various Latin Socinian works in the middle decades of the century helps to account for the increasingly urgent polemics against them.³⁷ The first Socinian work ever to be translated into English and published in England, however, was a commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Originally purported to be based on the lectures of John Crell (1590–1633) as written up or arranged by Jonas Schlichting (1592–1661),³⁸ it was rather sneakily translated and published anonymously by Thomas Lushington—without mentioning its original authors or their provenance.³⁹ Owen may well have owned this commentary,⁴⁰ and he would certainly interact with it in great detail in his own exposition of Hebrews. The challenge from the Socinians was not only doctrinal, but also exegetical.

In countering the perceived threat, Francis Cheynell wrote in 1650 that, “it was most requisite that I should write in English, because since the beginning of the year 1645 there have been many blasphemous bookes to the great dishonour of the blessed Trinity printed in England.”⁴¹ Andrew Marvell comments that Socinian books sold “as openly as the Bible” in 1672,⁴² and by 1680, George Ashwell was complaining that Socinian books had been widely dispersed and were eagerly read by younger students.⁴³ It would be strange, therefore, if Owen, who was involved in the delivery of ministerial training at Oxford, was not sensitive to the threat posed by such material and keen to engage both Continental and British anti-Trinitarians. It is perhaps an overstatement to say he “bent his studies” chiefly to refuting Socinians,⁴⁴ but he was clearly concerned about the influence and effect they were having in his day.

Political Motives?

Sarah Mortimer also attributes a political motive to Owen’s engagement with

the Socinians. She claims that Owen, at the height of his political influence in the 1650s, “found in Socinianism a convenient and suitably unpopular target against which he could put forward his own ecclesiastical vision.”⁴⁵ This involved an “Erastian” church settlement which would exclude Arminianism and in which magistrates would be called upon to prosecute English anti-Trinitarians such as Paul Best and John Biddle. These domestic concerns and native forms of heterodoxy were, says Mortimer, more in Owen’s sights than the foreign heresy of Socinianism itself. Owen, she says, wished to discredit several theological positions (especially Arminianism) by associating them with Socinianism, and yet ultimately this ploy failed. The effect of Owen’s plan to promote a strictly Calvinist settlement by linking “all versions of Remonstrant-style theology to Socinianism and to anti-Trinitarian heresy” was merely “to hamstring efforts for theological unity and to ensure that no confession was agreed in 1654.”⁴⁶

Owen was indeed at the forefront of efforts to outlaw Socinianism in the 1650s, and had presented a petition against the Racovian Catechism to Parliament in 1652.⁴⁷ As we shall see, he was also keen to draw suggestive connections between Socinianism and other forms of theology that he disliked. Yet it is not necessary to propose that his distaste at the Racovian Catechism was merely a political maneuver. The widespread opposition to Socinianism all across the continent from every corner of Trinitarian Christendom is sufficient to show that he would have been justified in opposing it for purely theological reasons, and Biddle was, in any case, more than just a local nuisance.⁴⁸ Moreover, there were other political reasons for the lack of an agreed confession in 1654 and it is very unlikely that Owen’s linking of Socinianism with Arminianism (a commonplace since the Vorstius affair in the decade prior to the Synod of Dort anyway),⁴⁹ was responsible for the failure of this endeavor. Others on the committee appointed to discuss “fundamentals” were equally vehement against Socinianism and also made this link, such as Francis Cheynell and Thomas Goodwin.⁵⁰ Moreover, as John Coffey points out, in December 1654, Parliament specifically and deliberately agreed that, “the true reformed Protestant Religion” should be “the public profession of these nations.”⁵¹ The new insertion of the word “reformed” here may well indicate that Parliament was happy to tolerate varieties of Calvinism but had on some level decided between Reformed and Remonstrant.⁵² The committee of which Richard Baxter was a part was not hamstrung by Owen

and did in fact print twenty propositions for Parliament; they were not taken further because, as Baxter himself reports, “the Parliament was dissolved, and all came to nothing, and that labour was lost.”⁵³

In any case, Owen’s continued focus on Socinian errors in his multi-volume Hebrews commentary (published between 1668 and 1684), well after his political influence had all but disappeared at the Restoration, and his continuing insistence on drawing connections between Socinian and Arminian errors, is hard to explain if it was developed merely for short term political reasons in the 1650s. Sarah Mortimer claims that when John Owen accused Richard Baxter of promoting Socinianism in 1654, this can only be understood in the light of disputes about the interregnum church settlement.⁵⁴ This, I think, is too bold a claim, though it is certainly the case that Baxter’s approach to making a settlement was criticized for being too open to the Socinians, as was that of John Goodwin.⁵⁵ As Baxter recounts the discussions of 1654 he writes,

I would have had the Brethren to have offered the Parliament the Creed, Lord’s Prayer, and Decalogue alone as our Essentials or Fundamentals; which at least contain all that is necessary to Salvation, and hath been by all the Ancient Churches taken for the Sum of their Religion. And whereas they still said, [A Socinian or a Papist will Subscribe all this] I answered them, So much the better, and so much the fitter it is to be the Matter of our Concord.⁵⁶

Although he himself was a Trinitarian (“I unfeignedly account the doctrine of the Trinity, the very summ and kernel of the Christian Religion” he claimed),⁵⁷ it is clear that Baxter often spoke in such a manner that Socinians themselves considered him to be sympathetic to their ways of thinking. They did at one time attempt secretly to recruit him.⁵⁸ Far from being a merely short-term political issue in 1654, Owen and Baxter would still be disagreeing over these issues well after the Restoration. In 1668, for example, Baxter resisted Owen’s suggestion for explicit exclusion of Socinian errors in a formula of concord between dissenters.⁵⁹

The problem of perception here was a difficult one for Baxter. He liked to call himself a “meer Christian” and tried to promote the Bible and the Apostles’ Creed as sufficient tests for orthodoxy (sometimes adding the Lord’s Prayer and Ten Commandments as additional touchstones). As

early as 1659 he used the term “meer Christians,”⁶⁰ and this became one of his regular slogans in later years, so that in 1680 he could write, “I am a CHRISTIAN, a MEER CHRISTIAN, of no other Religion; and the Church that I am of is the Christian Church . . . I am against all Sects and dividing Parties: But if any will call Meer Christians by the name of a Party, because they take up with Meer Christianity, Creed, and Scripture, and will not be of any dividing or contentious Sect, I am of that Party which is so against Parties.”⁶¹ Indeed, one might say of Baxter’s “autobiography” that “his attraction to ‘meer Christianity’ functions as an organising principle throughout his narrative and colours the way he sees and describes events.”⁶²

Both the slogan and this approach to ecclesiology were, however, held in common with some other groups, including anti-Trinitarians.⁶³ Most prominently, John Biddle had claimed in the title that his *Twofold Catechism* (1654) was “Composed for their sakes that would fain be meer Christians, and not of this or that sect.”⁶⁴ This was assailed a year later by the London Provincial Assembly, who complained, “How blasphemously have some disputed against the infinite merit, yea, and Deity of our Saviour . . . Thus pretending to make their disciples meere Christians, they have taken a faire course, to leave them meere Atheists.”⁶⁵ Owen also mocked Biddle’s self-designation as a “mere Christian” in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, insinuating that his doctrine was more Islamic than Christian.⁶⁶ He also added an appendix to this, his major work against Socinianism, specifically aimed at Richard Baxter, an intimation of association that did not go un-noticed.⁶⁷

Jonas Schlichting sought in his *Confessio Fidei* (1642) to promote Socinian views by “insisting on the sufficiency of the Apostles’ Creed as an adequate and sufficient summary of Scripture.”⁶⁸ It was, he said, “a full and genuine mark of Christianity,”⁶⁹ and Anglicans like Jeremy Taylor had long been happy with this uniting approach to various sects.⁷⁰ This meant that in the mid-seventeenth century a “meer Christian” who claimed to stand on scripture and the Apostles’ Creed alone could actually be, when pressed further, a Quaker, a Roman Catholic, an Episcopalian, or a Socinian. In such a context, it was no wonder, then, that Owen and other Reformed divines not only opposed such a loose definition of essential articles of faith but could also attack Baxter’s method as both sounding like and ultimately sponsoring Socinianism. Socinians did indeed promote and benefit from such tolerationism, which Owen saw as a “recipe for Socinian proliferation.”⁷¹

THE CRYPTO-SOCINIANISM OF HUGO GROTIUS

Socinianism was just one of a number of heterodox tendencies during the seventeenth century, and could easily be linked in contemporary minds with other currents of thought that led away from Reformed orthodoxy. In this regard, it is important to notice how throughout Owen's commentary on Hebrews he associates Socinian comments on the text with those of the Dutch Remonstrant theologian Hugo Grotius.

Arminianism and Socinianism

There was a long history of associating Arminianism with Socinianism. Arminius himself was accused of aiding and abetting the anti-Trinitarian cause through his interpretation of certain passages of scripture.⁷² The Reformed writer Nicolaus Bodecherus, who in 1618 had been deposed as a minister for having Remonstrant sympathies,⁷³ soon afterwards condemned Arminianism for agreeing in essence, words, and even method (*sive reipsa, sive verbis, sive etiam methodo*) with the Socinians.⁷⁴ Étienne Courcelles, a Professor in the Remonstrant College in Amsterdam, had even helped to prepare the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* (a major series of Socinian works) for the press,⁷⁵ and it was published by former Remonstrant pastor Frans Kuyper.⁷⁶ Socinian minister Martin Ruar, who had more than once been to England, even tried on behalf of the Racovians to effect a union with the Dutch Arminians,⁷⁷ some of whom (such as Episcopius and Courcelles) joined the Socinians in attacking the Nicene Creed and aspects of patristic orthodoxy.⁷⁸

In England itself, Richard Resbury accused well-known Arminian John Goodwin of "Pelagio-Socinianism,"⁷⁹ a doctrinal link which was also noted by George Walker,⁸⁰ as well as Thomas Edwards in his *Gangraena*.⁸¹ Indeed, Edwards reports that Goodwin sowed the seeds of Socinianism in London by publicly undermining the "cheif (sic) and most pregnant places" in scripture used to support the deity of Christ, with Arian and Socinian evasions.⁸² Thomas Firmin (1632–1697), "the best known and most influential Socinian in England in the latter part of the seventeenth century" had been close to Goodwin and attended his church,⁸³ but Goodwin himself was emphatic in his belief in the deity of Christ and the Spirit, and rejected the label Socinian despite admitting to being interested in acquiring Socinian books.⁸⁴ While insisting on justification *sola fide* and attacking Richard Baxter for undermining it, John Troughton (c. 1637–1681) lambasted the idea of justification

by faith plus obedience as 'Arminian, Popish, and to lead unavoidably unto Socinianism.'⁸⁵ As Carl Trueman suggests, "it was easy to see in the modifications of Trinitarian perspectives required by Arminian soteriology a decisive move towards . . . anti-Trinitarianism."⁸⁶ John Goodwin, Baxter, and others were therefore easily ensnared polemically in an anti-Socinian net.

Hugo Grotius and Socinianism

No bigger fish was caught in that widely cast net than Hugo Grotius. Owen is not the only commentator to be wary of Grotius, whose *Annotations on the Old and New Testaments* were first published in Amsterdam and Paris between 1641 and 1650. Abraham Calov also sought in his work on the Bible to explode "Grotian distortions and false interpretations."⁸⁷ The text of Grotius' *Annotations* was printed in one column and a detailed refutation of it in the other.⁸⁸ Richard Simon (1638–1712), as well as criticizing Grotius for his use of profane authors and his unnecessary multiplying of variant readings, also noted how in his biblical annotations, Grotius "being filled with the prejudices of the Arminians & Socinians, has sometimes favoured those two sects."⁸⁹

John Conant, Presbyterian successor of Owen as Vice Chancellor at Oxford, lectured on Grotius' *Annotations* while Regius Professor, seeking to vindicate the scriptures "from such of his expositions as the Socinians had taken any advantage."⁹⁰ The learned Theophilus Gale, while praising Grotius as "a good Critic" also warned his students against his Socinian tendencies and counselled them not to imbibe his erroneous theology from the *Annotations*.⁹¹ Grotius' approach to biblical interpretation added to suspicions so that, "in the seventeenth century Grotius was generally believed to be a Socinian himself, and suspected of a hidden political agenda."⁹² Even his attempt to distance himself from the Socinians on the atonement was considered to have assisted his adversary in many respects.⁹³

Owen attacked the Dutchman in *Vindiciae Evangelicae* and elsewhere, finding in his *Annotations* an affinity with Socinianism or, at least, faulty exegesis of key Christological texts which undermined the orthodox doctrine of Christ's deity.⁹⁴ So at the end of his assertion of Christ's deity and pre-existence, against the Socinian catechism, Owen adds "a little animadversion upon the catechists' good friend Grotius," showing how he agrees in the end with Socinian doctrine.⁹⁵ The Anglican theologian Henry Hammond

(1605–1660) leapt to Grotius’ defense, calling him “such a Gyant in all kinds of literature,”⁹⁶ and Owen attacked the *Annotations* again in 1656.⁹⁷ He continued to regard Grotius and other Arminians as at least “friends” to the Socinians as he had since his earliest published work.⁹⁸

The Arminian leader, John Goodwin, was fond of Grotius’ work, especially his *Annotations*,⁹⁹ and followed him on the atonement.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, “Mere Christian” Richard Baxter declared that in some subjects he had learned more from Grotius than almost any other writer, and praised his *Annotations*.¹⁰¹ Baxter considered Grotius a “Moderate Papist,”¹⁰² but cleared him from all suspicion of being a Socinian, claiming that he clearly believed in the Trinity, “however he dealt with particular Texts of Scripture that concern it.”¹⁰³ Yet as Mortimer says, “To Owen, it was not Biddle but Grotius who had done the most to undermine this Trinitarian reading of the Scriptures.”¹⁰⁴

Grotius’ hermeneutical approach can be seen to have roots in the humanist revival of Erasmus in the sixteenth century. Erasmus too had been suspected of denying the Trinity and the deity of Christ because of his textual observations. He defended himself from such accusations, but his scholarly approach was used by others to undermine the Trinity.¹⁰⁵ He is cited fifteen times in the Racovian Catechism, for example.¹⁰⁶ Grotius was a great admirer of his fellow-countryman and “intellectual ancestor” Erasmus, ostentatiously visiting the monument to the great humanist when he returned briefly to Rotterdam in October 1631.¹⁰⁷ Stephen Nye, in his sympathetic *Brief History of the Unitarians* (1687), mentions Erasmus as an honored forerunner of the Socinians, and then immediately follows up with a brief section on Grotius in which he writes that, “Grotius is Socinian all over . . . publishing some Annotations on the Bible, he interpreted the whole according to the mind of the Socinians. There is nothing in all his Annotations, which they do not approve and applaud. His Annotations are a compleat System of Socinianism.”¹⁰⁸

Owen on Grotius’ Socinian Tendencies

Given all the theological and personal links noted above, it is therefore no surprise that Owen referred to “the Pelagians, whose errors and heresies are again revived among us by a crew of Socinianized Arminians.”¹⁰⁹ Throughout his Hebrews commentary he associates Grotius in particular with the

Socinians, often mentioning them in the same breath. It is not my purpose to examine Grotius' theology to decide the issue of his orthodoxy on this point. Grotius did not directly deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Owen constantly insinuates, however, that Grotius adopted Socinian methods of interpretation and anti-Trinitarian readings of various key texts. He accuses him of speaking like one who denies the divine personality of the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁰ and casts doubt on Grotius' grasp of other aspects of Trinitarian orthodoxy.¹¹¹ More often than not, however, his approach is to show how close Grotius is to anti-Trinitarianism on exegetical details.

Grotius' agreement with the Socinians is logged in detail by Owen on numerous occasions throughout his commentary on Hebrews. On the word *οικουμένη* (world) in Hebrews 1:6, for example, the strange interpretation of the Socinians (that it means not world but "heaven") is also held "by Grotius after them."¹¹² Owen also notes in his comments on Hebrews 1:8, "your throne, O God, is for ever and ever" that Erasmus had mooted a non-Trinitarian reading of this—not allowing the title God (*θεός*) to be granted to Christ from this text—which the Socinians had happily seized upon and Grotius then followed.¹¹³ He speaks of a Socinian interpretation of Hebrews 2:14-15 held by "Enjedinus, and after him Grotius."¹¹⁴ On Hebrews 5:3, Owen will canvass the opinion of Crell and Schlichting and then add the view of "Grotius, who speaks to the same purpose."¹¹⁵ And on Hebrews 7:22 he writes of "the Socinians, who are followed by Grotius and Hammond."¹¹⁶

Discussing whether Christ offered a sacrifice for his own sins (Hebrews 7:27-28), Owen points out that "Socinus first affirmed that the Lord Christ offered also for himself, or his own sins. And he is followed herein by those of his own sect, as Schlichtingius on this place: and so he is also by Grotius and Hammond;—which is the channel whereby many of his notions and conceptions are derived unto us."¹¹⁷ In further elaboration of this "novel invention" he concludes that "Grotius adds little unto what Schlichtingius offers in this case," and "Hammond says the same."¹¹⁸ Owen notes that Crell and Grotius have disagreed on an exegetical detail from Hebrews 8:4 in their debate over the satisfaction of Christ.¹¹⁹ Yet he links them together in holding an unorthodox position on the same subject when discussing what *ἁμαρτίας ἀνεγκέιν* ("to bear sins") means in Hebrews 9:27 saying, "Grotius wholly follows the Socinians in their endeavours to pervert the sense of this word. It is not from any difficulty in the word, but from men's hatred unto

the truth, that they put themselves on such endeavours.”¹²⁰ So, in summary, Crell and Schlichting’s novel interpretations are opposed throughout Owen’s commentary, but he also feels compelled to draw attention to the fact that, on points both great and small, the Socinian “is followed in his conjecture (as almost constantly) by Grotius.”¹²¹

There are strong clues as to Owen’s motivation for demonstrating these exegetical links. Partly he wished to surround Grotius’ faulty annotations with doctrinal suspicion, so that a new generation of ministers did not start to read and preach the Bible in a Socinianizing fashion.¹²² He also wanted to warn such students of the scriptures that this way of reading the text would soon lead down a slippery slope to a denial of the Trinity, the atonement, and other core doctrines so that Christianity became merely a moral or ethical code.¹²³ Yet, more broadly, Arminians within the Church of England were looking to Grotius as their leading light and inspiration as they sought to re-orientate the Restoration Church away from its Reformed roots. Henry Hammond, a great admirer and defender of Grotius, played a leading part in that program,¹²⁴ which Owen sought to undermine.¹²⁵

Seen in this light, Owen’s theological polemic against Grotius does also contain, therefore, a strong element of domestic political concern. He not only associates Grotius with the heretical Socinians but shows that Hammond is the English face of this movement which could be “a direct pathway to Socinianism.”¹²⁶ He claims that Hammond and Grotius are the channels for Socinian ideas into England.¹²⁷ Hammond is often referred to as Grotius’ admirer or follower, particularly in the last volume of Owen’s commentary published in 1684.¹²⁸ So there can be little doubt as to whom is being referred to when Owen speaks of “the Socinians and those who syncretize with them in an opposition unto these testimonies given unto the Trinity.”¹²⁹ Hammond and the Arminianizing party within the Church of England were within Owen’s sights as he worked his way through Hebrews. He attempted to show in detail how they and Hugo Grotius, one of their intellectual inspirations, were guilty of crypto-Socinianism, or at least incipient Socinianism, at the exegetical level.

CONCLUSION

Socinianism was one of the greatest theological threats to Reformed orthodoxy in the seventeenth century. It is not surprising, therefore, that John

Owen spent considerable time and effort interacting with this heretical movement. His efforts were not simply theological but as with many other orthodox Trinitarian theologians at the time, he also sought to engage them exegetically in a sustained attempt to prove that their way of reading the Bible simply did not make as much sense of the text.¹³⁰ His repeated accusation that they had mishandled scripture was intended to persuade his readers that Socinianism was not merely a pernicious heresy on the theological, historical, and philosophical levels but that on the very ground they claimed to be strongest—close, unprejudiced reading of the text—their views were fatally flawed.

According to Owen, “the most outrageous errors that at this day infest Christian religion, as in the Socinians and others” were caused by “neglect and contempt of clear, open revelations, because the things revealed are mysterious.”¹³¹ As Reedy explains, when scripture clashed with what the Socinians supposed was reasonable, “for all their pious insistence on the primacy of Scripture, it is always Scripture which is corrected when a conflict between it and reason occurs. Either it is found that a text can be emended on the basis of a survey of ancient copies, or the interpreter realizes, under the pressure of the conflict, that the text at issue uses metaphorical language. The compromise always occurs on Scripture’s ground, not reason’s.”¹³² On this basis, Owen therefore accused the Socinians and those like them of having to twist scripture, neglecting the scope and design of specific passages, to avoid the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. He, on the other hand was keen to embrace the “fullness of the scriptures;” not to over-interpret them or engage in eisegesis, but to exegete them fully and carefully from the original languages, whatever the results.

In a highly charged polemical atmosphere, Owen also sought to draw strong connections between Socinianism and what he saw as other heterodox tendencies. Such connections were neither short-term political rhetoric, nor entirely without foundation since on both ecclesiological and exegetical levels there was great similarity between, for example, Baxter, John Goodwin, and Grotius on the one hand, and Crell and Schlichting on the other. This approach was also not unprecedented, as theologians and exegetes from other Continental confessions also noted vital links between Grotius (and other Arminians) and the Polish Brethren. Owen is meticulous and detailed in his efforts to document the relationships between these different groups and

approaches. He is, however, by no means as unusual or eccentric for doing so as some would suggest when his work is viewed from a wider perspective.

Dewey Wallace is not entirely wrong to note that refutations of Socinianism in the later seventeenth century, especially Owen's, often focused more on the atonement than the Trinity.¹³³ We can see, however, that Owen was particularly keen to expose the “πρῶτον ψεῦδος” (first lie, or basic error) of the Socinians concerning the deity of Christ. As Carl Trueman helpfully puts it, “in the light of the radical scripture principle of the Socinians, there was a pressing need for theologians such as Owen to counterbalance the Reformation emphasis upon scripture's perspicuity with an emphasis upon the need for responsible exegesis set in the context of broader theological concerns. Only in this way could such basic orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity be safeguarded. The naive anti-intellectualism which was the alternative could provide no realistic defence against the Socinian's radical onslaught.”¹³⁴ Owen's own exegesis therefore aimed to be deep, rigorous, and detailed in an attempt to undermine the Socinian claim to be radically biblical. He attacked their theological plausibility at a crucial foundational level, by attempting to demonstrate that their exegesis of key texts did not stand up to close scrutiny.

¹ W. Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 122.

² G. Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 119–120.

³ S. Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

⁴ A. Contzen, *Crudelitas et Idolum Calvinistarum Revelatum* (Moguntiae, 1614), 540 lumps Socinians together with Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists for their doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

⁵ C. à. Lapide, *Commentaria in Omnes Divi Pauli Epistolas* (Antwerp, 1635 [1614]), 206 associates Socinians with Peter Abelard's doctrine of the cross.

⁶ D. Petau, *Theologicorum Dogmatum: Tomus Secundus* (Paris, 1644), 218, 255 etc. and D. Petau, *Theologicorum Dogmatum: Tomus Quartus. Pars Altera* (Paris, 1650), 168, 617 etc. associates them with ancient heretics such as Ebionites, Julian the Apostate, and Paul of Samosata.

⁷ The Jansenist Pierre Nicole was also aware of the Socinian threat, and associated it with Calvinism. See for example, P. Nicole, *La Perpétuité de la Foy de L'Eglise Catholique Touchant L'Eucharistie* (Paris, 1666), 120, 147, 189 and P. Nicole, *Préjugez Légitimes Contres Les Calvinistes* (Paris, 1671), 8, 364, 402. Oratorian Richard Simon is also concerned to “refuter solidement les subtilités des Sociniens.” See the Preface D'Lauteur in R. Simon, *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Paris, 1680).

⁸ E.g. J. Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, sive Systema Theologicum* (Wittenberg, 1691), 189, 232, 383, 448, 539 etc.

⁹ K. Appold, “Academic Life and Teaching in Post-Reformation Lutheranism,” in R. Kolb, ed., *Lutheran*

- Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 109. See also T. Schmeling, “*Strenuus Christi Athleta: Abraham Calov (1612–1686)*,” in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 44.4 (December 2004): 357–399. Calov’s anti-Socinian works include A. Calov, *Socinismus Profligatus: Hoc est, Errorum Socinianorum Luculenta Confutatio* (Wittenberg, 1652) and A. Calov, *Scripta Antisociniana*, 2 vols. (Ulm, 1684).
- 10 Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 136.
 - 11 E.g. S. Maresius, *Hydra Socinianismi Expugnata* (Groningen, 1651); P. Jasz-Berenyi, *Examen Doctrinae Ariano-Sociniana* (1662); J. Hoornbeeck, *Socinianismi Confutati* (3 vols.; Utrecht, 1650–1664); N. Arnold, *Religio Sociniana... Refutata* (Amsterdam, 1654); J. Cloppenburg, *Compendiolum Socinianismi Confutatum* (Franeker, 1651).
 - 12 E.g. G. Walker, *Socinianisme in the Fundamentall Point of Justification Discovered, and Confuted* (1641). F. Cheynell, *The Rise, Growth, and Danger of Socinianisme* (1643); N. Chewney, *Anti-Socinianism* (1656); J. Tombes, *Emmanuel, or, God-Man: A Treatise... against the Lately Vented Socinian Doctrine* (1669); G. Ashwell, *De Socino et Socinianismo Dissertatio* (Oxford, 1680).
 - 13 D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 235.
 - 14 P. Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (T&T Clark, 2003), 39.
 - 15 E.g. T. Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena or A Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this Time (1646)*, 13. E. Pagitt, *Heresiography or A Description of the Hereticks and Sectaries of these Latter Times* (1645), 122–124.
 - 16 K. Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century* (SCM, 1990), 27.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, 150.
 - 18 S. Kot, *Socinianism in Poland: The Social and Political Ideas of The Polish Antitrinitarians in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1957), p218.
 - 19 E. Knott, *Mercy & Truth. Or Charity Maintayned by Catholiques* (Saint-Omer, 1634), pp102–105, 134. See also E. Knott, *Infidelity Unmasked, or, The Confutation of a Booke Published by Mr. William Chillingworth under this title, The Religion of Protestants, A Safe Way to Salvation* (Gant, 1652), pp118, 247, 343, 631, 635, 752, 779–780, 802, 876, 895.
 - 20 E. Knott, *A Direction to be Observed by N. N. if Hee Meane to Proceede in Answering the Booke Intituled Mercy and Truth, or Charity Maintained by Catholiks* (1636), 16.
 - 21 T. White, *Controversy-Logicke, or, The Methode to Come to Truth in Debates of Religion* (Paris, 1659), 12–13.
 - 22 P. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91.
 - 23 H. Blom, “Grotius and Socinianism,” in M. Muslow & J. Rohls, eds., *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 122.
 - 24 Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 85 makes the link, particularly with regard to Thomas Hobbes. J. Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 178–179 discusses the Bill and the eventual abolition of *De Haeretico Comburendo* in 1678.
 - 25 Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 149, 156, 159, 164–165, 167.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 57.
 - 27 *A Complete Collection* (1721).
 - 28 See *Works*, 13:2.
 - 29 J. Owen, *Θεωαχία Αὐτῆς ὁμοιαστῆς; or, A Display of Arminianisme* (1643), 118. *Works*, 10:111.
 - 30 E.g. J. Owen, *Diatriba de Justitia Divina* (Oxford, 1653) and the translation in *Works*, 10:481–624; *Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* in *Works*, 2:365–454; *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed, & Vindicated* (1677) in *Works*, 5:1–400.
 - 31 See Owen, *Works*, 12:52–53 where he refers to “a general Arminian malaise of which antitrinitarianism was merely one symptom” according to B. Worden, “Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate,” in W. J. Sheils, ed., *Persecution and Toleration* (Blackwell, 1984), 204 fn. 19.
 - 32 Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae; Works*, 12:1–590. Cf. CSPD, March 2nd 1653/4.
 - 33 Owen was aware of variations in anti-Trinitarian doctrine and noted how, for example, the Socinians distanced themselves from Arians, and how Biddle differed from the Socinians on the personality of the Holy Spirit in *Works*, 12:15, 334.
 - 34 Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 140.
 - 35 T. Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena* (1646), 169.
 - 36 H. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1951), 24, 30, 44.

- ³⁷ See Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 136 who lists some Dutch examples. We might also add works such as J. Crell, *The Two Books of John Crellius Francus, touching One God the Father* (Kosmoberg [i.e., London], 1665) an English translation of J. Crell, *De Uno Deo Patre Libri Duo* (Raków, 1630).
- ³⁸ C. Sand, *Bibliotheca Anti-Trinitariorum* (Amsterdam, 1684), 117 lists the work under Crell's name but adds that it is elaborated with the help of Schlichting ("ipsius ope à Jona Slichtingio concinnatus est"). See J. Crell & J. Schlichting, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Hebraeos... ex J. Crellii Praelectionibus Conscriptus a Jona Schlichtingio* (Raków, 1634) and J. Crell & J. Schlichting, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos, Johannis Crellii Franci Opera Omnia Exegetica*, vol. 2 in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vol. 7 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam], 1656).
- ³⁹ T. Lushington, *The Expiation of a Sinner: In a Commentary upon the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (1646). See the background to its publication in E. Porter, *Θεός Ανθρωποφόρος. Or, God Incarnate... Wherein also are Contained a Few Animadversions upon a Late Namelesse and Blasphemous Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (1655), 9–10.
- ⁴⁰ *Bibliotheca Oweniana* (1684), 4 #131, 18 #388, lists both the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* and the 1634 edition of Schlichting's commentary.
- ⁴¹ Epistle Dedicatory in F. Cheynell, *The Divine Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... in opposition to Pagans, Jewes, Mahumetans, Blasphemous and Antichristian Hereticks, who say they are Christians, but are not* (1650).
- ⁴² A. Marvell, *The Rehearsal Transpros'd* (1672), 96.
- ⁴³ "Socinianorum libros apud nos passim dispersos habuimus, & à junioribus quoque Scholasticis auide perlectos." Ashwell, *De Socino et Socinianismo Dissertatio*, 5 of his dedication to Thomas Barlow, Owen's old tutor. See also the "Ad Lectorem" and "Proemium" of G. Bull, *Defensio Fidei Nicæne* (Oxford, 1685) where he complains about the popularity of Christoph Sand's *Bibliotheca Anti-Trinitariorum* amongst theological students.
- ⁴⁴ As P. Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971), 174 points out, in 1721 when the *Complete Collection* was published, "a large portion of Protestant Dissent was quickly moving in the direction of Arminianism and Socinianism" which may account for this emphasis in the preface to that work.
- ⁴⁵ Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 197.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 205, 220.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.
- ⁴⁸ Biddle had attracted sufficient international attention to earn refutations from continental theologians, such as J. Cloppenburg, *Vindiciae pro Deitate Spiritus Sancti adversus Pneumatomachum Johannem Biddellum Anglum* (Franeker, 1652) and N. Arnold, *Atheismus Socinianus à Johanne Bidello Anglo* (Franeker, 1659).
- ⁴⁹ See Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism," 22–27. The link achieved confessional status when *Rejectio Errorum IV* on the Second Head of Doctrine of the Synod of Dort (1619) linked Arminian views *cum impio Socino*, "with wicked Socinus."
- ⁵⁰ E.g., Cheynell, *Divine Trinity*, 39, 147–148, 233, 330, 332, 442. T. Goodwin, *A Discourse of the True Nature of the Gospel* (1695), 3, 12, 67, 69, 74.
- ⁵¹ J. Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 243.
- ⁵² See my discussion of the word "Reformed" in the debates surrounding its insertion into the 1689 Coronation Oath in L. Gatiss, *The True Profession of the Gospel: Augustus Toplady and Reclaiming our Reformed Foundations* (Latimer Trust, 2010), 28.
- ⁵³ R. Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times* (1696), ii.205.
- ⁵⁴ Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 223.
- ⁵⁵ See e.g., W. Prynne, *Faces About, or, A Recrimination Charged upon Mr. John Goodwin* (1644), 12. Goodwin wrote the "Epistle to the Reader" for an edition of Acontius' *Satans Strategems* which contained a list of "fundamentals" that "even Socinians could endorse" according to Coffey, *John Goodwin*, 160. Baxter defended Goodwin from the charge of Socinianism; see T. Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 52 fn. 111, 81.
- ⁵⁶ Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ii.198.
- ⁵⁷ R. Baxter, *The Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1667), 377.
- ⁵⁸ *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ii.205–206.
- ⁵⁹ See their letters in *ibid.*, iii.63–65.
- ⁶⁰ R. Baxter, *Five Disputations of Church-Government and Worship* (1659), 137.
- ⁶¹ R. Baxter, *Church-History of the Government of Bishops and their Councils* (1680), in the section entitled, "What History is Credible?" See the use of "meer Christian/Christianity" in his *Christian Directory, or, A Summ of*

- Practical Theologie and Cases of Conscience* (1673), 31; *Which is the True Church?* (1679), 125; *An Apology for the Nonconformists Ministry* (1681), 131 (mostly written 1668–9); *A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685) on Revelation 13:18.
- 62 L. Gatiss, “The Autobiography of a ‘Meer Christian’: Richard Baxter’s Account of the Restoration,” *Churchman*, 122/2 (2008), 169.
- 63 William Chillingworth desired to see “plain and honest Christians” who tolerated others in the name of Christ instead of fighting over party labels; W. Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants A Safe Way to Salvation* (Oxford, 1638), 180 on which also see McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 84. Cambridge Platonist Henry More spoke highly of “a meer man, a true man, a Christian” as opposed to sectaries; H. More, *The Second Lash of Alazonomastix, Laid on in Mercie upon that Stubborn Youth Eugenius Philaethes* (Cambridge, 1651), 15. Roman Catholic J. Lewgar, *The Only Way to Rest of Soule in Religion Here, in Heaven Hereafter* (1657), 108–110 contrasts the “meer Christian” to the Catholick. Quaker R. Barclay, *Universal Love Considered and Established upon its Right Foundation* (Holland, 1677), 30, 31, 34 praises the “meer Christian.”
- 64 Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 240 says this “intriguing connection of phraseology” has not been noted in contemporary scholarship. I included my exploration of it in the first draft of this chapter before Lim’s book was published but could not, unfortunately, beat him into print! See also Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 183–184.
- 65 *An Exhortation to Catechizing* (1655), 3–4.
- 66 *Works*, 12:76. See his censure of the ‘mere Christian’ phrase on 70.
- 67 *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, i.111.
- 68 G. Williams, *The Polish Brethren: Documentation of the History and Thought of Unitarianism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the Diaspora 1601–1685*, 2 vols. (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 2:386. Williams claims this approach dates back at least to Hilary and was shared by Erasmus.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 2:391.
- 70 J. Taylor, *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΕΚΛΕΚΤΙΚΗ: A Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying* (1647), 32–33 suggests Papists, the Greek church, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists, Socinians, Anabaptists, and Ethiopian (Nestorian) churches could all unite around the Apostles’ Creed. On pages 74–75, he does also attack certain Anabaptist and Socinian exegetical tactics.
- 71 Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 251.
- 72 J. Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), 2:400–402. See also C. Bangs, “Arminius and Socinianism,” in Szczucki, ed., *Socinianism*, 81–84.
- 73 See I. De Smet, “Town and Gown in the Dutch Golden Age,” in D. Sacré & G. Tournoy, eds., *Myrica: Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Memory of Jozef IJsewijn* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 493. J. Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 219 calls him “a deserter from the Remonstrant cause.”
- 74 N. Bodecherus, *Sociniano-Remonstrantismus* (Leiden, 1624).
- 75 McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 138 fn. 4. This significant collection is available online at <http://www.sbc.org/pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=3075&from=publication&tab=3>.
- 76 McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 23.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 27–28.
- 78 See *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 4:94, 108. G. Burnet, *A Modest Survey of... Naked Truth* (1676), 5–6.
- 79 R. Resbury, *The Lightless-Starre, or, Mr. John Goodwin Discovered a Pelagio-Socinian* (1652).
- 80 Walker, *Socinianisme*, 8 speaks of “Socinian John” referring to Goodwin.
- 81 Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena*, 41.
- 82 Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena*, 115–116.
- 83 McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 52, 294. S. Nye, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Firmin* (1698), 6. See E. Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and Its Antecedents* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1945), 2:217 on Firmin’s practical help to Polish religious refugees.
- 84 See J. Goodwin, *Imputatio Fidei. Or a Treatise of Justification* (1642), Part 1, 112 on the deity of Christ and Goodwin, *Πληρωμα τὸ Πνευματικόν, or, A Being Filled with the Spirit... as also the Divinity, or Godhead of the Holy Ghost Asserted* (1670), 142–238 on the deity of the Holy Spirit (cf. 189, 200–201, 237 on Christ). In his *Hagiomastix, or The Scourge of the Saints Displayed in his Colours of Ignorance & Blood* (1647), 109–110 Goodwin claims he could not get hold of Socinian books “either for love or money.”
- 85 J. Troughton, *Lutherus Redivivus, or, The Protestant Doctrine of Justification by Faith Onely, Vindicated and a Plausible*

- Opinion of Justification by Faith and Obedience Proved to be Arminian, Popish, and to Lead Unavoidably unto Socinianism* (1677).
- ⁸⁶ C. R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 24.
- ⁸⁷ A. Calov, *Biblia Testamenti Veteris Illustrata in quibus... Grotianae Depravationes, & Pseudomeneias Iusto Examini Sistuntur & Exploduntur* (Frankfurt, 1672–1676).
- ⁸⁸ See H. Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation* (4 vols.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 3:230. See also A. Calov, *Disputatio Inauguralis Ad Divinam S. Apostoli Pauli Ad Romanos Epistolam... Hugonis Grotii Annotationibus Opposita* (Wittenberg, 1669), which contains page after page of “annotata anti-Grotiana” associating him (e.g., 55, 61) with Pelagians and Socinians.
- ⁸⁹ “Il faut pourtant prendre Garde qu'étant rempli des prejugez des Arminiens & des Sociniens, il a quelquefois favorisé ces deux Sectes.” Simon, *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*, 498.
- ⁹⁰ Tyacke, “Religious Controversy,” 599.
- ⁹¹ See Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 104.
- ⁹² Blom, “Grotius and Socinianism,” 123.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 125, 131. See also Rohls, “Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism,” 37. Owen examines the Crell–Grotius exchange on the atonement in Exercitation 33 of the Hebrews commentary; *Works*, 19:217–236.
- ⁹⁴ *Works* 10:425 (1647) is perhaps his first published criticism of “treacherous” Grotius. He speaks here of the Socinians as “the most wretched prevaricators in Christian religion which any age ever yet produced,” and of Grotius’ “wretched apostasy” into the “very dregs” of their error.
- ⁹⁵ *Works*, 12:235.
- ⁹⁶ H. Hammond, *A Second Defence of the Learned Hugo Grotius* (1655), 1.
- ⁹⁷ Owen, *A Review of the Annotations of Hugo Grotius*.
- ⁹⁸ Owen, *Display of Arminianisme*, 19, 101.
- ⁹⁹ Coffey, *John Goodwin*, 37, 38–39.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73–74, 203–204.
- ¹⁰¹ R. Baxter, *The Grotian Religion Discovered* (1658), 4–5.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 31–88.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 90.
- ¹⁰⁴ Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 227.
- ¹⁰⁵ “‘To Us There is But One God, the Father’: Antitrinitarian Textual Criticism in Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth- Century England,” in A. Hessayon & N. Keene, eds., *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 118, 136. McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁶ Snobelen, “Antitrinitarian Textual Criticism,” 121.
- ¹⁰⁷ Reventlow, *History*, 3:213.
- ¹⁰⁸ S. Nye, *A Brief History of the Unitarians, called also Socinians in Four Letters, Written to a Friend* (1687), 31–32. This explains why, for example, H. C. De Luzancy, *Remarks on Several Late Writings Publish'd in English by the Socinians* (London, 1696) being ostensibly aimed against Socinians, spends an inordinate amount of time refuting the *Annotations of Grotius*. For as he says (De Luzancy, 17), “these Gentlemen look upon an objection not to be answerable, if it has but the name of Grotius.”
- ¹⁰⁹ *Works*, 3:245 (from his *Πνευματολογία*, 1674).
- ¹¹⁰ *Works*, 23:235. Presumably this accusation rests on the ambiguous use of the potentially depersonalizing word *afflatum* to refer to the Spirit in H. Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum. Denuo Emendatius Editae* (Groningen: W. Zuidema, 1829), 7:436, and his addition there of Moses as the agent rather than the Spirit himself.
- ¹¹¹ E.g. *Works*, 22:579 concerning the eternal generation of Christ as the true and formal reason for his title “Son of God.” In *Works*, 24:426 he accuses Grotius of avoiding the Bible’s testimony to the eternity of the person of Christ (on Hebrews 13:8). See *Works*, 24:69–70 on an instance of Grotian misinterpretation that is shared by neither Hammond nor (surprisingly) the Socinians.
- ¹¹² *Works*, 20:155. They are linked again on this same issue in 20:324.
- ¹¹³ *Works*, 20:181. Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7:357–358. For Socinians on this verse, see J. Volkel, *De Vera Religione* (Raków, 1630), Book 1, 89–102 on “De Nomine θεός,” and the discussion of Hebrews 1:8 on 100; Crell, *The Two Books of John Crellius Francus, touching One God the Father* (Kosmoberg [i.e., London], 1665), 46–170, especially 107–110, 122 where Hebrews 1:8–9 is discussed; Lushington, *Expiation*, 8–10; and Crell & Schlichting, *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 81.
- ¹¹⁴ *Works*, 20:433.
- ¹¹⁵ E.g., *Works*, 21:471. Cf. *Works*, 23:54.

- ¹¹⁶ *Works*, 22:499.
- ¹¹⁷ *Works*, 22:566. Cf. 22:551. Socinus, Schlichting, and Grotius are shown to all agree in *Works*, 23:328–329. Schlichting, Grotius, then Hammond are quoted one after another in *Works*, 22:468.
- ¹¹⁸ *Works*, 22:570–571.
- ¹¹⁹ *Works*, 23:28.
- ¹²⁰ *Works*, 23:412.
- ¹²¹ *Works*, 24:212 (on Hebrews 11:39–40). See also the links between Grotius and the Socinians in *Works*, 23:443; 24:46, 153, 263, 338.
- ¹²² Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 207, 209.
- ¹²³ E.g., *Works*, 21:519.
- ¹²⁴ On Hammond's importance to the re-envisioning of Anglicanism in the seventeenth century, see J. W. Packer, *The Transformation of Anglicanism, 1643–1660, with Special Reference to Henry Hammond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969).
- ¹²⁵ For Owen's attachment to doctrinal Anglicanism and the political aspect of his support for it, see Lee Gatiss, "Anglicanism and John Owen" in *Crux* 52.1 (Spring 2016), 44–53 and Lee Gatiss, *John Owen: The Genius of English Puritanism* (London: Lost Coin, 2016), 18–20.
- ¹²⁶ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 176.
- ¹²⁷ *Works*, 22:566. See also *Works*, 22:499–500 on Hebrews 7:20–22 and the threesome again in *Works*, 24:212.
- ¹²⁸ *Works*, 24:46 (linking "Crellius, and Grotius who followeth him, with his admirers, and others that borrow falsehoods from them"), 55, 70, 85, 97, 112 ("Grotius with his follower, and the Socinian expositors"), 153, 213, 338 (linking Schlichting, Grotius, and Hammond).
- ¹²⁹ *Works*, 19:48.
- ¹³⁰ I unpack some of the details of this exegesis, especially from Hebrews 1–2 in chapter 2 of Lee Gatiss, *Adoring the Fullness of the Scriptures in John Owen's Commentary on Hebrews* (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 2013).
- ¹³¹ *Works*, 21:550.
- ¹³² Reedy, *The Bible and Reason*, 124.
- ¹³³ Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 76. See Owen's comments, for example, on Hebrews 2:10 and the Socinian denial of penal substitution in *Works*, 20:402.
- ¹³⁴ Trueman, *Claims*, 85.

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

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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.

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- 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.

John Owen and the Traditional Protestant View of the Hebrew Old Testament

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In 1948, John Bowman wrote an article for the *Evangelical Quarterly* entitled, “A Forgotten Controversy.”¹ The controversy concerned the doctrine of Scripture, at first between Protestants and Catholics, then between Protestants, Cappellus and the Buxdorfs, father and son, and later, between John Owen and Brian Walton. It is forgotten today because the traditional Protestant view of Scripture has been discarded, completely by critical scholars and partially by evangelical scholars. Charles Briggs, writing in the late 1800’s, triumphantly stated that the traditional Protestant view is now universally abandoned.²

It is not difficult to see why John Owen and his Protestant allies erred in particulars, such as: the Hebrew vowel points and accent marks as written predate the Masoretes, at least to the time of Ezra if not Moses; that the Rabbis and Jerome also thought the vowel points and accent marks as written went back to Ezra or Moses; Hebrew always used the Aramaic script, never the

older script; Hebrew is the oldest language, the language that God spoke to Adam. Moreover, Owen and others often used a strident tone, further alienating his opponents, then and now. History has not been kind to John Owen and his fellow Protestants.

But even forgotten controversies deserve another hearing from time to time. Owen and his colleagues were brilliant linguists as well as master theologians. That alone suggests the need for another look. Although they stumbled in details, Owen and his colleagues were correct on the core issues: the preservation of the Scriptures, the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, and the dangers of a textual criticism that creates its own text.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CONTROVERSY AND THE TRADITIONAL PROTESTANT CONSENSUS

One of the distinctive doctrines of the Reformation was its teaching on Scripture. Protestants taught that Scripture was the sole authority for Christian faith and practice. The Catholic Church, by contrast, taught that the Church was the final authority for Christian faith and practice and that the Church was the final interpreter of Scripture. The Protestant doctrine threatened the Catholic Church at its very core.

An essential aspect of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture was the preservation of God's word. The Westminster Confession, like all other Protestant confessions, teaches: "The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies in religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them."³ The integrity and authenticity of God's word must be sure for the Protestant doctrine to prevail. If God's word has been corrupted throughout the centuries, if its meaning and words have been altered over the ages, then the Protestant doctrine fails.

The Catholic Church soon grasped this. The counter-reformation charged that variant readings in the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament rendered their meaning uncertain. The Hebrew Old Testament contained later Jewish additions, particularly the vowel points and accent marks. The Vulgate, the Catholic Church maintained, predated the Masoretic additions, and should, therefore, have precedence to the Hebrew Old Testament.⁴ Furthermore, the problem of variant readings should not be

left to Protestants or scholars, whatever their talents. An authoritative body, indeed, a magisterium, must determine authentic Scripture: its canonicity and its integrity. The Council of Trent decreed the Vulgate as the “authentic” Scripture for faith, life, and controversy.⁵ The Protestants, to be sure, countered this claim, asserting the primacy of the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament over the Vulgate and the purity and integrity of God’s word. The battle lines were set, but not for long.

Buxtorf v. Cappellus

A Jewish scholar, with probably little or no concern for the controversy, Elias Levita, published *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth* (1538) claiming that the *written* vowel points and accent marks of the Masoretic Text were added after the Talmud (yet, he thought the Masoretic tradition preserved the *reading* of Moses and Ezra).⁶ The Catholics claimed victory. The Protestants, under the pressure of Levita’s work, responded with perhaps their best Hebrew scholar of the late 1500’s and early 1600’s, Johannes Buxtorf, the Master of the Rabbis. He challenged Levita’s arguments, claiming that Rabbinic authorities taught that the vowel points and accent marks as written were coeval with Moses or with Ezra.

Buxtorf’s positions, however, were challenged by an unexpected source, a Huguenot Protestant from the French school at Saumur, Louis Cappellus. Cappellus agreed with Levita that the vowels points and accents marks *as written* were added recently. As for the vowels and accents *as spoken* in the synagogue for centuries, all agreed—Levita, Buxtorf, and Cappellus—that they were the authentic vowels and accents preserved from the time of Ezra or earlier.⁷ Hence, they were of divine authority. The variant readings were the result of scribal “slips of the pen” or “in matters of no moment.” Cappellus, however, later abandoned this view based on the differences between the ancient versions and the Masoretic Text and became convinced that the Hebrew Old Testament had undergone significant corruption and change, not just in the vowels and accents, but even in the consonants themselves.⁸ He now emended the Masoretic Text by the ancient versions. He even conjectured emendations without the versions based on his principle, “where the sense flows better.”⁹ Later critical scholars, therefore, laud Cappellus as the first modern textual critic.¹⁰

The Protestants were horrified. Cappellus’s view, if accepted, would destroy

the Protestant doctrine of Scripture and make the Old Testament a malleable text in the hands and minds of the critics. Johannes Buxtorf's son, Johannes Buxtorf II, and other traditional Protestants challenged Cappellus.

Owen v. Walton

Meanwhile in England, Brian Walton with the help of many traditional Protestants published a Polyglot Bible that unexpectedly renewed the controversy, this time between Walton and John Owen. Owen had concerns that the Polyglot might "impair the truth of the other assertions about the entire preservation of the word as given out by God in the copies that yet remain with us."¹¹ They disagreed over five issues.

First, they disagreed about the vowel points as written. Owen believed that they were written at least from the time of Ezra; Walton believed that the Masoretes invented them centuries after the time of Christ. Walton, of course, was correct. But Walton, like Owen, believed that the text "was never arbitrary but the same before and after the punctuation [was written]" and that the vowels and accents (as spoken) were coeval with the consonants.¹² Second, they disagreed about the Ketib/Qere readings. Owen believed that they dated to Ezra; Walton to pre- and post-Talmudic times.¹³ Third, they disagreed about the use of ancient versions to correct the Masoretic tradition. Owen used the ancient versions only to aid in interpretation;¹⁴ Walton also used them to correct scribal errors in the Masoretic Text.¹⁵ Fourth, they disagreed about the use of Grotius's conjectures in an appendix to the Polyglot. For Owen, this was too close to Cappellus. Walton defended his use of Grotius since he was a "miracle of our times," "an incomparably learned man."¹⁶ Fifth, they disagreed over the quantity of variant readings. Owen thought that Walton multiplied variants needlessly, thus bringing doubt to the preservation of God's word.¹⁷ Walton claimed that Owen exaggerated the problem, since the important variant readings could be reduced to a page or two.¹⁸ Walton sought to be exhaustive by including Ketib/Qere and Ben Asher/Ben Naphtali readings.

Although they differed, they actually agreed on the core issues. Both agreed that God had preserved the Scriptures without essential defect, rejecting the Catholic and Cappellian views of Scriptural corruption.¹⁹ Both agreed that the transcribers of Scripture and not the biblical authors were the source of errors in the Masoretic Text and were "in matters of no moment."²⁰ Both

agreed that the vowel points and accents in the Masoretic Text reflected the inspired text of Ezra.²¹ Both rejected Cappellus's use of conjecture in correcting the Masoretic tradition.²² In fact, Owen complimented Walton's Polyglot and his introduction (Prolegomena) time and time again, holding the work in "much esteem"²³ and praising "the usefulness of the work."²⁴ Moreover, Owen believed that Walton was much closer to his and not Cappellus's views.²⁵

The dispute between Owen and Walton was, in some ways, regrettable. Although Owen admired Walton's work, he feared that it would be misinterpreted and abused by atheists, papists, and anti-Scripturalists.²⁶ Owen was particularly concerned with Grotius's conjectures and emendations in the appendix of Walton's Polyglot. While Walton rejected Cappellus's conjectures and methods, his inclusion of Grotius's conjectures seemed inconsistent and problematic. This made Owen suspicious of Walton. Walton, for his part, took Owen's fears personally and treated Owen's concerns, some legitimate, with contempt. In the end, they could agree that God had preserved His word "by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, and are therefore authentic." The controversy then was *not* ultimately between Owen and Walton, but between Cappellus and the traditional Protestants, including Owen and Walton.²⁷

A Brief Consensus

Finally, the dispute concluded with the last Protestant symbol of the era: the Helvetic Consensus Formula.²⁸ Writing in 1675, John Henry Heidegger with the assistance of Lucas Gernler and Francis Turretin produced the Formula to refute the teachings of the Saumur School, particularly Amyraut's view of hypothetical universalism, de la Place's view of the mediate imputation of Adam's sin, and Cappellus's views of the inspiration and integrity of Scripture.²⁹ Combined with the earlier confessions, the Helvetic Consensus Formula represents the final statement of the traditional Protestant doctrine of Scripture. The three canons of the Formula on the Scriptures affirm the preservation of the Scriptures and the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures in the first two canons, and condemn the text-critical method of Cappellus in the third canon.

The consensus did not last long, perhaps fifty to a hundred years. The 1700's would still find defenders of the traditional Protestant view, like the

great Hebrew scholar from the Baptist community, John Gill. Later in the 1700's James Robertson at Edinburgh and Olaus Gerard Tychsen in Germany performed rear-guard action for the traditional Protestant view, but it was now a lost cause.³⁰ Ironically, the traditional Protestant view—at least the divine origin of the vowel points, accents, and a textual correction limited to copyist mistakes—thrives now only in orthodox and traditional Judaism. Cappellus had won the day.

The Scriptures were now regarded as corrupted, obscure and, to many, out of date. A human criticism of Scripture now replaced the Catholic magisterium and the Protestant doctrine of Scripture.³¹ This criticism with its promised “assured results” operated on two levels: a lower criticism to reconstruct the Biblical text to a putative earlier form, and a higher criticism to discover the original sources and influences behind the text. Of course, the influences and philosophies behind these criticisms were purely naturalistic and hostile to the inspiration of Scripture.³² The idea that the Scripture were “immediately inspired of God” or that it was “kept pure in all ages” was now viewed as pre-critical and pre-scientific thinking, the romantic notions of well-meaning, but misguided believers, desperate to hold on to their faith.

A Lasting Impact

These criticisms have impacted Evangelicals. Many evangelicals have also discarded the traditional Protestant view of textual criticism that corrects only scribal slips of the pen and that resists emending the text based on the ancient versions or conjectures. Moreover, most evangelicals have abandoned the traditional Protestant belief in the divine authority of the vowel points and accents. Conservative Evangelicals and Protestants now often take a “medium course” on the vowel points and accents, as William Henry Green proposed, “The points are not inspired, but they are substantially correct ... The points form what may be called a traditional commentary upon the text, conscientiously noted down by learned scholars under circumstance peculiarly favorable for a correct understanding of it. They are most important help, which ought not to be slighted; and though they may be departed from in case of evident necessity, they should be adhered to unless there are very good reasons for not doing so.”³³ Recently and similarly, E. Ray Clendenen and David K. Stabnow declared the vowel points and accent marks non-canonical: “The Tiberian system was a method of putting in writing what has

been passed down for generations as an oral tradition. Thus the marks (vowel points and accents marks) are not canonical, but they are indicative of how the best Hebrew scholars of the day understood the venerable oral tradition and the semantic structure of the verse.”³⁴ Later, they also suggest that some of the consonants may be non-canonical as well: “Again, like the cantillation marks, the superscriptions [of the Psalms] may not be canonical.”³⁵ Evangelicals jettisoned important elements in the traditional Protestant doctrine of Scripture. We are all Cappellian now.

AFFIRMING THE TRADITIONAL PROTESTANT CONSENSUS

Although critical scholarship abandoned the traditional Protestant view of Scripture completely, and evangelical scholarship abandoned it in particulars, the traditional Protestants were correct in their core assertions, especially in three areas.

The Preservation of God’s Word

First, they were correct concerning the preservation of God’s word. The Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are the most commonly attested documents from the ancient world. There are over 6,000 Masoretic manuscripts along with about 200 manuscripts from Qumran and many translations in other languages from earlier Hebrew manuscripts.³⁶ There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, about 8,000 Vulgate manuscripts, and 1,000s of manuscripts of other ancient languages.³⁷ Nothing comes close to the Bible. The 17th century Protestants had no idea of these statistics since most manuscripts were discovered later. And more will undoubtedly come. But they did not need these numbers, since they knew that God’s word abides forever (Isa 40:8; 1 Pet 1:24-25).

More manuscripts, of course, means more variant readings, but the Protestant doctrine rightfully emphasized the quality of the manuscripts, not the quantity, in their creeds.³⁸ God’s word was “kept pure in all ages.”³⁹ The Protestants, therefore, often referred to the Masoretic tradition as “the autographs.”⁴⁰ The manuscripts of the 17th century Protestants certainly indicate a pure word of God, but later manuscripts show an even purer text. For the New Testament, Vaticanus, with copyist errors noted, virtually reproduces the New Testament as given by the Apostles. The same could be said for the other famous uncials and papyri manuscripts. For the Old Testament, the

two great Masoretic manuscripts, unknown to the 17th century Protestants, have come to light: Aleppo and Leningrad. Although missing parts due to anti-Jewish riots in 1948, Aleppo, the most important Masoretic manuscript, was produced by the greatest Masorete, Aaron ben Asher. Leningrad, a complete Old Testament manuscript, was carefully corrected to conform to Aleppo. Aleppo, with its missing parts supplied through Leningrad, is the Bible in Israel today, and it will be Israel's Bible until the Lord returns—it should also be the Old Testament for Protestants until the Lord returns. The only possible changes will be if new sections of Aleppo resurface as they have in the past.⁴¹ The Aleppo and Leningrad codices accurately reflect the divinely inspired Hebrew text of Ezra.

Such is, at least, the claim of Aaron ben Asher. He asserted that the Prophets, the Sopherim (Scribes), with Ezra and the wise men (of the Great Synagogue) originated the vowel points and accentual system.⁴² This does *not* mean that they created the *written* symbols for the vowels and accents, but that they established the *oral* tradition that the written vowels and accents would later represent. And he was not alone. Owen quotes a Rabbi Bechai who says, “The points within the letter of the book of Moses are of such a nature as is the breath within the human body.”⁴³ And Elias Levita states, “And thus it is said in the Mishnah, ‘Moses received the law from Sinai, and he handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua [handed it down] to the elders, and the elders [handed it down] to the prophets, and the prophets handed it down to the men of the great synagogue.’ And this is the meaning of the word **סֹפְרִים** in question; since it was transmitted to sages, from mouth to mouth, till the time of Ezra and his associates, and by them again to the Masoretic Sages of Tiberias, who wrote it down, and called it Massorah.”⁴⁴ Eben Ezra, the medieval rabbinic commentator, therefore, stated the orthodox and traditional Jewish opinion, “Any interpretation which is not in accordance with the arrangement of the accents, thou shalt not consent to it, nor listen to it.”⁴⁵ Jewish tradition and opinion are unanimous.

But this is more than Jewish tradition or opinion. History also confirms this. The Old Testament quoted in the Babylonian Talmud conforms closely to the Masoretic tradition of Tiberias, as does earlier Rabbinic literature.⁴⁶ About a hundred years before the Talmud, Jerome, a *Christian* scholar, largely reproduces the Masoretic tradition in his Vulgate.⁴⁷ The same is true concerning the earlier Peshitta and Aramaic Targums.⁴⁸ All

texts found at Masada (about AD 73) reflect the consonantal Masoretic Text.⁴⁹ Most biblical texts at Qumran follow the consonantal Masoretic Text.⁵⁰ One of the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran is virtually an exact copy of the consonantal Masoretic Text. The Greek revisions to the Septuagint are corrected to the Masoretic Text instead of the original Septuagint. The Samaritan Pentateuch, minus its theological changes and interpretive expansions, follows the Masoretic Text. Even the Septuagint (280 BC), in the Pentateuch and in other places, often reflects the Masoretic Text. History, time and again, confirms that the Masoretic Text is the dominant and authoritative tradition for the Old Testament.⁵¹

The New Testament also follows the Masoretic Text frequently, though it follows the Septuagint as well since Greek was the language for gentile Christians. The Masoretic tradition was the Old Testament text of first century Judaism, including of Jesus and his disciples.

And Jesus and the writers of the New Testament clearly believed that the Old Testament was kept pure in their age. They never hinted at a corrupted or uncertain text. Jesus taught that not even “a jot or tittle could fail,” “that Scripture could not be broken,” “that Scripture had to be fulfilled.” Moreover, Jesus in the account of Lazarus and the rich man describes the authenticity of Old Testament of his day, “But Abraham said, They *have* Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them” (Luke 16:29). Jesus is not talking about a corrupted version of Moses and the Prophets. They *have* Moses and the Prophets, pure and entire. Similarly, in the Gospel of John 5:46-47, Jesus states, “For he [Moses] wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words.” To Jesus, the words of Moses that he quoted were as authentic as his own words. Again, they *had* Moses’s writings. The same may be said for Paul, who referred to the Old Testament as “the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), *entrusted* to the Jews in the past and still the oracles of God to Paul in his time. Finally, Peter stated, “we *have* a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet 1:19), thereby claiming that his generation possessed in the Old Testament a more sure word than hearing God’s voice directly from heaven. They were not talking about the Scriptures theoretically or about the original autographs, but they were talking about the Scriptures of their day. To Jesus and the apostles, the original autographs and the Scriptures of their day were the same.⁵²

History and most importantly the New Testament have vindicated the

Protestant doctrine of the preservation of God's word. The past clearly confirms the Masoretic tradition.

And the present confirms it as well. The Masoretic Text is the basis of the Old Testament for modern Judaism and modern Christian Bibles, liberal or conservative, Catholic or Protestant. Although Charles Briggs looked forward to the day when the Masoretic Text would be discarded—"It [textual criticism] will do even more for the Old Testament so soon as the old superstitious reverence for the Masoretic tradition and servitude to the Jews has been laid aside by Christians scholars"⁵³—the Masoretic Text today is stronger than ever. It is, and will be, the Old Testament. The verdict of history is clear, and the future of the Masoretic Text is certain.⁵⁴

Verbal Inspiration of the Old Testament

Secondly, the Protestants were correct in their doctrine of verbal inspiration. Paul's statement of the Old Testament as the "oracles of God" (Rom 3:2; and also Stephen's statement in Acts 7:38) and similar statements throughout Scripture (1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 2:13) established the Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration. Of course, all confessions of 17th century Protestantism teach this, though none as explicitly as the Helvetic Consensus Formula that states that the Bible is inspired, "not only in its matter, but in its words." The general ideas, thoughts, or overall teaching of Scripture—that is, "its matter"—are certainly inspired, but so also the language or words of Scripture are inspired.

For the Hebrew Old Testament, however, a complication arises. The autographs were written with consonants, the vowels and accents being assumed. If God left only the consonants and not the vowels and accents, then God's word becomes uncertain, subject to human addition and error.⁵⁵ Happily, the issue is not in doubt. God vouchsafed the Old Testament in Hebrew to the Jewish people, as the Helvetic Consensus Formula says, "in particular the Hebrew original of the Old Testament, which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Jewish Church, unto whom formerly 'were committed the oracles of God' (Rom 3:2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels—either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points."⁵⁶ Jesus confirms this by stating, "that not one jot or tittle shall pass away from the Old Testament until all is fulfilled." However that passage is interpreted, it implies that God's word is preserved

and inspired to the smallest details. The vowels and accents, to be sure, are anything but details. The vowels breathe life into the consonants to form words. The accents group words to establish the meaning of sentences. Paul teaches that the Old Testament Scriptures were *words* directly breathed out of the mouth of God (2 Tim 3:16), not mere *consonants* left to the reader's predilections and abilities.⁵⁷ In short, the vowels and accents are essential to the words of the Old Testament; and therefore, they are essential to the doctrine of verbal inspiration of traditional Protestantism and Judaism.⁵⁸

We would do well to keep in mind that the same tradition that preserves the consonants also preserves the vowel points and accent marks. It is one tradition. If the vowels and accents are not regarded as representing the inspired text, why should the consonants be regarded as representing the inspired text? A middle course will not do. Most of the same arguments used against receiving the vowels and accents as inspired—particularly, the alternate readings of the ancient versions—can be used against the inspiration of the consonants as well. Moreover, the Dead Sea Scrolls furnish more consonantal variation from the Masoretic tradition. The Masoretic tradition must stand or fall as one. Traditional Protestantism and Judaism, therefore, accepted the entire Masoretic tradition, not just the consonants, as “the Lydian stone,” or touchstone by which all other ancient translations should be tested and corrected, as the ancient revisers of the Septuagint did.⁵⁹ Consistency demands this.

The Dangers of Textual Criticism that Creates its Own Text

Finally, the Protestants were correct in warning about the dangers of a textual criticism that created its own text. They recognized variant readings between the ancient versions and the Masoretic tradition and even variant readings within the Masoretic tradition. As “the Lydian stone,” the Masoretic tradition reigned supreme over the ancient versions. The variant readings of ancient versions represented interpretations of or deviations from the Masoretic tradition. The variant readings within the Masoretic tradition were usually “slips of the pen” that could be safely corrected since the Masoretes noted unique spellings in the Masora. The Protestants would be delighted with Aaron Dotan's edition of the Masoretic Text since he corrects the obvious spelling lapses, but presents the text according to the tradition, not according to his own opinion and understanding.⁶⁰ Moreover, Dotan lists those

corrections in an appendix so that all can judge the spelling corrections for themselves. As for other variant readings, the purest Masoretic Text should be followed: Aleppo where it exists, Leningrad where Aleppo is missing.⁶¹ In the rare case of a missing word, such as, 1 Samuel 13:1, no emendation should be made. Perhaps a footnote would be appropriate for possible readings of the ancient versions, but the text should not be emended. The Masoretic text should be preserved as is. Creating a new text is unnecessary.

Most critical and evangelical scholars, though accepting the Masoretic tradition in general, dissent from the traditional Protestant view. They emend the consonants of the Masoretic tradition to the ancient versions or other Hebrew texts, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or Samaritan Pentateuch, when scholars regard those versions or texts as an earlier or better form of the Hebrew text.⁶² They view the vowels as “less ancient and reliable than the consonants;”⁶³ and therefore, emend the vowels without footnote in modern translations. The accents, regarded as less reliable than the vowels, are frequently emended or ignored in modern translations or interpretations. Conjectural emendations are accepted: “Occasionally it is evident,” says Bruce Metzger, “that the text has suffered in transmission and that none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text.”⁶⁴ Cappellus could not ask for more.⁶⁵

Liberal translations, therefore, transform the Masoretic Text into a text of their liking. The *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), for example, frequently emends the Masoretic Text by the ancient versions (Gen 4:8; Deut 32:8; 1 Sam 14:41), by the Dead Sea Scrolls (Isa 14:30; 15:9; 45:2), by conjecture (Ps 2:11; some conjectures are not even noted [Amos 6:12 and 2 Sam 8:12]), or by re-ordering verses (22:1-4 to 1, 3a, 4, 2, 3b). Jack Lewis estimates that the RSV departs from the Masoretic Text “as many as six hundred times.”⁶⁶ This number, however, is certainly higher, probably in the thousands, since Lewis does not include departures from the accents. The RSV does not note or indicate such departures. The *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) continues this tradition, remaking the Masoretic Text into its own theological image. In addition to the myriads of emendations, conjectures, and verse restructurings, the NRSV purged the male-oriented language of the Bible because of modern sensitivities.⁶⁷ Other liberal translations closely follow the lead of the RSV and the NRSV in remaking the Masoretic Text, such as the

Catholic translations, *The American Bible* (with the approval of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) and the *New Jerusalem Bible*. Perhaps the most liberal translations are the *New English Bible* and the *Revised English Bible*. These Bibles consistently mutilate the Masoretic Text. For example, in the *New English Bible*, Zech 3:1-10 now follows 4:14, 4:1ff follows 2:13, 4:4-10 follows 3:10, and 13:7-9 follows 11:17. T. H. Brown claims that over 136 verses are reordered.⁶⁸ Today, there are feminist, Marxist, homosexual readings and translations of the Bible, as for example, *The Queen James Bible*.

Evangelicals also emend the text by the ancient versions, by the Dead Sea Scrolls, by conjecture, and by changing words from one verse to another verse, but they do it more conservatively than the liberals. According to Clendenen and Stabnow, the Septuagint corrects the Masoretic Text 277 times in the ESV, 257 times in the HCSB, 53 times in the NASB, 226 times in the NIV, which compares to 569 times in the NRSV.⁶⁹ The Dead Sea Scrolls correct the Masoretic Text 18 times in the ESV, 29 times in the HCSB, 14 times in the NASB, 30 times in the NIV, which compares to 72 times in the NRSV.⁷⁰ Editors emend the text by conjecture 26 times in the ESV, 21 times in the HCSB, 16 times in the NIV, which compares to 301 times in the NRSV.⁷¹ Clendenen and Stabnow's statistics would greatly increase if changes in the vowel points and accents were included. The ESV and HCSB place the last words in Psalm 48:1 into verse two. The ESV begins day one of creation in Genesis 1:3, instead of Genesis 1:1 according to the Masoretic Text (also see Exod 20:11). The ESV, NIV, and NASB95 improperly begin a new sentence or paragraph at the end of Numbers 26:4 to put the last words as part of verse five. Whereas the liberal translations emend the text thousands of times; the evangelicals emend hundreds of times.

The liberal translations are more extreme in their emendations than the evangelical translations, to be sure, but they influence evangelical translations. The flaw of the ESV, for example, is its reliance on the RSV. Worst of all, the gender-neutral direction has infected many evangelical translations, particularly, the later editions of the NIV. The most damaging influence on evangelical translations comes from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS),⁷² the modern critical text of the Masoretic tradition. The BHS changes the Masoretic Text repeatedly according to the tastes of its editors. Its arrangement of words and sentences, especially in poetical sections, has profoundly influenced translations and interpretations of evangelicals (and liberals).

The bottom line is that liberal and evangelical translators often change the Masoretic text to create their own text. Each translation committee forms its own magisterium. This is what concerned Owen and the Protestants. Perhaps, Owen's fears were not so misplaced after all.

CONCLUSION

Although Owen and all other 17th century scholars erred in details, and although modern scholars believe that Cappellus and later critical scholars overturned the traditional Protestant doctrine of Scripture, Owen and his fellow traditional Protestants were right concerning the core issues of the debate: the preservation of the Scriptures, the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, and the dangers of a textual criticism that creates its own text. These three issues were essential for the Protestant view of Scripture in the 17th century. They should be essential for the Protestant view of Scripture today.

APPENDIXES

I. The Westminster Confession of Faith and The Helvetic Consensus Formula: On the Scriptures.

A. The Westminster Confession of Faith 1647

Section eight stresses the importance of the Biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek), in being inspired and preserved, in being the final authority of any controversy, and in being necessary to translate the word of God into the languages of the nations.

8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations) being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in

all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

B. The Helvetic Consensus Formula 1675

The first canon of the Formula affirms the preservation of Scripture.

1. God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have His word, which is the “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore, the Church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a “sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet 1:19) and “Holy Scriptures” (2 Tim 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass” (Matt 5:18).

The second canon of the Formula affirms the verbal inspiration of the Scripture.

2. But, in particular the Hebrew original of the Old Testament, which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Jewish Church, unto whom formerly “were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels – either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points – not only in its matter, but in its words, inspired of God, thus forming together with the original of the New Testament, the sole and complete rule for our faith and life; and to its standard, as to a Lydian stone, all extant versions, oriental and occidental, ought to be applied, and wherever they differ, be conformed.

The third canon of the Formula condemns the text-critical method of Cappellus.

3. Therefore, we can by no means approve the opinion of those who declare that the *text* which the Hebrew original exhibits was determined by man’s will alone, and do not scruple at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable, and amend it from the Greek Versions of the LXX and others, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and Chaldee Targums, or even from other sources, yea, sometimes from their own reason alone; and furthermore, they do not acknowledge any other reading to be genuine except that which can be educed by the critical power of the human judgment from the collation of editions with each other and with various readings of the Hebrew original

itself – which, they maintain, has been corrupted in various ways; and finally, they affirm that besides the Hebrew edition of the present time, there are in the text of the ancient interpreters which differ from our Hebrew context other Hebrew originals, since these versions are also indicative of ancient Hebrew originals differing from each other. Thus they bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard.

II. CHART FOR THE DEPARTURES OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS FROM THE MASORETIC TRADITION

The following chart is from E. Ray Clendenen and David K. Stabnow, *HCSB, Navigating the Horizons in Bible Translations*, 166-167. The numbers represent how many times the translations depart from the Masoretic tradition and follow an ancient version or emend the text by conjecture. The asterisks mark those translations that do not indicate emendations, but Clendenen and Stabnow believe that the NLT emends the Masoretic tradition at least 13 times and the NASB at least 5 times (167), though these numbers for the NLT and NASB are “by no means an exhaustive list” (Ibid).

The numbers of this chart are actually much lower than the actual numbers since translations are not always consistent in marking departures from the Masoretic tradition especially if the departure concerns slight changes to the consonants or any changes to the vowel points or accent marks. In fact, the accents are frequently ignored in modern translations. If every departure from the Masoretic tradition were carefully noted, these numbers, especially the emendations, would be significantly higher.

	ESV	HCSB	NASB	NIV	NLT	NRSV
LXX cited	326	761	68	317	340	576
LXX Pref	277	257	53	226	240	569
DSS cited	30	121	16	43	32	75
DSS Pref	18	29	14	30	27	72
Sam cited	13	69	0	20	15	20
Sam pref	7	14	0	16	13	20
Emen	26	21	*	16	*	301

- 1 John Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 20 (1948): 46-68. For other accounts of this controversy, see Richard Muller, "The Debate over the Vowel Points and the Crisis in Orthodox Hermeneutics," in *After Calvin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 146-155. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol 2: Holy Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 396-416. Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies* (Lieden: Brill, 1996), 203-239. F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Exeter Devon: Paternoster, 1970), 159-162. Dominique Barthélemy, *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament* (trans. Sarah Lind; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 13-36.
- 2 Charles A. Briggs, *Whither?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), 282. Frants Buhl similarly stated that the orthodox Protestant view has been abandoned and that the critical views of Jean Morin and Louis Cappellus are now "universally adopted." Frants Buhl, "Bible Texts" in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (12 Vols.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 2:94.
- 3 *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications), 7 (1.8). See the appendix for the text of this section.
- 4 Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies*, 206. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (rev. David S. Schaff; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 2:82-83.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Christian D. Ginsberg, *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth of Elias Levita* (1867; rpt. New York: KTAV, 1968), 89, 102-103, 129, 133-134, 137.
- 7 Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," 54. Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin*, 151. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 2:408. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Vol 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 346-347.
- 8 Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," 54. Muller, *After Calvin*, 151.
- 9 Brian Walton, *The Considerator Considered* (London: Roycroft, 1659), 95. This principle invites abuse. Barthélemy, though not rejecting conjecture, decries its frequent abuse. Barthélemy, *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament*, 93-94.
- 10 Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," 54. Buhl summarized Cappellus's view, "This view [of Cappellus], instead of deriving the existing text from a gathering of inspired men in Ezra's time, assigns it to a much later date and quite different men, and, instead of absolute completeness, claims for it only a relative one with a higher value than other forms of the text." Buhl, "Bible Texts," 94.
- 11 John Owen, "On the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture," *The Works of John Owen* (16 vols.; ed., William H. Goold; Great Britain: Banner of Truth, 1988), 16:351.
- 12 Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 11. The accents being coeval with the consonants does not imply that Ezra was chanting the accents as the Masoretes did centuries later, but that Ezra and the Masoretes grouped words consistent with the accents in the Masoretic Text.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 108-109.
- 14 Owen, "On the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture," 419.
- 15 Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 56.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 17 Owen, "On the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture," 351-352.
- 18 Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 120-121.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 11, 14, 43. Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," 59.
- 22 Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 95.
- 23 Owen, "On the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture," 348.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 349, 351, 374.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 351.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 348.
- 27 Later scholars, virtually without exception, have excoriated Owen for his criticism of Walton. Briggs states, "John Owen, honored as a preacher and dogmatic writer, but certainly no exegete, had spun a theory of inspiration after the *a priori* scholastic method, and with it did battle against the great Polyglot. It was a Quixotic attempt, and resulted in ridiculous failure. His dogma is crushed as a shell in the grasp of a giant." Charles A. Briggs, *Biblical Study* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 146. Thomas Chalmers, as quoted by William Goold, the editor of Owen's works, regarded Owen's warning about the dangers of Walton's work as "illiterate" and "the outrageous violence of the Puritan." Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16:345. Stanley

Gundry claimed that Owen “left the field of battle undeniably vanquished.” Stanley N. Gundry, “John Owen on Authority and Scripture,” in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed., John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 209. Even B. B. Warfield, an admirer of Owen, deemed his work against Walton, “ill-considered.” B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol 6 *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (1931; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 278n17. William Goold’s view of Owen’s efforts is more positive, but concedes that Owen erred in particulars. Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16:345-347.

²⁸ See the appendix for the text of the first three canons.

²⁹ Charles Briggs admired the Saumur school with its “freer type of theology” and “more liberal type of Calvinism.” To Briggs, the reaction of Owen, Heidegger, Turretin and others to the Saumur school straitened “the formal principle of Protestantism and its vital power destroyed by the erection of dogmatic barriers against biblical criticism.” Briggs, *Biblical Study*, 142-146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 147-148, 151, 156; Bowman, “A Forgotten Controversy,” 62-63; Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 413. Briggs states, “So far as the Old Testament is concerned the theory of Buxtorf, Heidegger, Turretin, Voetius, Owen, and the Zurich Consensus, as to the vowel points and accents, has been so utterly disproved that no biblical scholar of the present day would venture to defend them.” Briggs, *Biblical Study*, 156.

³¹ “Recent criticisms have been very great in the departments of the text and the literature of the Bible. These have been reorganized as branches of science, with exact methods and well-defined principles, which lead to definite and reliable results ... The authority of the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament has been undermined; but critics the world over are laboring to secure a better text of the Old Testament; and they will succeed in a reasonable time.” Briggs, *Whither?*, 282.

³² For the current presuppositions of the dominant theory of textual criticism, see Barthélemy, *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament*, 84ff. In particular, textual criticism cannot determine what the original text of Moses and the Prophets was (This can only be determined, if at all, by higher critical methods.), but textual criticism can go back only to “the earliest attested text” that existed “behind all ancient variations.” These ancient variations happened after canonization (*ibid.*, 87-88). Moreover, the scribes or redactors made many intentional modifications, theological and exegetical, to the text (*ibid.*, 91).

³³ William Henry Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Text* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 73-74.

³⁴ E. Ray Clendenen and David K. Stabnow, *HCSB: Navigating the Horizons in Bible Translation* (Nashville: B&H 2012), 123.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁶ Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23. Tov states that the Dead Sea Scrolls has 190 biblical scrolls (*ibid.*, 103). The manuscripts of translations of the Masoretic or pre-Masoretic Text number in the thousands.

³⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 36, 76.

³⁸ Chad Van Dixhoorn believes that the Westminster Confession’s teaching on the preservation of the biblical texts “are more a comment on the survival rates of manuscripts than on textual exactitude.” Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 23. The Westminster Confession, however, refers to the textual accuracy of the texts, not simply “the survival rates of manuscripts.” What good are the quantity of manuscripts if their quality is defective? Yet, the quantity of manuscripts is important as well since they all reflect one apostolic archetype (in contrast to Gnostic Gospels which show a non-apostolic archetype) and show the accuracy and purity of the Scriptures in thousands of manuscripts.

³⁹ The Protestants distinguished between variant readings and corruptions. Variant readings were usually seen as unintentional scribal errors; corruptions were viewed as intentional modifications to the text. They admitted variant readings in the texts, but denied that the text had been corrupted (or at least not universally corrupted). Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols.; trans. George M. Giger; ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:111; Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 14, 292. The question was not whether there were variant readings, as all admitted them. “Rather the question,” states Turretin, “is have the original texts (or the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts) been so corrupted either by copyists through carelessness (or by the Jews and heretics through malice) that they can no longer be regarded as the judge of controversies and the rule to which all the version must be applied? The papists affirm, we deny.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:106.

⁴⁰ Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 14.

⁴¹ Yosef Ofer, “The History and Authority of the Aleppo Codex,” in *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Companion Volume* (ed., Mordecai Glazer; Jerusalem: Karger Family Fund and N. Ben-Zvi Printing, 2002), 30.

- ⁴² Aaron ben Asher, *Dikdukei Ha-Te'amim* (ed., Baer and Strack; Leipzig, 1879) xvi, 1.
- ⁴³ John Owen, *Biblical Theology* (trans., Stephen P. Westcott; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1661, 1994), 503.
- ⁴⁴ Ginsburg, *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth of Elias Levita*, 102-103. Levita quotes Mishnah *Pirke Avoth* 1:1.
- ⁴⁵ As quoted in James D. Price, *The Syntax of Masoretic Accents in the Hebrew Bible* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 9.
- ⁴⁶ Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 25, 28. For the Rabbinic sources, see Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 5711-1950), 20-27.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25, 28.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Tov also states, "The early origins of the מ [Masoretic Text or tradition] can also be inferred indirectly from the Qumran texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script. Since almost all paleo-Hebrew texts found in Qumran reflect the מ, they provide information about מ from a period preceding its attestation in Masoretic manuscripts. . . The antiquity of this tradition is also indicated by the use of scribal dots as word dividers in the paleo-Hebrew text from Qumran." *Ibid.*, 28.
- ⁵¹ Tov summarizes his opinion about the first period of the development of מ until AD 70, "There existed a relatively large number of differences between the members of the מ group in matters of content and orthography, but the differences in content were usually limited to single words and phrases." *Ibid.*, 30. Because of the accuracy and dominance of the Masoretic tradition in ancient times, Tov surmises that the temple authorities produced and transmitted the Masoretic tradition, "Since מ contains a carefully transmitted text, which is well-documented in a large number of copies, and since it is reflected in the rabbinic literature as well as in the Targumim and many of the Greek translations, it may be surmised that it originated in the spiritual and authoritative center of Judaism (that of the Pharisees?), possibly even in the temple circles. It was probably the temple scribes who were entrusted with the copying and preserving of מ. Though this assumption cannot be proven, it is supported by the fact that the temple employed correctors who scrutinized certain scrolls on its behalf. The fact that all the texts found at Masada (dating until 73 CE) reflect מ is also important." *Ibid.*, 28. Lieberman summarizes the Rabbinic opinion of the importance of the Temple Text, "Although it appears from the earlier rabbinic sources that only one authoritative book was deposited in the (archives of) the Temple, it does not follow that other copies were not to be found there. It means only that this book was the standard copy par excellence, the book, as the Rabbis tell us, from which the Scroll of the king was corrected under the supervision of the High Court. A special college of book readers (correctors of scrolls) who drew their fees from the Temple funds, checked the text of the book of the Temple. This is probably the only genuine text which was legally authorized for the public service . . . The copies of the temple were the "most accurate," the most exact books, but the *vulgata* [common texts of the people] continued to exist as the standard texts of the public." Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 22-23. The Septuagint (on the whole, though in places it represents a higher *vulgata*), the Samaritan Pentateuch, and many of the Dead Sea Scrolls represent a lower *vulgata* text (that is, generally accurate texts with interpretive or targumic expansions). The Rabbinic quotations, Targumim, Vulgate, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls represent a higher *vulgata* text (that is, a more accurate text than the lower *vulgata* texts with less expansions, except for the Targumim which is interpretive or expansive by design). The Masoretic text, particularly the Aleppo and Leningrad codices, are temple texts (that is, the most accurate and authoritative text). Josephus may have claimed to have received the Temple texts from Titus after the destruction of the Temple. "Again, when at last Jerusalem was on the point of being carried by assault, Titus Caesar repeatedly urged me to take whatever I would from the wreck of my country, stating that I had his permission . . . I also received by his gracious favor a gift of sacred books." Josephus, *The Life* (trans., H. St. J. Thackeray, Vol 1; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) §418 (75), 152-153.
- ⁵² Some Church Fathers held the same view as Christ and the Apostles that the Hebrew text of their day was equivalent to the Hebrew originals. Sidney Jellicoe states, "But he [Origen] made the initial error, as did Jerome after him, of supposing that the Hebrew current in his day was the original text—the *Hebraica veritas* as Jerome calls it." Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1968, reprint 1989), 102. If the New Testament's witness is accepted and if the Hebrew Old Testament later became corrupted, then that corruption must have occurred during or after apostolic times. This is most unlikely. Tov says, "When the early witnesses of מ are compared with the consonantal framework of this manuscript dating from 1009 [Leningrad], one realizes how close they are to medieval sources . . . The combined evidence shows that the consonantal framework of מ did not change much in the course of more than one thousand years." Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 30. Later, Tov describes the period

of AD 70 to the eighth century as a time, “characterized by a relatively large degree of textual consistency [in \mathfrak{M}].” *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵³ Briggs, *Biblical Study*, 162.

⁵⁴ Bowman, “A Forgotten Controversy,” 67-68. For the modern Israeli perspective, see Mordecai Glatzer ed., *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Companion Volume* (Jerusalem: Karger Family Fund and N. Ben-Zvi Printing, 2002).

⁵⁵ Briggs presses this point in rejecting the inspiration of the Scriptures, “But can their [Buxtorf, Heidegger, Turretin, Voetius, Owen, and the Zurich Consensus] theory of *Verbal* inspiration stand without these supports [the vowel points and accents]? Looking at the doctrine of inspiration from the point of view of textual criticism, we see at once that there can be no inspiration of the *written letters* or *uttered sounds* of our present Hebrew text, for these are transliterations of the originals which have been lost, and the sounds are uncertain, and while there is a general correspondence of these letters and sounds so that they give us essentially the original, they do not give us exactly the original. The inspiration must therefore lie back of the *written letters* and the *uttered sounds* and be sought in that which is common to the old characters and the new, the utterance of the voice and the constructions of the pen, namely, in the concepts, the sense and meaning that they convey.” The emphasis is Brigg’s. Briggs, *Biblical Study*, 156-157.

⁵⁶ Notice that the Formula claims to have received the Hebrew original of the Old Testament. The Formula, much like the other creeds of traditional Protestantism, regarded their manuscripts as equivalent or virtually equivalent to the originals manuscripts. “By the original texts,” writes Turretin, “we do not mean the autographs written by the hand of Moses, of the Prophets and of the apostles, which certainly do not now exist. We mean their apographs which are so called because they set forth to us the word of God in the *very words* of those who wrote under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” Emphasis mine. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:106.

⁵⁷ Cappellus rejected the elder Buxtorf’s claim that without the vowels and accents the Masoretic tradition could be distorted like wax. Barthélemy, *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament*, 16. The distortion of the accents, vowels, and consonants of the *New English Bible* and others vindicates Buxtorf. Regarding the antiquity of the reading tradition of \mathfrak{M} , Tov states, “On the other hand, since the biblical texts probably developed in a linear way, one from the other, it is not impossible that some form of a unified reading tradition nevertheless existed, which was adapted time and again to the various attestations of the biblical text ... Nevertheless, the group of \mathfrak{M} (that is, Hebrew medieval manuscripts and such versions as the Targumim, Aquila, and Theodotion) is rather uniform, even though one should note such instances as Jer 7:3, 7. A single reading tradition for \mathfrak{M} is also reflected in the practices of *Qere* and *‘al tiqre’*.” Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 41-42.

⁵⁸ “Suffer us briefly to say that we have always thought the truer and safer way to keep the authenticity of the original text safe and sound against the cavils of all profane persons and heretics whatever and to put the principle of faith upon a sure and immovable basis, is that which holds the points to be of divine origin, whether they are referred to Moses or to Ezra (the head of the great Synagogue). Therefore, the adversaries err who wish to impugn the authority of the Hebrew manuscript from the newness of the points.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:116.

⁵⁹ Tov mentions the *kaige*-Theodotion, Aquila, Symmachus, and the fifth column of the Hexapla as revisions of the Septuagint conformed to the Masoretic Text. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 25. Also see Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study*, 74-133.

⁶⁰ Aaron Ben Moses Ben-Asher, *Torah Nebiim u-Ketubim Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (ed., Aaron Dotan; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

⁶¹ The traditional Protestants used the Hebrew text of Jacob Ben Hayyim ibn Adonijah and others since they did not have Aleppo or Leningrad.

⁶² Bruce M. Metzger, *New Revised Standard Version*, in *The Complete Parallel Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), To the Reader, xvi.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Writing against Cappellus, Turretin said, “If we are not bound to the present reading of the Hebrew text and the true reading is to be derived partly from a collation of ancient versions, partly from our own judgment and conjectural faculty (so that there shall be no other canon of authoritative reading than that which seems to us to be the fitter sense), the establishment of the authoritative reading will be the work of the human will and reason, not of the Holy Spirit. Human reason will be placed in the citadel and be held as the rule and principle of faith with the Socinians.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:120.

- ⁶⁶ Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible/From KJV to NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 110
- ⁶⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Dentan, and Walter Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 55, 57, 73-84. This diktat came from the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, the sponsors of the RSV and NRSV, "in eliminating masculine-oriented language relating to people, so far as this could be done without distorting passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture and society." *Ibid.*, 57. Of course, this inevitably distorts the Scriptures by making biblical personalities speak anachronistically, even politically correct, like a modern English or Feminist Studies professor. This, of course, is the Left politicizing the Masoretic Text and biblical translation. Metzger also writes, "During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text." Metzger, *The New Revised Standard Bible, To the Reader*, xvii.
- ⁶⁸ T. H. Brown, "The New English Bible – 1970," *Bible League Quarterly* 281 (April-June 1970): 294. For more examples of the New English Bible and other modern liberal translations reconfiguring the Masoretic text, see Dominique Barthélemy et. al., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* (Vols. 1-5; New York: United Bible Society, 1979-1980).
- ⁶⁹ Clendenen and Stabnow, *HCSB: Navigating the Horizons in Bible Translation*, 166. See the second section of the appendix for a chart of these statistics.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 167. According to Clendenen and Stabnow, *HCSB: Navigating the Horizons in Bible Translation*, the NASB does not indicate its emendations. *Ibid.*, 169n.2.
- ⁷² K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Torah Nebiim u-Ketubim Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. "Textum masoreticum curavit" H. P. Rieger, "Massoram elaboravit G. E. Weil." (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, (1967-1977, 1997).

“... And Yet be Loth to Die?” Death and Dying in the Theologies of John Owen and Richard Baxter

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IMAGE AND FACTS

The Puritans were gripped individually and collectively by an intense and unremitting fear of death, while simultaneously clinging to the traditional Christian rhetoric of viewing death as a release and relief for the earth-bound soul.¹

This quotation from Stannard’s book *The Puritan Way of Death* summarizes well the general idea about how in puritan tradition death was seen and dealt with. Even apart from the question of whether there ever existed something like “the Puritans,” it may be asked what the sources are for the first part of the statement. The conclusion of this paper, at least, is that neither Richard Baxter (1615-1691) nor John Owen (1616-1683) can be used as witnesses to confirm this “intense and unremitting fear.” I’m afraid most of the other

puritan authors won't be suitable to support the standard image either but that is something for other papers and books that still have to be written.² For now we will focus first on Owen and then on Baxter after which an evaluation will be given of their thoughts.

JOHN OWEN

Introduction

An example of the place death and dying take in Owen's work, is found in Randall C. Gleason's comparison of John Calvin and John Owen on the topic of mortification.³ He devotes a paragraph on Calvin's view on the *meditatio future vitae*, but does not write a parallel section on Owen's view. In Sinclair Ferguson's book on *Owen's View of the Christian Life*, there is only one quotation devoted to the death of the Christian.⁴ The reason for this absence is that death and dying are hardly a topic for Owen. His focus is more on holy living than on holy dying, more on the death of sin than on the death of the sinner. This may be somewhat surprising for an author who lost nine of his ten children⁵ and whose best-known works has the word "death" three times in its title. It is less surprising if we consider that Owen's focus is on the death of Christ and not on that of the believer. Living in holiness, rather than dying in hope, is the theme of Owen's work. Yet I expect that a close reading of his entire opus will be fruitful enough for a monograph on death and dying in the theology of John Owen. At the moment we will have to restrict ourselves to his commentary on Hebrews.⁶

Hebrews

In spite of the apparent absence of the topic of death and dying in Owen's work, he does pay rather elaborate attention to it in his commentary on Hebrews 2:14-5. He states: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Owen begins his exposition with stating that this verse supposes four things: "First, that the devil had the power of death; secondly, that on this account men were filled with fear of it, and led a life full of anxiety and

trouble by reason of that fear; thirdly, that a deliverance from this condition was to be effected by the Messiah; fourthly, that the way whereby he was to do this was by his suffering.” This all relates to the natural and moral state of unregenerate man. Christ took part in this natural state and delivered “the children whom God designed to bring unto glory”⁷ through his death from this state and thus also from this moral state of fear of death.⁸ When Owen continues to describe more in detail this unregenerate state he constantly uses the past tense indicating that this situation is for the believer something from the past. “They were subject to death . . . It wrought *fear* in them; That fear brought them into *bondage*. . . they were subject, obnoxious unto, guilty of death.”⁹ I believe here we find the exact reason why in Owen’s works we find so little about death and dying. It is not a topic in his works as it is not a topic for the Christian. That is to say, not anymore. Yet he does continue in Hebrews to explain what this fear of death of the unbeliever is and from where it originates.

Fear is a perturbation of mind, arising from the apprehension of a future imminent evil; and the greater this evil is, the greater will the perturbation of the mind be, provided the apprehension of it be answerable. The fear of death, then, here intended, is that trouble of mind which men have in the expectation of death to be inflicted on them, as a punishment due unto their sins. And this apprehension is common to all men, arising from a general presumption that death is penal, and that it is the ‘judgment of God that they which commit sin are worthy of death,’ as Romans 1:32, 2:15.¹⁰

So, there is a general awareness that death has to do with the judgment of God and even those who have extinguished all this awareness still sense that death has something to do with punishment.¹¹ From this awareness comes the state of bondage: “The troublesome expectation of death as penal brings them into bondage.”¹² Owen gives a rather detailed description of the negative emotions this bondage brings forth and how people try in vain to get away from it and from the fear of death,¹³ stating, once again that “this is the condition of sinners out of Christ.”¹⁴ Now the problem is that man take this situation as a natural given. “Most men look on death as the common lot and condition of mankind, upon the account of their frail natural condition; as though it belonged to the natural condition of the children.”¹⁵ Owen

admits that there is a certain fear of death that is also common to the children of God. "There is a fear of death that is natural, and inseparable from our present condition; that is but nature's aversion of its own dissolution."¹⁶ This natural aversion against dying differs in degrees among men as well as among believers, and one person may fear it more than another. According to Owen this has nothing to do with a lack of faith and thus he calls it, "a guiltless infirmity, like our weariness and sickness, inseparably annexed unto the condition of mortality."¹⁷ Just as one can fall ill or can get tired, so also one can have an aversion to death, but this is something completely different from the deep fear of judgment or the attitude of sinners to ignore death as much as possible. Owen discerns as it were a third kind of fear namely that of those who are convinced of sin and judgment but are not yet freed by the gospel. The question is how much of this fear and this conviction of being a sinner one must have before one may be called a believer. Owen however rejects the question, as this is not something we can do ourselves but it is an effect of the knowledge of the law of God. His view is that this bondage in the fear of death is not a duty but something that happens "involuntary."¹⁸ It does, however, cause a person's desire to be delivered from this situation and thus from this fear of death as judgment and this desire makes one active to live in the communion with Christ. For it is Christ who by his death freed us from the fear of death.

Here, in a nutshell, we find the message of Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Christ took upon himself our nature and so he could undergo death and all the fears and anxieties around death for no other reason than to deliver God's children from death as judgment and our fear of death. In brief: "His death was the means of delivering them from death,"¹⁹ which entails that in Christ, the believer is freed from the state of being spiritually dead (temporal death) and from eternal death. What Owen means here, he more clearly states in his exposition on Hebrews 9:27 where he also discerns between temporal and eternal death and how Christ delivers from both.

1. As man was to die once legally and penally for sin, by the sentence of the law, and no more; so Christ died, suffered, and offered once, and no more, to bear sin, to expiate it, and thereby to take away death so far as it was penal.
2. As after death men must appear again the second time unto judgment, to undergo condemnation thereon; so after his once offering, to take away sin and death,

Christ shall appear the second time to free us from judgment, and to bestow on us eternal salvation.²⁰

The fear of death is caused by Satan as he in fact has the power of death in such a way that he can frighten us by confronting us with the fact that death is the punishment upon sin. God did not make death; death was not in God's creation. Instead, it was the result of Adam's sin and it is God's punishment of our sin. Now Satan has a tool to make us afraid, not so much with death as dying but with death as the ultimate confrontation with God's righteous judgment resulting in our eternal death. “God having passed the sentence of death against sin, it was in the power of Satan to terrify and affright the *consciences* of men with the expectation and dread of it, so bringing them into *bondage*.”²¹ Here lies the power of Satan that he can bind people with reminding them that the fact that they have to die is directly connected with the fact that they are sinners for God and under eternal punishment.²² The death of Christ makes Satan powerless as Christ takes away the guilt of sin and thus the ground for eternal punishment. “The destruction, then, here intended of ‘him that had the power of death,’ is the dissolution, evacuation, and removing of that power which he had in and over death, with all the effects and consequences of it.”²³ Now since Satan can no longer scare God's children with death as a penalty for sin, God's children no longer have to fear death at all. As soon as through faith the death of Christ is applied to the believer he or she is set free from this bondage of fear.²⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that Owen clearly views the death of the Christian as no longer a penalty for sin (cf. Heidelberg Catechism.), that there is no need to fear either temporal or eternal death, but that—and here we hear the pastor speak—God's children have this natural fear of death as something unknown and unpleasant.

Richard Baxter

Introduction

There is more about death and dying in Baxter's works than Owen's, which is not surprising as he gives many, extensive directions for all aspects of the

Christian life.²⁵ The title of my paper is a quote from Baxter's *The Saints Everlasting Rest*. In chapter 8, paragraph 19 he uses this phrase even three times in a row because he cannot understand, "that we can truly believe, that death will remove us from misery to such glory and yet be loth to die."²⁶ Also for Baxter death for a believer in Christ cannot be something to be afraid of nor something to keep with all strength away from as if death means the end to all blessings instead of the gateway to the fullness of all blessings. Yet Baxter was aware that there is both loathness to die and fear of death among Christian believers and therefore he wrote a treatise called *Directions for a Peaceful Death*. I take this treatise as exemplary for Baxter's view on death and dying. In the introduction of a separate version of this work he mistakenly says that these directions are also to be found in his book *Self Denial*.²⁷ This is true as to the matter that is dealt with in chapter forty of this book, but the directions Baxter publishes separately were first published in *A Body of Practical Divinity* under the chapter "For the Aged, Weak and Sick."²⁸ To my knowledge, separate attention has not been paid to this treatise although it is highly interesting in its genre and its content. In this treatise, it is as if Baxter follows up on Owen's statement that there is a natural aversion to death, an aversion believers also experience. He starts with saying that we need comfort when death approaches and that therefore his directions should, "make our departure comfortable or peaceful at the least, as well as safe." He by the way mentions twenty directions but finally lists eighteen. Baxter speaks even stronger of "our natural unwillingness to die."²⁹

Genre

Baxter's work, interestingly, is part of a genre originating in the late Middle ages, namely that of the *ars moriendi*. This art of dying well as it was called in English examples of the genre were written as small guidelines for priest and pastors to help prepare their parishioners for death. The approach of death makes the devil active to attack the conscience and the faith of the believer in the hope to make him or her sin against God. These sins would prolong the stay in purgatory extensively so it was necessary to help chase away the devil by admonishing the believer to focus on the triune God, Mary, and the other saints. Martin Luther wrote a similar treatise but filled it with a new theology. Whereas the medieval *ars moriendi* literature had purgatory as presupposition, Luther's starting point was the full reconciliation with

God through Christ making purgatory redundant and opening the gates of heaven for all who wished to enter through faith. His theology of grace also changed the expected attitude of the one about to die. In the medieval works, the subject of action was the believer who must focus on God and the saints with all strength whereas in Luther and his followers the subject is God who brings the comfort of the cross of Christ to the dying believer.³⁰ This reformed *ars moriendi* was described by various Calvinist and puritan writers such as Zacharius Ursinus, the author of the Heidelberg Catechism, and William Perkins whose *A Salve for a Sick Man, or a Treatise on Sickness and Dying*, first published 1595, and still is a bestseller. This new approach is taken up by Baxter who yet brings in elements that differ from Luther without departing from the theology of the cross. Just as Luther, Baxter did not write the work for pastors but for every believer to read and to take it to heart in order to overcome the fears of death so that, “the great impediment of their comfort is removed.”³¹

Content

Baxter starts his directions with saying that sickness preceding death may be seen as a mercy, God giving us the time to prepare for death and to make us even willing to leave this life. Sickness, together with the pain it brings about, makes us loose our appetite for earthly things so, “that we have so loud a call, and so great a help to true repentance and serious preparation!”³² For those who live close to God already, “a sudden death may be a mercy,” but ordinarily the mercy of God lies in a preparation through sickness. Baxter even suggests that without prior sickness one may be unprepared to die, though he does not address it at this point.

Baxter comforts the one who is sick unto death by reminding him that sickness comes from the Lord, that it is from him who loves us and who knows what is best for us. “Our sickness and death are sent by the same love that sent us a Saviour, and sent us the powerful preachers of his word, and sent us his Spirit, and secretly and sweetly changed our hearts, and knit them to himself in love; which gave us a life of precious mercies for our souls and bodies, and has promised to give us life eternal; and shall we think, that he now intends us any harm? Cannot he turn this also to our good, as he has done many an affliction which we have complained about?”³³ Out of this knowledge the dying believer should, “Look by faith to your dying, buried, risen, ascended, glorified Lord.”³⁴

When a believer keeps his eyes on Jesus, he can conquer fear of death since Jesus triumphed over death. Here Baxter brings in communion with Christ in such a way that it is comforting to know that what happened to him will also happen to us as believers. He lists the aspects of Christ's death and burial to say that Christ overcame all these and since he is the Head and we are the body the same counts for us. Death could not hold him and therefore it cannot hold us. This communion with Christ as the head is, according to Baxter, so strong that a believer has at death the joyful thought that he is going to his Saviour.

For Baxter, death for the believer is not a disturbing but a joyful thought. This thought however does not come automatically and Baxter admonishes believers to focus on God's promises. Specifically, to "choose out some promises most suitable to your condition, and roll them over and over in your mind, and feed and live on them by faith."³⁵ Sick people cannot handle too much so it best is to take two or three of God's promises and concentrate on these. Baxter then quotes thirteen Bible verses as examples to choose from, depending on the particular fears and sorrows with which the sick believer struggles.³⁶ So it is the external Word, the promise that comes from outside of us, that brings comfort and joy. Baxter, in line with Luther, directs the believer away from him of herself, *extra nos* to God's promises. He then continues to convince the sick believer that the glory of heaven is so much better than life on earth. Yet it is important to notice that for Baxter the glory is not heaven in general, but specifically the promise of seeing God face to face. Now we see only the works of God in creation, but there we will see himself. "If it be delectable here to know his works, what will it be to see the cause of all? All creatures in heaven and earth conjoined, can never afford such content and joy to holy souls, as God alone!"³⁷ It is not the comforts and joys of life in heaven that make up the essential aspect of heaven, but the *visio Dei*, the vision of God believers will have there. It is not our future deliverance of sin and sorrow but full communion with God that causes leaving this life to be a moment of joy. That moment is far better than the glimpse of God's back that Moses experienced, the vision of Christ Stephen experienced when he was stoned to death, and the rapture into the third heaven Paul experienced. To be sure, these were all highlights, "but our beatific sight of the glory of God, will very far excel all this." Baxter does not say more at this point but refers readers to his *Saints Everlasting Rest*, where he takes up the subject more fully.³⁸

Here he turns to another way of fighting the fear of death, namely, focusing on the fact that after death the believer will take part in the communion with Christ shared by the angels and all the believers who went before him. “It will greatly overcome the fears of death, to see by faith the joys of them that have gone before us; and withal to think of their relation to us.”³⁹ Once again it is not the prospect of being with the angels and the saints but of taking part in their joy of being with God and seeing his face. Considering their joy helps enormously to conquer the fear of death. There is also joy, however, in the prospect of both being with the angels who, “are our special friends and guardians, and entirely love us, better than any of our friends on earth do!,”⁴⁰ and with all those believers who have gone before, who no longer experience suffering, sorrow, fear, sin or death whatsoever. For Baxter the participation in their joy is on a higher level but fellowship with them is also a reason not to fear death and, at a certain moment, even long for it.⁴¹ According to him we can sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and enjoy their fellowship as well join them in praising God. He once again reminds the reader that the highest joy is seeing God and being with Christ but knowing we will meet with all those believers is also an encouragement and a comfort against the fear of death.⁴²

Subsequently Baxter gives a long list of those who we will see and communicate with in heaven implying that he is convinced that we can recognize each other in heaven. He provides a list of persons he personally looks forward to talking to and is excited to know.⁴³ It’s interesting to read his list—though we probably shouldn’t try to draw too many conclusions from it.

That I shall dwell with such as Enoch and Elias, and Abraham and Moses, and Job and David, and Peter and John, and Paul and Timothy, and Ignatius and Polycarp, and Cyprian and Nazianzen, and Augustine and Chrysostom and Bernard and Gerson, and Savonarola and Mirandula, and Taulerus and Kempisius, and Melancthon and Alasco, and Calvin and Bucholtzer, and Bullinger and Musculus, and Zanchy and Bucer, and Grynaeus, and Chemnitius and Gerhard, and Chamier and Capellus, and Blondel and Rivet, and Rogers and Bradford, and Hooper and Latimer, and Hildersham and Amesius, and Langley and Nicolls, and Whitaker and Cartwright, and Hooker and Bayne, and Preston and Sibbes, and Perkins and Dod, and Parker and Ball, and Usher and Hall, and Gataker and Bradshaw, and Vines and Ash, and millions more of the family of God.

Syllogismus practicus

In Direction VIII Baxter addresses what to do if someone fears he doesn't have the Spirit—the same Spirit who gives the believer a desire for holiness and hope. Baxter answers this pastoral need with the practical syllogism:

If you say, I fear I have not this earnest of the Spirit; whence then did your desires of holiness arise. What weaned you from the world, and made you place your hopes and happiness above? Whence came your enmity to sin, and opposition to it, and your earnest desires after the glory of God, the prosperity of the gospel, and the good of souls? The very love of holiness and holy persons, and your desires to know God and perfectly love him, do show that heavenly nature or spirit within you, which is your surest evidence for eternal life: for that spirit was sent from heaven, to draw up your hearts, and fit you for it; and God does not give you such natures, and desires, and preparations in vain.

So if one doubts having the Spirit he can fight this doubt by looking at his desire to live according to God's will, a desire that can only come from the Holy Spirit in one's heart. Second to noticing the desire is the fact of living holy. This means that not only the attempt to live as a Christian but even the attempt itself is an assurance of God's Spirit working in you, and thus the assurance of passing over to eternal life with God at the time of death. He encourages the dying believer to, "Look also to the testimony of a holy life."⁴⁴ Baxter knows that the person hearing his words will likely respond by saying that his personal holiness falls far short of what it could be and that he is full of sin and failure. Such a reply is met with the observation that whatever holiness one does find can only come from God. God, therefore, is at work in you and he will reward you for very good he sees in you, which is all a work of God's grace in the believer. Baxter calls the good or the holiness that is in us "evangelical righteousness" that consists in innocence, or freedom from the curse of the law, as opposed to "legal righteousness."⁴⁵ This evangelical righteousness is based on the merits of Christ and is a righteousness distributed to us, but which is nevertheless present in the life of the believer. It is to this righteousness that the believer must look if there is fear of God's judgment at death. Believers must not neglect the comfort God gives in the work he does in us by only looking at our sins and injustice.⁴⁶

On one's deathbed, knowledge of one's sins is certainly a reason for

repentance, but assurance lies in remembering the desire, however imperfect, to do what pleases God. Baxter connects this attention on imperfect longing for holiness directly to on Christ who carried away our sin and guilt. The *sylogismus practicus* should not focus too long on the believer but should help to turn his dying eyes towards Christ crucified and to the gracious God. If we see how good God has been to us on earth then how much more will he do so in heaven? Knowing that will make our deathbed a place of longing, “to go to that God, that has so tenderly loved me, and so graciously preserved me, and so much abounded in all sorts of mercies to me through all my life.”⁴⁷

In Direction XII Baxter clearly reprimands the believer who is at an older age and yet unwilling to die. “How long would you stay, before you would be willing to come to God?”⁴⁸ Baxter answers the complaint that life was too short with saying “if you have lived well, you have lived long,” and with pointing at the many who die at young age. Therefore, let it not come to a situation that God needs to take us away against our will. We know that we are mortal just like all living creatures. But animals—Baxter calls them “poor brute creatures”—are killed for our hunger and delight in food, but we die, “to live in joy with Christ and his church triumphant,”⁴⁹ so how can we shy away from going that path? As for our body, shouldn’t we be happy to get a new one and get rid of that body that is imperfect and full of sin?⁵⁰ The same counts for the world we are in now and the world where will go to. Baxter encourages the dying believer to compare these two worlds and to come to the conclusion that it is a mercy of God to be delivered from a world polluted with sin. We pray every day to be less sinful and more holy, how then can we fear or complain when we can reach this to the full? We struggle every day with grief, sin, weaknesses, pain, cares, doubts, temptations, “and yet is it not desirable to be with Christ? . . . And yet are we so unwilling to be gone?”⁵¹

Baxter asking such questions and continues to list all that is burdensome of living in this world. Directions XVI and XVII are an encouragement to take the right and timely measures. “Settle your estates early, that worldly matters may not distract or discompose you.” People that have money should arrange on time that a good part of it goes to charity or to other ways of serving God as this richness in fact comes from him.⁵² This counts especially for those who have no children or who have children that have gone bad ways and don’t deserve their parents’ money. It is furthermore essential to,

“get some able, faithful guide and comforter to be with you in your sickness, to counsel you, and resolve your doubts, and pray with you, and discourse of heavenly things, when you are disabled by weakness for such exercises yourselves.” At the hour of sickness and death, one needs good, spiritual company. All of these directions help to accomplish what Baxter calls for in his final directions: “Be fortified against all the temptations of Satan by which he uses to assault men in their extremity: stand it out in the last conflict, and the crown is yours.”⁵³

Conclusion

Baxter picks up the medieval genre of *Ars Moriendi* in the same reformational way as Martin Luther did before him. His approach is pastoral with a focus on the certainty of eternal salvation; however, for him, it is not the salvation of the sinner but the communion with God that is at the heart of the heavenly life.

Resume and outlook

A woodcut published in 1590 by the Tübingen printer Georg Gruppenbach⁵⁴ seems to confirm the general image of the immense fear some Calvinists and thus some puritans have of death and dying. The person on the bed—maybe John Calvin himself—represents all dying Calvinists and shows them in despair because of the doctrine of predestination, while death is very near and a pastor unsuccessfully tries to give comfort. This seems to be the message this picture communicates, as it gives a number of Bible quotations aiming to demonstrate that the doctrine of predestination is unscriptural. The puritan doctrine of predestination is, especially in the hour of death, cause for despair and fear. Analyses of the works of Calvin, Ursinus and some other Calvinists have shown already that what they said and wrote about death differs quite a bit from this image and now we can add Owen and Baxter to this group. The breach Luther brought about in the *ars moriendi* changing doubt into certainty without losing the reality of anxieties, works clearly through in the views of Owen and Baxter. Nowhere in their works is there even a trace of intense fear of death. The opposite is the case for death is seen as the happy transition into eternal glory. Death and dying are minor topics in their works as their focus is on holy living before God, death is the upgrade from living *coram Deo* to seeing God face

to face. Their views can best be illustrated by a quote from the last letter we have of Owen and where he shows that—speaking like Baxter—he is not “loth to die.” On August 22, 1683 he wrote:

“I am going to him whom my soul hath loved, or rather hath loved me with an everlasting love; which is the whole ground of all my consolation.”⁵⁵

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- ¹ David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 79. See also these articles: David E. Stannard, “Death and Dying in Puritan New England,” *The American Historical Review* 78/5 (1973): 1305-1330; David E. Stannard, “Death and the Puritan Child,” *American Quarterly* 26/5 (1974): 456-476; David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. More balanced is the conclusion of Petra Holubová: “It should be reiterated that the Puritan attitude toward death in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England was ambivalent and contained both terror at the possibility of eternal damnation and hope for deliverance,” *The Puritan view of death: attitudes toward death and dying in Puritan New England*. Unpublished thesis, Prague, 2011, 81.
 - ² Literature on this topic is so far rather scarce. David Sceats, “‘Precious in the Sight of the Lord...’: the theme of death in puritan pastoral theology,” *Churchman* 95/4 (1981).
 - ³ Randall C. Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification. A comparative study in reformed spirituality*, New York: Peter Lang, 1995.
 - ⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987, 278.
 - ⁵ “Owen did not mention...the deaths of any of his children, in his extant writing.” Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism. Experiences in Defeat*, New York: Oxford University Press, 103.
 - ⁶ Quotations here are from the Goold-edition. See for an introduction to this work: John W. Tweeddale, John Owen’s Commentary on Hebrews in Context, in Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012, 49-63.
 - ⁷ Hebrews, *Works* 19: 438.
 - ⁸ “1. As to their natural condition, that he *did partake of it*, he was so to do: ‘He also himself did partake of the same’ 2. As to their moral condition, he *freed them from it*: ‘And deliver them.’” 437.
 - ⁹ Hebrews, *Works* 19: 438.
 - ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19: 439.
 - ¹¹ See *ibid.*
 - ¹² *Ibid.*
 - ¹³ “And all these things concur in the bondage here intended; which is a dejected, troublesome *state* and condition of mind, arising from the apprehension and fear of death to be inflicted, and their disability in whom it is to avoid it, attended with fruitless desires and vain attempts to be delivered from it, and to escape the evil *feared*.” Hebrews, *Works* 19: 440.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19: 441.
 - ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁸ “This estate, then, befalls *men* whether they will or no. And this is so if we take bondage passively, as it affects the soul of the sinner; which the apostle seems to intend by placing it as an effect of the fear of death.” *Ibid.*, 19: 442.
 - ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19: 446.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22: 502.
 - ²¹ *Ibid.*, 19: 449.
 - ²² “All *sinners* out of Christ are under the *power* of Satan. They belong unto that kingdom of death whereof he is the prince and ruler.” *Ibid.*
 - ²³ *Ibid.*, 19: 450.

- ²⁴ “The fear of death being taken away, the bondage that ensues thereon vanisheth also. And these things, as they are done *virtually* and legally in the death of Christ, so they are *actually* accomplished in and towards the children, upon the application of the death of Christ unto them, when they do believe.” *Ibid.*, 19: 452.
- ²⁵ See for example his *A Treatise of Death, the Last Enemy to be destroyed* comprising 94 pages in *The practical works of Richard Baxter*, Vol. 17, 510-604.
- ²⁶ The phrase is also heard in hymn 256 of *A Church of England Hymn Book*, 1879, where it says: “Dead to life, yet loath to die.”
- ²⁷ *A Treatise on Self Denial*, London, 1675.
- ²⁸ The directions are in Volume 3, 420-433.
- ²⁹ Direction II.
- ³⁰ See for an extensive bibliography: Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)*, Aldershot: Routledge, 2007, 1-6. See also: Luise Schottroff, *Die Bereitung zum Sterben- Studien zu den frühen reformatorischen Sterbebüchern*. Vol. 5 of *Refo500 Academic Studies*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012.
- ³¹ Direction I.
- ³² Direction II.
- ³³ Direction III.
- ³⁴ Direction IV.
- ³⁵ Direction V.
- ³⁶ John 3:16; Acts 13:39; Heb 8:12; Isa 40:11; Gal 5:17; John 6:37; Luke 17:5; 2 Cor 5:1-6, 8; Phil 1:23; Rev 14:13; 1 Cor 15:55; Acts 7:59.
- ³⁷ Direction VI.
- ³⁸ “But having spoken of this so largely in my *Saints’ Rest*, I must stop here, and refer you thither,” Direction VI.
- ³⁹ Direction VII.
- ⁴⁰ Direction VII.
- ⁴¹ “Is not their company desirable? And their felicity more desirable?” Direction VII.
- ⁴² “Though it must be our highest joy to think that we shall dwell with God, and next that we shall see the glory of Christ, Yet is it no small part of my comfort to consider, that I shall follow all those holy persons, whom I once conversed with, that are gone before me,” Direction VII.
- ⁴³ “I name these for my own delight and comfort; it being pleasant to me to remember what companions I shall have in the heavenly joys and praises of my Lord.”
- ⁴⁴ Direction IX.
- ⁴⁵ Direction IX.
- ⁴⁶ “Seeing therefore the Spirit has given you these evidences, to difference you from the wretched world, and prove your title to eternal life, if you overlook these, you resist your Comforter, and can see no other ground of comfort, than every graceless hypocrite may see.”
- ⁴⁷ Direction XI.
- ⁴⁸ Direction XII.
- ⁴⁹ Direction XIII.
- ⁵⁰ “Remember both how vile your body is, and how great an enemy it has proved to your soul; and then you will the more patiently bear its dissolution. It is not your dwelling-house, but your tent or prison, that God is pulling down.” Direction XIV.
- ⁵¹ Direction XV.
- ⁵² “And if God has endowed you with riches, dispose of a due proportion to such pious or charitable uses, in which they may be most serviceable to him that gave them you.”
- ⁵³ Direction XVIII.
- ⁵⁴ © Historical Museum of the Reformation. Exposed at the International Museum of the Reformation (Geneva).
- ⁵⁵ Peter Toon, ed., *The Correspondence of John Owen*, Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970, 174.

SBJT Forum

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ster and others have called “retrieval theology,” because it was engaging with past theological voices for the sake of contemporary doctrinal renewal. As pastors and other ministry leaders developed an interest in the history of Calvinistic thought, it is only natural that they would discover John Owen’s works. He was arguably the most prolific theologian within the English Puritan tradition. Owen was also a key English voice within the broader theological movement called Reformed Scholasticism or Reformed Orthodoxy, which was an attempt to systematize Calvinistic thought in the generations following the Reformation proper.

The second reason, which is in some respects a case study within the broader Calvinistic resurgence, is the influence of J. I. Packer. When Packer was a student at Oxford during World War II, he was quite taken by a Keswick understanding

SBJT: Why has there been a resurgence of interest in John Owen in recent decades?

Nathan A. Finn: I think there are at least three interrelated reasons that we have witnessed renewed interest in John Owen in recent decades. The first reason is the general resurgence of interest in Calvinism and related topics. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, many evangelicals in the English-speaking world “rediscovered” the Reformation and the Puritans, often in response to what many perceived to be a doctrinally vacuous, anthropocentric revivalism. Meetings such as the annual Puritan Conference in London and publishers such as Banner of Truth played a key role in promoting this resurgence in its early decades.

Midcentury interest in the Reformed tradition was a form of what John Web-

of spirituality. As Packer gradually found the Higher Life spirituality be increasingly stultifying, he discovered the Puritans, among whom he found a more biblical approach to the Christian life. Packer became a regular speaker at the Puritan Conference, often reading papers related to Owen's life and thought. He also wrote introductions to Banner of Truth reprints of Owen's *Mortification of Sin* and *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Packer's introduction to the latter volume has become something of a classic in Reformed circles. I have no doubt that far more people have read Packer on Owen and the atonement than have actually read Owen's actual treatise on the work of Christ.

The final reason is in some ways a further extension of the aforementioned reasons. In 1994, John Piper gave a biographical address on Owen at the annual Bethlehem Conference for Pastors. Piper was a rising star among many evangelicals, having by that time authored influential books such as *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (1986) and *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (1991). His talk on Owen became widely available on the internet and was later published as part of the book *Contending for Our All: Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen* (2006).

I believe Piper helped to "mainstream" John Owen among the generation of evangelicals that came of age in the 1990s and early 2000s. Many of these younger evangelicals were more Calvinistic than the generation that came before them; they were the same folks whom Collin Hansen would later call "Young, Restless, and Reformed." Today, John Owen has become almost as well-known as Jonathan Edwards—another theologian whom Piper (and Packer) helped to popularize among evangelicals.

Ryan M. McGraw is Professor of Systematic Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He has pastored churches in the Presbyterian Church in America and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and has published numerous books and articles on Owen's theology, both for academic and broader audiences. He is married to Krista and they have four children.

SBJT: According to John Owen, What is the Key to the *Mortification of Sin*?

Ryan M. McGraw: Many people are interested in John Owen's teaching on the *Mortification of Sin*. For some, this is virtually the only book that they associate with Owen's name. In this author's opinion, while this is an excellent book, it is not one of Owen's

best. His writings on Christ, the Trinity, and the Spirit in volumes 1-4 of his *Works* are likely his greatest and most useful writings, excepting the volumes on *Hebrews*.

Yet the reason why so many Christians likely turn to the *Mortification of Sin* above Owen's other books is because it strikes a nerve with them. They recognize that killing indwelling sin is both difficult and necessary and they want practical helps to make progress in doing it. However, this can create a bias in readers to find what they expect to see in the *Mortification of Sin* rather than what Owen has to offer them. Many read this book looking for practical rules regarding how to change their practices. While Owen gives such rules, it is easy to miss is how they operate in relation to Christian faith and practice. According to Owen, the key ingredient to mortifying sin is exercising faith in Christ in dependence on the Holy Spirit. This is precisely what makes his teaching so potentially valuable to the church today. We can better appreciate and learn from Owen's teaching on mortifying sin by answering three additional questions: What is the purpose of the *Mortification of Sin*? Why is it misunderstood? And, What is its true value?

First, what is the purpose of the *Mortification of Sin*? The purpose of the *Mortification of Sin* is to develop what might be called the negative side of sanctification. Expounding Romans 8:11-13, Owen explained that mortifying sin was possible for believers alone, since Christ broke sin's power over them through their union with himself by faith, which happened in their effectual calling. Since the Spirit is the author of mortifying sin, he alone can bless the divinely required means of putting sin to death. Those who do not mortify sin shall die, and those who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh shall live. Mortification is the duty of all believers for all of their lives (chapters 1-4). Before identifying signs of particular unmortified lusts in believers, Owen described what mortification is not and what it is (chapters 5-6). While mortifying sin is a vital work for Christians, it is an incomplete work. As believers are united to Christ through faith they are justified and adopted. In the lifelong process of sanctification, they must kill sin on the one hand (mortification) so that they can walk in new obedience on the other (vivification). Two mistakes that we can make in reading this book, then, are to treat killing sin as an end in itself and to forget that union with Christ through faith by the Spirit's power alone makes mortification possible. The purpose of the *Mortification of Sin* is to promote the negative side of sanctification, in union with Christ, by

the Spirit's power, in order to pave way for the positive side of sanctification.

Second, why is the *Mortification of Sin* often misunderstood? I heard one well-known Owen scholar say that in order to grasp Owen's teaching on mortification, people should read it alongside his Christological treatises in volume one of his *Works*. This is good advice in that Owen's writings on Christ represent some of his best material. However, it is misleading since it implies a defective Christology in the *Mortification of Sin*. Chapters 7-13 of this book provide nine rules for mortifying sin. Two things are particularly noteworthy about this list. First, in contrast to many modern approaches to indwelling sin in believers, rule six out of nine alone treats changing outward circumstances. For Owen (following Christ), fighting against sin must work from the inside out rather than from the outside in. Second, these nine rules were "preparatory" only for mortifying sin (*Works*, 6:78). While many read the mortification of sin to find precisely the kind of ninefold-list presented in these chapters, Owen reminded his readers that though such things were necessary to mortification, we should not mistake them for mortification. The *Mortification of Sin* is sometimes misunderstood in that, according to Owen, the true work of mortification lies in Christology and Pneumatology.

Third, what is the true value of the *Mortification of Sin*? According to Owen, mortifying sin involves the habitual weakening of sin, constant fighting against it, and frequent success in practice (chapter 6). Christians cannot make progress against sin merely by changing their outward behavior or circumstances. Instead, we mortify sin through the Spirit changing our hearts in communion with Christ. In contrast to many modern approaches, this entails more than contemplating our justification. It involves actively drawing power from Christ by faith in relation to every action and every part of the Christian life. This reminds us in passing that it is neither wise nor profitable to judge an author's emphases by the amount of space that he dedicates to some issues in proportion to others. In Owen's case, chapter 14 of the *Mortification of Sin* brought his entire teaching to its climactic application. The true value of this book is that Owen demonstrates that mortification takes place primarily through exercising faith in Christ through the Spirit's power.

In short, the reason why Owen's book on mortification remains helpful to believers today is that he treated mortification as an act of communion with Christ by the Spirit. This prevents the mortification of sin from devolving into a Christian version of a twelve-step program into a transformative act of

communion with the triune God. It also recognizing the necessity of using means in mortifying sin while placing these means in an evangelical context.

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concerning his own *particular interest* in forgiveness. A man may, many do, believe it for themselves, so as not only to have the benefit of it but the comfort also.”

The attainability of assurance must be understood in relationship to faith, however. Owen unreservedly supported an organic relationship between faith and assurance but no confusion between the two. He believed faith included persuasion of the availability of divine forgiveness, but said that did not necessarily include the personal application of forgiveness—which alone gives rise to full assurance. He wrote, “There is or may be a saving persuasion or discovery of forgiveness in God, where there is no assurance of any particular interest therein.”

Second, like the Westminster Confession, *Owen regarded assurance as normative though not necessarily common*. That was consistent with the Confession’s teaching that there are degrees and various kinds of assurance. All true believers possess some assurance, but few can claim the blessing of “full

SBJT: What did John Owen teach on the Christian having a proper assurance of faith?

Joel R. Beeke: John Owen’s (1616–1683) views on assurance of faith have largely been neglected due in part to his never writing a separate treatise on this important subject. His most thorough exposition of assurance is in his *Psalm CXXX*. This can best be understood as an augmentation of the Westminster Confession’s teaching on assurance, while remaining within its framework. Let us think about what Owen teaches on this important subject in four steps.

First, *Owen plainly asserted the attainability of assurance*. He wrote: “There may be a gracious persuasion and assurance of faith in a man concerning

assurance.” Owen wrote, “*This discovery of forgiveness in God is great, holy, and mysterious, and which very few on gospel grounds do attain unto. . . Even one experimental embracement of it [i.e., the full assurance of personal interest in divine forgiveness], even at the hour of death, doth well deserve the waiting and obedience of the whole course of a man’s life.*”

Believers who gain full assurance of forgiveness by God do not find it quickly or easily. Those who do not understand that can substitute a notion of forgiveness in God for personal forgiveness from God.

Owen also believed that believers with full assurance were never safe from attacks on their faith. Still, even when a believer is spiritually “cast down,” assurance is not altogether lost (Psalm 42); rather, assurance may continue even under a deep sense of indwelling sin and infirmity. Owen wrote: “A man’s assurance may be as good, as true, when he lies on the earth with a sense of sin, as when he is carried up to the third heaven with a sense of love and foretaste of glory.”

Here Owen not only confirmed but went beyond section 18.4 of the Westminster Confession. For Owen, conviction of sin and assurance of salvation were not antagonistic. Rather, both should be sought, and both are given and retained by God’s grace. Though full assurance is difficult to obtain, true believers must strive for it. As Owen wrote: “*It is the duty of every believer to labour after an assurance of a personal interest in forgiveness, and to be diligent in the cherishing and preservation of it when it is attained . . . It is no small evil in believers not to be pressing after perfection in believing and obedience.*”

The Christian need not despair if he comes short of reaching such assurance, for God may have wise reasons for withholding it from him. Despite God’s wisdom and sovereignty, however, lack of assurance is ordinarily due to the believer’s shortcomings. As Owen wrote: “*In ordinary dispensations of God towards us, and dealings with us, it is mostly our own negligence and sloth that we come short of this assurance . . . Considering what promises are made unto us, what encouragements are given us, what love and tenderness there is in God to receive us, I cannot but conclude that ordinarily the cause of our coming short of this assurance is where I have fixed it.*”

Third, *Owen’s theology on how assurance is obtained* is very much like that of the Westminster Confession, 18.2, which says assurance is obtained through the promises of salvation in Jesus Christ, as well as through inward evidences

of saving grace and the testimony of the Spirit of adoption. Specifically, Owen taught the following on how assurance is obtained:

(1) The primary ground of assurance is the promises of God, specifically the satisfying blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, embraced by faith. Owen wrote: “The soul, by a direct act of faith, believes its own forgiveness, without making inferences of gathering conclusions; and may do so upon the proposition of it to be believed in the promise.”

(2) The primary ground of assurance leads the believer to the secondary grounds, for he who trusts in the objective promises of God in Jesus Christ will yearn to have those promises to be subjectively “testified unto his conscience in a word of promise mixed by faith.” According to Owen, that testimony is one of two secondary grounds of assurance and is based on inward evidences of saving grace. He wrote, “A due spiritual consideration of the causes and effects of regeneration is the ordinary way and means whereby the soul of believers come to be satisfied concerning that work of God in them and upon them.”

(3) In advocating an immediate witness of the Spirit, Owen prevented this experience from becoming too mystical in the following ways. First, he said the Holy Spirit applies his immediate witness through the Word, not beyond the Word. Thus this witness, which is the direct, miraculous, and powerful application of the Word in God’s sovereign time and way, is both Spirit-applied *and* Word-centered. Second, Owen said that the immediate testimony of the Spirit should not be expected or depended upon because of its extraordinary role as a sovereign gift. Moreover, because the Spirit’s immediate testimony is sovereign, no one can say exactly how full assurance should be experienced.

Fourth, in *Psalm CXXX*, Owen nicely showed how a believer may retain, renew, and improve personal assurance of grace. He said that can be done through three activities of faith: “recalling” grace, “waiting on” grace, and fruitful obedience.

The Christian must first seek grace to recall the Spirit’s past, assuring work in order to improve upon his present degree of assurance. Owen indicated that he knew the typical believer seeks such grace far too seldom. Recalling grace may also reveal defects in the believer that thwart assurance.

Next, the Christian must wait for grace in order to renew and improve assurance. As Owen wrote: “*Whatever your condition be, and your*

apprehension of it, yet continue waiting for a better issue, and give not over through weariness or impatience.”

Finally, while recalling and waiting for grace, the Christian must strive for obedience. Indeed, faith and obedience are ultimately inseparable. Said Owen, “The more faith that is true and of the right kind, the more obedience; for all our obedience is the obedience of faith.”

According to Owen, such obedience manifests itself in “the choicest actings of our souls towards God, —as love, delight, rejoicing the Lord, peace, joy, and consolation in ourselves, readiness to do or suffer, cheerfulness in so doing. If they grow not from this root, yet their flourishing wholly depends upon it; so that surely it is the duty of every believer to break through all difficulties in pressing after this particular assurance.” In short, the way to retain and improve assurance is through obedience, which is also the fruit of assurance.

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SBJT: For some evangelicals it is hard to conceive how the incarnation affects the Christian life, but this was not the case with John Owen. Why was this the case?

Matthew Barrett: You are exactly right. For Owen, a robust, orthodox, Reformed Christology does (and should) impact and affect the Christian life. “The person of Christ,” wrote Owen, “is the most glorious and inef-fable effect of divine wisdom, grace, and power” (*The Person of Christ in Works*, 1:44). For Owen, Christ is the “next foundation” of acceptable religion and worship. The first foundation is God the Father. To him is due all worship and honor and glory since

we are his creatures, and he is our Creator. Through the created order God has manifested himself, that is, his “Divine Being, existence, excellencies, and properties” (cf. Rom 1:18–22). However, none of this compares to

his special revelation of himself through his Son, Christ Jesus. Christ is the “foundation of the new creation” and he is “most ineffable and glorious” (*Works*, 1:45). “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16), and he did so for us and our salvation. Christ is the Word who was made flesh in order to dwell among us (John 1:14).

But, asks Owen, “what Word was this?” Owen’s answer is revealing: “That which was in the beginning, which was with God, which was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made; who was light and life. This Word was made flesh, not by any change of his own nature or essence, not by a transubstantiation of the divine nature into the human, not by ceasing to be what he was, but by becoming what he was not, in taking our nature to his own, to be his own, whereby he dwelt among us. This glorious Word, which is God, and described by his eternity and omnipotency in works of creation and providence, ‘was made flesh,’—which expresseth the lowest state and condition of human nature. Without controversy, great is this mystery of godliness!” (*Works*, 1:46-47).

No wonder Isaiah, predicting the coming of this long-awaited Messiah, titles him “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6) (*Works*, 1:48). Owen also appeals to Heb 1:1-3). For Owen, this is the “glory of the Christian religion—the basis and foundation that bears the whole superstructure” and what sets Christianity apart from every other false religion. The Son of God, taking on our human flesh, becoming a man in order to save us from sin and condemnation, uniting us to himself—this doctrine is certainly the foundation of our entire faith, a foundation that cannot be shaken. Whatever beauty and glory there was in that initial relation between man and God in the garden (Genesis 1–2), “it was all but an obscure representation of the exaltation of our nature in Christ—as the apostle declares, Heb. 2:6–9” (*Works*, 1:48). In our union with Christ we have a far greater union than before. Nothing compares to the union we have with the Son of God who has manifested himself in the flesh through the “subsistence of the divine and human natures in the same single individual person” (*Works*, 1:48).

The beauty of our union becomes even more apparent when we consider humanity’s state after the fall. It is true, says Owen, that there was “true religion in the world after the fall, both before and after the giving of the Law; a religion built upon and resolved into divine revelation.” However, with

the coming of Christ we have something “far more glorious, beautiful, and perfect, than that state of religion was capable of, or could attain” (*Works*, 1:48). Hebrews 1:1–3 and Colossians 2:17 demonstrate Owen’s point. Though God, in times past, spoke through his prophets, in these last days he has spoken directly through his own Son, who is the “brightness of his glory” and through whom our sins are “purged.” While the promise was given through the prophets, it is with the advent of Christ that God fulfills that promise, establishing a new covenant through the blood of his Son.

Therefore, says Owen, “as all the religion that was in the world after the fall was built on the promise of this work of God, in due time to be accomplished; so it is the actual performance of it which is the foundation of the Christian religion, and which gives it the pre-eminence above all that went before it” (*Works*, 1:49). For Owen, should we take away Christ—both who he is and what he has accomplished—we “despoil the Christian religion of all its glory” (*Works*, 1:49).

Taken from Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ by Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, © 2015, pp. 101-103. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Book Reviews

Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice. By Alan Mugridge.
WUNT 362. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016. 558 pp., \$239.00, hard.

Blame the scribes! That has been a refrain for quite some time in the field of New Testament Textual Criticism. Now, Alan Mugridge, Senior Lecturer of New Testament at Sydney Missionary and Bible College, attempts to find out what we can actually know about those who penned the manuscripts.

The purpose of the volume, according to Mugridge, “is to examine the extant Christian papyri, along with a number of allied papyri as a control set, in order to ascertain what kinds of writers actually copied or wrote them” (2). By “Christian papyri,” he means the ones bearing Christian texts: Old Testament, New Testament, apocryphal, patristic, hagiographic, liturgical, gnostic, Manichaeian, and unidentified texts. By “allied papyri,” he means those addressing a deity or deities for help in life: amulets, magical texts, Jewish texts (OT and other), and school texts.

To non-experts, there is still much to consider in this work beyond the papyrological particulars provided in the catalogue of 548 papyri that dominates the book (155–410). Mugridge eagerly contests widely held beliefs about the copying of early Christian texts—the idea that early Christians had their texts copied “in house” (i.e., by themselves without much scribal expertise)—and he refutes the persistent suspicion that the copyists of some NT papyri deliberately changed the text to comply with their theology because they were Christians. The reality, he argues, is that the copyists of early Christian texts were *not* typically Christians. Rather, the majority of them were trained, professional scribes, who probably had a variety of religious convictions.

These arguments will no doubt elicit howls of protest from other specialists, but they touch upon one of the book’s greatest strengths. Mugridge offers a remarkably rich discussion of scribal features and of how the copying of Christian texts took shape over time (1-154). He shows how complex of a topic it really is, and presents his case through a closer reading of more manuscripts than most can claim. His hope is readers will come away with

a better understanding about how Christians had their texts copied during the second to fourth centuries AD, as well as the kinds of people who would have had the ability and opportunity to copy them.

In this work, we also learn that “there are so few examples of Christian or Jewish papyri (at least up to the end of the fourth century AD) with regular and clear spacing between words” (71). While that news is not especially fresh, it certainly helps actualize the importance of what a growing number of scholars are saying about the alleged difficulties of reading a manuscript written in *scriptio continua* (i.e., without spacing between words): it was the norm of the day and we should essentially drop the line of argument that says a “professional” reader was required. In fact, the author’s treatment of various “reading aids” is necessarily brief but useful for that very reason: readers’ aids “cannot serve to confirm or indicate the professionalism of the copyist of the Christian papyri reviewed here, since writers on the spectrum from highly professional scribes down to the very unskilled writers made the same kind of intermittent and inconsistent use of them” (91).

Some major overstatements, however, detract from the volume’s overall effect. In attempting to counteract the dominant view that early Christian texts were reproduced by Christians, who were mostly nonprofessional scribes, Mugridge exaggerates the evidence. For instance, to say that professional writers required writing implements that “must have been unusual for anyone to possess, except trained scribes and members of the elite” is to overreach (13). It is also bold to give so much credit to the *assumption* that over 80-90% of the population was illiterate because some scholars have argued that a certain type of formal schooling “was available only to a few” (12), and therefore risky to base an entire book on this premise. Valid objections can be made to refute this latter claim, and ample evidence exists contrary to the former one. See, for example, counter arguments and evidence in my article on ancient literacy (*TrinJ* 36.4 [2015]: 161–89) and forthcoming book on early Christian reading practices (*Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017]).

Mugridge then goes on to state that “there is no reason to use the word [‘scriptorium’ as a setting in which the copying of texts involved more than a single scribe] for this early period in general, [and] it would be better not to use it at all when discussing Christian papyri from the first four centuries” (16). This assertion, however, remains unsubstantiated, especially because

there is evidence that can be used to suggest that scriptoria were well-established by the end of the second century AD. The utilization of *nomina sacra*, preference for the codex form, and a host of other common characteristics among early Christian texts, such as uniformity in manuscript size, range of handwriting, and particular readers' aids, are all indications of organization and standardization of practice that cannot so easily be swept aside in just a few sentences or paragraphs. Some type of controlled production (i.e., quality control) for the public usage of the following second-century Christian manuscripts, for example, seems probable: 155, 171, 172, and 201 (according to Mugridge's catalogue numbering system; or more popularly known among readers of this journal as P64/67, P104, P77, and P90 respectively).

He also seems to assume throughout the work that there exists a directly proportional relationship between scribal professionalism and textual purity. Yet scribal hands do not necessarily dictate scribal accuracy (among studies not noted in this volume, see Colin Roberts, *The Antinoopolis Papyri* [1950]; Susan Stephens, *Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library II* [1985]). Granted, he does note that trained scribes could and did make errors (e.g., see 142). But he still concludes with such strong language to the contrary: "By drawing on the services of trained copyists to have their texts reproduced, the Christians were *guaranteed* prompt and *accurate* work ... the *accuracy embedded in the copying* of texts served as *the* basis for generally *very consistent* texts being dispersed ... To have *ensured accurate copying* from the start, rather than leaving that task to amateur 'insiders,' laid a foundation for *thoroughgoing reliability*" (153; most italics added).

Last but not least, because there are so few surviving papyri with signs that a professional scribe had done the copying (i.e., "stichometric counts") in the archaeological record, much of the research Mugridge discusses in this regard is speculative, some extremely so. That is not necessarily a bar to his project; the speculations are thought-provoking, and the process by which scholars try to piece together the past from many different perspectives is an interesting story in its own right. In other words, the lack of sharp conclusions comes with the territory.

In sum, I highly recommend this book and believe that every theological library should own a copy. Mugridge's reliable, wealth-of-details approach demands a reflective read. While I do not think he succeeds in proving that the majority of early Christian texts were copied by non-Christians, he does

effectively show how most copyists of early Christian texts had skill and an interest in doing their work well and accurately. Or to put this yet another way, whereas Mugridge argues that “there is no firm evidence that the copyists were generally Christians” (2), I would contend with equal conviction that there is no firm evidence that the copyists were *not* generally Christians.

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Canaan and Israel in Antiquity: A Textbook on History and Religion. Second edition. By K. L. Noll. London and New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013, pp. xvi + 434pp., \$43.95 paper.

Over a decade after the first edition, K. L. Noll, Associate Professor of Religion at Brandon University, published a second edition of *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity*. This book is designed to provide a first step into the study of the ancient world of Canaan and Israel for the intelligent reader (1). The book’s ten chapters cover an impressive range of material including terminology and methodological issues (chapters 1-3), surveys of historical periods (chapters 4-5, 7-8, 10), and religion in the ancient Near East (chapters 6 and 9). Noll seeks to avoid the complexities of academic debate. Yet readers who give more weight to the biblical text in reconstructing history will frequently find points of disagreement with the author’s revisionist perspective.

The first three chapters introduce the reader to the terminology, geography, and chronology of Canaan and Israel, as well as methodological approaches to historiography. Noll describes his work as a “humanist history,” which eschews ideological approaches. The burden of this method is the dignity of the people under investigation. The authors ultimate concern is to represent the ordinary lives of ancient peoples to the reader. As a method concerned strictly with the facts, humanist history, as characterized by Noll, has no room for the supernatural, a fact evident in his handling of ancient literature. These chapters contain a helpful introduction to the sources involved in historical reconstruction (texts and archaeology). Notable is Noll’s overview of archaeological method.

When considering what constitutes history, Noll looks to the genre of Greek *historia* as the standard. The essence of this genre is the careful investigation of past events using credible sources. Yet since the majority of ancient literature was unconcerned with facts, says Noll, it more often than not could be labeled as folklore (67). The past created by the authors of these texts, bearing little to no resemblance to actual historical events, was not intended to be understood factually. Rather, it was the representation of a fluid process of cultural memory. Noll attributes this conception of history to a common understanding in the ancient world. Genesis 1 and 2, for instance, were designed to be an anthology of Jewish folklore (94). He states that if the compiler of Genesis were alive today he would likely be surprised to find his work included among sacred documents attributed to divine inspiration (94).

The exodus from Egypt is another representative example of Noll's approach to historiography. In his view, these stories do not describe, or attempt to describe, real events (101). He points to inconsistent chronology within the biblical text regarding the date of the exodus. Of course, the chronological difficulties have been long recognized, and various solutions have been put forward. All of this, however, is futile in Noll's view. Even if one could harmonize the chronology of the text with other known events, Noll says that this "would constitute little more than desperation—the desire to create a reliable account of the past from an ancient folklore" (99). This position, however, betrays the very ideological bias that the author seeks to avoid.

The chapters detailing the various historical periods are dense, but very readable. In addition to the transitions from one chronological period to another, Noll discusses Israel's origins, literacy, views on a United Monarchy, economics, the complexity of Judaism in the post-exilic period, and much more. Regarding early Israel, the author notes the difficulty of discerning ethnicity from the material culture. He rejects the simple equation of certain features, such as the absence of pig bones and the presence of Four-Room Houses, with an ethnic group called Israel. Though some regional communities may have identified as "Israel," he states, "the biblical definition of Palestine as 'all Israel' . . . must be judged entirely artificial" (175).

The chapters on religion in Canaan and the ancient Near East take as their foundation its supposedly evolutionary origin. Religion, says Noll,

resulted from evolved survival strategies, as well as the social and cultural circumstances of societies. Yet contrary to the beliefs of many today, religion was a social reality, not one that was integral to the spiritual life of ancient peoples. Noll rejects the application of words such as “faith” to the religious experience of those in question. Nevertheless, he surveys the primary deities of the ancient Near East, as well as the practices of divination and prophecy. While many points of these sections are instructive, the reader is left with a sense that there was little, if anything, distinctive about Israel’s religion.

Noll is to be commended for the breadth of material included in this book. His mastery of the primary source material is impressive by any standard. It is also refreshing to have a readable survey of the various historical periods, including both text and archaeology. Numerous charts, maps, and images aid the reader in visualizing the described content. A final point to be commended is the presentation of both sides of various debated topics. For instance, Noll outlines detailed arguments both in favor and against the United Monarchy. Complex issues, such as the Low Chronology hypothesis, are distilled with remarkable clarity. Though readers may disagree with many of Noll’s conclusions, they must first wrestle with his well-researched positions with careful attention.

As mentioned above, however, readers who give more weight to the biblical text will find much to fault with the volume. Many conclusions are presented as self-evident, although many good scholars would disagree. This is reinforced especially in the suggested reading sections at the end of every chapter, which prioritizes the works of “minimalist” scholars. A greater diversity of viewpoints in some chapters could help readers get a more balanced perspective.

Though Noll places the supernatural outside the scope of historical inquiry, he inadvertently makes theological value judgments at points. Those operating from a reflective theological disposition will find such statements dismissive and reductionistic. Noll questions, for instance, why a deity would associate itself with a written corpus (i.e., Scripture). This fact alone, says Noll, indicates that such deity is the subjective creation of those desiring a god invested in human history (78-79). One can respond to this claim in several ways, but according to the text itself, the God of Israel is the Lord of history. Israel was not distinctive in claiming a relationship with a god who acted in history, but Israel did argue for the uniqueness of their God. Moreover,

covenants were historical in orientation. The preamble of many covenant agreements from the ancient Near East recount the historical context of the treaty. Though Noll rejects the idea of God as a historian, one may ask what else one may expect. The question comes down to the value of the biblical text in one's system of understanding. This is one area readers of this journal will disagree with Noll.

While there are numerous points of disagreement within each chapter, the overall work is a helpful introduction to the issue at hand. Though the present work has a much wider focus, those interested in the history of Israel would do well to use it alongside other histories, such as Eugene Merrill's excellent work, *Kingdom of Priests* (Baker Academic, 2008). Readers would also do well to first familiarize themselves with the minimalist/maximalist debate to help put the present work in perspective. An in-depth look at this in the context of history writing is Megan Bishop Moore, *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

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