DIVINE AND HUMAN AGENCY BY MEANS OF THE COVENANT: THE ANTI-PELAGIAN THEOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN

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APPROVAL SHEET

DIVINE AND HUMAN AGENCY BY MEANS OF
THE COVENANT: THE ANTI-PELAGIAN
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To my future wife and children

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PREFACE

As a man born from my parents and reborn in Christ, I am greatly honored to serve in glory in the expansion of Your Heavenly Kingdom. I am also greatly honored to live as You guide me now. To sacrifice Your Sacrifice upon the altars of my glory is of great dishonor. To dedicate all who I am is of great honor. I desire to be competent in many things; may honor and truth be chief among them for Your glory. I am incompetent in many things; may dishonor be chief among them. I request continual guidance to be incompetent in evil and competent in good.

Indeed, the Lord has blessed me with wonderful people, but I would sadly have to restrict myself from mentioning all. Nonetheless, whether mentioned or not, they are all valuable. My thanks to my family. My father taught me the importance of following my call. My mother taught me the importance of persistence. I am grateful for my siblings: Gloria, Marshall, and Samuel. I appreciate how our unique features built up teamwork in the family and led to healthy character development. I am also grateful for the spiritual brotherhood of my friends. While there are many, I would like to mention Alec Stevens and Luke Thompson. I appreciate their honor and sincerity.

My thanks to Ann Carmichael, a history professor in pandemics. Her guidance helped me to connect mundane individual events to society, culture, and other developments worldwide. I am also grateful for David Pace, a history professor in the development of European thought. His guidance helped me explore the development of ideas organically. I also thank Kristine Jones, my history coach. Due to our major differences in doctrine, she asked questions about the theological terms and concepts I deploy and thereby helped me sharpen my articulation and presentation.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary enriched my theological training and strengthened my conviction. The Church History faculty provided valuable expertise and life lessons. While I was struggling to specify my theological interests in my MDiv, Michael Haykin stirred up interest in the doctrinal elements in history. Gregory Wills instructed me to become more articulate and concise in presenting myself. David Puckett encouraged me to take on what I considered complex challenges. My advisor, Shawn Wright, suggested exploring John Owen for a research paper. His suggestions prompted me to explore Owen's works even further, and I eventually changed the direction of my dissertation.

Every event is part of God's divine sovereignty. Looking back, I realize how each of those moments strengthened my conviction to study my current topic. If there were disruption in even one of those moments, I would not have looked into Owen and probably would have gone a different path. Or perhaps the Lord would have guided me differently. In his divine providence, the Lord provided guidance. The Lord rules over life and death. The Lord rules over good and evil. The Lord decides whether to strengthen us in the form of a blessing or a curse. The Lord rules over heaven and hell. Truly, the Lord is sovereign over all.

Benjamin Elijah Ahn

Louisville, Kentucky
May 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Owen was the "Calvin of England"[1] whose works require thorough research. As "one of the towering theologians of the Calvinist heritage," Owen used covenant theology as a foundational basis.[2] From its beginnings, covenant theology dealt with the dual elements of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The seemingly incompatible elements were important to maintain balance. On the one hand, an emphasis on divine sovereignty often led to a charge of Antinomianism. On the other hand, an emphasis on human responsibility often led to a charge of Arminianism or popery. Being aware of these issues, Owen constantly strived to explain the dualities of the covenant.

For Owen, the notion of divine and human agency is critical to the anti-Pelagian stance among many elements of the covenant. With this doctrine, he opposed Pelagianism as he asserted human responsibility. Neither did he compromise divine sovereignty. Unlike claims that the Puritans were legalistic or voluntarist, Owen's case demonstrates that human responsibility is only one aspect of the whole. For Owen, both divine and human agents in the covenant indicate that human endeavors are from God. There is no room for Pelagianism. Even the most personal endeavors, such as the mortification of sin, were first and foremost initiated by God alone. The Spirit who began the Christian life will complete it as well. Human responsibility is not antithetical to God's rule, but rather a part of it.

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[1] Allen C. Guelzo, "John Owen, Puritan Pacesetter," *Christianity Today* 20, no. 17 (1976): 14.

[2] Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

Studying Owen's pneumatology is necessary to understand his anti-Pelagian emphasis on human responsibility within the covenant. To Owen, the Holy Spirit and sanctification were intrinsically connected. One was not possible without the other. A consideration of Owen's polemical and pastoral context will aid in clarifying his thought process. For Owen, both divine and human agents showed how divine sovereignty is connected to human responsibility. Life and doctrine are both important. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate agent working in the covenant, even as believers do their required part.

Thesis

John Owen vindicated an anti-Pelagian soteriology by means of divine and human agencies in the covenant. Three elements of his thought demonstrate this assertion. First, Owen was concerned that an emphasis on human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty was ultimately Pelagian. This would make Christianity anthropocentric. Hence, Owen strongly advocated for an anti-Pelagian soteriology. Second, as a covenant theologian, he employed covenant theology to address both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. An emphasis on divine sovereignty often led to a charge of antinomianism. Likewise, an emphasis on human responsibility often led to a charge of Arminianism or popery. To combat these twin errors, Owen emphasized the dual nature of the covenant of grace in which God sovereignly established and maintained a saving relationship with the elect. At the same time, God required ongoing faith and repentance from the elect. These seemingly contradictory dualities were reconciled in the covenant. Third, Owen regarded pneumatology as a critical element to explain how human endeavors in the covenant were ultimately from God. When applied to the covenant, the Spirit was the ultimate defense against all types of Pelagianism. Owen pointed out that the Spirit not only initiates faith but also strengthens it. Even the most personal endeavors, such as mortification of sin, were neither Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian because of the Spirit. Throughout his works, Owen vindicated an anti-Pelagian soteriology by means of covenantal pneumatology.

Background

Personal Interest

My initial exposure to John Owen was through reading polemics, particularly on the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It was surprising to see how scholars treated human responsibility as a contentious element to divine sovereignty. As I read Owen, I learned that pneumatology was important in bridging the two supposedly contradictory elements. For Owen, the human agent, corrupted by sin, can never fulfill covenant responsibilities. This required another person, who is not corrupted, to regenerate and enable human agency. The Son, as the second Adam, carried out the Father's will and secured the covenantal blessings. Still, believers were not automatically strengthened to fulfill covenantal faithfulness out of their strength alone. The Spirit, however, the third person of the Trinity, now powerfully indwells believers personally. As promised in Scripture, the Spirit's indwelling regenerates and enables believers to honor the Son and thereby honor the Father. Though not identical, other Puritans shared substantial similarities with Owen's emphasis.[3]

When I read scholarly treatments of Owen, however, I realized that most research on Owen was focused on Christology or covenant theology. On the other hand, research on the Holy Spirit usually treated the Puritans in general, rather than focusing on an individual's pneumatology. What was also unexpected was that even amid the Puritans themselves, Owen was among the pioneering figures who provided explicit treatments on the Holy Spirit.[4] The result is a need to highlight Owen's pneumatology to better

[3] B. B Warfield claims, "Puritan thought was almost entirely occupied with loving study of the work of the Holy Ghost. . . . The developed doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly a Reformed doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine." B. B. Warfield, "Introductory Note," in *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, by Abraham Kuyper, trans. Henri de Vries (1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), xxviii, xxxiii.

[4] Geoffrey Nuttall argues, "What justifies Owen in his claim to be among the pioneers, is the place given in Puritan exposition to experience, and its acceptance as a primary authority. . . . The interest is primarily not dogmatic, at least not in any theoretic sense; it is experimental. There is theology, but, in a way which has hardly been known since St. Augustine, it is a *theologia pectoris*." Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.

understand covenant theology. As someone who treasures willpower, I have been fascinated with the inter-dynamics of "thought" and "practice" in human affairs since my undergraduate years, and I believe Owen's pneumatology further fuels human agency not despite divine sovereignty but because of it.

History of Research

Most scholars recognize the importance of Owen and his tradition, especially covenant theology and Christology. Indeed, Owen acknowledged the importance of both covenant theology and Christology. Within the covenantal context, Christ secures the redemptive benefits for believers. Yet this itself, while important, does not address the individual. Here, Owen's view of the Holy Spirit is important. Owen himself said that the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of redemption among believers. Thus, pneumatology is essential on a personal level. Yet there are few detailed treatments on Owen's pneumatology. Though scholars recognize the importance of the subject, Owen's pneumatology has been generally treated in light of other themes. While Owen's pneumatology should always be considered in light of covenant theology and Christology, there is a need to address the Spirit in his role within the individual in the covenant.

Perry Miller sparked an interest in the theological and historical significance of the Puritan covenant.[5] While Miller recognized the importance of the covenant concept in Puritanism, he saw it as an "imposition upon the system of Calvin," which the English Puritans were "compelled" to add to their theology between 1600 and 1650.[6] The "revision of Calvinism," Miller continued, was brought out by "skillful dialectic," intent on recovering an emphasis on man's responsibilities in relation to the sovereignty of John

[5] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939); Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956); Perry Miller and Thomas Johnson, eds., *The Puritans*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

[6] Miller, *New England Mind*, 366-67.

Calvin's God.[7] Covenant theology was "a substantial addition" to Calvinism by the Puritans.[8] Miller further wrote that Luther and Calvin "made hardly any mention of the covenant."[9] For Miller, the covenantal "idea of mutual obligation" was an innovation imposed on Calvin.[10]

Basil Hall argued that Calvinism was a fundamental distortion of Calvin's theology by Theodore Beza and William Perkins.[11] Hall added that Calvin was influential in English theology in the form of Beza's distorted Calvinism. He provided examples between Calvin and English Calvinists to support his view.[12] Similarly, R. T. Kendall argued that William Perkins, fueled by Beza, modified Calvin's view of the Christian experience and moved toward a more anthropocentric and moralistic, even a legalistic, approach to the Christian life.[13] In other words, the Calvinists deviated from Calvin significantly enough to say they were no longer true to Calvin. Kendall brought the general thesis of pitting Calvin against the Calvinists when he traced the doctrine of faith from Calvin to Perkins and ultimately to the Westminster Assembly, concluding that the Westminster divines followed Beza rather than Calvin himself.

Dale Stover directly connected Owen's pneumatology to his covenant theology and discussed how Owen formulated his covenantal thought, but Stover grounded Owen's

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[7] Miller, *New England Mind*, 396.

[8] Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans*, 1:57.

[9] Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 60.

[10] Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 61.

[11] Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Abingdon, UK: Sutton Courtenay, 1966), 26.

[12] Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," 33-36.

[13] R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, new ed., Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 1-9, 51-66.

covenant theology in a contract theory rather than the Trinitarian counsel.[14] Stover identified two streams of thought in Owen's tradition. The first stream was the covenant or contract theory of William Tyndale (1494-1536). According to Stover, "The pietistic, man-centered focus of this theology has to be accounted one of the most fundamental forces in Owen's thought, as well as in the whole of English religious life."[15] The second stream was Calvinism. Stover argued that while "predestination theme may have had its provenance in Calvin, but it was given an essentially different sense by Beza and others. . . . Plucked out of its original context where it was a sign of grace and a correlate of faith understood as personal union with Christ, it was made to serve as the schema for a deterministic system."[16]

Stover identified Perkins as the one who first wielded together the "anthropological emphasis of the contract theory and the ideological thrust of predestinarianism" in English covenant theology, which was evident in the covenant theology of John Owen.[17] Stover assessed, "When God is known in this philosophical way, then epistemology is inevitably detached from soteriology."[18] However, this dissertation holds that Owen connected his argumentations to soteriology. This dissertation argues that Owen's covenant theology was rooted in the Trinitarian counsel. The covenant was no mere contract but a counsel between the three persons of the Trinity. In other words, covenant theology had implications for the individual believer. Finally, this dissertation argues that Owen's theology was ultimately anti-Pelagian because it was rooted in divine sovereignty.

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[14] Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967), 144-213.

[15] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[16] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[17] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[18] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 304.

Other scholars have challenged the "Calvin against the Calvinists" thesis. In response to Miller, Everett Emerson compared certain aspects of covenant theology with Calvin's sermons on the conversion process to avoid the errors of comparing Calvin's *Institutes* with the sermons of the New England covenant theologians. Emerson regarded such comparison as unfair and insisted that it was more appropriate to use Calvin's sermons as a comparison. In Emerson's assessment, although Calvin himself was not a covenant theologian, "many of the implications of covenant theology" were present in Calvin's teaching.[19] Emerson concluded that "Puritan thought differs from Calvin's in being much more concerned with man's salvation and less concerned with God's glory."[20] In short, while the emphases differed, there was continuity in basics.

John Von Rohr added, "The Covenant of Grace is both conditional and absolute."[21] Von Rohr concluded that the Puritan handling of the covenant idea was two-dimensional. The covenant is conditional yet absolute because God "promises and fulfills the conditions."[22] Von Rohr further confirmed the "dual presence" of the covenant in Puritan thought. If the Puritan emphasis on God's eternal decree was opposed by Arminians, then the emphasis on human responsibility was opposed by Antinomians.[23] Both dimensions were required to avoid misunderstandings. Therefore, for mainstream Puritans, "basically the bilateral and unilateral were conjoined, human responsibility and divine sovereignty were unitedly maintained, and the covenant of grace was seen as both conditional and absolute."[24]

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[19] Everett H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," *Church History* 25, no. 2 (1956): 141.

[20] Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," 142.

[21] J. Von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History* 34 (1965): 201.

[22] Von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance," 202.

[23] J. Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 7.

[24] Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace*, 33.

Similarly, Andrew Woolsey saw continuity between the early Reformed and the later Reformed tradition. According to Woolsey, Miller's presentation of Calvin is "little more than a caricature, typical of the times in which he was writing."[25] Miller also "gave credence to the notion that covenantal theology originated with Perkins and the Puritans," but Woolsey pointed out Miller's failure to "appreciate both the nature of Calvin's predestination, and also the presence of a similar theology of the covenant in his theological system."[26] For Woolsey, "nowhere was the unity and continuity of the Reformed view of the covenant more evident in Perkins's works than in the twin emphases on the sovereignty of grace and the reality of human responsibility."[27]

Likewise, Paul Schaefer argued that "Perkins and his followers never strictly followed the thought of any one particular Reformed thinker."[28] They instead used the "Reformed heritage in which they were nurtured as a catalyst to develop their own understanding of the care of souls and of the doctrine of the Christian life."[29] Within the Reformed camp, they attempted to explain the various issues present, especially issues related to true piety.[30] Overall, Schaefer argued that the Cambridge brothers were in continuity with Calvin and the Reformed tradition. They held together God's sovereignty and human responsibility with the theme of justification and sanctification. The

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[25] Andrew Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 111.

[26] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 111.

[27] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal* Thought, 497.

[28] Paul R. Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011), 54.

[29] Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood*, 54-55.

[30] Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood*, 55.

differences in emphasis were pastoral concerns dictated by historical context rather than substantial differences in doctrine.[31]

Carl Trueman saw development in the Reformed tradition rather than strict continuity or discontinuity.[32] Reflecting this position, Trueman saw Owen not merely as a Puritan, but a Reformed theologian who was well schooled in "Renaissance thinking" at Oxford.[33] Based on this Reformed position, Owen uniquely battled his theological opponents as an anti-Pelagian.[34] According to Trueman, Owen lived in an "increasingly complex polemical environment" with the arrival of Catholic, Arminian, and Socinian opponents.[35] Such events called for "theological work" to "defend and refine the Reformed heritage in the face of such novel threats."[36]

McKinley examined Owen's doctrine of illumination in light of his theological context. He argued that the Puritans generally believed that the Holy Spirit "not only inspired Scriptures in the first century" but also enlightened "the believer in the

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[31] Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood*, 322. For a comprehensive overview of the development of the Reformed tradition, see Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Ada, MI: Baker, 2008); Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[32] Carl R. Trueman, "The Reception of Calvin: Historical Considerations," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, nos. 1-2 (2011): 19-27. See also Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998); Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007); Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998); Carl Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

[33] Trueman, *John Owen*, 15.

[34] Carl Trueman, "John Owen as a Theologian," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Darlington, UK: Evangelical, 2002), 51.

[35] Trueman, *John Owen*, 6.

[36] Trueman, *John Owen*, 6.

seventeenth century."[37] After locating Owen within the Puritan tradition, McKinley explicated Owen's doctrine of illumination. According to McKinley, "John Owen sought to maintain a view of illumination which maintained a healthy tension between the Spirit and the Scriptures. As a result, he had serious reservations with the views of illumination advocated by the enthusiasts, the rationalists and the Catholics."[38]

In his dissertation, Lee Gatiss examined Owen's commentary on the Hebrews. In this work, Gatiss largely addressed Owen's treatment of Socinianism, Jewish, and Roman Catholic exegesis, and covenant theology. In the context of developing covenant theology, Owen's "basic threefold division between the covenants of works, grace, and redemption and his use of standard terminology" demonstrated his continuity with "post-Reformation federal thought. . . . [But Owen's] exegetical foundation for various aspects of his federal framework" was unique, especially his use of Hebrews 8:6.[39] Here, Owen developed an emphasis on Christ as the Mediator, which appears frequently in other works by Owen. For Gatiss, Owen's uniqueness demonstrated an "unwillingness to follow the mainstream when he felt scripture itself was leading him elsewhere."[40]

Like-minded scholars reached similar conclusions. In general, they held that the Puritans had qualitative continuity with Calvin and other early Reformers. Consequently, Owen scholars rightly emphasized the covenant and the Trinity. At the same time, whether directly addressed or not, pneumatology was tied together with covenantal concepts. Steve Griffiths explicated Owen's view of sin as it pertains to the individual, society, and the church. Griffiths estimated that federal theology became "foundational for English Reformed thinking" by Owen's time as the result of "the

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[37] David John McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination and its Contemporary Relevance" (ThD diss., University of Santo Tomas, 1995), 95.

[38] McKinley, "Owen's View of Illumination," 97.

[39] Lee Gatiss, "Adoring the Fullness of the Scriptures in John Owen's Commentary on Hebrews" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2013), 192.

[40] Gatiss, "Adoring the Fullness of the Scriptures," 192.

amalgamation of both the independent development of the English tradition and reflection of Continental thought."[41] The bilateral approach was thus fundamental to Owen. At the heart of Owen's spirituality, however, lies the importance of holiness. Foundational to Owen's view of holiness is "the standing of the individual before God; how the believer has a responsibility to mortify sin within the context of union with Christ."[42] Yet this union with Christ is made effectual through "the work of the Holy Spirit who is the cause of all participation in God's grace."[43]

More recently, Ryan M. McGraw examined Owen to evaluate "broader trajectories in the development of Reformed thought in critical areas."[44] After reflecting on the themes of the Trinity, covenant, and experiential knowledge, he notes, "Owen's primary aim in his work on the Holy Spirit was the personal holiness of believers. . . . Holiness is the Spirit's work, but it is rooted in the believer's union with Jesus Christ. Union with Christ is the means by which believers partake of the graces of the Holy Spirit."[45]

Sinclair Ferguson explicated Owen's view of the Christian life by using Owen's covenant theology as a starting point. According to Ferguson, the relevance of covenant theology to Owen was that "during the sixteenth century covenant theology came to be regarded as a key to the interpretation of *Scripture* and, during the seventeenth century, a key to the interpretation of *Christian experience*."[46] The ultimate function of the

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[41] Steve Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: Sin in the Writings of John Owen* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2001), 22.

[42] Griffiths, *Redeem the Time*, 195.

[43] Griffiths, *Redeem the Time*, 222.

[44] Ryan M. McGraw, *John Owen: Trajectories in Reformed Orthodox Theology* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 2.

[45] McGraw, *John Owen*, 150.

[46] Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 20, emphasis original.

covenant was "union with Jesus Christ." This union was the "principle and measure" of all spiritual blessings and "effected through the Spirit who is given according to the ancient covenant promise."[47] For Owen, the Holy Spirit, "who is the substance of the promise of the covenant, is given, as it were, from the heart of the covenant of redemption."[48] Through the Spirit's agency, the "cause of all other graces" are communicated "by virtue of our union with Christ."[49] Consequently, divine grace "turns moral duties into evangelical obedience."[50]

In a similar way, Matthew Barrett and Michael Haykin argued that closely connected to Christology was the covenant of redemption, which Owen saw as a demonstration of "the eternal and Trinitarian nature" of salvation, as well as the "very foundation, the rock upon which our redemption is then accomplished." Accordingly, as the One who applies redemption, the Spirit "works within us, changes us, makes us new creatures in Christ."[51]

Christopher Cleveland demonstrated how Owen was Reformed while sharing similarities with Thomas Aquinas. Cleveland saw in Owen a Thomistic understanding of "an infused habit of grace" that produces action in believers.[52] The purpose was to argue "against Pelagian and semi-Pelagian ideas and to argue for God's monergistic work in regeneration."[53] Cleveland, however, found Owen directly contradicting Thomas on justification. Whereas Thomas saw justification as a quality of grace infused into the

[47] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 32.

[48] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 33.

[49] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 33.

[50] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 67.

[51] Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 140, 163.

[52] Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 78.

[53] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 78.

believer, Owen saw justification as God's imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. As Cleveland put it, Owen used Thomistic concepts of infused grace in regeneration and sanctification, but he is "firmly Protestant and Reformed" on justification.[54]

Similarly, James M. Henderson argued, "All of these views of Aquinas, Scotus, Erasmus, and their followers are problematic because they turn grace into a kind of commodity, available for the price of cooperation."[55] Moreover, such views "de-personalize the work of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit becomes an impersonal power, dispensed through the sacraments or infused at birth, rather than the third person of the Trinity working within the human soul."[56]

Methodology

In this dissertation I explicate Owen's pneumatology in two parts. In part 1, I first survey his historical and theological context, giving attention to how Owen fits into the development of covenant theology in England. For this purpose I briefly examine other English theologians, documents, and Owen's own covenant theology. Examining both the historical and theological contexts reveals how Owen was part of the covenantal tradition. In part 2, I expound Owen's Trinitarian convictions in his polemical context to reveal his emphases. Examining polemics reveals how Owen sharpened his thought by means of argumentation. Afterwards, I walk through Owen's pneumatology as it pertains to divine and human agencies. This reveals that the Spirit was involved in both agencies and that Owen's doctrine informed practice. My plan was to thoroughly examine primary source material to highlight Owen and other persons involved. I accessed them through

[54] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 119.

[55] James M. Henderson, "Election as Renewal: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Divine Election" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2012), 132.

[56] Henderson, "Election as Renewal," 133.

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Summary of Contents

Chapter 1 explores the history of research on Owen and provides a rationale for the current study. On the rationale, this chapter notes that much of the content pertaining to the thesis is abundantly present in scholarship. Yet there is more to be explored. The issue is not a lack of content but rather a lack of articulation. Most scholars have rightly emphasized Owen's covenant theology and Christology. They have also recognized the importance of Owen's pneumatology. However, Owen's pneumatology was primarily treated as an impersonal or contractual being rather than as a divine person of the Trinity. This dissertation seeks to demonstrate that Owen treated the Holy Spirit as a divine person who was involved covenant through Trinitarian counsel. Rooted in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit indwelled a believer's soul through the covenant. Owen's pneumatology functioned in a covenantal context in a distinctly anti-Pelagian fashion. While many existing treatments themselves are rightly done, there is a need to understand how Owen's pneumatology was linked to his strongly Augustinian and covenantal thought. The chapter concludes with a statement of the thesis.

Chapter 2 will explore Owen's historical context for doing theology. Owen's biographical content will be closely linked to the historical context of England. Owen's position at Oxford during Cromwell's reign will be highlighted to provide a groundwork for his polemics. This will clarify that Owen belonged to an English tradition but that he had a unique context for doing theology.

Chapter 3 will outline the basic elements of covenant theology. Examining other influential Puritans will establish Owen's common Calvinistic position. While the Savoy Declaration will help understand Owen's own position, the Westminster Confession will highlight that, despite disagreements over details, the Puritans had a common Calvinist

conviction. Examining Owen's exposition of Hebrews will further help understand Owen's covenant theology.

Chapter 4 will start with Owen's defense of predestination against Arminianism. Then, this chapter will outline Owen's emphasis of divine agency in light of predestination. After a brief outline of the background, Owen's engagement with his opponents will be highlighted. This chapter will thereby note that though each opponent had a unique distinctive—they were all Pelagian from Owen's perspective. This chapter will conclude that Owen was an opponent of Pelagianism despite his emphasis on human responsibility, and that this was possible because of his pneumatology.

Chapter 5 will outline Owen's divine agency in the covenant. The chapter will address the covenant from the perspective of divine agency and focus on the issues before believers are enabled. The emphasis is on the exclusive divine agency of the Spirit. Thus, there is no human agency involved in this part of the covenant. The Spirit's divinity as God and his unique role as the third person of the Trinity will be evident by illustrating the exclusive works of the Spirit. By highlighting how the Spirit alone can regenerate believers to perform their covenant duties, this chapter will provide the ground for Owen's assertion of human responsibility. This chapter also emphasizes that the Spirit can establish the ground for human agency because of his divinity. This chapter will conclude that though believers themselves have no capacity to perform covenant duties, the Spirit lays the groundwork for human agency.

Chapter 6 will outline Owen's human agency in the covenant. Building on the previous chapter, this chapter will illustrate the works of the Spirit in believers, emphasizing how the Spirit works in believers by enabling them to fulfill their covenantal responsibilities. In contrast to chapter 5, chapter 6 will address the covenant from a human perspective, particularly the covenantal responsibilities of believers. It is the Spirit who works in believers, but it is also believers who actually fulfill their covenantal responsibilities. By highlighting human agency in light of the Spirit's involvement, this

chapter will note that even the most personal endeavors are not mere human efforts because of the Spirit. This chapter will conclude with an emphasis that human responsibility becomes possible, as well as anti-Pelagian, because of the Spirit.

The conclusion will summarize the overarching ideas from the previous chapters. Each point will highlight the important components of the thesis. Despite the emphasis of human responsibility in the covenant, Owen was anti-Pelagian because of covenantal pneumatology.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

Through his life and ministry, John Owen (1616-1683) demonstrated his nonconformity from a number of angles—theological, political, and cultural. In this chapter, the focus is on Owen's pursuit of the Reformation of England through an anti-Pelagian lens. Owen recognized Pelagianism as a major threat to the Reformed teaching on salvation from his early Oxford years. Pelagianism taught that original sin did not taint the human ability to perform good. Pelagius (360-20), a theologian from the British Isles, taught that it is unfair for anyone to be held accountable for another's sin. In this regard, Adam's sin did not affect human capability. He believed that the doctrine of original sin undermined human agency and promoted reliance on forgiveness without responsibility. Pelagius spread his teachings primarily in Carthage. Around 412, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) vigorously opposed Pelagius and strengthened his view of original sin and the necessity of free grace. Only God had the power to save sinners, but Pelagianism distorted divine sovereignty in the name of free will.[1]

Later, for the Puritans who desired to bring further reform to the Church of England, Augustine's position represented salvation by sovereign grace. In contrast, Pelagius' position represented salvation by free will.[2] For Owen and the Puritans, though

[1] For more on Augustine, see Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). In 412, Augustine wrote *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione Libri III* (Three Books on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins). In 414, he wrote *De Spiritu et Littera* (On the Spirit and the Letter). In these works, Augustine affirmed original sin and the necessity of Christ for salvation.

[2] The terms "Reformed" and "Puritan" are not identical. Reformed theologians mostly followed the teachings of Calvin and other reformers around Continental Europe. By definition, the Puritans pursued further reform in the Church of England. But most Puritans followed the Reformed tradition. In this study,

the name was different, the same fundamentals of Pelagianism were emerging in the name of Arminianism. Calvinism taught that sinners had no ability to do good due to original sin. God predestined the elect to salvation. Although sinners may perform certain duties, it is up to God to save the sinner. Calvinism believed that human responsibility and divine sovereignty were compatible.

In contrast, Arminianism, originated by Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), taught that human free will contributed to salvation. Although God worked for salvation, it is up to a human being to choose God's grace. Arminius believed an over-emphasis on divine sovereignty contradicted free will. Arminius spread his teachings throughout Holland. In 1610, the year after Arminius died, his followers articulated Arminianism in the *Five Articles of Remonstrance*. In response, Reformed theologians in Holland, also known as the Dutch Reformed Church, held an international synod to settle the issue, namely, the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). At Dort, the Church of England participated in an international council of Reformed churches and formulated the canons.[3]

As a student at Oxford, Owen witnessed the spread of Arminianism. During the Civil War (1642-1651), he revealed his concerns on Pelagianism in a national context through his preaching. Parliament's commander Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) recognized Owen and appointed him as his chaplain in 1649. After a series of campaigns, Cromwell chose Owen as the vice-chancellor of Oxford 1652. With his new position, Owen and his colleagues sought to actualize the Reformation in England further. However, shortly after the Restoration, after the Great Ejection of 1662, he and other nonconformists were no longer mainstream. Nonetheless, Owen continued to pursue the anti-Pelagian cause. He served nonconformist congregations and continued to produce theological works that

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therefore, the two terms are synonymous. For more details, see Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[3] Reformed theologians in Holland opposed Arminianism and defended the teachings of Calvinism.

reflected and clarified his position. Owen's works, as well as his life, demonstrated his conviction for an anti-Pelagian soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, guided by divine sovereignty.[4] Thereby, Owen emphasized both human agency and divine sovereignty. In sum, Owen was dedicated to divine sovereignty even as he vigorously exercised human responsibility throughout his life. Therefore, as a nonconformist, Owen pursued an anti-Pelagian Reformation of England.

This chapter will explicate Owen's life and person in four parts. Each part will describe a relevant life event followed by an explanation of his theological concern. In part 1, I will survey the early struggles Owen went through in a setting hostile to reform. Despite a hostile setting, he made decisions he thought were necessary on both personal and theological levels. In part 2, I will survey Owen's experience of assurance, as well as his theological position. Due to its importance in the Reformation, he regarded assurance as a major component of theology, and potentially further reform. In part 3, I will survey how Owen rose to prominence and executed the values he embodied earlier. While he was politically ambitious, his position reveals his theological concern as well as his character. Owen expressed genuine theological concerns from his personality through these events. In part 4, I will survey how Owen continued his journey of reform regardless of his political standing. While holding steadfast to the divine sovereignty of the Triune God, Owen vigorously worked on building a godly nation and demonstrated the importance of human responsibility as an anti-Pelagian. In conclusion, the nonconformist John Owen pursued the Reformation of England through an anti-Pelagian lens.

The Origins of a Puritan Quest (1630-1642)

Nonconforming Upbringing

Owen left a single statement on his personal life. "I was bred up from my infancy under the care of my father," Owen wrote, "who was a Nonconformist all his

[4] Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation. Owen's soteriology is anti-Pelagian in that he actively addressed what he identified as Pelagian elements.

days, and a painful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord."[5] Although Owen did not further elaborate on his personal life, he clearly noted that his father was a nonconformist. In this regard, one could learn more about Owen by examining what nonconformity meant to his father.

In seventeenth-century England, being a nonconformist indicated a desire for further reform in the Church of England. In England, the reformation had "advanced upon an intensely conservative and elite-reorganization of state power and ecclesiastical property," and had "not been a distinctly religious affair."[6] In 1603, James VI of Scotland (1566-1625) succeeded Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and signified the succession of Protestant monarchs.[7] As the new ruler, James attempted to style his rule as a union of Great Britain, but faced difficulty from multiple areas.[8] For example, Scotland showed apathy, England showed hostility, and Ireland was Roman Catholic. Such difficulties of "balancing governmental responsibilities in the contexts of competing institutions in England, Scotland, and Ireland generated financial, constitutional, and religious tensions between the crown and Parliament that characterized the reign of James and his son, Charles I."[9] English Protestants were not seeing improvement.

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[5] John Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism, with a vindication of the Congregational Churches in England from the Imputation thereof, Unjustly Charged on them by Mr D. Cawdrey, Preacher of the Word at Billing, in Northamptonshire*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 13:224. To provide a realistic portrayal of Owen's life, I kept the original spelling of Owen's time from the seventeenth-century. Italics and emphasis removed for all quotes.

[6] Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23. See also John Coffey and Paul Chang-Ha Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[7] For more on the Puritans during the reign of Elizabeth I, see G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Cape, 1967); Patrick Collinson, *Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[8] Although James succeeded Elizabeth as James I in England, he mostly reigned in Scotland as James VI.

[9] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 24.

The Puritans understood that an optimal reform required a comprehensive cooperation from both authorities and the people. In this case, the king was uncooperative. But at least the people would persist. According to Patrick Collinson, the "hotter sort of Protestants," also known as the Puritans, had solidified a movement aiming for further reform of the Church of England by 1603.[10] As Crawford Gribben assessed, the Puritans wanted to move beyond the "ideological consensus" of Calvinism and make changes in "the church's liturgy, sacraments, and practice."[11] In addition, the English Reformation "had advanced upon an intensely conservative and elite-centered reorganization of state power and ecclesiastical property, and for many, perhaps most, of its participants, it had not been a distinctly religious affair."[12] For example, the Puritans critiqued the use of the prayer book and vestments in worship. The Puritans gained momentum, but they were also concerned with the king's different religious preferences. Nicholas Tyacke observed that "a darkness seems to descend over the history of Puritanism," as it became more evident that the "concerted Elizabethan attempt to remodel the English Church along more Protestant lines" was not likely to improve under James.[13]

One symbolic event was the Thirty Years War in 1618. In this event, James refused to support his Calvinist son-in-law Frederick V (1596-1632), who married

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[10] Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 26. After breaking from the Roman Catholic Church, Henry VIII, the head of the Church of England, led the reformation with the help of supportive theologians. They started formulating their teachings with the Ten Articles in 1536, and finalized them with the Thirty-Nine articles in 1571. The Thirty-Nine Articles became the standard doctrinal document of the Church of England as it related to Calvinist and Roman Catholic teachings. Owen and the Puritans wanted further reform. See also Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History* 20 (1951): 37-57.

[11] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 25.

[12] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 23. See also Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

[13] Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism c.1530-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 111. See also Patrick Collinson, *The Puritan Character: Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth-Century English Culture* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark, 1989).

Elizabeth Stuart (1596-1662) in 1613.[14] As a result, many English Protestants perceived that "James was not the godly monarch they anticipated."[15] Some Puritans moved to the New World to pursue religious liberty. Nevertheless, many Puritans remained in the Church of England. While outwardly compromising with the established church, these Puritans continued their habits of personal devotion. One distinctive feature was "self-consciousness."[16] For example, they recorded spiritual diaries as well as discussing the ideals of further reform within the church.[17]

Owen was born into a nation that had been undergoing a religious change with comprehensive impact. Alister McGrath assessed that there was "no particular reason for the Church of England to pay much attention to doctrinal questions."[18] Since 1530, Henry VIII (1491-1547) and his successors declared there would only be one Church in England. They permitted no rivals and emphasized the unity of the national church. Theological discussions took place, but "they were not regarded as identity giving."[19] In other words, the Church of England retained religious monopoly and replaced papal authority with royal authority. In 1558, Elizabeth I declared the Act of Uniformity, which provided official regulations for worship in the Church of England. The emphasis was on unity, not doctrine. In this regard, Elizabeth's emphasis on ensuring that all English Christians feel reasonably at home in the Church of England "led to the necessity of doctrine being played down: an emphasis on doctrine might lead to divisions within the

[14] For more details, see Peter H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A History of the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[15] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 26.

[16] Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 38.

[17] Also see Polly Ha, *English Presbyterianism, 1590-1640* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[18] Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 225.

[19] McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 224.

new church and hence internal weakness."[20] If the churches of England divided, such division would lead to a divided and vulnerable England. In short, the English reformation was focused more on national unity than doctrinal purity. For the Puritans, this meant that the monarch, the head of the Church of England, could deviate from religious priorities in the name of national unity.

Owen's family lived as nonconformists in this historical context. In 1616, John Owen was born at Stadhampton near Oxford. His father, Henry, was a minister of the local congregation. He had an older brother, William, and two younger brothers, Henry and Philemon. He also had two sisters. One was named Hester, and the name of the other sister is unknown. It is unclear when Henry married, but his six children were raised in Stadhampton. Although it is difficult to learn about life in Stadhampton, John regarded the small town as his home.[21] Henry, John's father, may have been a student at Oxford and a schoolmaster in Stokenchurch, Oxfordshire. In 1613, Henry was ordained as priest by John Bridges, a bishop of Oxford. The ordination took place at Newnham Courtney, a local parish church.[22]

Gribben speculated that Owen's family "does not appear to have been wealthy, as the circumstances of Owen's matriculation as a student may suggest," but retained some significant Welsh networks such as the "unknown uncle who financed his education."[23] In November 1631, after education at a local grammar school, John and William Owen

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[20] McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 225.

[21] Sarah Gibbard Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent John Owen, 1616-83" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1972), 26-28. For more on village life in this era of England, see Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[22] Clergy of the Church of England Database, accessed May 1, 2017, https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/, ref 14409.

[23] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 27.

left Stadhampton to matriculate at Queen's College, Oxford.[24] His tutor, Thomas Barlow (1609-1691), was a Calvinist and future Royalist who instructed John in metaphysics and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).[25] Barlow was also an expert on metaphysics.[26] Despite differences on the matter of conformity, Owen and Barlow were lifelong friends who opposed Arminianism.[27] Earlier, at the Synod of Dort, the Church of England participated in an international council of Reformed churches at which the canons were formulated. James himself showed much interest in its process.[28] True to this tradition, Owen and the Puritans supported the fundamentals of the Synod of Dort, and identified Arminianism as a major threat.

In 1632, John and William received their Bachelor of Arts at Oxford. But this itself did not signify the completion of one's academic pursuits. The Bachelor of Arts signified "the attainment of a standard to pursue higher studies for the Master of Arts, which was regarded as a degree in its fullest sense."[29] Accordingly, John and William graduated with a Master of Arts in 1635.[30] William was ordained as deacon in March 1634 and as priest in May 1635 by John Bancroft, bishop of Oxford. He was licensed to preach

[24] Biographers have not identified the name of the local grammar school. Stadhampton is about 10 miles (16 km) southeast of Oxford.

[25] Christopher Cleveland demonstrated how Barlow's instructions of Aquinas shaped Owen's theological method. While there were differences on the teachings of habits, both Aquinas and Owen upheld the Trinity. See Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013).

[26] Queen's College was known for metaphysics in this era. Within the Owen family, only John and William attended this college.

[27] For example, Owen helped Barlow in the 1650s as Oxford vice-chancellor. See Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 2-3. For an analysis on the dynamics between Arminianism and Calvinism, see F. A. van Lieburg and Aza Goudriaan, eds., *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[28] Anthony Milton, ed., *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618-19)* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2005).

[29] Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*: *The Life and Work of John Owen* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 5.

[30] For more on the religious history of Oxford, see David Hoyle, *Reformation and Religious Identity in Cambridge, 1590-1644* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2007).

in the diocese of Salisbury in September 1635.[31] But Owen chose a different path.

Upon graduation, William entered ministry. As for Owen, however, he intended to prolong his studies to attain the Bachelor of Divinity. This allowed Owen to widely read both British and Continental authors. His two primary fields of interest were the "continuing controversy between Protestants and Roman Catholics and the growth of Arminian doctrine in Holland and in the Church of England."[32] While Owen pursued his studies, however, the Church of England was moving "in an ever more Rome-ward direction" despite Puritan efforts to "steer it towards further reformation."[33] On Owen's childhood experiences overall, Gribben observed that "they were formed in the home of a moderate Puritan minister," whose work suffered "the bitterness of the compromises that were required by an establishment unsympathetic to his godly ideals."[34] As a Puritan with a Reformed conviction, Owen saw Roman Catholicism and Arminianism becoming a rising force in his own time.[35]

An Oxford Student under Laud

While at Oxford during the 1630s, Owen witnessed the influence of Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645) under the kingship of Charles I (1600-1649). Realizing Arminianism as a threat, Owen's views were "in line with those who were heavily critical of Charles I."[36] Their general perception was that Charles I was sympathetic to

[31] Clergy of the Church of England Database, ref 14411. For more on Owen's family, see Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 28-29.

[32] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 6.

[33] Stephen Westcott, *By Bible Alone! John Owen's Puritan Theology for Today's Church* (Fellsmere, FL: Reformation Media, 2010), 17.

[34] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 26.

[35] Trueman argued that Owen's theology should be addressed in the context of other European Reformed theologians. See Trueman, *John Owen*, 5-6.

[36] Steve Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: Sin in the Writings of John Owen* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2001), 103. There is no record in which Owen openly supported or opposed the execution of

Catholicism. To add more fuel to Puritan fears, Charles I married Henrietta Maria, a Roman Catholic sister of Louis XIII. Considering that Owen saw Roman Catholicism as a threat, such events were alarming.

William Laud had been appointed university chancellor of Oxford in 1630 and became archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. These Arminian theologians in the Church of England shared many similarities with Roman Catholics. For example, King Charles I had already prohibited discussions of Calvinism such as predestination by 1628. As the archbishop, Laud started to reintroduce Roman Catholic elements to worship.[37] A major danger was that these theologians denied that the pope was the antichrist and recognized the Roman Catholic church as orthodox.

In fact, Owen witnessed the deviations from doctrinal purity at Oxford. The new provost, Christopher Potter, had a controversial election. However, Potter improved discipline and encouraged homiletics and linguistics. He promoted the learning of Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic.[38] The Puritans supported such endeavors, but Potter was moving away from predestination theology. In 1630, when Laud was installed as the new chancellor, Potter recommended that the fundamentals of Reformed theology should not be "unhesitatingly defended."[39] In March 1630, John Langhorne, senior fellow of Queen's College, threatened to "stilletto Mr Provost" after years of engaging in a theological

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Charles I. My contention, however, is that Owen supported a godly leadership, but not necessarily a monarchy. This was notable when Owen opposed Cromwell becoming king.

[37] Though archbishop Laud leaned toward Arminianism, this does not mean that the Church of England was predominantly Arminian. Just as the Puritans had conformists and nonconformists, the Church of England had both Reformed and Arminian theologians. For example, William Perkins (1558-1602) and Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) were Reformed theologians who remained in the Church of England. See Paul R. Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011).

[38] F. S. Boas, *The Diary of Thomas Crosfield: M.A., B.D. Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), xix.

[39] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 31.

disagreement with Potter. Not surprisingly, Langhorne opposed Potter's election.[40] In 1631, Edward Cookes, another fellow of Queen's, reportedly condemned Potter as a "dishonest man & persecutor of all goodness."[41]

In 1630, Potter rejected the doctrine of reprobation, an important component of predestination, as being contrary to Scripture as well as the Reformed tradition and reason.[42] From Provost Potter, as well as from other Fellows, Owen heard sermons and catechisms which taught that while God is sovereign, man had some part in the redemption process through free will.[43] In 1636, Laud rewrote the university statutes and published them. In the new statutes, Laud required students and staff to subscribe to the "Thirty-Nine Articles," to swear to support the royal supremacy, and support university traditions.[44] The Articles supported Reformed teachings such as the Trinity and predestination, but Owen had difficulty swearing to support the king and the university, as Charles I and Provost Potter, alongside Archbishop Laud, were demonstrating anti-Calvinist positions.[45]

Indeed, Owen started to notice the increasing Arminian influence primarily led by Laud. The Church of England once supported the reformation at the Synod of Dort. The representatives of England who refuted Arminianism supported the views of the Reformed tradition. But now Owen and the Puritans were witnessing the rise of Arminianism undoing the further reform they pursued. Peter Toon, Owen's biographer, observed that Owen "quickly perceived that the central point at issue was the doctrine of predestination."[46]

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[40] Boas, *The Diary of Thomas Crosfield*, 41.

[41] Boas, *The Diary of Thomas Crosfield*, xx.

[42] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 31.

[43] For more details on how Laud and Potter implemented their teachings, see Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 32-35.

[44] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 35.

[45] John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:6, 53, 65, 122-23.

[46] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 8.

Gribben also noted that, for Owen, the rise of Arminianism "could mean nothing less than the dismantling of the Reformation."[47]

The imposition of Laud against Reformed theology was becoming personal. Later in 1646, Owen criticized Laud for the "darling errors of late years were all of them stones of the old Babel" that were "erected to dethrone Jesus Christ."[48] They were fundamentally "popish errors." Owen lamented that these popish errors were present in worship through "their paintings, crossings, crucifixes, bowings, cringings, altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany, rails, images, copes, vestments,—what were they but Roman varnish, and Italian dress for our devotion, to draw on conformity with that enemy of the Lord Jesus?"[49] Owen grieved at how "their old father of Rome" refreshed his spirit to corrupt England.[50]

In 1637, after consulting his father and others, Owen left Oxford. Sarah Cook wrote, "The loss of his very membership in the university, at the hands of the state and the state church, must have been a crushing disappointment."[51] Tim Cooper noted Owen's experience as "a decisive, shaping experience as he witnessed the growing encroachment of Laudianism on Oxford University."[52] Such a practical experience of Laud's leadership "would undoubtedly have fed into his concern to affirm God's sovereignty."[53] In 1638, however, Owen was ordained as priest by John Bancroft (1574-1640), who was a friend and supporter of Laud. By the late 1630s, Bancroft was known for his enthusiasm for

[47] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 32.

[48] Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," in *The Works of John Owen*, 1:li.

[49] Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," 1:li.

[50] Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," 1:li.

[51] Cook, "A Political Biography," 37.

[52] Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 84.

[53] Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity*, 85.

Arminian reform in and around Oxford. Nonetheless, Bancroft ordained Owen, who left Oxford. It is possible that Bancroft did not consider Owen a threat. Indeed, although Owen opposed Arminianism, he was not viral or influential in public. Gribben saw this as an "apparent compromise with a prominent member of the Arminian hierarchy" which may have been "both cause and consequence of Owen's descent into depression."[54] While leaving Oxford was difficult for Owen, it is difficult to regard the ordination as a compromise. As a student, Owen had little authority and influence to engage with Laud and Potter. Considering that their influence was increasing, Owen may have become vulnerable once exposed to authorities. If Owen decided to be more aggressive with his opposition, he could at least refuse ordination by Bancroft. But once again, Owen carefully discussed this matter with his family and opted for safety. In this regard, he was defensive in that he left Oxford instead of being on the offense by engaging in controversies. It is evident, however, that Owen struggled with depression after leaving Oxford.

After a few arrangements, Owen stayed with Lord Lovelace at Hurley, a supporter of the king.[55] Not surprisingly, when the English Civil War commenced in 1642, his patron joined the Royalist cause. Royalists were not necessarily Arminians. The fact that Charles supported Laud's leadership, however, was an indication that Royalists were likely to support Laud, or at least not oppose him. For Owen, to be surrounded by another Royalist meant having another person supporting Charles, who in turn was a supporter of Laud. This seemed alarming enough. As a result, Owen moved to London. As Cook remarked, the religious struggles "dividing the nation interrupted his program at Oxford, his expectation of an inheritance from his uncle, and his employment in the Lovelace household."[56] Considering that Oxford was heavily involved in his training, this was a bold declaration. Nonetheless, Owen willingly severed himself from Laud's Oxford both

[54] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 37.

[55] Manfred Weidhorn, *Richard Lovelace* (New York: Twayne, 1970).

[56] Cook, "A Political Biography," 42.

theologically and publicly. Thereby, Owen demonstrated his anti-Pelagian stance as a nonconformist.

Assurance and the Ambition for Reform (1642-1649)

Owen in London and Assurance

When Owen arrived in London in 1642 "he may have found himself operating independently of family networks" for the first time.[57] London had become the center for the Parliamentary cause, but Owen was journeying into an unknown world.[58] He also went through a lasting transformation at this time. By then, according to Toon, Owen was convinced that "the only source of authority in religion was Holy Scripture; he wholeheartedly accepted Calvinist teachings, and knew how and why they were different from the teachings of Lutheranism, Arminianism, and Roman Catholicism."[59] Although Owen did not leave a personal reflection, the Protestant tradition, for the most part, regarded Roman Catholicism as antichristian.[60] The Synod of Dort indicated that the Puritans also considered Arminianism as a threat. Lutheranism shared the same fundamentals with the Puritans and the Reformed tradition, but the latter made use of covenant theology as a primary interpretive tool. As revealed later in the confession at Savoy of 1658, Owen and his colleagues supported the teachings of Westminster of 1647, which distinctly taught covenant theology.[61] In this regard, Owen was rooted in the Reformed tradition.

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[57] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 40.

[58] Francis J. Bremer, *Lay Empowerment and the Development of Puritanism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 46.

[59] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 12.

[60] Martyn C. Cowan, *John Owen and the Civil War Apocalypse: Preaching, Prophecy and Politics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 8.

[61] More on covenant theology in chap. 3.

Despite the development of his theological stance, Owen had not yet experienced the assurance of the Holy Spirit "witnessing to his own that he was a child of God."[62] However, he soon went through a change as he arrived in London. One Sunday in 1642, Owen and his cousin went to hear renowned Presbyterian minister Edmund Calamy (1600-1666) preach at St. Mary's, Aldermanbury. But Calamy was unable to preach, and a substitute preacher preached on Matthew 8:26, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"[63] Despite his cousin's suggestions that they leave to hear a different preacher, Owen stayed and heard the sermon. He was immediately brought into a sense of peace and assurance. This was when "God design'd to speak peace to his soul" and lay "the foundation of that solid peace and comfort which he afterwards enjoy'd as long as he liv'd."[64] Assurance was a major component for the Protestants. The same applied to Owen and the Puritans.[65] Symbolically, Owen experienced a doctrine that was treasured in his tradition. It was also timely in that Owen launched into "the first stages of the literary and pastoral career to which he would dedicate his life."[66]

The assurance experience was a major, comprehensive transformation for Owen.[67] Biographers provided their respective interpretations. Gribben stated that from

[62] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 12.

[63] In this dissertation, all quotations from Scripture are from the Geneva Bible unless noted otherwise. The Geneva Bible was the primary Bible for Protestants in England. For more details, see Bruce Metzger, "The Geneva Bible of 1560," *Theology Today* 17, no. 3 (1960): 339-52.

[64] John Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen D D*., by John Owen(London: John Clark, 1721), v.

[65] For more details on the importance of assurance for Protestants in England and Holland, see Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

[66] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 42. For more details, see C. J. Sommerville, "Conversion, Sacrament and Assurance in the Puritan Covenant of Grace to 1650" (MA thesis, University of Kansas, 1963); Lynn Baird Tipson, "The Development of a Puritan Understanding of Conversion" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1972).

[67] Assurance of conviction is different from the assurance of salvation or conversion. In this case, Owen was already a Christian who believed in Reformed teachings.

this transformative experience Owen "was launched into the first stages of the literary and pastoral career to which he would dedicate his life."[68] Toon observed that this meant "he would now see everything that happened to him and to the Church of Christ in terms of the providence and predestination of God. . . . [It also meant] he would strive to ensure that church people received both the doctrines of the Gospel and the inward presence of the Holy Spirit."[69] Years later, Owen brought these reflections to his works on the Holy Spirit.

Owen's Ministry

As a Reformed Puritan, Owen had a vision for his nation, but based on the conditions of gospel responsibilities under the reformation cause. After the assurance experience, he further consolidated his anti-Pelagian stance. In March 1642, Owen produced his work against Arminianism, entitled *A Display of Arminianism*. Owen, like most of his Reformed brethren, identified Arminianism as a Pelagian threat. The two were not identical in that Arminianism seemed to emphasize grace more than Pelagianism. Though fundamentally, Arminianism also denied the predestination of God, just like Pelagianism.[70] Eventually, free will or human responsibility played a role in salvation. From this, Owen saw a link between the two and regarded Arminianism as Pelagian. He noted, "Arminianism became backed with the powerful arguments of praise and preferment and quickly prevailed to beat poor naked truth into a corner."[71] For this reason, Owen insisted upon "the lovers of the old way to oppose this innovation."[72]

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[68] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 42.

[69] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 13.

[70] John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:2.

[71] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:8.

[72] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:8.

Throughout his theological engagement, Owen "believed that he had uncovered a high-level conspiracy to undermine the orthodox foundations of the Church of England."[73] Fundamentally, the demolishing of predestination, "this rock of our salvation, hath been the chief endeavour of all the patrons of human self-sufficiency; so to vindicate unto themselves a power and independent ability of doing good, of making themselves to differ from others, of attaining everlasting happiness, without going one step from without themselves."[74]

The book was dedicated to the Committee of Religion, which functioned as theological guard since 1640. In response, the committee appointed Owen to serve at Fordham in Essex in the following year. During this time, he worked on *Two Short Catechisms* to instruct his church.[75] While Owen shared the fundamentals of the Puritan tradition, he did not hesitate to nuance differences. For example, for Owen, the law of God was "written with the finger of God in two tables of stone on Mount Horeb, called the Ten Commandments," and it binds us because it was "written in the hearts of all by the finger of God."[76] As Gribben noted, Protestant theologians "did not agree on the relationship between the moral law given in Eden, the Ten Commandments given to Moses, and the new law of righteousness given by Jesus Christ."[77] In this case, Owen saw the Mosaic Covenant, or the Covenant of Sinai, as a binding law on believers.

At Fordham, Owen also developed his views of ecclesiology. In 1644, Owen published his teachings on Presbyterianism in *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*. In this work he encouraged believers to diligently search Scripture "for

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[73] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 59.

[74] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:53.

[75] John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms: Wherein the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ Are Unfolded and Explained*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 1:465.

[76] Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, 1:476.

[77] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 64.

taking away that veil of ignorance" and come to "a saving knowledge in and a right understanding of them," which is "not only *lawful* and *convenient*," but also "absolutely necessary" to salvation.[78] Every believer was responsible to follow Scripture. In 1644, however, Owen realized that what he considered Presbyterianism was actually Independency.[79] Afterward, Owen supported Independency. Gribben identified John Cotton as the primary influence.[80] In addition, Cook observed, independency "by no means necessitated belief in toleration," but English Independents "were a minority and could not expect to survive except under a policy of toleration."[81] However, Owen "never favored the total separation of church and state."[82] At Fordham, Owen developed his positions on ecclesiology, covenant theology, and toleration that he would support throughout his life.[83] Though by 1646, his ministry at Fordham came to an end.

As the Civil War intensified, Owen steadily became a public figure. After leaving Fordham for Coggeshall he was invited to address the House of Commons in 1646. In 1647, he published another anti-Arminian work, which centered around the controversies of Thomas Moore's Arminianism.[84] According to Thomas Edwards, Moore was a "great Sectary, that did much hurt in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and Cambridgeshire; who was famous also in Boston, Lynn, and even in Holland, and was followed from place

[78] John Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished, or, a Brief Discourse Touching the Administration of Things Commanded in Religion*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 13:39.

[79] Owen later reflected his change of position in 1658. He acknowledged that he already supported the congregational position without knowing it. Owen reflected, "Only, being unacquainted with the congregational way, I professed myself to own the other party, not knowing but that my principles were suited to their judgment and profession." Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, 13:222-23.

[80] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 65.

[81] Cook, "A Political Biography," 55.

[82] Cook, "A Political Biography," 56.

[83] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 67.

[84] Biographical information unclear.

to place by many."[85] Owen showed urgency in that Arminianism had become a local threat that was "daily spreading of opinions here opposed about the parts where I live, and a greater noise concerning their prevailing in other places."[86] In response, he concluded that Arminianism made Christ an unfaithful priest. A sacrifice and intercession are "both acts of the same sacerdotal office, and both required in him who is a priest; so that if he omit either of these, he cannot be a faithful priest for them. . . . [Christ must be] an advocate to intercede, as well as offer a propitiary sacrifice, if he will be such a merciful high priest over the house of God."[87] A separation of "the death and intercession of Christ, in respect to the objects of them, cuts off all that consolation which any soul might hope to attain by an assurance that Christ died for him. . . . [The doctrine of] general ransom is an uncomfortable doctrine, cutting all the nerves and sinews of that strong consolation" from God who is "so abundantly willing that we should receive."[88]

As a nonconformist, as well as an opponent of Arminianism, Owen solidified his views. By spring 1648, in the words of Cook, Owen "had defined his religious and political position as what may be called a conservative Independent."[89] He regarded Arminianism, "which had driven him from Oxford as a papal attempt to subvert a traditionally Calvinist national church."[90] Owen viewed the Civil War as "God's means of purging the state of its papal leanings. . . . [He] fully supported the Parliament and its army, whose whole purpose, he thought, was to restore the gospel in England."[91] Meanwhile, in summer 1648,

[85] Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 10:140. The prefatory note allowed both More and Moore.

[86] Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 10:156.

[87] Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 10:183.

[88] Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 10:186.

[89] Cook, "A Political Biography," 68.

[90] Cook, "A Political Biography," 68.

[91] Cook, "A Political Biography," 68.

General Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671) and the Parliamentarian New Model Army sieged a nearby city of Colchester. Here, Owen was invited to preach to the troops. He became a friend to some of the officers, including Cromwell's son-in-law, Henry Ireton.

Owen and the Political Stage (1649-1661)

Owen's Sermons

As the Civil War progressed, Parliament overwhelmed the royalists. As a result, Charles I was executed on January 30, 1649. Gribben noted that the execution "marked a critical turning point both in the wider political, cultural, and religious landscape of England—and in the life of John Owen."[92] As Parliament prepared the process of a new republic, "England entered a decade of political experiment and administrative improvisation, which marked a decisive break with centuries of tradition, and which would create extraordinary opportunities for the advancement of the talented, the ambitious, and the mendacious."[93] England was entering uncharted territory. In the midst of complications, Owen was invited to preach before Parliament the day after the execution of Charles I.

In 1649, the day after Charles I was executed, Owen linked the ungodly leadership of Charles to the sins of the nation in his sermon titled "Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection." The message was that the nation suffered God's judgment because of the king's sins. Owen acknowledged that God's "builders must hold swords and spears, as well as instruments of labour."[94] He observed that when false worship has "possessed the governors of a nation, and wrapped in the consent of the greatest part of the people who have been acquainted with the mind of God; that people

[92] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 96.

[93] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 98.

[94] John Owen, "Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection," in *The Works of John Owen*, 8:129.

and nation, without unprecedented mercy, is obnoxious to remediless ruin."[95] In the sermon, Owen reflected not only nonconformist concerns, but also the concerns of the Puritans who desired further reform.

The sermon was based on Jeremiah 15:19-20, a passage about returning to righteousness and fighting against sin, and in print entitled "Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection." In this sermon, Owen compared ancient Judah in the time of Jeremiah with England. Due to the sins of King Manasseh and the people, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people went into captivity. Likewise, God judged England through the civil wars and the execution of the king. Owen judged that England was in a dire situation. He realized that England "hath fallen . . . into nation-destroying sins" and observed that "providence hath once more given it another bottom" for the time being, but if England continues to fail in the "same block of impiety and cruelty," England will eventually "end in total desolation."[96] The fate of "poor England lieth at stake."[97] In other words, the sovereign God held the people of England responsible for their sins.

Owen exhorted his audience to humility and steadfastness in the midst of suffering. At the same time, Owen emphasized divine sovereignty. He warned, "If therewith men become also proud, selfish, carnally wise, revengeful, furious upon earthly interests, full, impatient; doubtless God is departed, and an evil spirit from the Lord prevaileth on them."[98] As a call to faithfulness, Owen insisted that England should see "the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of Almighty God, that is able to bring light out of darkness, and to compass his own righteous judgments by the sinful advisings and undertakings of men."[99] Toon observed that though "there is nothing remarkable about

[95] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:137.

[96] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:138.

[97] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:138.

[98] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:162.

[99] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:162.

the sermon itself it was an appropriate message in a difficult hour."[100] Owen made it clear that God had condemned the king for supporting false worship and tyranny, which became the basis of God's righteous judgement. In this context, the people of England had to exercise human responsibility before the sovereign God by opposing the condemned king.

In the same sermon, in 1649, Owen attached a tract entitled, "Of Toleration: and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion." In this work, Owen maintained that the magistrate was "the governor or shepherd of the people, in any nation, being acquainted with the mind of God, to take care of the truth of the gospel be preached to all the people of that nation, according to the way appointed, either ordinary or extraordinary."[101] But this applied only to the public sphere. Owen noted that punishing heretics is not a requirement in Scripture unless they cause civil disorder. He remarked, "I speak as to public appearances; for private disquisitions after such things I may be otherwise minded."[102]

In a public setting, however, the magistrates and churches had a duty to preserve the truth of God and oppose error "by the spiritual sword and spiritual hammer of the Word of God and by proper use of church discipline."[103] As the supreme magistrate, the Parliament had the duty "to provide for the preaching of the gospel in the whole nation and to remove all antichristian worship."[104] Owen affirmed, "The magistrate ought not to make provision of any public places for the practice of any such worship as he is convinced to be an abomination unto the Lord."[105] To specify, he insisted that the magistrate remove "Papists' images, altars, pictures," as well as "Turks' mosques; prelates' service-book,"

[100] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 34.

[101] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:189.

[102] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:194.

[103] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 34.

[104] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 34-35.

[105] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:189.

for it is "the duty of the magistrate not to allow any public places for (in his judgment) false and abominable worship."[106] He also suggested, "Let Papists, who are idolaters, and Socinians, who are anthropolatrae, plead themselves."[107] For Owen, the magistrate was an important instrument of reform. To secure true worship of the sovereign God, magistrates had to exercise responsibility. It is important to point out that, for Owen, the king was no longer head of the Church. Nonetheless, Owen also made it clear that magistrates are still involved.

After his first public sermon before Parliament, Owen became a popular preacher. Parliament invited him again three months later in April 1649. The sermon was based on Hebrews 12:2.[108] In this sermon, "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth," Owen explained that "the heavens of the nations" referred to the "political heights and glory, those forms of government which they have framed for themselves and their own interest, with the grandeur and lustre of their dominions."[109] Likewise, the "nations' earth is the multitudes of their people, strength, and power, whereby their heavens, or political heights, are supported."[110] While explaining the sinful endeavors of mankind, however, Owen emphasized that the Lord Jesus Christ, "as antichristian tyranny draws to its period, will so far shake and translate the political heights, governments, and strength of the nations, as shall serve for the full bringing in of his own peaceable kingdom;—the nations so shaken becoming thereby a quiet habitation for the people of the Most High."[111]

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[106] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:194.

[107] Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:194.

[108] The Geneva Bible translated, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2).

[109] John Owen, "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth: A Sermon Preached to the Honourable House of Commons in Parliament Assembled, April 19, 1649, a Day Set Apart for Extraordinary Humiliation," in *The Works of John Owen*, 8:253.

[110] Owen, "Shaking and Translating," 8:253.

[111] Owen, "Shaking and Translating," 8:260.

Owen observed that "the government of the nations (as many of them as are concerned therein) is purely framed for the interest of Antichrist."[112] During these evil times, Owen stressed the importance of abandoning the interests of the antichrist and returning to Christ. He observed that Christ, "having promised the service of the nations to his church, will so far open their whole frame to the roots, as to pluck out all the cursed seeds of the mystery of iniquity, which, by the craft of Satan and exigencies of state, or methods of advancing the pride and power of some sons of blood, have been sown amongst them."[113] Among the audience was Oliver Cromwell, who was "deeply impressed with Owen's ability to relate those affairs in which he, as an army commander, had such a great stake to the will of God for the future of Christianity in Europe."[114] Cromwell shared the same Calvinist teachings of Scripture and the liberty of conscience. In fact, in the early 1630s, he even considered moving to New England to escape the anti-Puritan reforms of Archbishop Laud of the Anglican Church.[115] The contents of the sermon indicated that Owen treated these events in light of divine sovereignty.[116] In addition, despite his ambitions, Owen wanted to make sure he was in line with scriptural teachings. For Owen, such was the way to reform England. In fact, he saw his reformation ambition as a means to observe divine sovereignty.

According to Martyn C. Cowan, Owen's sermons of 1649 were abundant in the "prevalence of apocalyptic language," usually condemning the papal antichrist.[117]

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[112] Owen, "Shaking and Translating," 8:266.

[113] Owen, "Shaking and Translating," 8:266.

[114] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 36.

[115] Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell, The Lord Protector* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 48-50. See also Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution II: The Impact of the Protestant Reformations on the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2003).

[116] For more details, see Lloyd Gyln Williams, "Digitus Dei: God and Nation in the Thought of John Owen: A Study in English Puritanism and Nonconformity, 1653-1683" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1981).

[117] Cowan, *John Owen and the Civil War Apocalypse*, 8.

This was not a fanatical panic response but commonplace in post-Reformation England. Owen was convinced that "there was a link between the apocalyptic narratives and specific political and ecclesiastical events of his time."[118] For Owen, images such as the ten-horned beast (Dan 7) and the great red dragon and the two beasts (Rev 12-13), were assigned to prominent figures in the sacred drama. Owen believed that they were being played out in the theater of history, and these images had some application to Roman Catholicism.[119]

Accordingly, Owen was concerned with England's place in salvation history, which was evident when he expressed, "God calls them to repentance and acknowledgement of the truth,—as in my text, Macedonia: and England, the day wherein we breathe."[120] Owen also warned not to be complacent but vigilant. He remarked that if England received "more culture from God than other nations, there is more fruit expected from England from other nations. . . . [For now,] the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of England; and if it be as earth which, when the rain falls upon it, brings forth nothing but thorns and briers, it is nigh unto cursing, and the end thereof is to be burned."[121] Owen held that just as an individual is responsible to serve God and produce fruit, so is a nation.

Rise to Power

In 1649, the day after preaching on Hebrews, Owen visited General Fairfax. While Owen waited to be seen, Cromwell arrived with his officers. Cromwell recognized Owen and greeted him. Immediately, Cromwell invited Owen to join his campaign in Ireland as chaplain. Owen primarily engaged in preaching and administrative duties, but

[118] Cowan, *John Owen and the Civil War Apocalypse*, 8.

[119] Cowan, *John Owen and the Civil War Apocalypse*, 9.

[120] John Owen, "A Vision of Unchangeable, Free Mercy, In Sending the Means of Grace to Undeserving Sinners," in *The Works of John Owen*, 8:15.

[121] Owen, "A Vision of Unchangeable, Free Mercy," 8:39.

he managed to write a reply to a criticism from Richard Baxter (1615-1691).[122] According to Toon, the fact that Owen sought to "defend the doctrine of the limited atonement of Christ when there were so many things to do in the troubled country of Ireland reveals just how important the preservation of orthodox Calvinism was to him."[123] Indeed, "compromise with Arminianism" would lead people to Arminianism, which "lead either to popery or Socinianism."[124]

In September 1649, during the campaign, Owen heard of the terrors of the massacre at Drogheda, although he did not witness it. For Cromwell, such an attack was a necessary and merciful policy that "aimed at striking terror into the enemies and thereby preventing future bloodshed, and the possibility of a foreign invasion of Ireland."[125] But Owen made it clear that the expansion of the kingdom of Christ was the fundamental objective. After the campaign, Owen preached before Parliament, urging them to be faithful "in doing all the work of God whereunto you are engaged, as he is faithful in working all yours whereunto he is engaged."[126] England had the duty to engage in God's work, which "is the propagating of the kingdom of Christ, and the setting up of the standard of the gospel."[127] Owen also lamented how Christ

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[122] John Owen, *Of the Death of Christ, the Price He Paid, and the Purchase He Made*, *in The Works of John Owen*, 10:429. For more details see Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2003).

[123] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 40.

[124] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 40.

[125] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 39. This does not mean that Cromwell held a blind hatred toward neither Ireland nor the Royalist cause. For example, James Ussher remained in the Church of England even though he shared much in common with the theologians of the Parliament. Nonetheless, when Ussher died, Cromwell insisted on a state funeral at Westminster Abbey, and the ceremony followed the liturgy of the banned Book of Common Prayer, though Ussher's friends attended a private funeral at Reigate. See Richard Parr, *The Life of the Most Reverend Father in God, James Ussher* (London: 1686), 78-79.

[126] John Owen, *The Steadfastness of the Promises, and the Sinfulness of Staggering: opened in a sermon preached at Margaret's in Westminster, before the Parliament, February 28, 1649, being a day set apart for solemn humiliation throughout the nation*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 8:235.

[127] Owen, *The Steadfastness of the Promises*, 8:235

> 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? . . . [He hoped that] the Irish might enjoy Ireland so long as the moon endureth, so that Jesus Christ might possess the Irish. . . . God hath been faithful in doing great things for you; be faithful in this one,—do your utmost for the preaching of the gospel in Ireland.[128]

In 1649, Owen became an official preacher at Whitehall Palace, and in 1650 he joined Cromwell in his campaign in Scotland. In 1651, Owen became dean of Christ Church, Oxford. Here, Owen regularly preached at Christ Church and also on alternate Sundays with Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) at St. Mary's. From this period, Owen launched a sermon series which became *On the Mortification of Sin*, as well as many other works which he saw necessary. Then, in September 1652, Cromwell appointed Owen as the university's vice-chancellor despite Owen's request to the contrary. As Gribben stated, "Owen's appointment was a symbolic victory, for he who had preached to commemorate the execution of the king was being invited to officiate in the very deanery which during the civil wars had functioned as Charles's palace, and over the Great Hall in which had been convened the displaced royalist Parliament."[129]

Owen had a monumental task of reforming the university, but he utilized his wisdom and tolerance to stabilize it. In his administration, Owen infused that tolerant spirit "which so many in those times forgot when they rose to power,—by a generous impartiality in the bestowal of patronage,—by an eagerness to detect modest merit, and to help struggling poverty,—by a firm repression of disorder and licentiousness, and a steadfast encouragement of studious habits and good conduct."[130] During the few years of his vice-chancellorship, Owen succeeded "in curing the worst evils of university, and

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[128] Owen, *The Steadfastness of the Promises*, 8:235. My assessment is that Owen genuinely cared for Ireland. In addition, this is one of the areas in which Owen was willing to differ from his contemporaries. This sermon revealed another element of Owen's disagreeable personality. He was willing to express differing thoughts.

[129] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 125.

[130] Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," 1:li.

restoring it to such a condition of prosperity as to command at length even the reluctant praise of Clarendon."[131]

In 1657, however, Owen's friendship with Cromwell deteriorated, though he was not removed from Cromwell's regime until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Cromwell was offered the throne on March 31 and wrestled with the decision. In response, Owen was angry and opposed such an idea. Richard Cromwell (1626-1712), son of Oliver, informed his brother Henry that "Dr Owen hath been very angry and went in great haste out of London."[132] According to Toon, Owen had good cause to do so because he believed that "the Republic had been created under the guidance of God in order to fulfill a particular role."[133] From past experience, Owen was convinced that "a monarchy or prelacy went hand in hand."[134] Even if Cromwell "himself opposed prelacy his successors could so easily reintroduce it and thereby destroy all that which the revolution had achieved."[135]

True to his convictions, Owen was concerned with the purity of the religion professed by the nation, and this obliged him to persuade Cromwell not to take the crown.

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[131] Thomson, "Life of Dr Owen," 1:li.

[132] Peter Gaunt, ed., *The Correspondence of Henry Cromwell, 1655-1659* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 221. The crown incident further revealed the disagreeable personality of Owen. The incident also revealed that Owen was idealistic and somewhat naïve in politics. While I agree with Cooper's assessment that Owen was not friendly, I would add that Owen was not skilled in applying political tactics to other people. If Owen wanted to dissuade Cromwell while remaining in power, he could have expressed his disagreement differently instead of getting too angry. For more on Owen's personality, see Tim Cooper, "Owen's Personality: The Man behind the Theology," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 215-26.

[133] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 99.

[134] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 99.

[135] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 99. This is where I disagree with Cooper's speculation. In one observation, Cooper noted, "Owen tended to prioritize political ends over personal relationships." Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity*, 123. Cooper presented the case of Owen challenging Cromwell as an example. While there is merit to Cooper's view, Owen tended to prioritize whatever he believed was right or proper. As a politically ambitious person, he would have supported Cromwell becoming king if he wanted to retain power. The fact that a politically ambitious Owen openly opposed Cromwell's kingship indicates that Owen was a disagreeable person. In addition, the fact that a disagreeable Owen did so suggests that he had genuine theological concerns.

According to Owen, public temptations are "usually accompanied with strong reasons and pretences, that are too hard for men, or at least insensibly prevail upon them to an undervaluation of the evil whereunto the temptation leads, to give strength to that complicated temptation which in these days hath even cast down the people of God from their excellency."[136] Soon enough "they degenerate from the manners of the people from whence they came and fall into that of the country whereunto they are brought; as if there was something in the soil and the air that transformed them."[137]

Eventually, in May 1657, Cromwell did not accept the crown. England did not return to monarchy. But this event opened a gulf between Cromwell and Owen that never healed. In July 1657, Cromwell resigned as chancellor of Oxford, and appointed his son Richard as his successor.[138] In October 1657, Richard nominated John Conant as the new vice-chancellor of Oxford without any recognition of Owen's achievements.[139] In addition, around that time, Thomas Goodwin replaced Owen as Cromwell's spiritual advisor.[140] Nonetheless, Owen was pleased with the clauses on religion of the *Humble Petition and Advice* in 1657. This became the legal basis of Cromwell's second period as Lord Protector. The clauses revealed that all ministers were expected to agree with the major matters of religion such as the Trinity or the authority of the Old and New Testaments. But those who differed on secondary matters were allowed to practice their views under the law. No dissenter from the National Church was to be punished except for civil

[136] John Owen, *Of Temptation*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 6:112.

[137] Owen, *Of Temptation,* 6:112.

[138] Peter Toon, *The Correspondence of Dr. John Owen* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 98-99.

[139] Toon, *The Correspondence of Dr. John Owen*, 101.

[140] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 182.

disturbance. However, popery, prelacy, and all forms of blasphemy and licentiousness were banned.[141]

The Savoy Assembly

In September 1658, the revolutionary leader Cromwell died. Despite the possible changes in their friendship after Owen's objection of Cromwell becoming king, Owen seems to have had some part in Cromwell's funeral.[142] During his rule, Oliver Cromwell declared England to be a Commonwealth after the execution of Charles I. But his son and successor, Richard Cromwell, failed to continue his father's influence as Lord Protector. In 1659, Richard resigned and ceded power to Parliament. There were critics, such as Richard Baxter and George Vernon, who claimed Owen was largely responsible for Richard Cromwell's demise. Ferguson noted that Baxter's views were "somewhat prejudiced."[143] Vernon also accused Owen of blaspheming the Lord's Prayer by putting on his hat. In response to George Vernon's accusation, Owen clarified that he was not involved.[144]

Despite the failures of Richard Cromwell, Owen cooperated with his colleagues to continue building up the reform they envisioned. Owen's endeavors demonstrated his anti-Pelagian stance. They also reflected his gospel zeal fueled by the Spirit. One of those reflections was on the topic of assurance. Since the 1650s, Oliver Cromwell sought "to construct a broad-based toleration of the godly," but had difficulty finding a doctrinal

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[141] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 100-101. In 1648, Owen affirmed, "The magistrate ought not to make provision of any public places for the practice of any such worship as he is convinced to be an abomination unto the Lord." See Owen, "Righteous Zeal," 8:189. Despite their disagreement on kingship, Cromwell and Owen worked together for religious liberty while suppressing heresy. Cromwell cooperated with what Owen preached earlier.

[142] Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 14.

[143] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 14.

[144] John Owen, *Reflections on a Slanderous Libel against Dr Owen*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 16:277.

foundation.[145] In addition, Owen and his colleagues sought to influence a government they no longer controlled.[146] The Westminster Assembly produced a confession in 1647, but it was not given legal authority. Since 1652, Owen was involved in several committees to produce "a new confession of faith that would provide an adequate balance between orthodoxy and broad-mindedness, and which could be used to police a national established faith."[147]

In October 1658, in his final years at Oxford, Owen participated in a synod of churches meeting at the Savoy Palace in London. Owen was part of a committee where they were to prepare the draft of The Declaration of Faith and Order, or the Savoy Declaration (SDF).[148] In this session, Owen and his colleagues shared the fundamentals of their Puritan faith, as well as their views on religious tolerance. Owen likely wrote the preface. As a group, they were committed to the "propagation of the Gospel through the parish system," which was reflected in Article XIV of the institution of churches.[149] As an expression of doctrinal unity and defense, the Independents modeled their confession after the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647.[150]

For the most part, the SDF adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) with its own modifications to nuance their Independency. In terms of policy in SDF 19.4, Owen and his colleagues taught that the judicial laws of Moses had "moral use."[151] In SDF

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[145] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 196.

[146] Cook, "A Political Biography," 253.

[147] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 196.

[148] This event represented a process that went many years before Owen started reading John Cotton's *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Other members were Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye (1595-1672), William Bridge (1600-1670), William Greenhill (1591-1671), and Joseph Caryl (1602-1673).

[149] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 104.

[150] Owen was not a participant of the Westminster Assembly.

[151] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A. G. Matthews (London, 1658), 100.

24.3, they entirely rejected the state's power to govern the church. The magistrate had no right to disturb difference ways of worship.[152] As Gribben observed, the Savoy Declaration "advanced a more robust Reformed theology, while reserving the right of revolution."[153]

One important modification concerned assurance.[154] Although Owen was not the sole author, the fact that Owen and his colleagues were involved indicated his support of the content. According to WCF 18.2, assurance is not "a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith" according to the promises of salvation.[155] Assurance is "the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption."[156]

In comparison, SDF 18.1-2 described assurance with a different nuance while sharing the same fundamentals. On false assurance, "temporary believers and other unregenerate" sinners could "vainly deceive themselves with false hopes, and carnal presumptions of being in favor of God, and state of salvation."[157] However, true believers "may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of Grace, and may rejoyce in the hope of the glory of God."[158] Here, assurance is not "a bare conjectural and probable

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[152] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 109.

[153] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 198.

[154] There were other modifications as well. For example, some major changes in the SDF were on repentance (chap. 15), a rewriting of the limits of magisterial authority (chap. 24), and new additions on the church (chap. 26). Although Owen and his colleagues do not provide an explanation for these changes, this implied that while they valued unity in fundamental doctrines of faith, they freely made different nuances as they saw necessary.

[155] Westminster Assembly, *The Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechism* (Westminster Assembly, 1646), 28.

[156] Westminster Assembly, *The Confession of Faith*, 28.

[157] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98.

[158] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98.

persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith, found on the blood and righteousness of Christ" according to the gospel.[159] Assurance is also "upon the inward evidence of those graces unto which promises are made, and on the immediate witness of the Spirit, testifying our Adoption, and as a fruit thereof, leaving the heart more humble and holy."[160] Whereas WCF described assurance as an inheritance, SDF described assurance as a fruit. But both emphasized the importance of the Spirit in assurance.

The divines encouraged believers to seek assurance, which could also provide support for works. SDF 18.3 wrote that "a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties," but being enabled "by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may without extraordinary revelation in the right use of ordinary means attain thereunto."[161] Therefore, a believer should diligently "make his calling and election sure, that thereby his may be inlarged in peace and joy in the holy Ghost," as well as "in strength and cheafulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance."[162] Nonetheless, Owen and his colleagues were aware of difficulties in reality. The divines noted that true believers may have their assurance shaken "by falling into some sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit." In due time, however, the assurance may be revived "by the operation of the Spirit."[163]

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[159] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98.

[160] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98. This paragraph is rewritten. WCF 18.2 wrote,

> This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

[161] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98.

[162] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98.

[163] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 98-99.

On assurance, Joel Beeke noted three points. First, the Independents used the phrase "found on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the Gospel" instead of being "founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation."[164] In this reworking, there is no essential change. Second, the Independents wrote "and on the immediate witness of the Spirit" instead of "the testimony of the Spirit."[165] In this modification, Beeke speculated that Goodwin had a major influence here "due to his insistence on definitely separating the syllogism from the immediate witness of the Spirit."[166] Third, the Independents chose "testify our Adoption."[167] In this change, Beeke believed it to be "a direct concession to Owen's view that the sealing of the Spirit is common to every believer."[168] Therefore, such a modified phrase is more fitting for Owen's view that "in full assurance the Spirit testifies to the believer what he already possesses from God's side."[169]

Owen and his colleagues described the role of the magistrate in relation to religious liberty. Civil magistrates were ordained by God for his glory and the public good. For that purpose, magistrates were armed "with the power of sword, for the defence and incouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers."[170] Christians are allowed to become magistrates, who are "bound to incourage, promote, and protect the professors and profession of the Gospel."[171] The magistrates should "take care that

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[164] Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 237.

[165] Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 238.

[166] Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 238. Cf. Thomas Goodwin, "An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, ed. John C. Miller (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 1:227-67.

[167] Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 238.

[168] Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 238.

[169] Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 238.

[170] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 107.

[171] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 108-9.

men of corrupt minds and conversations do not licentiously publish and divulge Blasphemy and Errors in their own nature, subverting the faith, and inevitably destroying the souls of them that receive them."[172] For Owen, magistrates were important instruments of reform. They had to exercise responsibility to secure true worship of the sovereign God. But when it comes to differences about "the Doctrines of the Gospel, or ways of the worship of God," which do not disturb others "in their way of worship that differ from them," the magistrates have "no warrant" to suppress their liberty.[173] For Owen and his colleagues, religious liberty was not an absolute privilege. The purpose of religious liberty was to pursue godliness. Within godly bounds, believers were free to worship as they desire.[174]

Life after the Restoration (1662-1689)

After Oxford

In 1659, Richard Cromwell resigned and ceded power to Parliament. Due to political turmoil, however, Parliament sought to restore the monarchy. Parliament judged that England needed a leader. Eventually, in 1660, the monarchy was restored in England. Charles II (1630-1685), the son of Charles I, was crowned on April 1661 at Westminster Abbey. The Restoration immediately stirred up turmoil for Owen and other nonconformists.[175] In 1662, the Act of Uniformity was passed. Ministers were now

[172] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 109.

[173] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 109.

[174] This partly explains why Owen vigorously opposed Socinians although they were not Roman Catholic. Socinians attacked the Trinity and thus subverted the faith. If left unchecked, Socinians could potentially create more evil for which England may be punished.

[175] For more details, see John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Coffey, *Persecution and toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2002); Tim Cooper, "Reassessing the Radicals," *Historical Journal* 50 (March 2007): 241-52; Gary S. De Krey, "Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667-1672," *The Historical Journal* 38 (1995): 53-83.

required to conform to the Book of Common Prayer.[176] Owen declined to conform and his service to Oxford came to an end. He moved to Stadhampton and continued his ministry at a local congregation. But the monarchy intensified its pressure for conformity through the Act of Uniformity. Many Puritans refused to conform and faced the Great Ejection of 1662. After these events, Owen's "contribution to the church and the nation was largely unofficial, and made from outside of positions of recognized authority."[177] Owen was at the end of this stage of life and at the beginning of another.

Owen himself further resisted the demands from the monarchy. Despite the Five Mile Act in 1665, which forbade ministers to preach in their own area, he continued to preach. Nevertheless, he probably suffered less than his brethren due to his comparative wealth.[178] After the Plague and the Great Fire of 1665-1666, Owen went to preach in London. In 1673, his congregation in London united with the congregation which was formerly ministered to by Joseph Caryl, another Savoy participant. During this last decade of life, Owen was devoted to writing and ministry. One of the works he published was on the Holy Spirit. In one preface, Owen noted, "I know not any who ever went before me in this design of representing the whole economy of the Holy Spirit."[179]

While Owen published works on the Holy Spirit, he also provided his explanations on assurance. His assurance experience of 1642 was connected to the work of the Holy Spirit. It was also part of the Puritan desire for further reform. According to Alec Ryrie, emotion was not a hindrance, but a tool of faith. Whereas the Stoic ideal cultivated indifference to pain, for many Protestants, including John Calvin, the anguish and agony of Christ in his Passion "proved not only such feelings were legitimate, but also that

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[176] Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration: A Political and Religious History of England and Wales, 1658-1667* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 176; Lucy Bates, "The Limits of Possibility in England's Long Reformation," *Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (December 2010): 1049-70.

[177] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 14.

[178] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 15.

[179] Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:7.

suffering in Christ's service was of positive value for Christians."[180] The Puritans treasured affections. While the Puritans recognized the importance of disciplining their affections, the purpose was to direct them and heighten them, not restrain them.[181] This was the case before Owen's time. In 1625, for example, during a plague, Arthur Hildersham had tried to keep his audience alert to the surrounding horrors. As Hildersham preached, "None of us are sufficiently affected."[182] He was more alarmed by too little or the lack of emotion.

Due to the importance of emotion, the Puritans were careful to distinguish assurance and (false) security. For the Puritans, as Ryrie summarized, assurance "is the well-grounded conviction that you are amongst the elect, and through grace, a child of God."[183] In contrast, security is "an ill-grounded conviction of the same thing."[184] The Puritans saw assurance, like any other emotion, as a valuable asset to further reform. By starting with themselves, the Puritans sought to reform the nation. Even under a leadership that was against further reform, the Puritans continued their work. The spiritual initiative to piety was an adjustment to the failure of gaining power for national reform. If the national church cannot be reformed, at least the citizens could be reached at personal and local levels.[185] In this context, Owen went through a spiritual experience that was a major component of the Puritan tradition.

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[180] Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 18. For more details, see Ian Hugh Clary, "Hot Protestants: A Taxonomy of English Puritanism," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no. 1 (2010): 41-66.

[181] Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 19.

[182] Samuel Torshell, "The Saints Humiliation," in *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed abroad 1475-1640*, ed. W. A. Jackson, J. F. Ferguson, and K. F. Pantzer (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976-1991), 12.

[183] Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 23. For more details, see Edward H. Davidson, "'God's Well-Trodden Foot-Paths': Puritan Preaching and Sermon Form," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25 (1983): 503-27. Alfred Habegger, "Preparing the Soul for Christ: The Contrasting Sermon Forms of John Cotton and Thomas Hooker," *American Literature* 41 (1969): 342-54.

[184] Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain*, 23.

[185] Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 65.

Psalm 130

As a Puritan, Owen valued assurance. In 1668, he treated assurance in an expository manner rather than a systematic one. Much of the treatment was in his study of Psalm 130.[186] When commenting on verse 4, Owen observed three propositions.[187] The first observation was "faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, thought it have no present sense of its own peculiar interest therein, is the great supportment of a sin-perplexed soul."[188] The second observation was "gospel forgiveness, whose discovery is the sole supportment of sin-distressed souls, related to the gracious heart or good will of the Father."[189] Forgiveness came through "the propitiation that is made by the blood of the Son, and free condonation or pardon according to the tenor of the covenant of grace."[190] The third observation was "faith's discovery of forgiveness in God is the sole bottom of adherence to him, in acceptable worship and reverential obedience."[191]

Yet, Owen also recognized that there are oppositions to a real knowledge of forgiveness. First, the "voice of conscience lies against it."[192] An unseared conscience "inexorably" condemns and pronounces wrath and anger "upon the soul."[193] This is because the conscience "naturally knows nothing of forgiveness; yea, it is against its very

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[186] The Geneva Bible translated,

> Out of the deep places have I called unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears attend to the voice of my prayers. If thou, O Lord, straightly markest iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But mercy is with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I have waited on the Lord: my soul hath waited, and I have trusted in his word. My soul waiteth on the Lord more than the morning watch watcheth for the morning. Let Israel wait on the Lord: for with the Lord is mercy, and with him is great redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. (Ps 130).

[187] The Geneva Bible translated, "But mercy is with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Ps 130:4).

[188] John Owen, *A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 6:384.

[189] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:384.

[190] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:384.

[191] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:384.

[192] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:387.

[193] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:387.

trust, work, office to hear any thing of it."[194] Second, the law "lies against this discovery."[195] The law does not know mercy or forgiveness. In addition, the law is "connatural" to the sinner. The law implanted in the heart by nature. One can "never shake it off or part with it" because the law "cleaves to him as the flesh to the bone."[196] However, the gospel that controls the "sentence of the law, and to relieve the sinner from it, is foreign to his nature, a strange thing to him."[197] Third, the "ingrafted notions that are in the minds of men concerning the nature and justice of God lie against this discovery."[198] Sinners presumptuously believe that "God is an avenger of sin," and from this the "dread and fear" surprises them at "an apprehension of the presence of God" that may come "on his errand."[199]

In addition to oppositions, Owen listed a few false presumptions of forgiveness. The first is an "atheistical presumption" on God.[200] Such presumptuous people have "no deep nor serious thoughts of his greatness, holiness, purity, severity. . . . [Sin's concernments] flow from its relation unto God; and as men's apprehensions are of God, so will they be of sin, which is an opposition to him."[201] God is not revered, sin is regarded as trivial, and therefore forgiveness means nothing.[202]

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[194] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:387.

[195] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:389.

[196] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:389.

[197] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:390.

[198] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:391.

[199] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:392.

[200] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:393.

[201] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:394.

[202] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:394.

The second is a "general notion" with no solid foundation. One aspect of it is that it is "loose and general."[203] In this case, the sinner lacks "fixedness and foundation; which defects accompany all notions of the mind that are only retained in the memory, not implanted in the judgement."[204] Sinners take forgiveness for granted and "never yet had any serious exercise in their souls."[205] Such false grounds have false ends, and at the bottom is "self-righteousness."[206] Those who learned forgiveness through faith, however, are different because they "have a sense of it fixed particularly and distinctly on their minds" and "have been put upon an inquiry into the rise and grounds of it in Christ. . . . [Truly forgiven sinners] see how and by what means more glory comes unto God by forgiveness than by punishing of sin."[207] Owen was clear that Christ is the foundation of true forgiveness, and sinners who have true forgiveness seek to glorify God.

The nature of true forgiveness, according to Owen, is threefold. One is that true forgiveness comes from "the gracious heart of the Father."[208] While some are concerned with only pardon from punishment, the sinner must realize the sovereign and gracious nature of God through Christ. From Ephesians 1, Owen explained, "The rise is his eternal predestination; the end, the glory of his grace; the means, redemption in the blood of Christ; the thing itself, forgiveness of sins."[209] Forgiveness "flows from the cross, and springs out of the grave of Christ."[210] Christ purchased forgiveness through his death and resurrection. Owen expressed that "to hold communion with God, in the blood of his Son,

[203] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:394.

[204] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:394.

[205] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:395.

[206] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:398.

[207] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:395.

[208] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:399.

[209] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:404.

[210] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:405.

is a thing of another nature than is once dreamed of by many who think they know well enough what it is to be pardoned."[211]

Second, Owen then explained that "this discovery of forgiveness is and can be made to faith alone."[212] For one thing, forgiveness is "too deep and mysterious to be fathomed and reached by anything else."[213] It is beyond reason, but this is "faith's proper work, even to know that which passeth knowledge. . . . [The work of faith] cannot be thoroughly be known in its nature and excellency; to have, by believing, all the ends of a full comprehension of that which cannot be fully comprehended."[214] Such an assurance of forgiveness is, in general, "the product of a more plentiful communication of the Spirit."[215]

Third, while Owen noted that assurance is a divine working of the Spirit, he also noted that every believer has the duty to "labour after an assurance," and that in ordinary settings, "it is mostly [by] our own negligence and sloth that we come short of this assurance."[216] Nonetheless, Owen was aware that there could be true faith without assurance. Faith is often expressed by trusting in the Lord. But "all this goes no farther than the soul's resignation of itself unto God, to be dealt withal by him according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, ratified in the blood of Christ."[217] This a soul "cannot do, without a discovery of forgiveness of God; but this a soul may do, without a special assurance of his own interest therein."[218] Through his rhetoric, Owen acknowledged that

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[211] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:407.

[212] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:410.

[213] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:410.

[214] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:412.

[215] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:414.

[216] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:414.

[217] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:415.

[218] Owen, *Psalm CXXX*, 6:415.

although believers are required to seek assurance, there could be times where they may not find it. Nonetheless, through true faith, the soul could resign itself to God.

The Seal of the Spirit

The Reformed tradition, including the Puritans, valued assurance. Owen belonged to this tradition. In 1657, Owen argued that we are "sealed to the day of redemption, when, from the stamp, image, and character of the Spirit upon our souls, we have a fresh sense of the love of God given to us, with a comfortable persuasion of our acceptation with Him."[219] Ferguson observed that Owen's mind was not "settled on one side of the question or the other" at the time of writing.[220]

By 1677, however, Owen settled his exegesis.[221] For one thing, after "renewed thoughts and consideration," he acknowledged that he could not support the views of his colleagues.[222] Owen stated that being sealed with the Spirit is "no especial act of the Spirit, but only an especial effect of his communication unto us."[223] The "sealing of the Son is the communication of the Holy Spirit in all fulness unto him, authorizing him unto, and acting his divine power in, all the acts and duties of his office."[224] God sealed "the Head of the Church with the Holy Spirit," and "may we best learn how the members are sealed with the same Spirit, seeing we have all our measure out of his fulness, and our

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[219] John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 2:243.

[220] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 122.

[221] The Puritans had different views on whether the Spirit sealed believers immediately apart from the Word or through the examination of the Word. For example, Goodwin held that the Spirit witnessed immediately. Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) held that the Spirit witnessed through Scripture. See Adam Embry, "John Flavel's Theology of the Holy Spirit," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 4 (2010): 94.

[222] John Owen, *Two Discourses concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 4:400.

[223] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:400.

[224] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:400.

conformity unto him is the design of all gracious communications unto us."[225] Owen's point was clear: "The effects of this sealing are gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in and upon believers; but the sealing itself is the communication of the Spirit unto them."[226]

In addition, Owen noted that the seal of the Spirit formed the basis of spiritual disciplines: "In this state God owns them, and communicates unto them his Holy Spirit, to fit them for their relations, to enable them unto their duties, to act their new principles, and every way to discharge the work they are called unto."[227] Owen expressed his awareness that this "hath not been rightly apprehended," but it is "not any act of the Spirit in us that is the ground of our assurance, but the communication of the Spirit unto us."[228] The indwelling Spirit alone determines "our especial relation to God."[229] As God seals believers, they receive "assurance of his love; and this is to be the sole rule of your self-examination whether you are sealed of God or no."[230]

Accordingly, Owen expressed his striving for a biblical and realistic view of assurance. He observed that due to "somewhat remaining in it of the principle that it had in its old condition," the soul is sometimes "put to question whether it be a child of God or no."[231] This is where the Spirit "comes and bears witness."[232] Owen then alluded this process to a judicial proceeding. In this proceeding, "the soul is brought before the law of

[225] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:403-4.

[226] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:404.

[227] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:404.

[228] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:405.

[229] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:406.

[230] Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 4:406.

[231] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

[232] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

God "by the power of its own conscience."[233] There, the soul pleas before the Judge that "he is a child of god, that he belongs to God's family; and for this end produceth all his evidences, every thing whereby faith give him and interest in God. . . . [Meanwhile, Satan] opposeth with all his might; sin and law assist him; many flaws are found in his evidences; the truth of them all is questioned; and the soul hangs in suspense as to the issue."[234] During these events, "the Comforter comes, and, by a work of promise or otherwise, overpowers the heart with a comfortable persuasion (and bears down all objections) that his plea is good, and that he is a child of God." The Spirit works "effectually, voluntarily, and freely."[235]

Sometimes the law seems to prevail and "the poor soul is filled with dread about its inheritance."[236] Possibly, from its "own witness, from its faith, sanctification, former experience," the soul "keeps up the plea."[237] But the process is not done

> until the Spirit, who worketh freely and effectually, when and how he will, comes in with his testimony also; clothing his power with a word of promise, he makes all parties concerned to attend unto him, and puts an end to the controversy. . . . [Just as Christ calmed the storm,] the Holy Ghost by one word stills the tumults and storms that are raised in the soul, giving it an immediate calm and security, it knows his divine power, and rejoices in his presence.[238]

From this, Ferguson observed that Owen recalls his own experience by referencing Matthew 8:25-27, and that his "wise and patient exposition of assurance inevitably received flesh and blood from his personal search for assured acceptance before God."[239] Indeed, Owen clearly pronounced that the Spirit is involved in the whole journey, from start to

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[233] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

[234] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

[235] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

[236] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

[237] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:241.

[238] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:242.

[239] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 124.

finish. He also nuanced that the Spirit carries out his role as a Comforter. As someone who wanted to see further reform in England, Owen experienced firsthand how the Spirit worked upon his soul.

Final Years

Near the end of his life, Owen suffered from severe asthma and possibly gallstones. He was frequently unable to preach. With the help of colleagues such as Robert Ferguson, Alexander Shields, and David Clarkson, Owen continued his work.[240] In a final letter to his friend, Charles Fleetwood, Owen wrote that he is "going to Him who my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love, which is the whole ground of all my consolation."[241] Owen acknowledged that he is "leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but whilst the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poore underrower will be inconsiderable. Live and pray and hope and doe not despair; the promise stands invincible that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee."[242]

In 1683, on 24 August, Owen took his final breath and went to his heavenly home. He was buried in Bunhill Fields eleven days later. David Clarkson (1622-1686), who preached his funeral sermon, remembered Owen in the following: "A great light is fallen; one of eminency for holiness, learning, parts, and abilities; a pastor, a scholar, a divine of the first magnitude; holiness gave a Divine lustre to his other accomplishments, it shined in his whole course, and was diffused through his whole conversation."[243] Clarkson further remarked that Owen was "a burning and a shining light, and you for a

[240] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 17.

[241] Toon, *The Correspondence of Dr. John Owen*, 174.

[242] Toon, *The Correspondence of Dr. John Owen*, 174.

[243] David Clarkson, *Funeral Sermon* (London: Wycliffe Society, 1846), 452.

while rejoiced in his light: alas! that it was but for a while, and that we cannot rejoice in it still!"[244]

Conclusion

John Owen strived to live faithfully in accordance with Scripture. Part of the faithful life meant seeking to expand the kingdom of Christ. While the transformation of the individual was fundamental, expanding the gospel truth to society was also important. Owen's vigor throughout his life demonstrated how much he valued human responsibility not despite divine sovereignty, but because of it. His striving for holiness with an anti-Pelagian conviction is a major example. Owen's use of free will was rooted in the sovereign will of the Trinitarian God. Through the guidance of the Spirit, he came to Christ and preached the gospel for the glory of the God.

Owen left a single statement on his personal life.[245] Not surprisingly, biographers acknowledged the difficulty of learning more about Owen as a person. According to one anonymous author, Owen suffered afflictions that "were very great, in respect of his Children, none of which he much injoyed while living, and saw them all go off the Stage before him."[246] Though, Owen made no single reference to such losses. Godfrey Noel Vose noted the difficulty of learning the personality of Owen in this regard.[247] Peter Toon said, "Owen as a man, as a human being, still remains an elusive character. After reading the Reliquiae or Dr Nuttall's biography one feels that one knows

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[244] Clarkson, *Funeral Sermon*, 452.

[245] Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, 13:224.

[246] *A Vindication of the Late Reverend and Learned John Owen D.D. by a Friendly Scrutiny into the Merits, and Manner of Mr. Rich. Baxter's Opposition to Twelve Arguments concerning Worship by the Lyturgy, said to Be Dr. Owen* (London: Printed for Thomas Malthus, at the Sun in the Poultry, 1684), 38.

[247] Godfrey Noel Vose, "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen (1616-1683)" (PhD thesis, State University of Iowa, 1963), 30-31. See also Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Calvin of England: Some Aspects of the Life of John Owen (1616-1683) and his Teaching on Biblical Piety," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 1 (2004): 169-83; Dewey D. Wallace, "The Life and Thought of John Owen: A Study of the Significance of Calvinistic Theology in English Puritanism" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1956).

Owen's contemporary, Richard Baxter, as a real, living person, but the same cannot be said of Owen."[248] In fact, Geoffrey Nuttall noted, "There is something about Baxter's writing which I find peculiarly affecting: the style, the self-expression, is so direct, penetrating, sure, yet so sincerely modest, almost ingenuous, and produces a strange feeling that the man is personally present, at least that he wrote this only yesterday and wrote it to you."[249] In contrast, Nuttall left no such description of Owen. Cooper said, "If Baxter is impossible to avoid, Owen is nearly as difficult to find. We are faced with the effusive Baxter, the elusive Owen."[250] Kelly Kapic admitted, "As much as I have learned from John Owen, it is hard for me to imagine hanging out with him at the local pub."[251]

Nonetheless, Owen expressed his vigor and zeal for the expansion of holiness under the guidance of divine sovereignty. Gribben acknowledged that "Owen emerges as the genius of English Puritanism," and that his works represents "the best of the intellectual and spiritual achievements of that generation of English Protestants who could no longer tolerate the ambiguity and frustration of their parents' relationship to the established church."[252] John Piper observed that although Owen left no personal reference to his pain, "just knowing that the man walked in the valley of the shadow of death most of his life gives me a clue to the depth of dealing with God that we find in his works. God has his strange and painful ways of making his ministers the kind of pastors and theologians he

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[248] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 176.

[249] Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "The Personality of Richard Baxter," in *The Puritan Spirit: Essays and Addresses*, ed. Geoffrey Nuttall (London: Epworth, 1967), 104. Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was a contemporary of John Owen who was also a nonconformist. For a comparative analysis between Baxter and Owen, see Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity*.

[250] Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity*, 6.

[251] Tim Cooper, "State of the Field: 'John Owen Unleashed: Almost,'" *Conversations in Religion and Theology* 6 (2008): 250.

[252] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 272.

wants them to be."[253] Similarly, Kapic commented, "If his logic sometimes appears cold and crisp, its goal is warm and human. . . . While Owen is theocentric, this works hand in hand with his profound results in anthropological concerns."[254] Indeed, Owen hoped that "mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things."[255] As an anti-Pelagian, Owen vigorously exercised human responsibility because of divine sovereignty.

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[253] John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 87.

[254] Kelly Kapic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 235.

[255] Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 6:4.

CHAPTER 3

COVENANT THEOLOGY

Introduction

Throughout his life and career, John Owen (1616-1683) pursued an anti-Pelagian reformation of England. However, despite taking an anti-Pelagian stance, Owen emphasized the importance of a godly life that promoted the reformation cause. For example, in 1649, after the execution of Charles I, Owen preached that the magistrate was "the governor or shepherd of the people, in any nation, being acquainted with the mind of God, to take care of the truth of the gospel be preached to all the people of that nation."[1] Though magistrates did not obtain salvation apart from God, Owen exhorted them to promote the gospel. In Owen's understanding, divine sovereignty and human responsibility did not contradict each other. For Owen, human agency was compatible with his anti-Pelagian position, which he developed based on covenant theology. But Owen did not develop covenant theology from a vacuum. In the Reformed tradition, covenant theology served to harmonize divine and human agencies.

After the Restoration, though no longer in power, Owen established himself as a leader of nonconformists. In 1664, the Parliament of England enforced the Conventicle Act 1664, which forbade conventicles. Nonetheless, Owen established himself through numerous publications and sometimes facilitated the careers of others, such as John Bunyan (1628-1688), the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. According to Owen's biographer, Crawford Gribben, "Owen's publications in the latter period of his life

[1] John Owen, "Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 8:189.

reflected the distinctive cadences of his theology, which had long been established."[2] Among those publications was his commentary on Hebrews. Owen published his first folio of *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* in 1668. Owen expanded the expository series in 1674, 1680, and 1684. It is possible that Owen incorporated his lectures into the commentary.[3] As an exposition, Owen focused on explaining the passage, but reflected his theological tradition in the process. One of the theological reflections was on the covenant. In fact, Owen provided a comprehensive explication of his covenant theology in the Hebrews commentary. But Owen's covenant theology was shared among the Reformed tradition.

Although there were different nuances, Owen shared the fundamentals of covenant theology with the Reformed tradition. As an instrument for understanding Scripture, Reformed theologians utilized the covenant as their primary model for theology. By definition, a covenant involved two parties entering into a mutual agreement on a series of responsibilities followed by a blessing or penalty. In this case, in covenant theology, God initiated a pact with humanity with a set of responsibilities. There are rewards for fulfilling the responsibilities and penalties for violation. God also bound himself with man mostly through his promises. In other words, God also bound himself with responsibilities. Although the covenants had their unique features, they shared the fundamentals because God initiated the covenant for humanity. Some covenants seemingly emphasized divine sovereignty whereas others emphasized human responsibility. However, Owen and his colleagues regarded each covenant to be a divine initiative. As the Creator, God had no obligation to assist humanity, but God provided rewards and punishments through covenants. Each covenant had its function, but the ultimate purpose was Christ the

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[2] Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 234.

[3] Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 18. For more on the history of Owen's Hebrews commentary, see Lee Gatiss, "Adoring the Fullness of the Scriptures in John Owen's Commentary on Hebrews" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2013), 1-7.

Mediator. Therefore, Owen regarded covenant theology as a theological basis for anti-Pelagianism.[4]

This chapter examines Owen's covenant theology. There are three major covenants the tradition agreed upon, and each covenant will receive a section for explication. Most Reformed theologians identified three covenants throughout Scripture. After providing a general context in which Owen operated, each section provides Owen's view of the particular covenant as well as its development within tradition. The first is the covenant of works. The second is the covenant of grace. The third is the covenant of redemption. But there is also another covenant, the Covenant of Sinai, which was debated among Reformed theologians. Owen was among the minority to identify the Covenant of Sinai as a major covenant. Such an examination will reveal that Owen was developing his personal theology within a tradition. Owen was unique, but also a man of his time.

Covenant Fundamentals

Covenant Origins

The Reformed theologians described the relationship between God and Adam with covenantal concepts. Many scholars tried to identify the covenant's origins.[5] Although they did not invent new concepts, the covenant became essential to their tradition.[6] Reformed theologians believed Scripture taught the covenant's concepts. According to Everett Emerson, although Calvin himself was not a covenant theologian, "many of the

[4] Many scholars have treated Owen's covenant theology. See Michael William Bobick, "Owen's Razor: The Role of Ramist Logic in the Covenant Theology of John Owen (1616-1683)" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1996); Carol A. Williams, "The Decree of Redemption Is in Effect a Covenant: David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2005), 61.

[5] See Robert Letham, "The Foedus Operum: Some Factors Accounting for Its Development," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 457-68; David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 276-304.

[6] Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1699)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 254-57.

implications of covenant theology" were present in Calvin's teaching.[7] J. V. Fesko explains that David Dickson (1583-1663) was the first to comprehensively explain the covenant of redemption (or *pactum salutis*) before the Scottish Kirk's General Assembly in 1638. Within a few decades, numerous Reformed theologians, including those in England, embraced covenant theology as a scriptural doctrine.[8]

Patrick Gillespie (1617-1675), a reformer of Scotland, provided an extensive treatment of covenant theology that was solely devoted to the Covenant of Redemption.[9] In 1653, Gillespie was appointed as principal of the University of Glasgow under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell. As a friend and colleague of Owen, Gillespie shared the Reformed fundamentals.[10] In the first part of his work on the covenants of grace and redemption, Gillespie explained the general nature of a biblical covenant as the following: (1) there are at least two parties; (2) an agreement is essential to the covenant; (3) the covenant must have mutual conditions with the promises that both parties will perform them; (4) covenants have mutual obligations; (5) covenants have mutual edification of the parties involved; and (6) both divine and human covenants are lawful are binding and therefore inviolable.[11]

In addition to the covenant's general nature, Gillespie also explained the specific nature of different types of covenants as the following: (1) parties; (2) subject matter; (3) extent; (4) annexes, adjuncts, and accidents; (5) nature; (6) terms of conditions and

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[7] Everett H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," *Church History* 25, no. 2 (1956): 141.

[8] J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption*: *Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 47.

[9] Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened, or, The Secret of the Lords Covenant Unsealed, in a Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London: R. C., 1981). Owen wrote the introduction. For an overview of Gillespie's doctrine, see Carl R. Trueman, "The Harvest of Reformation Mythology? Patrick Gillespie and the Covenant of Redemption," in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essay in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 196-214.

[10] Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 71.

[11] Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption*, 48.

the relationship between the parties; (7) influences; (8) predominant influence; and (9) content.[12] Gillespie then provided biblical texts to orchestrate his view. James B. Torrance misunderstood Gillespie when he described such a view as a preconceived idea or definition of the covenant upon the text.[13]

Covenant Conditions

The Reformed theologians affirmed the covenant's conditionality with different nuances. Contemporary scholars have noted the conditionality. For example, John von Rohr argued that to "speak of the nature of the covenant of grace in Puritan thought is to speak actually of its two natures." In Puritan terminology, "the covenant of grace is both conditional and absolute."[14] In addition, as Richard Muller noted, Reformed theologians insisted that the covenant is both "one-sided" (monopleuron) and "two-sided" (dipleuron).[15] Muller added, "The language of monopleuron and dipleuron describes the same covenant from different points of view."[16] The covenant is absolute in that God is the sole author. At the same time, once the elect accepted God's offer through faith, the covenant terms mutually and contractually bound both parties.[17]

In this way, seventeenth-century Puritans presented a powerful polemic against other theological traditions by means of the covenant. This was not a contradictory claim to divine sovereignty, but rather an affirmation of human responsibility. This was

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[12] Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption*, 49.

[13] James B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 51-76.

[14] John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 53.

[15] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 120-22.

[16] Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 120.

[17] George Marsden, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation of the Puritans: A Critique," *Church History* 39, no. 1 (1970): 91-105. See also Francis Butts, "The Myth of Perry Miller," *The American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 665-94.

especially the case against those deemed as either Pelagian or antinomian.[18] For example, John Flavel (1628-1691), a reformer of England, explained the issues involved in a few ways. First, the question of "whether the covenant of grace be conditional or absolute, was moved (as a learned Man observes) in the former Age, by occasion of the Controversy about Justification, betwixt the Protestants and Papists."[19] Second, Flavel addressed the reasons why Protestants had differing views on whether conditions were required for salvation. One the one hand, some Protestants denied conditionality "for fear of mingling Law and Gospel, Christ's righteousness and Man's, as the Papists had wickedly done before."[20] On the other hand, Protestants who affirmed conditionality "did so out of fear also; lest the necessity of Faith and Holiness being relaxed, Libertinism should be that way introduced."[21] In short, Flavel recognized that there is no reason to deny that the covenant of grace is conditional if there is agreement on the important distinctions.

Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659), a reformer of England, defended the covenant's conditionality on the following basis: The covenant is a means through which the sovereign God brings in sinners to faith, which in turn enables regenerate sinners to fulfill their covenantal responsibilities. In reference to Hebrews, Bulkeley argued that Scripture "plainely and fully imply the condition required in the Covenant of life, our calling being

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[18] Simply put, Pelagians generally taught that human free will could achieve salvation without God's grace. Pelagians denied divine sovereignty and overemphasized human responsibility. On the other hand, antinomians generally taught that believers are not bound to follow the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments. In short, antinomians denied human responsibility and overemphasized divine sovereignty.

[19] John Flavel, *Planelogia, a succinct and seasonable discourse of the occasions, causes, nature, rise, growth, and remedies of mental errors written some months since, and now made publick, both for the healing and prevention of the sins and calamities which have broken in this way upon the churches of Christ, to the great scandal of religion, hardening of the wicked, and obstruction of Reformation: whereunto are subjoined by way of appendix: I. Vindiciarum vindex, being a succinct, but full answer to Mr. Philip Cary's weak and impertinent exceptions to my Vindiciæ legis & fœderis, II. a synopsis of ancient and modern Antinomian errors, with scriptural arguments and reasons against them, III. a sermon composed for the preventing and healing of rents and divisions in the churches of Christ* (London: R. Roberts for Tho. Cockerill, 1691), 242.

[20] Flavel, *Planelogia*, 242.

[21] Flavel, *Planelogia*, 242.

finished in the working of faith, which is the condition of the Covenant."[22] No sinner is effectually called "so as to have part in that eternall inheritance, untill he believe, so that the Legacies of the Testament being to those that are called, that is, to those that do believe."[23] Bulkeley understood that "the intent of the Apostle in calling the Covenant by the name of a Testament, was not to exclude the condition, but only (as was said) to shew the stability and immutability of the Covenant."[24]

For Bulkeley, divine sovereignty instituted the covenant. For example, Bulkeley explained, the covenant "which passeth betwixt God and us, is like that which passeth between a King and his people; the King promiseth to rule and govern in mercy and in righteousnesse; and they againe promise to obey in loyalty and in faithfulnesse."[25] On the importance of faith, Bulkeley remarked,

> Faith reconciles the heart unto God, it doth not only believe that he is reconciled unto us, but also reconciles us unto God, whereas before we hated him, and would none of him, and thrust him away from us, as the Israelites did Moses. . . . [Nonetheless,] now the soule having by faith believed his goodnesse towards us, is thereby reconciled unto him, it layes down all weapons of defiance, and submits in love.[26]

Like a traitor who found "the gracious favour of his Prince, in pardoning his treacherous practises, his naughty heart which was before so full of treachery, is now overcome with this undeserved favour."[27] Due to such a transformation, "our heart is turned to him, our hatred is turned into love, faith working love causing us to love him, for that great love wherewith hee hath loved us in Christ."[28]

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[22] Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1651), 284.

[23] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 284.

[24] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 284.

[25] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 310.

[26] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 313.

[27] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 313.

[28] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 313.

Gillespie, a reformer of Scotland, argued that covenant conditions are consequent, but these conditions "denote no causality, nor proper efficiency in the condition, with respect to the thing promised, but an instrumentality and connexion, and thus faith hath no proper efficiency in our Justification, but only an instrumentality."[29] Like his colleague, Owen provided a summary of how to understand covenantal conditions to maintain both divine grace and conditionality in the covenant. Owen does not say "the covenant of grace is absolutely without conditions," if it means "the duties of obedience which God requireth of us in and by virtue of that covenant."[30] But "the principal promises thereof are not in the first place remunerative of our obedience in the covenant, but efficaciously assumptive of us into covenant; and establishing and confirming in the covenant."[31] Believers do not merit their place in the covenant. They simply obtain it by faith. Works are the fruit of faith, which in turn confirm believers' covenantal statuses. Beeke and Jones noted that this position reflects the concerns of the "Reformed theologians who rejected meritorious conditions in terms of earning or meriting salvation while still affirming conditions, such as faith, that enabled sinners to receive the benefits of the covenant."[32] The aforementioned theologians share continuity in that they reject antecedent conditions in salvation. When they speak of antecedent conditions, it is in relation to the application of the merits of Christ.

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[29] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 261.

[30] John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 6:68. To avoid confusion, I removed italics or emphasis when quoting from Owen's works.

[31] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:69; 6:55.

[32] Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, eds., *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 309.

The Covenant in Context: William Perkins

Biographical Sketch: Perkins

The Puritans, who wanted further reform of the Church of England, used covenant theology as a theological norm. But this is not merely a Puritan tradition. The Reformed tradition shared the same conviction and utilized covenant theology as the primary interpretative tool for understanding Scripture.[33] However, the concepts of covenant theology were present even earlier. The early reformers are prime examples.[34] To honor *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), the reformers naturally took interest in the exposition of Scripture. During that process, one of the important concepts they found was the covenant. George Marsden observed that covenant theology "was emphasized primarily because it was discovered to be a biblical concept," which was for the reformers, "one more instance of the Protestant recovery of biblical teaching."[35] The importance of covenant theology in the reformers was "supported by the fact that the covenant doctrine began to appear in numerous places almost as soon as the Reformation had begun."[36] However, examining theologians outside England is beyond the scope of this chapter. To illustrate the development of covenant theology in England, this section examines an early English theologian, William Perkins (1558-1602).[37]

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[33] For more details, see Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Appleford, Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay, 1966), 19-37.

[34] See Andrew Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 204-49. Woolsey provided a comprehensive overview on the origins of the covenantal concepts since the early church. The development of covenant theology is beyond the scope of this chapter.

[35] Marsden, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation," 99-100.

[36] Marsden, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation," 100.

[37] D. W. Atkinson, "A Salve for a Sicke Man: William Perkins' Contribution to the Ars Moriendi," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 46 (1977): 409-18; Lyle D. Bierma, "Federal Theology in the 16th Century: Two Traditions?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1983): 304-21; Bierma, "The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 3 (1990): 453-62; Bierma, "The Significance of William Perkins," *Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 (1966): 113-28; Bierma, "William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry in the

Perkins was not a contemporary of Owen. Nonetheless, Perkins was among the early Puritans who pursued further reform under the reign of Elizabeth I.[38] Paul Schaefer commented that Perkins was concerned with upholding "both the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and the responsibility to respond to God's call in faith and a life of piety."[39] Providing an example of one of the early Puritans will help the reader understand Owen's theological foundation. In short, Owen operated within a Puritan tradition, which pursued further reform of the Church of England. Perkins was an early reformer of England who laid the theological foundation for future the Puritans.

Perkins was an early influential writer who laid the foundations of covenant theology among the Puritans in England.[40] In 1577, Perkins matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge and served as a fellow from 1584 to 1595. He preached in Great St. Andrew's Church from 1584 until his death. Perkins remained in the Church of England, but nonetheless sought further reform. Perkins dedicated himself to reforming the established church according to the Reformation standards of doctrine and practice, manifesting through a godly life. Accordingly, sanctification was central, but was part of a soteriological concern. Schafer observed that whenever Perkins "treated sanctification,

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Elizabethan Church," *Reformed Theological Review* 24 (1965): 73-84; Bierma, "William Perkins and the Origins of Reformed Casuistry," *Evangelical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1968): 3-20.

[38] For more details, see George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957); W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); E. Sullivan, "Doctrinal Doubleness and the Meaning of Despair in William Perkins's 'Table' and Nathaniel Woodes's The Conflict of Conscience," *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013): 533-61; Nigel Voak, "Two Faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology. Sacraments and Salvation in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52, no. 1 (2001): 103-73.

[39] Paul Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011), 51-52. For more details, see Steven R. Pointer, "Puritan Identity in the Late Elizabethan Church: William Perkins and 'A Powerfull Exhortaton to Repentance,'" *Fides et Historia* 33 (2001): 65-71; Rosemary A. Sisson, "William Perkins, Apologist for the Elizabethan Church of England," *The Modern Language Review* 47 (1952): 495-502; Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3 (1940): 171-96.

[40] For more details, see Joseph A. Pipa, "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985).

that daily outworking of Christian experience, he did so in the context of other theological topics, and in the context of the life situation of those within an established church that contained, in his mind, true and false believers."[41] In essence, the reformation Perkins sought was to begin with God, who worked his grace in Christ in the individual by the power of the Spirit and means of grace, especially the preaching of the Word.[42] For Perkins, both divine sovereignty and human responsibility were central, but divine sovereignty was the foundation.

Dale Stover assessed that Perkins was "the chief architect" who built English covenant theology upon the "twin principles of election and piety."[43] According to Stover, "The pietistic, man-centered focus of this theology has to be accounted one of the most fundamental forces in Owen's thought, as well as in the whole of English religious life."[44] Stover argued that Calvin's predestination was "a sign of grace and a correlate of faith understood as personal union with Christ," but Calvinists distorted predestination into "the schema for a deterministic system."[45] For Stover, Perkins was responsible for wielding the "anthropological emphasis of the contract theory and the ideological thrust of predestinarianism" in English covenant theology.[46] What Stover labeled the "double heritage" was "evident in, and confirmed by, the covenant thought of John Owen."[47] While Owen shared the fundamentals of covenant theology with Perkins, as demonstrated in the

[41] Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood*, 49.

[42] Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood*, 50.

[43] Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967), 165.

[44] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[45] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[46] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[47] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

Savoy Declaration of Faith of 1658, neither Owen nor Perkins was anthropocentric. Both were anti-Pelagian because their covenant theology was rooted in divine sovereignty.

Covenant Basics: Adam and Christ

As a Puritan, Perkins utilized the covenant as an interpretive tool for understanding Scripture. For Perkins, the covenant served as the basis for understanding the headship of Adam and Christ.[48] In *A Golden Chaine*, he provided a general definition of the covenant as God's "contract with man concerning the obtaining of life eternall, upon a certain condition."[49] The covenant "consiseth of two parties: Gods promise to man, Mans promise to God."[50] God's promise to man, is that, "whereby he bindeth himself to man to bee his God, if he performe the condition."[51] Man's promise to God, is that "whereby he voweth his allegiance unto his Lord, and to performe the condition between them."[52]

In short, Perkins explained that God's covenant is "his contact with man concerning the obtaining of life eternall, upon a certain condition."[53] He then added that there are "two kindes of this covenant."[54] First, the covenant of works is "God's covenant, made with condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the morall law."[55] The Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, was essentially an abridgement of the covenant

[48] For more details, see V. L. Priebe, "The Covenant Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1967).

[49] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or the description of theologie: containing the order of the causes of saluation and damnation, according to Gods woord*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthie Minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge* (London: John Legatt, 1631), 1:32. See also William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof, Divided into Five Bookes* (London: Edw Griffin, 1643).

[50] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[51] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[52] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[53] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[54] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[55] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

of works.[56] Second, the covenant of grace is "that whereby God freely promising Christ, and his benefits, exacteth againe of man, that hee would by faith receive Christ, and repent of his sinnes."[57]

Perkins followed the Reformed tradition in that the law had three categories: moral, ceremonial, and judicial. John Woolsey noted that Perkins had "no misgivings about identifying the moral law with the covenant of works or insisting that eternal life could be had upon the perfect fulfilling of its precepts."[58] But Perkins was well aware of sinful man's inability to perform righteousness.[59] Sinners could not fulfill God's commands in the covenant of works.

However, the fall did not completely eliminate the knowledge of the law. Sinners were ignorant of the written law, yet still culpable. Perkins explained, "When God first gave the law, he also gave the power to fulfill the law."[60] Sinners lost this ability by their own fault. Nonetheless, Perkins clarified that people are "as straightly bound to the obedience of the law of God, as Adam was by creation."[61] In addition, Perkins remarked,

> That Part of Gods work, concerning the righteousness and godliness, which was written in Adams minde by the gift of creation; and the remants of it be in every man by the light of nature in regard whereof it bindes all men… The Law is natural and was in mans nature before the fall; but the Gospell is spirituall, revealed after the fall, in the covenant of grace. Adam in his innocencie knew the Law, but he knew nothing then of believing in Christ.[62]

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[56] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[57] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:71.

[58] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 466. Cf. William Perkins, *godly and learned exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount: preached in Cambridge by that reuerend and iudicious diuine M. William Perkins*, in *Workes*, 3:34.

[59] William Perkins, *A Treatise Tending Vnto a Declaration Whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*, in *Workes*, 1:713.

[60] William Perkins, *A commentarie or exposition, vpon the fiue first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *Workes*, 3:10.

[61] Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, 3:10.

[62] Perkins, *Sermon on the Mount*, 3:33-34.

Perkins further clarified, "The Law gives commandment touching things that were by nature in Adam before his fall, forbidding those things which are contrarie to those virtues which were in his perfect nature."[63] Woolsey observed that Perkins "dealt with the law in a variety of doctrinal contexts, not least in relation to the covenant."[64]

Perkins saw that Adam's relationship with God was governed by law and had continual happiness promised on the condition of obedience. However, Perkins did not view the Edenic arrangement as purely legalistic. He made it clear that no creation could merit anything from God: "Yea, and Adam also, if he had stoode in his first innocencie, could have deserved nothing from God, because it is the bounden dutie of the creature to performe obedience unto his Creator."[65] God promised Adam eternal life on the condition of perfect obedience, but Adam did not claim it. God granted eternal life based on the promise. The legal arrangement in Eden was "a manifestation of divine condescension and grace."[66]

Perkins held that "Adam before his fall, did indeed receive grace both for himself, and for others also."[67] This was a concept of pre-fall grace for Adam. But Perkins distinguished pre-fall grace from justifying grace through faith, which was the defining mark of the covenant of grace. Ian Breward claimed, "Perkins did not emphasize, as Calvin had, the gracious side of the law, and its relationship to the covenant of grace."[68] In response, Woolsey described this as "misleading."[69] At one point, Perkins compared

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[63] William Perkins, *A godly and learned exposition or commentarie vpon the three first chapters of the Reuelation*, in *Workes*, 2:21.

[64] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 471.

[65] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:105.

[66] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 471.

[67] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:113.

[68] Ian Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558-1602" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963), 57.

[69] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 471.

the believer's sanctification to the creative purpose in which "Adam once had this life of grace, bestrusted to him."[70] In another place, Perkins contrasted grace pre lapsum and grace post lapsum in regard to power and perseverance: "Though Adam had a greater measure of grace then we now have, yet our grace hath a greater priveledge then his had."[71] Woolsey observed, "Adam's situation was more conducive to obedience, but those in Christ had an assurance of perseverance which Adam lacked."[72]

Perkins regarded the work of Christ as essential in revealing the nature of Adam's relationship with God. As the second Adam, Christ came to undo the failures of the first Adam and restore what was lost. Christ could secure salvation only "by making satisfaction to the Father for the sinner of man."[73] This entailed "the perfect fulfilling of the law," as well as sacrificing himself as payment demanded by the law.[74] As a priest, Christ made "a full propitiation to his Father for the Elect" of satisfaction "by performing perfect obedience to the will of God."[75]

Christ's obedience to the law as the second Adam was the ground of justification. Christ had no need to merit anything for himself.[76] This was the essence of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace was "absolutely necessarie for salvation: for of necessitie a man must be within the covenant, and receive Christ Iesus the very substance therof; or perish eternally."[77] Indeed, Perkins regarded the mediatorial work of

[70] William Perkins, *A godlie and learned exposition upon the whole epistle of Jude*, in *Workes*, 3:495, 488.

[71] Perkins, *Commentary on Revelation*, 2:4.

[72] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 471.

[73] William Perkins, *The foundation of Christian religion gathered into sixe principles*, in *Workes*, 1:4.

[74] Perkins, *The Foundation*, 1:5.

[75] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:27.

[76] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:82.

[77] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:73.

Christ as "the foundation and ground worke of the covenant of grace."[78] Woolsey commented that Perkins "interpreted Christ's redemptive work in terms of the second Adam providing salvation and justification through his obedience to, and satisfaction of, the righteousness of the law, in order to undo the devastation and death introduced by the disobedience of the first Adam."[79]

Covenant Basics: Unilateral and Bilateral Aspects

Perkins made it clear that Christ, as the second Adam, brings salvation to the elect through perfect obedience. Nonetheless, there was a conditionality in the covenant. Perkins provided a general definition:

> Gods covenant is his contract with man concerning the obtaining of life eternall, upon a certain condition. This covenant consiseth of two partes: Gods promise to man, Mans promise to God. Gods promise to man, is that, whereby he bindeth himself to man to bee his God, if he performe the condition. Mans promise to God, is that whereby he voweth his allegiance unto his Lord, and to performe the condition between them.[80]

In this context, the covenant of works was "Gods covenant, made with the condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the morall law," which requires perfect obedience.[81] In contrast, the covenant of grace is "that whereby God freely promising Christ and his benefits, exacteth againe of man, that hee would by faith receive Christ, and repent of his sinnes."[82] This covenant "is also named *a* Testament: for it hath partly the nature and properties of a testament or will. For it is confirmed by the death of the testatour, Heb. 9.16."[83]

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[78] William Perkins, *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles according to the tenour of the Scriptures, and the consent of orthodoxe Fathers of the Church*, in *Workes*, 1:168-70.

[79] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 472.

[80] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[81] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[82] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:71.

[83] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:71.

According to Woolsey, Perkins did not differentiate between testament and covenant. Rather, the idea of a testament was "bound up, or part of, the covenant of grace."[84] Perkins further elaborated, "In this covenant we do not so much offer, or promise any great matter to God, as in a manner onely receive: even as the last wil and testament of a man, is not for the testatours, but for the heires commoditie."[85] Perkins clearly emphasized the covenant's unilateral aspect. But Perkins was also aware of the bilateral aspect. He explained that men were bound not only to the natural law of creation, but also by the gospel to believe in Christ. This bond had necessary conditions to distinguish those who were chosen from those who were not.[86]

In the *Exposition of the Symbole*, Perkins defined the covenant of grace as "a compact made between God and man touching reconciliation and life everlasting by Christ."[87] This compact involved two parties. God was the primary party who promised life in Christ. The other party was man, who bound himself to believe and rest upon the promises because "God makes no covenant and reconciliation without faith. . . . "In the making of the covenant there must be mutuall consent of the parties on both sides, and besides the promise on Gods part, there must also be a restipulation on mans part; otherwise the covenant is not made."[88]

In sum, Perkins valued divine sovereignty, but also understood that human responsibility was important in Scripture. Perkins utilized the covenant in his interpretation of Scripture to harmonize these seemingly contradictory concepts. For Perkins, the covenant was prevalent throughout Scripture and it emphasized both divine sovereignty

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[84] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 474.

[85] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:71.

[86] William Perkins, *A discourse of conscience wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to get and keepe good conscience*, in *Workes*, 1:513.

[87] Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 1:167.

[88] Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 1:168.

and human responsibility. Though, ultimately, the covenant was God's initiative and therefore anti-Pelagian because God laid the foundation of salvation and believers followed his commands. In addition, Christ fulfilled God's commands and secured salvation for believers after Adam's failure. Believers were simply following the commands based on the merits of Christ. Therefore, for Perkins, the covenant was an anti-Pelagian tool for understanding Scripture. As a pioneer of the Puritans, Perkins laid the foundations of covenant theology, which was shared among Reformed theologians in England. Owen was among them.

The Covenant of Works

Development in England

Before the Restoration of 1660, Owen cooperated with his colleagues to continue building the reform they envisioned. Since the 1650s, Oliver Cromwell sought "to construct a broad-based toleration of the godly," but had difficulty finding a doctrinal foundation.[89] The Westminster Assembly produced a confession in 1647, but it was not given legal authority. Since 1652, Owen was involved in several committees to produce "a new confession of faith that would provide an adequate balance between orthodoxy and broad-mindedness, and which could be used to police a national established faith."[90]

In October 1658, Owen and his colleagues drafted The Declaration of Faith and Order, or the Savoy Declaration (SDF). They echoed Westminster as well as other Puritan predecessors like Perkins. As a group, they were committed to the "propagation of the

[89] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 196.

[90] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 196. For more details, see Richard L. Greaves, "The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought," *The Historian* 31 (1968): 21-35; Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967): 133-61; Michael McGiffert, "Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism," *The Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 463-502; Jens G. Møller, "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 46-67; Møller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 308-34; Laurence R. O'Donnell III, "The Holy Spirit's Role in John Owen's 'Covenant of the Mediator' Formulation: A Case Study in Reformed Orthodox Formulations of the *Pactum Salutis*," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 4, no. 1 (2012): 91-115; Lillback, *The Binding of God*.

Gospel through the parish system," which was reflected in Article XIV of the institution of churches.[91] As an expression of doctrinal unity and defense, the Independents modeled their confession after the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647.[92] Owen's endeavors demonstrated his anti-Pelagian stance.

Although the Reformed theologians differed on particular nuances or details, they shared a general definition of a covenant. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 7.1 stated, "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him, as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." Similarly, WCF 7.2 stated, "The first covenant made with man, was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience."[93]

In 1658, Owen and his Reformed colleagues affirmed their shared fundamentals in the SDF. The theologians first mention the covenant in relation to Adam's fall. SDF 6.1 stated, "God having made a covenant of works and life, thereupon, with our first parents and all their posterity in them, they being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan did wilfully transgress the law of their creation, and break the covenant in eating the forbidden fruit."[94] Due to this sin, humanity "fell from original righteousness and communion with God," and became "wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul

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[91] Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*: *The Life and Work of John Owen* (1971; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 104.

[92] Owen was not a participant of the Westminster Assembly.

[93] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechism* (Westminster Assembly, 1646), 7.1-7.2.

[94] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A. G. Matthews (London, 1658), 83.

and body."[95] The original sin made humanity "utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." From this corruption "all Actual transgressions" proceed.[96]

In SDF chapter 7, Owen and his Reformed colleagues wrote that the distance between God and humanity was so great that "they could never have attained the reward of Life, but by some voluntary condescension on Gods part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of Covenant." The first covenant God made with man was the "Covenant of Works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience."[97] But man made himself "incapable of life by that covenant" because of the fall. Nonetheless, "the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace." In the covenant of grace, the Lord "freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."[98] In this regard the covenant of works was made with Adam before the fall, whereas the covenant of grace was with Adam after the fall.[99]

Throughout SDF chapter 7, Reformed theologians made it clear that God voluntarily made the covenant for humanity. The reward of life was a divine gift. As Willem van Asselt observed, "The covenant of works is synthetically, rather than analytically related to creation. It is a real addition to creation that was not originally there."[100]

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[95] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 83.

[96] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84.

[97] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84.

[98] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84-85.

[99] The Covenant of Grace will be dealt with in another section.

[100] van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, 259-60.

Development in Owen

Owen published his first folio of *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* in 1668. He expanded the expository series in 1674, 1680, and 1684. In the Hebrews commentary, Owen echoed Gillespie's basic framework, as well as that of Perkins, in his view of a covenant. If Gillespie was the immediate basis, then Perkins was the fundamental basis. In continuity with tradition, Owen viewed the covenant as an arrangement into which two or more parties mutually enter. In his exposition of Hebrews, Owen defined a covenant as a "voluntary convention, pact, or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage."[101] Owen then provided three essential requirements. First, the covenant requires "distinct persons" because it is a "mutual compact."[102] Second, the agreement "must be voluntary and of choice upon the election of the terms covenanted about."[103] Third, the matter of a "righteous and complete covenant must be of things in the power of them who convent and agree about them."[104] Otherwise, the compact is "vain and ineffectual."[105]

According to Owen, the covenant of works, "or the law of our creation as it was given unto us," was a covenant "with promises and threatenings, or rewards and punishments, annexed unto it."[106] The nature of the covenant of works consisted in "that upon our personal obedience, according unto the law and rule of it, we should be

[101] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:82; 7:55.

[102] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:82.

[103] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:82.

[104] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:83.

[105] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:83.

[106] John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ; Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 5:275. Owen published this work in 1677.

accepted with God, and rewarded with him."[107] A covenant is a compact, convention, or agreement. It was not "expressly called a covenant," but still contained the nature of a covenant.[108]

Owen remarked that the covenant made with Adam can be considered in two ways. First, by "law only," Owen referred to the Creator-creature relationship: "God being considered as the creator, governor, and benefactor of man; and man as an intellectual creature, capable of moral obedience; this law was necessary, and is eternally indispensable."[109] Though the original covenant was not called a covenant, it contained the nature of a covenant. This was because of "the agreement of God and man concerning obedience and disobedience, rewards and punishments."[110] External signs expressed these promises of rewards and punishments: "The first in the tree of life, the latter in that of the knowledge of good and evil."[111] The first tree was the expression of grace, and the second the expression of justice. With these signs, God established the original law of creation as a covenant and gave it the nature of a covenant. These two sacramental trees acted "as the signs and pledges" of the covenant of works.[112] Thus, for Owen, the covenantal nature at Eden revealed that Adam had the law written on his heart and in the two trees.

In 1668, Owen also defined the nature and ends of a covenant in his exposition of Psalm 130: "In its own nature it is a convention, compact, and agreement for some

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[107] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:275.

[108] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:60. See also John Owen, *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 6:470; Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:168, 210; Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11:210. See also, Owen, *Hebrews*, 3:77-78, 82; 7:55.

[109] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:60.

[110] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:60.

[111] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:60.

[112] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:61.

certain ends and purposes between the holy Creator and his poor creatures."[113] Owen saw the covenant as "the grace and condescension of God."[114] As a creature, mankind is "a mere object" of God's dominion

> made at his will and for his pleasure, and on the same reasons to be crushed at any time into nothing; now he hath a bottom and ground given him to stand upon, wheron to expect good things from God upon the account of his faithfulness and righteousness. . . . [In a covenant, God gives] those holy properties of his nature unto his creature" and "by them to plead and argue with him.[115]

Without the covenant, mankind has "no foundation for any intercourse or communication with God"[116] or any expectation and direction on "how to deal with him in any of his concernments."[117] By means of the covenant, mankind "might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him;—all unto his glory."[118] On the purpose of the covenant, Owen wrote, "That we might live to God, be accepted with him, and come to the eternal fruition of him, is the whole of man, all that we were made for or are capable of; and these are the ends of every covenant that God makes with men."[119]

Despite the mutuality, Owen clarified that the covenant is an act of God's mercy. Several things should be noted here. First, Owen stressed the justice and righteousness of this first covenant. The commands involved in it "were all suited unto the principles of the nature of man created by God."[120] Second—and of greater significance—is the

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[113] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:470.

[114] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:471.

[115] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:471.

[116] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:471.

[117] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:471.

[118] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:471.

[119] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:470-71. The context was on the forgiveness with God in the new covenant.

[120] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:472; 6:675.

suggestion that the reward of eternal life far exceeds strict justice, for the very reason that the reward is a matter of promise. The first covenant was an expression of infinite love, not merely of justice. Everything is set in the context of God's will for man's happiness.[121] In fact, it is fundamental to Owen's theology that every covenant involves the promise of God. In other words, Owen taught that there is the grace of promise even in the covenant of works, although it is not the covenant of grace. Thus, Owen wrote, "There is infinite grace in every divine covenant, inasmuch as it is established on promises. Infinite condescension it is in God, that he will enter in covenant with dust and ashes, with poor worms of the earth."[122] This thought he finds is rooted in the very nature of the divine-human relationship. It is also the underlying assumption of Romans 4:2: even if a man were to keep the covenant of works, he would acquire no merit.

Owen and his colleagues observed that the covenantal rewards are based on God's promises regardless of man's perfect obedience. In 2016, Timothy Baylor observed, "It is not, then, the intrinsic worth of the creature's own acts that form the basis for its reward, but rather the gracious promise of God set forth in the covenant."[123] Unlike the law, which was based on the Creator-creature relationship, the covenant was added "by God's free goodness and favor."[124] The contrast between God's authoritative dominion to voluntary condescension in the covenant "highlights the gracious character of God's dealings with humankind."[125] By instituting the covenant, "God elevates

[121] Owen, *An Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:472.

[122] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:68; 6:116.

[123] Timothy Robert Baylor, "A Great King above All Gods: Dominion and Divine Government in the Theology of John Owen" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2016), 122.

[124] Baylor, "A Great King above All Gods," 122.

[125] Baylor, "A Great King above All Gods," 122.

creatures out of their lowly position and grants them a dignified and privileged status as covenantal partners."[126]

On the state of man before the fall, Owen made three observations. First, man was "a rational creature, and thereby necessarily in a moral dependence on God: for being endowed with intellectual faculties."[127] Man had "an immortal soul," was "capable of eternal blessedness or misery, able to know God, and to regard him as the first cause and last end of all," and "to love, fear, and obey him, and to trust in him as a preserver and rewarder."[128] Being created in the image of God, man was inclined and enabled to do so.

Second, man "was constituted under a covenant." The law of man's obedience was "attended with promises and threatenings, rewards, and punishments, suited unto the goodness and holiness of God. . . . [The promise of eternal life] exceed the worth of the obedience required, and so was a superadded effect of goodness and grace, yet was it suited unto the constitution of a covenant meet for man to serve God."[129] On the other hand, the punishment for disobedience was "such as the righteousness and holiness of God, as his supreme governor, and Lord of him and the covenant, did require."[130] The covenant was an expression of God's nature. As Owen explained, "Although God might have dealt with man in a way of absolute sovereignty, requiring obedience of him without a covenant of a reward infinitely exceeding it," man was "constituted under a covenant."[131]

Third, man was considered with "especial respect unto that covenant under

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[126] Baylor, "A Great King above All Gods," 122-23.

[127] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:336.

[128] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:336.

[129] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:337.

[130] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:337.

[131] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:337.

which he was created," the covenant of works.[132] This was because man was supposed to rest with God as "the end or reward of his works, or of his personal obedience unto God, by absolute strict righteousness and holiness."[133] Man was able to relate to "God's entering into it upon the finishing of his own works."[134] Therefore, as rational creatures, "some portion of time is by them necessarily to be set apart to the solemn worship of God."[135] In short, God enabled man to do good through the covenant.

The same God who covenanted with Adam before the fall once again covenanted with Adam after the fall. In his work on communion with God, Owen described the covenant's creation as the foundation of all creatures' fellowship with God. Since the entrance of sin, "no man hath any communion with God" by nature.[136] As Owen put it, "Whilst there is this distance between God and man, there is no walking together for them in any fellowship or communion. . . . [After losing] our first interest in God" by sin, there was no possibility of recovery within ourselves.[137] Humanity lost "all power for a returnal."[138] In this dire situation, "The manifestation of grace and pardoning mercy" is "only door of entrance into any such communion."[139] The clear light of communion is "discovered in the gospel" and the administration of the Spirit.[140] "By that

[132] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:338.

[133] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:338.

[134] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:338.

[135] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:338.

[136] John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation; or the Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 2:6. Owen published this work in 1657.

[137] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:6.

[138] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:6.

[139] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:6.

[140] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:6.

Spirit we have this liberty."[141] In Christ, by the Spirit, Owen explained that communion with God "consisteth in his communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that *union* which in Jesus Christ we have with him."[142]

On the surface, the covenant of works may seem solely conditional and works-oriented. It required perfect obedience from Adam for eternal life. But Owen and his Reformed colleagues explained that the covenant of works, like any other covenant, was an expression of God's mercy. Far from being Pelagian, God himself initiated and enabled Adam to fulfill his responsibilities in the covenant. The covenant of works did not contradict human agency. It was a divine initiative to enable human responsibility.

The Covenant of Grace

Development in England

In the seventeenth-century, Reformed theologians, such as the participants of WCF and SDF, employed the concept of the covenant of grace to establish the foundation of salvation history after the fall. The covenant of grace began with the first promise made to Adam in Genesis 3:15 and culminated in the work of Jesus Christ, the covenant's Mediator.[143] Though the covenant of grace is one "in substance," Reformed theologians "divided the covenant of grace into several administrations to reflect the pattern of the biblical narrative, which shows the gradual unfolding of God's redemptive purposes."[144] According to John von Rohr, the Puritans saw the progress of salvation "in the

[141] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:6. The Geneva Bible translated, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord with open face, and are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:17-18).

[142] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:8-9.

[143] The Geneva Bible translated, "I will also put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. He shall break thine head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

[144] Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 259.

administration of the one covenant, and thus the whole of the biblical story was [the] stage for this drama of the history of salvation."[145]

According to Gillespie, the covenant of grace "is the very hinge upon which the whole business of Salvation from beginning to end is turned about."[146] Similarly, Reformed theologians valued the covenant of grace and elaborated on it in the WCF and SDF. In both confessions, history is divided into two distinct dispensations, the covenant of works and covenant of grace. Each covenant had different grounds for salvation but the two covenants did not contradict each other. They were different in terms of administration. The covenant of grace represented God's gracious response to Adam's failure to fulfill perfect obedience in the covenant of works. WCF 7.3 stated, "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace."[147] In this covenant, God "freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."[148]

WCF 7.5 further elaborated, "This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come."[149] These signs were "sufficient and efficacious" for that time.[150] Through the Spirit's operation, these signs helped "instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised

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[145] von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace*, 49.

[146] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 29.

[147] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith,* 7.3.

[148] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith,* 7.3.

[149] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.5.

[150] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.5.

Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation."[151] This part of the covenant is called "the Old Testament."[152] The Old Testament served as a sign that pointed to Christ.

In SDF chapter 7, Owen and his Reformed colleagues shared the same fundamentals with the WCF. The first covenant God made with man was the "Covenant of Works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience."[153] But man made himself "incapable of life by that covenant" because of the fall.[154] Nonetheless, "the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace."[155] In the covenant of grace, the Lord "freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."[156]

The covenant of grace is "frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a Testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed."[157] The covenant of grace "hath been differently and variously administered in respect of ordinances and institutions in the time of the law, and since the coming of Christ in the flesh. . . . [Nonetheless,] for the substance and efficacy of it, to all its spiritual and saving ends," the covenant of grace "is one and the same; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the

[151] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.5.

[152] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.5.

[153] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84.

[154] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84.

[155] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84-85.

[156] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 85.

[157] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 85.

Old and New Testament."[158] As Beeke and Jones stated, "The covenant of grace forms the heart and soul of Reformed soteriology and declares that salvation, whether in the Old or New Testament, is by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ."[159]

Development in Owen

Owen provided two principal reasons why the covenant of grace is different from the covenant of works. He explained that the covenant of works is about getting accepted and rewarded by God "upon our personal obedience, according unto the law and rule of it."[160] Owen presented two issues pertinent to the covenant of works. First, "all things were transacted immediately between God and man."[161] There was no mediator; thus, everything depended on one's personal obedience. Second, only "perfect, sinless obedience would be accepted with God."[162] There was no pardon of sin or any provision for "any defect in personal obedience."[163] Since this was the case, no new covenant was possible "unless the essential form of it were of another nature,—namely, that our own personal obedience be not the rule and cause of our acceptation and justification before God."[164]

The covenant of grace had to differ from the covenant of works to remedy man's failure. The covenant of grace had to be "a new, real, absolute covenant, and not a reformation of the dispensation of the old."[165] Otherwise, if personal righteousness

[158] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 85.

[159] Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 259.

[160] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:275.

[161] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[162] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[163] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[164] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[165] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

remains the standard, believers are "yet under the first covenant."[166] Owen identified two major differences. First, justification in the covenant of grace is entirely of grace "which wholly excludes works; that is, so of grace, as that our own works are not the means of justification before God."[167] Second, the covenant of grace has a "mediator and surety; which is built alone on this supposition, that what we cannot do in ourselves which was originally required of us, and what the law of the first covenant cannot enable us to perform, that should be performed for us by our mediator and surety."[168]

In the covenant of grace, Christ is "the principal subject-matter," the sure undertaker.[169] On the transaction between the Father and the Son, the covenant's promise was about Christ and his mediation, "with the benefits that should redound unto mankind thereby in grace and glory."[170] As the Mediator, Christ undertook "unto God whatever by the terms of the covenant was to be done for man, to accomplish it in his own person. . . . [His task was to do] whatever was to be done in and by man, to effect it by his own Spirit and grace; that so the covenant on every side might be firm and stable, and the ends of it fulfilled."[171] As SDF 8.1 noted, Christ was the Mediator "between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and Kin, the Head and Savior of his Church," through whom people will "be his seed, and to be by hm in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified."[172]

In addition, Owen explained that "all solemn covenants were always confirmed

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[166] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[167] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[168] Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:276.

[169] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:78.

[170] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:78.

[171] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:78.

[172] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 86.

by sacrifice, especially between God and his people."[173] To provide insights to sinful humanity, God revealed his will "by the institution of a priesthood and sacrifices" to resemble the "heavenly transaction between the Father and the Son."[174] The priesthood and sacrifices were not "the original exemplar" of the covenant, but a "transcript and copy" of what was done in heaven.[175] They were "a type of what should be afterwards accomplished in the earth."[176] The graciousness of the covenant of grace is rooted in God's willingness to accept the work of Christ on the believer's behalf. Because Christ is the surety as the Mediator, the covenant of grace has an enduring stability and certainty of fulfillment never possible in the covenant of works.[177]

As the Mediator, the death of Christ symbolized the completion and culmination of the new covenant (or testament). John W. Tweeddale observed, "All theology then, is based on either one of two covenants."[178] The covenant of works was the "one that is built on God's covenant with Adam," whereas the covenant of grace was the one "founded on the mediatorial works of Christ."[179] Sebastian Rehnman commented that the death of Christ "is the crown and glory of the divine disclosure of grace in history and the treasure of Owen's heart. . . . [Owen stressed] how the progressive movement of revelation culminated in Jesus Christ because the whole mind and will of God was revealed in him."[180] Rehnman observed that Owen addressed the glories of the new covenant's

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[173] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:78.

[174] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:96. Note that two divine persons in the Trinity made the heavenly transaction.

[175] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:96.

[176] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:96.

[177] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened*, 233-44.

[178] John W. Tweeddale, *John Owen and Hebrews: The Foundation of Biblical Interpretation* (London: T & T Clark, 2019), 60; Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:60-62.

[179] Tweeddale, *John Owen and Hebrews*, 60.

[180] Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 174.

revelation in his exposition of Hebrews 8:6 and subsequent verses. Here, Owen commented,

> That which before lay hid in promises, in many things obscure, the principal mysteries of it being a secret hid in God himself, was now brought to light; and that covenant which had invisibly, in the way of a promise, put forth its efficacy under types and shadows, was now solemnly sealed, ratified, and confirmed, in the death and resurrection of Christ.[181]

In the SDF of 1658, when Owen was still in power, Owen and his colleagues stated that the covenant of grace "is one and the same; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the Old and New Testament."[182] On the new covenant, Owen clarified, "It was always the same, as to the substance to it, from the beginning," in relation to the covenant of grace.[183] In both cases, Jesus Christ was "the only way and means of salvation unto the church, from the first entrance of sin."[184] In essence, they are one and the same. But the covenant of grace, in relation to the Old Testament, "consisted only in a promise."[185] In short, God instituted the covenant of grace after the covenant of works failed. But the covenant of grace appeared in the form of a promise in the old covenant. The covenant of grace appeared more clearly in the new covenant. In other words, the old covenant pointed to the new covenant.

The law at Sinai could be described as the old covenant only because the blood of sacrifices had confirmed it. However, under the New Testament, the covenant of grace "with its own seals and appointments" is "the only rule and measure of all acceptable worship."[186] The new covenant promised "is not the promise of grace, mercy, life, and

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[181] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:64.

[182] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84-85.

[183] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:74.

[184] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:74.

[185] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:74.

[186] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:75.

salvation by Christ."[187] The new covenant had "the formal nature of a covenant."[188] Being established "by the death of Christ," the new covenant is "the procuring cause of all its benefits, and the declaring of it to be the only rule of worship and obedience unto the church."[189] As Owen put it, the covenant of grace is more about "the way of life, grace, mercy, and salvation by Christ."[190] But the new covenant is more about "its actual establishment in the death of Christ, with that blessed way of worship which by it is settled by the church."[191] The covenant of grace appeared in the form of a promise in the old covenant, but appeared more clearly in the new covenant. The old covenant was the form of a promise whereas the new covenant was the actualization of the promise. But the covenant of grace was the foundation of salvation by Christ. The new covenant was about the actual benefits and establishing the church. The covenant of grace was the root whereas the new covenant was the fruit.

The Covenant of Redemption

Development in England

Reformed theologians utilized the covenant of redemption (or *pactum salutis*) as the eternal foundation of the covenant of grace. In this covenant, the Father appointed the Son as the Mediator to execute the covenant of grace. The covenant is between God the Father and God the Son. For this reason, unlike the other covenants, the covenant of grace is intra-trinitarian. According to Fesko, the covenant of redemption is "the eternal intra-trinitarian covenant to appoint the Son as covenant surety of the elect and to redeem

[187] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:75.

[188] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:75.

[189] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:75.

[190] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:75.

[191] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:75.

them in the temporal execution of the covenant of grace."[192]

Scholars have identified Dickson, a Scottish reformer, as the first person to explicitly describe the covenant of redemption.[193] In 1638, Dickson participated in the General Assembly of Scotland to address Arminian errors. Among many points, Dickson argued that the chief Arminian error was the unfamiliarity with the "Covenant of redemption betwixt God and Christ."[194] He explained that the covenant of redemption was between God and Christ, whereas the covenant of grace was between God and man.[195] According to Herman Witsius (1636-1708), a Dutch reformer, the covenant between the Father and the Son "is the foundation of the whole of our salvation."[196]

Both the WCF and SDF affirmed the covenant of redemption as the eternal foundation. WCF 8.1 stated, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and men, the Prophet, Priest, and King."[197] Likewise, SDF 8.1 stated, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King."[198] The statements reflect the views of Owen and those of his colleagues.

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[192] Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption*, 15.

[193] Richard Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11-25; Trueman, "The Harvest of Reformation Mythology?," 196-214; Williams, "The Decree of Redemption."

[194] David Dickson, "Arminianism Discussed," in *Records of the Kirk of Scotland, Containing the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies, from the Year 1638 Downwards*, ed. Alexander Peterkin (Edinburg: Peter Brown, 1845), 156.

[195] Dickson, "Arminianism Discussed," 157. For more on the historical origins of the covenant of redemption, see Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption*, 29-46.

[196] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (London: T. Tegg & Son, 1837; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 2.3.1.

[197] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith,* 8.1.

[198] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 86.

Reformed theologians explained that the basis of the covenant of redemption was the agreement between the Father and the Son. One of the ways of explanation was to bring in the covenant of grace. Bulkeley affirmed that the "whole business of our salvation was first transacted between the Father and Christ."[199] Likewise, Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) understood the covenant of grace to be an agreement God makes with sinners in the temporal realm. Similar to the WCF and SDF, Burgees affirmed that the Father and the Son concluded a distinct covenant from eternity. This eternal covenant of redemption thereby provided the foundation for the temporal covenant of grace.[200] Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), a participant of the Westminster Assembly from Scotland, contrasted the covenant of redemption with the "covenant of reconciliation" in terms of shared love.[201] Rutherford taught that the covenant of redemption represents the "eternal design of love in the heart of God toward his Son, his everlasting delight" in which there was "mutual love-delight acted by the Father and Son."[202] For Rutherford, the covenant of redemption provided the basis for God's love for sinners. Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), Owen's colleague, added that the covenant of redemption was "the greatest affair, between persons of the highest sovereignty and majesty, that ever was transacted either in heaven or earth, or ever will be."[203]

In addition to setting the basis of the covenant of redemption, Reformed theologians addressed divine justice. Gillespie treated the necessity of the covenant of

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[199] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 31.

[200] Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated from the Errors of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and Antinomians, in Thirty Lectures at Lawrence Jury* (London: Robert White, 1654), 375-76.

[201] For Rutherford, the covenant of reconciliation is synonymous with the covenant of grace.

[202] Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh: Andro Anderson for Robert Brown, 1655), 326.

[203] Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 5, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 7.

redemption's necessity in the context of God's justice.[204] In doing so, Gillespie recognized that divine justice will be satisfied because of the covenant of redemption. Nonetheless, Gillespie was not sure whether God could have forgiven Adam's sin apart from Christ's satisfaction.[205] The primary issue was whether God's justice in punishing sin was "so natural, that he cannot but punish it, or require satisfaction; otherwise he should deny himself, and his own nature."[206] Gillespie distanced himself from this "extreme" position.[207]

In a similar way, Goodwin argued that God's decree to forgive sin in the covenant of redemption is the free act of his will. God satisfied his justice with his love and wisdom in effecting his will. As a result, God's justice was satisfied through the death of Christ on behalf of the elect. Still, "there was one way indeed which was more obvious, and that was to pardon the rebels, and make no more ado of it; for he might if he had pleased have ran a way and course of mere mercy, not tempered with justice at all."[208] Goodwin clarified that to punish sin is an act of God's will in the same way that other works *ad extra*. Otherwise, the sinner would die immediately if God's nature was the basis for punishing sin. Goodwin reasoned that it must be an act of God's will to suspend the sentence of death. He taught that God's hatred of sin is "an act of his nature, but to express his hatred by punishing, is an act of his will; and therefore might be wholly suspended."[209]

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[204] Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace the Second Part, wherein Is Proved, That There Is Such a Covenant, the Necessity of It, the Nature, Properties, Parties thereof, the Tenor, Articles, Subject-Matter of Redemption, the Commands, Conditions, and Promises Annexed, the Harmony of the Covenant of Reconciliation Made with Sinners, wherein They Agree, wherein They Differ, Grounds of Comfort from the Covenant of Suretyship* (London, 1677), 51.

[205] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 32-33.

[206] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 36.

[207] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 37.

[208] Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 5:15.

[209] Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 5:72.

When Christ prayed that the cup might be taken from him (Mark 14:36), the preceding words, "all things are possible unto thee," suggested the possibility for God to forgive apart from the death of Christ.

Despite the difficulty of identifying whether punishment of sin is part of God's nature or God's will, both Gillespie and Goodwin described that the covenant of redemption manifested God's attributes to the fullest possible extent. Gillespie noted that, in Christ, "his glorious attributes and nature was made conspicuous, and the declarative glory thereof had a more glorious luster, than by all the works of Creation and Providence beside."[210] For Goodwin, the covenant of redemption is God's "masterpiece wherein he means to bring all his attributes upon the Stage."[211] As the SDF stated, sinful man became "incapable of life."[212] Aware of human sinfulness, Goodwin asked, "Who is there in heaven and earth [that] should be a fit mediator, both able and willing to undertake it, and faithful to perform it?"[213] That mediator is Christ.

Development in Owen

In the *Exposition of Hebrews*, Owen made a distinction between "the covenant that God made with men concerning Christ, and the covenant that he made with his Son concerning men."[214] There was a divine transaction between the Father and the Son "about the redemption of mankind."[215] Like any other "proper covenant," the covenant of redemption "required that it be made between distinct persons."[216] In the covenant of

[210] Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, 40.

[211] Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 5:16.

[212] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84.

[213] Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 5:18.

[214] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:78.

[215] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:84.

[216] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:84.

redemption, the Father was the "prescriber, the promiser and lawgiver; the Son was the undertaker upon his prescription, law, and promises."[217]

Owen made three points on the conditions required of the mediator. First, Christ must "assume or take on him the nature of those whom, according unto the terms of this covenant, he was to bring unto God" (Heb 2:9).[218] The Son, "by an act of infinite grace and condescension," complied. This divine condescension was "the foundation of His obedience, gave the nature of merit and purchase unto what he did."[219] The Father prescribed that He should come in this manner, and the Son's assumption of human nature was "indispensably necessary" for his work as mediator (Gal 4:4).[220] Otherwise, the Son could not have "exalted the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, nor been himself in our nature exalted unto his mediatory kingdom, which are the principal ends of this covenant."[221]

Second, because Christ assumed human nature, it was requisite that he should be "the servant of the Father, and yield universal obedience unto him" in a threefold manner: "according to the general law of God obliging all mankind, and according unto the especial law of the church under which he was born and made, and according unto the singular law of that compact or agreement which we have described."[222] Third, because Christ

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[217] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:85.

[218] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:94. The Geneva Bible translated, "But we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor, which was made little inferior to the Angels, through the suffering of death, that by God's grace he might taste death for all men" (Heb 2:9).

[219] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:94-95.

[220] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:95. Owen partially quoted Gal 4:4 and Rom 8:3 from the AV. In its entirety, Gal 4:4 stated, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." In its entirety, Rom 8:3 stated, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

[221] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:95.

[222] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:95. Owen mentioned Isaiah 42:1 to support his point. The Geneva Bible translated, "Behold, my servant: I will stay upon him: mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles."

acted as surety for sinful humanity, he was required to make atonement for sin "in and by our nature assumed, and answer the justice of God by suffering and undergoing what was due unto them; without which it was not possible they should be delivered or saved, unto the glory of God."[223] As the Mediator, Christ interposed himself "between the law and sinners," and between "divine justice itself and sinners," to make atonement for them.[224]

On divine justice, Owen differed from Gillespie and Goodwin. Gillespie was not certain whether God's forgiveness was due to his nature or the demands of satisfaction. Goodwin described God's forgiveness as the free act of his will. Owen described God's forgiveness in relation to the requirements of divine justice. For Owen, God's eternal justice required "that it should be brought about by the sufferings of the Son, and it was itself expressed and exercised in those sufferings."[225] The right God has to "act his righteousness" is "supreme and sovereign, arising naturally and necessarily from the relation of all things unto himself."[226] On the state of humanity, God has "an unchangeable, sovereign right to deal with us and act towards us according to the infinite, eternal rectitude of his nature."[227] God cannot act otherwise "towards us but according to what the essential rectitude of his nature doth direct and require; which is the foundation of what we plead in the case before us concerning the necessity of the priesthood of Christ."[228]

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[223] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:95. Owen mentioned Isa 53:11-12 to support his point. The Geneva Bible translated, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I give him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was counted with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and prayed for the trespassers."

[224] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:95.

[225] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:91.

[226] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:100.

[227] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:101.

[228] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:101.

On the priesthood of Christ, Owen wrote that it was "justice that made it necessary."[229] In fact, God's act of justice "is not a mere free act of his will, but the natural dominion and rule which he hath over sinning creatures, in answer unto the rectitude and holiness of his own nature."[230] Although mercy is "an essential property of God," neither the law, nor the state of things "raises any natural respect or obligation between mercy and its object. . . . [God can] execute the punishment which his justice requireth without the least impeachment of his mercy; for no act of justice is contrary unto mercy. . . . [To] absolutely pardon where the interest of justice is to punish, is contrary to the nature of God."[231] Owen differed from his colleagues. Nonetheless, Owen and his colleagues shared the same fundamentals in that divine justice is important in the covenant of redemption.

In sum, in the covenant of redemption, God the Father and God the Son built the foundation of salvation. Based on the foundations of the covenant of redemption, the Son represented humanity and served as the Mediator between God and man. Whereas the covenant of works provided the basis of theology through Adam, the covenant of grace provided the basis of theology through Christ.

The Covenant of Sinai

Development in Tradition

Most Reformed theologians agreed that the old and new covenants are one in substance and kind. They are simply different administrations of the covenant of grace. But Reformed theologians differed on their views of the covenant of Sinai. Some theologians were dichotomist. In this view, theologians regarded the covenant of Sinai as a revival of

[229] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:103.

[230] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:104.

[231] Owen, *Hebrews*, 2:107.

the covenant of works, but subservient to the covenant of grace.[232] For example, Rutherford observed, "The law as pressed upon Israel was not a covenant of works."[233] Francis Turretin (1623-1687), theologian of Geneva, noted, "The difference between the Old and New Testaments (broadly considered) is only accidental, not essential."[234] For Turretin, though the salvific function of Sinai was similar to that of the covenant of works, the Sinai covenant "is no other than the covenant of grace entered into before with the fathers."[235] As Owen acknowledged, the "judgment of most reformed divines is, that the church under the old testament had the same promise of Christ, the same interest in him by faith, remission of sins."[236] Whereas "the essence and the substance of the covenant consists in these things, they are not to be said to be under another covenant, but only a different administration of it."[237] As Owen confirmed, dichotomy was the majority view.

Others were trichotomist or Salmurian. According to Mark Beach, some Reformed theologians within Reformed churches "sought wholly to divide the Law and Gospel from one another by positing a third covenant," which was the "covenant of the Law."[238] In this view, theologians regarded the covenant of Sinai as separate and distinct. Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664), a French theologian who studied at the Academy in Saumur, was one of the advocates. According to Beach, Amyraut "believed that a distinct 'legal covenant,' juxtaposed to the covenant of grace and distinct from the covenant of works, better captured the biblical materials on the nature of the covenants and the relationship

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[232] Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 294.

[233] Rutherford, *Covenant of Life*, 60.

[234] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992), 2:237.

[235] Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:264.

[236] Owen, *Hebrews*, 7:70.

[237] Owen, *Hebrews*, 7:70.

[238] J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Rupprecht, 2007), 301.

between the two testaments."[239] John Cameron (1579-1625), Amyraut's mentor at the academy, also supported a trichotomous view of salvation history.[240]

Among the two positions, scholars differed in how to categorize Owen's view of Sinai.[241] Sebastian Rehnman argued that Owen belonged to "trichotomist federal theology" and that he formulated "a distinct and separate covenant for the Mosaic era and thus adheres to the threefold covenantal structure."[242] In short, Rehnman identified Owen as a trichotomist. On the other hand, Mark Jones identified Owen as a dichotomist. He argued that "only two covenants could ever save," and Owen as a trichotomist holds only "if one allows that the covenant of grace flowers into the new covenant whereas the old covenant is abrogated by the new covenant and remains distinct from the covenants of works and grace."[243] Lee Gatiss also supported this view.[244] Though, Benedict Bird sought to "avoid the reductionism implicit in the dichotomous and trichotomous assessments."[245] Bird argued that the covenant of redemption led to "two over-arching temporal" covenants, "each reflecting the Works and Grace principles," which "culminate in the New Covenant."[246] While Bird would avoid categorization, he seems to emphasize the

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[239] Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 301.

[240] Sebastian Rehnman, "Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous? A Problem for Federal Theology," *Dutch Review of Church History* 80, no. 3 (2000), 298-99.

[241] Sinclair B. Ferguson argued that Owen developed a fourfold covenant model consisting of the covenants of works, grace, redemption, and Sinai. Ferguson demonstrated that Owen developed a "mediating position." See Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 22, 28.

[242] Rehnman, "Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous?" 302.

[243] Mark Jones, "The 'Old' Covenant," in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael Haykin and Mark Jones (Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 201-2.

[244] Gatiss, "Adoring the Fullness of the Scriptures," 190.

[245] Benedict Bird, "John Owen's Taxonomy of the Covenants: Was He a Dichotomist or a Trichotomist?" *Foundations* 78, no. 5 (2020): 78.

[246] Benedict Bird, "John Owen's Taxonomy," 78.

dichotomous view by referring to two overarching covenants. In this manner, scholars on both sides provided their views, but in my observation, both sides are simply emphasizing different sides of the same coin. Owen demonstrated traits of both dichotomy and trichotomy.

Owen was a dichotomist with a trichotomous emphasis. In terms of substance, there were two covenants. In terms of distinction, there were three covenants. The three distinct covenants were the covenant of works, covenant of Sinai, and covenant of grace. Owen saw the Sinai covenant as a distinct covenant, but it revived the covenant of works. The two were not identical but shared the same substance. Therefore, in terms of shared substance, there are two covenants in Owen. But the distinction is real, so the Sinai covenant is a distinct covenant. Both the covenant of works and covenant of Sinai shared the same substance with distinct features. For example, the covenant of works was made before the fall, whereas the Sinai covenant was made after the fall. The Sinai covenant was distinct in that it revived the covenant of works after the fall. For our purposes, this section examines Owen's perspective on the covenant of Sinai.

Development in Owen

In 1642, Owen worked on *Two Short Catechisms* to instruct his church.[247] While Owen shared the fundamentals of the Puritan tradition, he did not hesitate to nuance differences. For example, for Owen, the law of God was "written with the finger of God in two tables of stone on Mount Horeb, called the Ten Commandments," and it binds us because it was "written in the hearts of all by the finger of God."[248] As Gribben noted, Protestant theologians "did not agree on the relationship between the moral law given in Eden, the Ten Commandments given to Moses, and the new law of righteousness given

[247] John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*: *wherein the principles of the doctrine of Christ are unfolded and explained*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 1:465.

[248] Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, 1:476.

by Jesus Christ."[249] In this case, Owen saw the Mosaic Covenant, or the Covenant of Sinai, as a binding law on believers.

Most Reformed theologians agreed that the old and new covenants must be one and the same, albeit differently administered. Owen was aware of the majority view. As a participant of the SDF, he affirmed that for his colleagues, the covenant of grace "is one and the same; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the Old and New Testament."[250] Although the SDF does not address all the individual nuances, the confession indicated that most Reformed theologians supported this statement.

As Owen observed, for most Reformed theologians, the two testaments, or covenants, were "only different administrations of the same covenant."[251] On the old covenant, "the original covenant of works, made with Adam and all mankind in him, is not intended; for this is undoubtedly a covenant different in the essence and substance of it from the new."[252] On the new covenant, it is complete in its gospel administration "when it was actually established by the death of Christ, as administered in and by the ordinances of the new testament."[253]

Both covenants belonged to the covenant of grace. For example, the Old Testament writings, namely the Law, Psalms, and the Prophets, clearly "contain and declare the doctrine of justification and salvation by Christ."[254] The church of the Old Testament believed and lived out faith in Christ. This is also demonstrated "in that the doctrine mentioned is frequently confirmed in the New Testament by testimonies taken

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[249] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 64.

[250] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 84-85.

[251] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:70.

[252] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:70.

[253] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:70.

[254] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:71.

out of the Old."[255] If the Sinai covenant were "separated from its figurative relation unto the covenant of grace," then none would be "eternally saved."[256] For most Reformed theologians, the Sinai covenant was part of the covenant of grace.

Nonetheless, Owen expressed his willingness to dissent from the majority view, including the SDF, a confessional standard in which Owen participated. For most Reformed theologians, the old and new covenants are "only a different administration" of the covenant of grace. However, Owen noted, "This was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ, that it hath the appearance and name of another covenant."[257] First, there was a difference "in the way and manner of the declaration of the mystery of the love and will of God in Christ; of the work of reconciliation and redemption, with our justification by faith."[258] Under the Old Testament, when people saw an object it was at a great distance and so they did not see things "clearly and perfectly. . . . [But now] under the gospel, the object, which is Christ," people "see all things clearly."[259]

Second, there was a difference in "the plentiful communication of grace unto the community of the church."[260] Under the Old Testament, all true believers had "true, real, saving grace communicated unto them; but the measures of grace in the true church under the new testament do exceed those of the community of the church under the old."[261] The obedience God required "in any covenant, or administration of it, is proportionable

[255] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:71.

[256] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:71.

[257] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:71.

[258] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:71.

[259] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:72.

[260] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:72.

[261] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:72.

unto the strength which the administration of that covenant doth exhibit."[262] If believers do not endeavor "for a share in that plentiful effusion of grace which doth accompany its present administration, the gospel itself will be of no other use unto them, but to increase and aggravate their condemnation."[263] For Owen, the New Testament does not minimize human responsibility. In fact, believers under the New Testament would increase their condemnation if they were not engaged with the gospel. In other words, they were more responsible to pursue the gospel.

For Owen, the Sinai covenant, "the first covenant," was a "distinct covenant" and "not a mere administration of the covenant of grace."[264] The Sinai covenant was "never intended to be of itself the absolute rule and law of life and salvation unto the church, but was made with a particular design, and with respect unto particular ends."[265] Owen believed the apostle was clear on this. It was not merely a difference in the administration of the covenant of grace. Therefore, for Owen, the Sinai Covenant "could abrogate or disannul nothing which God at any time before had given as a general rule unto the church . . . [because] that which is particular cannot abrogate any thing that was general," and yet "that which is general doth abrogate all antecedent particulars, as the new covenant abrogate the old."[266] For Owen, at this point, there was a major difference between the Sinai covenant and new covenant.

The Sinai covenant revived the covenant of works, but they were not identical. Owen argued the covenant at Sinai was not intended to abrogate the covenant of works. Rather, the Sinai covenant "re-enforced, established, and confirmed that covenant."[267]

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[262] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:73.

[263] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:73.

[264] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:77.

[265] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:77.

[266] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:77.

[267] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:77.

Owen provided three reasons. First, the Sinai covenant "revived, declared, and expressed all the commands of that covenant in the decalogue; for there is nothing but a divine summary of the law written in the heart of man at his creation. . . . . [In the Sinai covenant] the nature of that first covenant, with its inexorableness as unto perfect obedience, was represented," which none could fulfill.[268] Second, the Sinai covenant "revived the sanction of the first covenant," in which the penalty was death.[269] Third, the Sinai covenant revived the promise "of eternal life upon perfect obedience."[270] For Owen, although the Sinai covenant came after the fall, it shared the same substance as the covenant of works.

The Sinai covenant served two purposes. First, by reviving the covenant of works, Sinai put "an awe on the minds of men, and set bounds unto their lusts, that they should not dare to run forth into that excess which they were naturally inclined unto."[271] Second, Sinai served to "shut up unbelievers," who refused to seek "righteousness, life, and salvation by the promise, under the power of the covenant of works, and curse attending it."[272] But Owen clarified that the Sinai covenant was not intended to give life and righteousness, nor was it capable of doing so. Thus, God promised "to give righteousness, justification, and salvation, all by Christ, to whom and concerning whom it was made."[273] Before the covenant of grace was "solemnly confirmed in the blood and sacrifice of Christ," and thereby establishing "the only rule of the worship of the church," the Sinai covenant "did not constitute a new way or means of righteousness, life, and salvation; but believers sought for them alone by the covenant of grace as declared in the

[268] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:77.

[269] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:78-79.

[270] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:79.

[271] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:81.

[272] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:81.

[273] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:81.

promise."[274] For Owen, the Sinai covenant, or the old covenant, had a different substance from the new covenant. Although part of the covenant of grace, the Sinai covenant did not share the same substance as the new covenant. Rather, the Sinai covenant shared the same substance with the covenant of works. If the Sinai covenant was different only in terms of administration, then it should still serve as a means of righteousness in terms substance.

Owen continued to highlight the differences between the two covenants. The old covenant was "given at Sinai in Arabia," whereas the new covenant was "given at Jerusalem" in the death and resurrection of Christ.[275] Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. He was "a mediator, as designed of God, so chosen of the people, in that dread and consternation which befell them upon the terrible promulgation of the law."[276] On the other hand, Christ was the Mediator of the new covenant. Owen remarked, "He who is the Son, and the Lord over his own house, graciously undertook in his own person to be the mediator of this covenant; and herein it is unspeakably preferred before the old covenant."[277] In essence, Owen regarded the covenant of Sinai as a distinct entity that shared the same substance. The covenant of Sinai was the old covenant, which pointed to the new covenant. In other words, after the fall, the Sinai covenant functioned as the covenant of works as an instrument to point believers to Christ.

Conclusion

John Owen shared the fundamentals of covenant theology with the Reformed tradition. Reformed theologians attempted to harmonize both divine sovereignty and human responsibility through covenant theology. On the one hand, an overemphasis on divine sovereignty would lead to antinomianism, salvation void of human responsibility.

[274] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:82.

[275] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:88.

[276] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:89.

[277] Owen, *Hebrews*, 6:89.

On the other hand, an overemphasis on human responsibility would lead to Pelagianism, salvation void of divine sovereignty. Earlier Reformed theologians, such as Perkins, utilized covenant theology to harmonize the difficult concepts. Perkins built the foundations of covenant theology for Owen and his colleagues.

Owen and his colleagues had different nuances, but the WCF and SDF reflect their shared fundamentals. The covenant of works was between God and Adam. God promised Adam eternal life on the basis of perfect obedience. But Adam failed and thereby lost the ability to obey God's commands. The covenant of grace was God's remedy for Adam after the fall. In this covenant, God promised a mediator who would fulfill perfect obedience. The covenant of grace was administered differently in the Old and New Testaments. For Owen, the old covenant was the Sinai covenant, which revived the covenant of works. Christ initiated and fulfilled the new covenant. The covenant of grace was more general, whereas the new covenant was more specific, but both shared the same substance.

The covenant of redemption was the basis for the covenant of grace. This covenant was different in that the Father appointed the Son as the Mediator to execute the covenant of grace. Each covenant had conditions, but at the same time, God initiated each covenant. In each covenant God made with man, God mercifully sought to enable the other party to fulfill covenantal responsibilities. Consequently, human agency in the covenant relied on divine sovereignty. In other words, human agency in the covenant was anti-Pelagian. Therefore, Owen utilized covenant theology as a theological basis for anti-Pelagianism.

CHAPTER 4

PREDESTINATION

Introduction

Through covenant theology, John Owen pursued an anti-Pelagian reformation of England. In the Reformed tradition, covenant theology was a scriptural tool that harmonized divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Thus, human responsibility was not Pelagian in covenant theology because all human endeavors were within divine sovereignty. The first Adam failed to uphold the covenant of works, but Christ, the second Adam, achieved the salvation of humanity according to the covenant of grace. As the Mediator between God and man, Christ secured the benefits of the covenant. As the second member of the Trinity, Christ the Son covenanted with God the Father to save humanity in the covenant of redemption. In this process, the Godhead predestined certain people to salvation. In other words, believers received salvation not through their own merits but the merits of Christ. In this regard, predestination was an important element that was connected to the Trinity, as well as other important teachings.

In the Reformed tradition, the covenant would be anti-Pelagian only if the Trinitarian God predestined believers to perform righteousness. Since sinners were incapable of performing righteousness, only the predestined elect could perform righteousness. Otherwise, humanity would be left to achieve their salvation to the extent God did not intervene. Consequently, Reformed theologians defended predestination against deviations. Among those deviations were Arminians, who claimed to support the Reformation but deviated from the Reformed tradition by attacking predestination. Although Arminians were not anti-Trinitarian, Reformed theologians considered them a threat because they attacked predestination, in which the Trinity was involved. Owen and

his colleagues considered such deviation critical enough to consider them Pelagian. In other words, from the Reformed perspective, Arminians subtly undermined the Trinity by opposing predestination. Therefore, Owen regarded predestination as a theological basis for anti-Pelagianism against Arminians.

This chapter examines Owen's Trinitarian theology in polemics. There are three major sections. The first section examines the theology of Jacob Arminius (1559-1609) in his context regarding his early years and his theology while he was a professor at Leiden University. The second section examines the Reformed response to Arminius. This section relocates the landscape from Holland to England by discussing the predestination of William Perkins (1558-1602) and the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The third section examines Owen's theology in the English context. This section is divided into two parts. The first part examines Owen's defense of predestination against Arminianism. The second part examines Owen's defense of the perseverance of saints against John Goodwin (1594-1665).

Overall, these examinations will reveal that Owen developed his theology within a tradition. Opposing Roman Catholicism was important but not enough. To be considered Reformed, one had to oppose Roman Catholicism and support the fundamentals of the Reformed tradition, such as predestination. From the Reformed perspective, the Trinitarian God designed predestination, perseverance, and other doctrines. Through his defense of predestination and perseverance, Owen indirectly defended the Trinity.

Arminius: Early Years before Leiden

Upbringing

Jacob Arminius (1559-1609) was born in Oudewater, Holland.[1] His father,

[1] Caspar Brandt, an Arminian minster, published a biography of Arminius in 1724: *Historia vitae Iacobi Arminii* (Amsterdam: Martinus Schaegenius, 1724). Carl Bangs wrote the first comprehensive biography of Arminius in English in 1971. The second edition is used in this dissertation: *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985).

Herman, a weaponsmith, died either in Jacob's infancy or before his birth.[2] At this time, the Netherlands would soon combat Roman Catholic Spain for freedom, and the anti-Catholic sentiment would grow.[3] In the political realm, the Netherlands faced a conflict that would last for decades. In the religious realm, Reformed theology was becoming the dominant stream.[4] In 1575, William of Orange (1650-1702) founded Leiden University as a reward for the city's victory over Spain. Leiden became a symbol of Protestant competition against the University of Leuven, which was under Spanish control. Arminius enrolled in 1576 and completed his studies in 1581.

Near the end of his Leiden years, Arminius studied under Lambert Daneau (1530-1590), a Calvinist theologian from France.[5] After completing his studies at Leiden, he moved to Geneva. At the theological academy of Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), a theologian from France, served as the successor of John Calvin (1509-1564), also a theologian from France.[6] Though Arminius briefly left Geneva to study at the University of Basel in 1582, he returned to Geneva by October 1584.[7] Overall, Arminius received a Reformed upbringing in his student years.[8]

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[2] Bangs, *Arminius*, 25-26. Bangs demonstrated that Jacob Arminius lost his father before 1559. This chapter uses 1559 as the year of Arminius's birth instead of the traditional 1560.

[3] The Dutch War of Independence (1568-1648) or the Eighty Years' War; also known as the Dutch War of Independence. In this event, the Seventeen Provinces of The Netherlands rebelled against Philip II of Spain, the sovereign of the Habsburg Netherlands.

[4] Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26.

[5] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 27.

[6] Beza was supralapsarian and pastoral. Arminius rejected predestination for promoting ungodliness, but Beza's life and ministry indicated otherwise. See Shawn D. Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Eugene, OR: Paternoster, 2004).

[7] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 28.

[8] While Calvin was an early reformer who built the theological foundations of Geneva, he was not the sole developer of the Reformed tradition. For more on the theological developments of the Reformed tradition, see Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

A Student in Geneva

At Geneva, Arminius had no major controversies despite certain speculations. Arminius defended a few disputations as a student and composed Latin poems but produced no major theological works during his time in Geneva.[9] In another case, there was speculation that Arminius was once a supralapsarian who made a dramatic change during his ministry in Amsterdam.[10] Petrus Bertius (1565-1629), a long-time friend of Arminius, claimed that Arminius was asked to refute the infralapsarianism of the ministers of Delft. He was invited to write a treatise to defend the supralapsarianism of Beza. But Arminius embraced his opponents' position after studying the doctrine. Though the story lacks a realistic basis, Arminius was not controversial in Geneva.[11] This did not mean, however, that Arminius supported Beza's supralapsarianism. Not being Roman Catholic was not the same as being supralapsarian.

Scholars have commented on the theological position of Arminius during his stay in Geneva.[12] According to Carl Bangs, a biographer of Arminius, it is likely that Arminius never supported supralapsarianism.[13] Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, also biographers of Arminius, commented, "Not only did Beza never require his students to agree with his precise predestinarian views, but Arminius never gives any hint

[9] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 28.

[10] Supralapsarianism and Infralapsarianism are views on the logical order of God's decrees. Supralapsarians taught that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically preceded the decree of the fall. Infralapsarians taught that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically succeeded the decree of the fall.

[11] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 29.

[12] Arminius primarily mentioned supralapsarianism in his critiques, but he repudiated all forms of Reformed teachings on predestination. For more treatments on Arminius's position on predestination, see Bangs, *Arminius*, 350-55; F. Stuart Clarke, *The Ground of Election: Jacob Arminius' Doctrine of Work and Person of Christ* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 148-64; Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 83-93; Willliam Gene Witt, "Creation, Redemption, and Grace in the Theology of Jacob Arminius" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), 684-724.

[13] Bangs, *Arminius*, 138-41.

that he had a change of heart."[14] Richard Muller pointed out that Geneva was "not at all dominated by supralapsarianism."[15] Beza himself "probably did not claim confessional status for his doctrine," but rather "recognized the generally infralapsarian view of Bullinger and others as the confessional norm" for Reformed churches.[16] Beza supervised the development of *Harmony of the Reformed Confessions* in 1580, whose basis was provided by Bullinger's *Confessio Helvetica*.[17] Stanglin and McCall speculated that Arminius was likely to have supported "conditional predestination."[18]

By 1587, with a favorable recommendation from Beza, Arminius returned to the Netherlands and passed the examinations for ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church. Arminius was committed to ministry in Amsterdam, whose consistory (local church council) had funded his education in Geneva. Amsterdam was also becoming a commercial center. In 1588, Arminius was ordained as a minister in the Old Church in Amsterdam and started his ministry of fifteen years.[19]

Arminius: Examination of Perkins

Although Arminius was a Dutch theologian, he critiqued a reformer of England. In 1602, before becoming a professor at Leiden, Arminius completed his examination of

[14] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 29.

[15] Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 19.

[16] Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 19.

[17] Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 19.

[18] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 29. In Reformed theology, conditional election is the belief that God foresaw who will have faith in Christ and chose them for eternal salvation. Advocates emphasized the importance of a person's free will. The opposing view, unconditional election, is the belief that God chooses whomever he wills solely based on his purposes. Advocates emphasized the importance of God's sovereign will apart from the free will of human beings. The Synod of Dort addressed this issue.

[19] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 28.

William Perkins (1558-1602), a supralapsarian reformer in England.[20] In his introductory letter, Arminius raised certain issues on the Reformed teachings on Scripture. Arminius noted some problematic notions. One was that "God, by a most absolute and immutable decree," predestined to life certain people "without regard to any one's obedience or belief in Christ," while others were predestined "to eternal and unescapable misery, without regard to the disobedience or unbelief of any individual."[21] Arminius observed that "these elect, endowed with faith and conversion, cannot fall away, either totally or finally" from Christ "whatever of sin they may commit, even the most atrocious," because "it is all a matter of infirmity and weakness."[22]

Arminius concluded, "From these notions, stated in his fashion, the most dangerous opinions are easily imbibed, preparing the way either to security or to despair."[23] Through this discussion on predestination, Arminius wished to support the position "which is chiefly adapted to promote amongst all men piety towards God; which least fosters carnal security, yet is most potent for the removal of despair."[24] In other words, for Arminius, predestination undermined piety because it promoted false security and despair.

Arminius acknowledged that God's decree of "gracious communication" and "punitive justice" was "peremptory in respect of the angels."[25] With regard to humanity, however, God's decree was not "peremptory" because "God did not determine to act according to that greatest rigour of the law, but decreed to unfold to them all His

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[20] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet on Predestination*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 3, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 251. Perkins died before Arminius completed his response.

[21] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 258.

[22] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 258.

[23] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 258.

[24] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 263.

[25] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 277-78.

goodness."[26] For Arminius, "there was no fixed predestination and reprobation of men with regard to whom mercy, and its opposite, justice, could have no place."[27] For Arminius, while predestining someone before committing good or evil is contrary to Scripture, God is glorified when people are judged based on their merit.[28]

For Arminius, predestination "includes the means by which the predestined are certainly and infallibly to attain to salvation," whereas reprobation "includes the negation of the same means."[29] Since this is the case, Arminius concluded that "predestination and reprobation did not take place with reference to men to whom those means were unnecessary and incommunicable."[30] Predestination has its place only "in Christ," and since "Christ was ordained and given for sinners," predestination and reprobation "could not have had place before the sin of man."[31]

Hence, for Arminius, it followed that God "set before Himself as His end, as well in the act of creation, as in that of glorification and its opposite, condemnation, the illustration of his glory."[32] God obtained his end with goodness, wisdom, and power "in the act of creation" combined with justice "in glorification and condemnation."[33] God

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[26] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 278.

[27] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 278. Since Arminius believed in judgment by merit, believers persevered on their own without God's decree. Thus, Arminius effectively denied the doctrine of perseverance as well as assurance of salvation. For a similar interpretation from other angles, see Robert A. W. Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort" (PhD diss., Aberdeen University, 1979), 311.

[28] Arminius's attacks on predestination had implications for the covenant. For Arminius, as Letham noted, "There are no absolute or unconditional promises in the gospel," since the promises were based on merit. Arminius made the gospel promises in the Covenant of Grace conditional. See Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," 315.

[29] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 278.

[30] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 278.

[31] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 279.

[32] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 279.

[33] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 279.

"foresaw from eternity what was to take place, and freely arranged concerning the future by ordination to that end according to His own will and pleasure, compelled by no necessity," as if he had no other way.[34] Arminius supported predestination according to God's foreknowledge. Since God chose believers based on what they do in the future, salvation was conditional, and believers were left to obtain righteousness independently.

Arminius: Leiden Theologian

Early Professorship

Arminius started teaching in September 1603.[35] As the topic for his inaugural lecture series, he chose the object of theology, the author and goal of theology, and the certainty of theology.[36] After expounding the fundamentals of theology, Arminius lectured on the priesthood of Christ.[37] This was not a random or typical choice. Arminius followed the path of his Leiden predecessor, Franciscus Junius (1545-1602), who died in the plague. Born in France, Junius studied under Calvin and Beza at Geneva. By this time, according to Muller, protestants survived over decades "of debate, confessional

[34] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 279.

[35] In 1601, there was a plague in the Low Countries of The Netherlands. After the plague took two of three faculty members in Leiden University's Staten College, Arminius was chosen to fill the vacancy. Staten College was established in 1592 to train Reformed ministers. The only teaching faculty remaining was the Calvinist Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641). To compensate for the loss, university authorities sought Arminius to fill one of the vacant positions. The curators of the university, the magistrates, and the students overwhelmingly supported Arminius, but some vocal ministers opposed his appointment. The opposition was mainly because of his suspected Pelagianism. One of his opponents was Gomarus. But Arminius also had a major advocate—Johannes Wtenbogaert (1557-1644), a friend of Arminius since their student days in Geneva, and chaplain to Maurice, Prince of Orange. In addition to a powerful network of supporters, Arminius thrived in the interviews and inquiries. Gomarus also examined Arminius in person and ended up supporting him. In July 1603, Gomarus examined Arminius in a disputation on the nature of God. As a result, Leiden University conferred the doctoral degree on Arminius with the approval of his examiner, Gomarus. By September 1603, Arminius became a full professor at Leiden alongside Gomarus. At Leiden University, however, Arminius would become a controversial figure. See Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 30-31.

[36] Arminius, *Oration I. The Object of Theology*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, 1:321; 1:348; 1:374.

[37] Arminius, *Oration IV. The Priesthood of Christ*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, 1:402.

formulation, and systematic development" before turning to work on dogmatic systems.[38] Muller identified Junius as one of the first, if not the first, "to write a full-scale prolegomenon."[39] One of the major platforms was disputations.

Arminius made use of theological disputations at Leiden. Stanglin stressed the importance of studying disputations as "a necessary component for knowing the fully story of the Arminian controversy, even if current scholarship has largely ignored these documents."[40] First, the disputations are important as "a principal means for discovering the contours of any given professor's theology."[41] Second, the disputations are important "because they reveal not only a professor's own theology, but also his thought at the particular time that he authored the disputation."[42] Third, the disputations became "a platform for airing theological opinions in an acceptable academic context."[43] From the overall context, Arminius used disputations to share and defend his views. He considered himself a reformer of Holland.

Disputing Predestination

In 1604, Arminius faced his first controversy as a professor. In February, Arminius wrote a disputation on predestination, and a student defended it.[44] According to Muller, Gomarus identified freedom in two ways, that is, "from external coercion and from

[38] Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 24.

[39] Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 24.

[40] Stanglin, *Arminius on Assurance of Salvation*, 44.

[41] Stanglin, *Arminius on Assurance of Salvation*, 44.

[42] Stanglin, *Arminius on Assurance of Salvation*, 45.

[43] Stanglin, *Arminius on Assurance of Salvation*, 46.

[44] Arminius, *Examination of the Thesis of Dr. Francis Gomarus Respecting Predestination*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, 3:526.

internal necessity understood as an absence of an initial indeterminacy."[45] Robert A. W. Letham observed, "A definite reaction against Bezan supralapsarianism, especially as it found expression in the theology of Gomarus," Arminius attempted to rectify the doctrine of predestination.[46] For example, in his response to Thesis XXIII, Arminius first agreed with Calvinist Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641) in that "God has a certain casting away or reprobation, according to which He has appointed some from eternity to be rejected from life eternal."[47] But Arminius pointed out differences. One was that "God's first action" regarding any object "cannot be its casting away or reprobation to eternal misery" because "God is the highest good," and therefore "His first volition" is "the communication of good."[48] Otherwise, God is "the supreme evil."[49] For Arminius, "the meritorious cause of casting away is the sin and disobedience" of the reprobated person which preceded "the volition of the person to be cast away"[50] because merit "does not move power to action, but moves a just will to will the casting away of him" who deserved it.[51]

For Arminius, supralapsarians introduced God "as dealing with some of His creatures by hypocrisy and fraud, and with wonderful art leading them into sin."[52] In this case, sinners may seem "to perish by their own fault" and "suffer deservedly," all the while

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[45] Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 221.

[46] Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," 319.

[47] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:588.

[48] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:590.

[49] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:590.

[50] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:591.

[51] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:591. As Leiden professor, Gomarus also presided over disputations. For more details, see Willem J. van. Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011); David V. N. Bagchi and David Curtis Steinmetz, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[52] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:591.

God "delights and exceedingly desires to inflict upon them simply from His own will and pleasure and mere wantonness of mind."[53] For Arminius, predestination was a "blasphemy" to reject "because He does not destine to just damnation except according to justice."[54] Predestination was "not the part of justice to destine a non-sinful creature to damnation, but of the highest injustice and most perverse malice, worse than which not even the devil himself could conceive in his own most wicked mind."[55]

The same applied to the gospel. For those who are already reprobate "by the absolute decree of reprobation," God "neither wills that Christ should be of advantage, nor is willing to bestow remissions of sins."[56] Therefore, the reprobate "are commanded to believe a lie, and are heavily punished because they do not believe it," which is contrary to "the good God."[57] Calling a reprobate to believe in the gospel was a false invitation. In other words, Arminius considered Reformed predestination, especially supralapsarianism, as an evil doctrine contrary to Scripture that made God the author of evil. Arminius believed he was correcting such a doctrine.

In his response to Thesis XXVI, Arminius remarked, "If God does not wish the death of the wicked, much less does He wish the death of the non-wicked, yea, of the creature not yet in existence."[58] Arminius affirmed that God "hates" unrighteousness, which is "a proper and adequate object of the Divine dislike."[59] God "hates the wicked who will not renounce it" and therefore curses only apply to sinners.[60] Therefore, "since

[53] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:591.

[54] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:591.

[55] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:591.

[56] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:611.

[57] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:611.

[58] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:613.

[59] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:613.

[60] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:613-14.

the reprobate are cursed, the reprobate are also sinners; and first sinners before they are cursed, because sin contains the meritorious cause of cursing."[61] In other words, Arminius argued that sinners were not predestined to condemnation, but meritoriously cursed.

Letham concluded, "In striving for Christocentricity he ends up with anthropocentric synergism and seriously undermines assurance."[62] Bangs commented, "Predestination must be understood Christologically; it must be evangelical; it must not make God the author of sin; it must not make man the author of salvation."[63] Stanglin noted that predestination was the foundation of assurance and thus "a quintessential condition for Arminius's assessment of a doctrine of predestination is whether it truly accomplishes its intended use of healthy, biblical assurance."[64] Overall, Arminius valued assurance as he valued predestination. But similar to predestination, Arminius did not support the Reformed position on assurance. Arminius valued predestination, but it was conditional. Likewise, Arminius taught conditional assurance. In the Reformed tradition, believers received assurance because God has predestined the elect and gives assurance as such that they are children of God. For Arminius, however, predestination was based on God's foreknowledge, based on who would become believers in the unfolding of God's plan. Similarly, Arminius taught that assurance was based on who would become believers. In short, Arminius supported conditional assurance based on conditional predestination.

The disputation itself was part of the curriculum. However, Gomarus was scandalized by Ariminius's position and launched an intense attack on the same topic. Gomarus disputed outside academic norms and brought unrest.[65] Naturally, the

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[61] Arminius, *Examination of Gomarus*, 3:614.

[62] Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," 320.

[63] Bangs, *Arminius*, 350.

[64] Stanglin, *Arminius on Assurance of Salvation*, 93.

[65] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 31. Peter Bertius (1565-1629) was a friend and biographer of Arminius who supported him and spoke at his funeral in 1609. Bertius observed, "Satan

professors sought to deal with this unrest so "that the union of the Reformed Churches may be preserved inviolate against the calumnies of adversaries."[66] After examination, the professors concluded that "in their opinion, the students were engaged in more disputes than was agreeable to them as Professors," but among the professors of theology, "no difference existed that could be considered as in the least affecting the fundamentals of doctrine."[67]

Political Setting of Holland

Stanglin and McCall made two points on Arminius's controversies. The first point is on the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. For the reformers, such as Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Calvin, affirming justification by grace meant rejecting salvation by merit. This also meant affirming the doctrine of unconditional election. Though Arminius upheld the Trinity, he repudiated the supralapsarianism of Beza. Instead, Arminius supported conditional election and thereby rejected all forms of Calvinist predestinations. For his opponents, rejecting unconditional election meant embracing salvation by merit. Claiming that free will could contribute to salvation was likely to give the impression of being a Roman Catholic.[68]

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endeavoured to excite a persuasion in certain inconsiderate persons, that in all these things Arminius was actuated by a selfish desire to procure his own glory." Such "suspicious and ill-advised suggestion" stirred up evil, "but the Professors, his colleagues, crushed it in the bud, in compliance with the prudent advice given by the Curators." See Peter Bertius, *An Oration on the Life and Death of that Reverend and Very Famous Man James Arminius, D.D.*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, 1:38.

[66] Arminius, *An Oration*, 1:39.

[67] Arminius, *An Oration*, 1:39. Both Arminius and Gomarus signed the document on August 10, 1605. Regarding the fundamentals of doctrine, Arminius faced Trinitarian controversies as well. In October 1608, the States of Holland requested Arminius to officially respond to a series of articles. These anonymous articles accused Arminius of heretical teachings. One of the accusations was on the Trinity in his dispute with Trelcatius. Arminius was aware that affirming the Trinity was important to uphold orthodoxy. Nonetheless, despite his efforts to avoid accusations of heresy, Arminius faced accusations of Christological heresy for the rest of his life. See Bangs, *Arminius*, 281-82.

[68] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 33.

The second point was on the growing Dutch resentment against the Catholic Hapsburg dynasty in politics. This was intensifying with the religious distrust of Roman Catholicism.[69] In 1555, Philip II of Spain (1527-1598) gained the throne. As a Roman Catholic, Philip II regarded religious conformity as "the desired means to political conformity."[70] Historian Jonathan Israel observed, "Ultimately, Philip hoped to transform the Netherlands into a secure bastion of Spanish power which would simultaneously serve as a bulwark against the spread of heresy."[71]

From the late 1560s, for both political and religious reasons, the Dutch people revolted against Spanish occupation until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This was the Eighty Years' War or the Dutch War Independence (1568-1648). These were times when political and religious alliances were interconnected. Arminius noticed the culture of his time. In 1606, Arminius remarked that a lover of peace "would be stigmatized as a deserter of the common cause, and considered guilty of heresy, a favourer of heretics, and an apostate and a traitor."[72] In these times, "all these enmities, schisms, persecutions, and wars, are commenced, carried on, and conducted, with the greater animosity" in which people consider their enemy "as the most infectious and pestilent fellow in the whole Christian world."[73] Both Dutch and Spanish forces considered each other "an enemy of God, and a servant of the devil."[74] In this regard, the charge of popery was "more than an allegation of doctrinal preference or even ecclesiastical communication," and "always

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[69] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 33.

[70] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 34.

[71] Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 166.

[72] Arminius, *Oration V. On Reconciling Religious Dissensions Among Christians*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, 1:451.

[73] Arminius, *Religious Dissensions*, 1:451.

[74] Arminius, *Religious Dissensions*, 1:451.

carried with it connotations of sedition."[75] It was during these times when Arminius was controversial.

The Reformed Response to Arminius

Perkins: Supralapsarianism

Perkins died before he could respond to Arminius.[76] Nonetheless, his teachings indicate that he honored supralapsarianism while also harmonizing human responsibility. As a Puritan, Perkins was primarily concerned with conversion and godliness.[77] Although godliness indicated a disciplined life of a believer, Perkins believed a biblical experience of God's sovereign grace was vital for assurance. For Perkins, sovereign grace in predestination built the foundation for experimental faith, which provided genuine assurance and hope for the believer.[78]

Perkins examined four positions on predestination in the introduction to *A Golden Chaine* (1591). The first position was the old and new Pelagians, who placed the cause of predestination in man. Here, God ordained men to life or death according to his foreknowledge of their rejection or reception of grace based on free will. The second position was that of the Lutherans, who taught that God chose some to salvation by his

[75] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 34.

[76] For more details, see Karen Bruhn, "Pastoral Polemic: William Perkins, the Godly Evangelicals, and the Shaping of a Protestant Community in Early Modern England," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 72 (2003): 102-27; Charles Robert Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1971).

[77] For an analysis of continuity from Calvin to Perkins, see Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). In general, the Puritans were believers who sought further reform in the Church of England. In this regard, the Puritans were Reformed theologians in England. While the terms *Puritans* and *Reformed* are not identical, this chapter will use then synonymously.

[78] For treatments on Perkins's assurance, see Joel R. Beeke, "William Perkins and His Greatest Case of Conscience: 'How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No,'" *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2006): 255-77; Beeke, "William Perkins on Predestination, Preaching, and Conversion," in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002); J. I. Packer, *An Anglican to Remember: William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer* (London: St. Antholin's Lectureship Charity, 1996); Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990).

mercy but rejected the rest because he foresaw their rejection of grace. The third position belonged to the semi-Pelagian Roman Catholics, who ascribed God's predestination partly to mercy and partly to foreseen preparations and meritorious works. Finally, some taught that God saves some merely of his mercy and damns others entirely because of man's sin. Yet, the divine predestination concerning both has no other cause than his divine will. Of these four, Perkins decided to oppose the former three and vindicate the fourth. Perkins valued divine sovereignty over any other human scheme.

As a supralapsarian, Perkins held that the sovereignty of God and his decree gave God the most glory and the believer the most comfort. For Perkins, it is important to understand predestination in relation to the triune God, from whom the divine decrees flow. According to Perkins, God's glory is "the infinite excellency of his most simple and most holy divine nature."[79] Perkins reflected his fundamental convictions throughout his works. One major example would be his chart of salvation on the golden chain.

In *A Golden Chaine*, Perkins stressed that the will of God in Christ is immovable both in terms of sovereign decree and the execution of that sovereign decree. In the "Table," Perkins charted that God not only decreed man's destiny, but also the means to salvation. Through these designs, the elect might attain eternal life, and without them, the reprobate could not be saved. At the top of the chart is the triune God as the foundational source of the decree. At the bottom is God's glory as the ultimate goal of the decree. On the left is a chain of the steps by which God saves the elect. On the right is a chain by which the reprobate face damnation for their sins. In the center is a chain representing the work

[79] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or the description of theologie: containing the order of the causes of saluation and damnation, according to Gods woord*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthie Minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge* (London: John Legatt, 1631), 1:13, emphasis removed.

of Christ the Mediator in his humiliation and exaltation. Perkins drew lines connecting the work of Christ to every step of the order of salvation to show that all is in Christ.[80]

After introducing Christ as the foundation of election, Perkins explained how the covenants implement predestination. Perkins taught that God set a covenantal context for the fall by establishing a covenant of works with Adam in Eden.[81] Similarly, he made the covenant of grace in a soteriological context of the elect. In a two-sided view of the covenant of grace, the pact between God and man implied a mutual, voluntary interaction. In addition, Perkins added a one-sided view of the covenant as testament. In this context, sinners were made believers through God's sovereign gift of salvation in Christ. Beeke and Jones observed that this "view is consistent with Perkins's emphasis on apprehending Christ to open the door for the application of His benefits."[82]

As a supralapsarian Puritan who valued a godly life, Perkins offered a view of covenant as a means to balance the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Without the covenant of grace, man cannot fulfill God's demands. With it, however, man finds his will renewed through the Holy Spirit and potentially becomes capable of choosing repentance. In Perkins's diagram, man becomes active in "mortification and vivification," which leads to "repentance and new obedience."[83] For Perkins, conversion is the point of reconciliation at which the dualities of the covenant unite. This allowed the covenant to be presented in the form of a voluntary act by the regenerate in their search for personal assurance within God's initiative. The greatest case

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[80] See Perkins's chart in *Golden Chaine*, 1:11. For more details, see Anthony Milton, "Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?" *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9 (1978): 68-81; Mark R. Shaw, "William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590s," *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996): 267-301.

[81] Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

[82] Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, eds., *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 125.

[83] Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, 1:32.

of conscience would be "whether a man be converted and under the covenant of grace."[84] Far from being fatalistic by being supralapsarian, and far from being Pelagian by emphasizing human responsibility, Perkins deployed the covenant as an important means to balance these seemingly conflicting elements.

Synod of Dort

In 1610, a year after Arminius died, his followers articulated Arminianism in the *Five Articles of Remonstrance*. In response, Reformed theologians in Holland, also known as the Dutch Reformed Church, held an international synod to settle the issue. This was the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The Church of England also participated in the synod that culminated in the Canons of Dort.[85] James VI of Scotland, who succeeded Elizabeth I, showed much interest in its process.[86] True to this tradition, Owen and the Puritans supported the fundamentals of the Synod of Dort and identified Arminianism as a major threat.[87]

In the Canons of Dort, the Reformed theologians directly refuted each point of the Remonstrants and provided their position accordingly. Commonly known as the five points of Calvinism, or TULIP, Reformed theologians reached a general agreement on what they considered core teachings of their tradition.[88] The first point was total depravity.

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[84] Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 311.

[85] Reformed theologians in Holland opposed Arminianism and defended the teachings of Calvinism.

[86] For more on British involvement, see Anthony Milton, ed., *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618-19)* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2005).

[87] In this chapter, Puritans are those who desired further reform in the Church of England. For example, John Owen was a Puritan as well as Reformed. He was Reformed in that he believed in Reformed teachings. He was Puritan in that he desired to reform England based on Reformed teachings. For more on the connection between Calvin and the Puritans, see William H. Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists: A Comparison of Their Thought through an Examination of Their Doctrines of the Knowledge of God, Faith, and Assurance" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1973).

[88] Reformed theologians only reached a general agreement at the synod. They did not account for the different nuances of a particular theologian.

In this view, due to original sin, every person was totally depraved and incapable of righteousness. The second point was unconditional election. In this view, God decided to save certain people regardless of their performance. There was no room for human contribution. The third point was limited atonement. In this view, the death of Christ is capable of saving all, but limited in terms of application, since they applied only to the elect.[89] The fourth point was irresistible grace. In this view, God effectually applied saving grace to those whom he has determined to save, that is, the elect, and overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith. The fifth point was perseverance of saints.[90] In this view, since God is sovereign and his will cannot be thwarted by anyone, those whom God has called to salvation will continue in faith until the end. In sum, Reformed theologians affirmed that divine sovereignty, not free will, was the foundation of salvation. From the Reformed perspective, Arminianism was not a mere error but a false doctrine that contradicted Scripture.

Arminianism in England

As the Synod of Dort indicated, the Church of England supported the Reformation. By the early seventeenth century, the majority of theologians in the Church of England were Calvinists, as well as the more educated laypeople. According to Nicholas Tyacke, "Puritanism around the year 1600, and for more than two decades subsequently, was thought of in terms either of a refusal to conform with the religious rites and ceremonies of the English Church, or as a presbyterian rejection of church government by

[89] Calvinists do not believe that the atonement is limited in its value or power, but rather that the atonement is limited in the sense it is intended for some and not all. Some modern theologians use the term *definite* or *particular atonement* to avoid misunderstanding. The content remains the same for both terms.

[90] For a comparison between Lutheran and Calvinist views, see Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2006), 448.

bishops."[91] Prior to Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645), both conformists and nonconformists "all had in common Calvinist predestinarian ideas."[92]

In 1626, however, after the debate at York House, Charles I made a royal declaration that silenced controversial religious matters.[93] Related to this event, Richard Montagu (1577-1641) played a role in stirring controversy through both publications and politics between 1625-1629. Montagu had the open support of bishops John Buckeridge (1562-1631), John Howson (1557-1632), and Laud. Monatgu's *Appello Caesarem: A Just Appeale from Two Unjust Informers* (1625) attacked some Calvinist teachings including the perseverance of the saints.[94] Francis Rous (1581-1659) defended predestination against Montagu in 1626.[95]

According to Patrick Collinson, the declaration's effect was "to silence the Calvinist moral majority from preaching on matters considered of vital importance in the salvation of God's elect children."[96] As a result, the royal proclamation enabled Laud to assume his church policy in the 1630s.[97] Tyacke added that the Arminian policies of

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[91] Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1530-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 133. See also Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). In this work, Tyacke argued that Arminianism was the direct cause of the Civil War instead of Puritanism.

[92] Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism*, 133.

[93] As late as 1628, Reformed theologians still considered Charles I as orthodox. See Patrick Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 97; Anthony Milton, "Arminians, Laudians, Anglicans, and Revisionists: Back to Which Drawing Board?," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78 (2015): 723-43.

[94] Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 130. See also Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon, 1983); Collinson, *Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[95] Francis J. Bremer and Tom Webster, eds., *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 2231.

[96] Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, 97.

[97] Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, 97.

Charles I resulted in "a polarization of extremes unknown since the Reformation."[98] In response, Collinson cautioned that to call Charles I and his allies Arminian, "as contemporaries often did, is to stigmatise, to define the whole in terms of one of its parts and to distract and falsify by importing the name of a foreign theologian whose authority in England was uncertain."[99] Collinson added that some Calvinists "were members of the Anglican Church who could justly claim to have the weight of tradition on their side," as well as embracing "the principles of *jure divino episcopacy*."[100] He also cautioned that Laud's position was not monolithic or representative.[101] Another factor was that Laud was cautious of excessive Arminianism and distanced himself from controversial doctrines.[102] While Arminian influence was true, the degree of its influence requires further research.

For the Reformed theologians, though Charles I and Laud may not have been excessively pro-Arminian, they were still violating reformation principles and disrupting further reform. From Owen's perspective, the Arminian influence was threatening enough for him to break from Oxford. During the 1630s, while at Oxford, Owen witnessed the influence of Arminius through Archbishop Laud. Charles I appointed Laud as university chancellor of Oxford in 1630 and then archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. From Owen's perspective, these Arminians in the Church of England shared many similarities with Roman Catholics. For example, King Charles I had already prohibited discussions of Calvinism after the York House debate in 1626. As the archbishop, Laud started to

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[98] Nicholas Tyacke, "Puritanism, Arminianism, and Counter-Revolution," in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (London: Macmillan, 1973), 129.

[99] Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, 97.

[100] Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, 98. The term literally means "by divine right or authority of the episcopacy."

[101] Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft*, 98.

[102] Kevin Sharpe, "Archbishop Laud and the University of Oxford," in *History and Imagination: Essays in Honor of H. R. Trevor-Roper*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl, and Blair Worden (London: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 146-64. For more details, see Milton, "Arminians, Laudians, Anglicans, and Revisionists," 723-43.

reintroduce Roman Catholic elements to worship. A major danger was that these theologians denied that the pope was the antichrist and recognized the Roman Catholic church as orthodox.[103]

The fact that Charles I silenced discussions of Reformed teachings under debate was alarming enough for Owen. The same applied to Laud. Even if Laud did not fully support Arminianism or Roman Catholicism, his debatable policies and reluctance to embrace Reformed doctrine was disturbing for Owen. Peter Toon, Owen's biographer, observed that Owen "quickly perceived that the central point at issue was the doctrine of predestination."[104] Crawford Gribben also observed that, for Owen, the rise of Arminianism "could mean nothing less than the dismantling of the Reformation."[105] The imposition of Laud against Reformed theology was becoming personal. In 1637, after consulting his father and others, Owen left Oxford. Sarah Cook observed, "The loss of his very membership in the university, at the hands of the state and the state church, must have been a crushing disappointment."[106] While some scholars may differ on the degree of Arminian influence in England, it was substantial enough for Owen to leave Oxford because the Reformation was under attack.

Divine Providence

Development in England

Reformed theologians in England, or Puritans, emphasized the importance of

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[103] Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 2.

[104] Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*: *The Life and Work of John Owen* (1971, repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 8.

[105] Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32.

[106] Sarah Gibbard Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent John Owen, 1616-83" (PhD diss, Harvard University, 1972), 37.

divine providence.[107] Arthur Dent (1553-1607) wrote, "For every one of us, when we do confess God to be almighty, do acknowledge that he by his providence rules everything."[108] In a sermon from Romans 11:36 regarding the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, William Ames (1576-1633) said, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."[109] God is the holy head of humanity who takes care of all his children. God does not force his creatures to act, but rules them "sweetly" according to their nature.[110]

In his *Marrow of Theology*, Ames stated, "The providence of God is that efficiency whereby he provides for existing creatures in all things in accordance with the counsel of his will. . . . [Divine providence] extends to all things, not only general but particular."[111] However, divine providence was not the same as God's predestination or eternal decree. God's providence was the execution of that decree within the time and space of his creation. Ames wrote, "Predestination is a decree of God concerning the eternal condition of men which shows his special glory."[112] He quoted 1 Thessalonians 5:9, which stated, "God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain mercy."[113]

On the meaning of providence, William Pemble (1591-1623) wrote, "Providence is an external and temporal action of God, whereby he preserveth, governeth, and disposeth all and singular things, which are, and are done, both the creatures, and the faculties and

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[107] For more details, see Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

[108] Arthur Dent, *A Sermon of Gods Providence* (London: John Wright, 1609), 2.

[109] William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008), 55.

[110] Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, 58.

[111] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra (Eusden, NY: Pilgrim, 1968), 107.

[112] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 152.

[113] Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 152.

actions of the creatures."[114] In these acts, God "directeth them both to the mediate ends, and to the last end of all, after a set and determinate manner, according to the most free decree, and counsel of his own will; that himself in all things may be glorified."[115] Similarly, Edward Leigh (1603-1671), who served in Magdalen Hall at Oxford as divinity reader and tutor, offered the same definition of providence in teachings.[116]

The Puritans further emphasized that God sustains his creation through his providence. Edward Corbet (d. 1658) added, "Every creature depends on God."[117] As Corbet wrote, "We cannot utter one word, think one thought, turn our eye, or move a finger, without the concurrence of his power who gives life and breath, and all things."[118] From the Puritan perspective, God does not leave the house alone after completion. He continues to sustain the house. All of creation depended on God for their existence, and God accomplishes his purposes through his governing providence.

In his commentary on Ephesians 1, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), Owen's friend, wrote, "He plotteth every thing beforehand. . . . Nothing falleth out but what he had laid the plot before."[119] Goodwin continued that God's "will shall stand, it shall not be resisted," God's providence included very small matters, chance events, and all human

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[114] William Pemble, "A Treatise of the Providence of God," in *The Workes of that Learned Minister of Gods Holy Word, Mr. William Pemble* (London: Tho. Cotes for E. F., 1635), 271. Pemble served as reader and tutor of Magdalen College at Oxford. Later, during the English Civil War, whereas Cromwell dominated the Cambridge area, the Royalists dominated the Oxford area. The Royalists needed finances and asked Oxford for loans in the form of "either cash or plates." See Marian Campbell, "Medieval Founders' Royal Relics: Royal and Episcopal Patronage at Oxford and Cambridge Colleges," in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, ed. Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2002), 128.

[115] Pemble, "A Treatise of the Providence of God," 271.

[116] Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity* (London: A. M. for William Lee, 1654), 1:296.

[117] Edward Corbet, *Gods Providence* (London: Tho. Badger for Robert Bostock, 1642), 3.

[118] Corbet, *Gods Providence*, 4.

[119] Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 1:211.

choices.[120] The counsel of God is his "mature pitching upon what is best" or "a certain judgment of what is best to do," which only God could do.[121] Ultimately, God wills all things to happen, for God did not make choices by selecting the best available option, as if he had limited options. Instead, "all is attributed to his will" and God's counsel formulated how "to do it the best way."[122] The purpose of our existence is God's glory. Goodwin confessed, for "your being, all you are and have, should be to his glory."[123]

Obadiah Sedgwick (1600-1658) added, "God has a providence that extends to all creatures and the details concerning them."[124] He referenced Christ's words from Matthew 10:29-30: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."[125] Based on this passage, Sedgwick offered this definition of providence: "Divine providence is an external action of God whereby He conserves and governs all things wisely, holily, justly, and powerfully, to the admiration of His own glory."[126]

Owen on Providence

In March 1642, Owen produced *A Display of Arminianism* to refute Arminianism. Overall, Owen's first work on Arminianism was passionate but not as theologically articulate. It was more of a general critique of Arminianism than a refined response to a specific position. Nonetheless, Owen clearly presented his anti-Pelagian

[120] Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:212-13.

[121] Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:217.

[122] Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:218.

[123] Goodwin, *First Chapter of Ephesians*, 1:220.

[124] Obadiah Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Kelly Van Wyck (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2007), 8. This book was originally published as *The Doctrine of Providence Practically Handled* (London, 1658). Sedgwick participated in the Westminster Assembly.

[125] Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 9.

[126] Sedgwick, *Providence Handled Practically*, 9.

stance through this work.[127] Philemon Stephens published Owen's work in Paul's churchyard, London.[128] As an active publisher since at least 1622, Stephens's activities indicated "a moderate Puritan and strongly anti-Catholic inflection."[129] Gribben commented, "Unusually, given the economics of the early modern book trade, we can assume that Stephens's outputs were a guide to his own convictions, and that he was in close contact with important sections of his market."[130] In fact, Stephens's shop was a "known meeting place for the godly" in the 1630s.[131] Stephens was an innovative publisher who maximized returns. Gribben commented that Stephens was one of the earliest publishers to "use the blank leaves at the end of text blocks to advertise other titles, and book historians have identified one of his printings of Owen as including one of the earliest examples of this practice."[132]

Owen, like most of his Reformed brethren, identified Arminianism as a Pelagian threat. The two were not identical in that Arminianism seemed to emphasize grace more than Pelagianism. But fundamentally, Arminianism also denied the predestination of God, just like Pelagianism.[133] Eventually, free will or human responsibility played a role in

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[127] Carl Trueman commented that Owen's arguments "exhibit a considerable amount of continuity not only with the anti-Pelagian thrust of Reformation Protestant thought but also with the doctrinal patterns and vocabulary of the medieval scholastics, whose philosophical insights inform Owen's arguments concerning God's sovereignty at almost every turn." Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 111.

[128] For more on Philemon Stephens, see Daniel Doerksen, *Picturing Religious Experience: George Herbert, Calvin and the Scriptures* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 35-36.

[129] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 45.

[130] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 45.

[131] Jacqueline Eales, "A Road to Revolution: The Continuity of Puritanism, 1559-1642," in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (Baisngstoke, UK: Palgrave, 1996), 199.

[132] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 45. See Archer Taylor, *Book Catalogues: Their Variety and Uses* (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1957), 83-84.

[133] John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 10:2.

salvation. From this, Owen saw a link between the two and regarded Arminianism as Pelagian. Owen noted, "Arminianism became backed with the powerful arguments of praise and preferment and quickly prevailed to beat poor naked truth into a corner."[134] For this reason, Owen insisted upon "the lovers of the old way to oppose this innovation."[135] In October 1642, Owen witnessed the outbreak of the Civil War in England. Seeing as Charles I and Laud were considered anti-Christian Arminians, in addition to personal contexts, it was natural for Owen to oppose Arminianism.

Owen echoed other Puritans when he wrote providence as "an ineffable act or work of Almighty God, whereby he cherisheth, sustaineth, and governeth the world," in which God directs everything "agreeably to those natures which he endowed them withal in the beginning, unto those ends which he hath proposed."[136] God the Creator continued to work after completing creation and governed all things, even human suffering or evil. Owen added, "There is nothing which he hath made, that with the good hand of providence he doth not govern and sustain."[137]

For Owen, there were both primary and secondary causes in divine providence. Citing Hebrews 1:3, Owen wrote that God "upholdeth all things by the word of his power."[138] Owen stated that God upholds all things in "their being, natural strength, and faculties."[139] God works in and through secondary causes. He rules all things to make them accomplish His purposes for His glory. Owen acknowledged that understanding how God works through secondary causes was "beyond the reach of mortals," but divine

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[134] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:8.

[135] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:8.

[136] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:31.

[137] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:32-33.

[138] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:34.

[139] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:34.

providence was clearly revealed in Scripture.[140] On Proverbs 16:33, Owen wrote that although the lot might be cast, "the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."[141] He argued that God was involved with his creation in every way.

For Owen, his understanding of God's being was the foundation of divine sovereignty. According to Carl Trueman, Owen held that "God can be described using the scholastic notion of pure or simple act."[142] For example, on God's simplicity and his decrees, Owen explained, "The decrees of God, being conformable to his nature and essence, do require eternity and immutability as their inseparable properties. God, and he only, never was, nor ever can be, what now he is not."[143] According to Trueman, simplicity meant that "God is fully actualized being, with no potential to change and no cause either logically or ontologically anterior to Himself," which Owen employed to connect other important Reformed doctrines.[144]

Owen on Arminianism

Owen provided some points against Arminians. Owen saw a connection between predestination and perseverance. According to Owen, if "final perseverance in faith and obedience" were the cause of election, "then none can be said in this life to be elected; for no man is a final perseverer until he be dead, until he hath finished his course and consummated the faith."[145] In short, Arminianism effectively denied perseverance by denying predestination.

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[140] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:35.

[141] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:35.

[142] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 111. For more on the development of divine simplicity, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 3:271-97.

[143] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:19-20. While divine simplicity may seem impersonal, Owen used this definition to portray a personal God as he saw in Scripture.

[144] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 111.

[145] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:63.

In 1602, to refute the predestination Perkins, Arminius argued that if God "from eternity, without any pre-existence of sin in His own prescience, determined to display His glory by mercy and by punitive justice," and "decreed to create man good, but mutable; ordained also that he should fall," Arminius judged that such an opinion could not be established by Scripture.[146] God is "the first and supreme efficient cause of all His own acts and works, and the sole and only cause of many them."[147] Since this was the case, God has "always set before Himself as the supreme and ultimate end the manifestation of His own perfection, that, His own glory."[148] As "the first and supreme cause," God is "not moved to action by anything extraneous" to himself, since he "cannot have been the prime and supreme cause" otherwise.[149] In other words, for Arminius, reprobation of people who have not yet sinned was contrary to God's nature.

Owen offered his view of election as "an eternal act of God's will. . . . Every cause must, in order of nature, precede its effect; nothing hath an activity in causing before it hath a being. . . . Operation in every kind is a second act, flowing from the essence of a thing which is the first."[150] In this case, "all our graces and works, our faith, obedience, piety, and charity, are all temporal, of yesterday."[151] Therefore, works "cannot be the cause of, no, nor so much as a conditional necessarily required for, the accomplishment of an eternal act of God, irrevocably established before we are."[152] In other words, election was from God's eternal will. Since humanity was temporal, human works cannot serve as the cause of God's eternal act.

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[146] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 276.

[147] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 276.

[148] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 276.

[149] Arminius, *Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet*, 276.

[150] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:63.

[151] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:63.

[152] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:63.

Trueman identified a major difference between Owen and the Arminians. According to Trueman, Owen regarded predestination "as originating solely in the being of God and not as the result of God's foreknowledge or of any human act of faith."[153] From Owen's perspective, the Arminian notion of election, "allowing as it does for a realm of action outside the direct will of God," was incompatible with his notion of election, "whereby the source of any action or event's being cannot ultimately derive from anywhere other than God."[154]

Consequently, Owen repudiated the Arminian view of foreknowledge: "If predestination be for faith foreseen," certain things will follow.[155] First, election would not be of God, "who calleth us with a holly calling," since "it must be his whose faith is, that doth believe."[156] Second, in such a case, "God cannot have mercy on whom he will have mercy, for the very purpose of it is thus tied to the qualities of faith and obedience, so that he must have mercy only on believers antecedently to his decree."[157] Third, such a case hinders God "from being an absolute free agent, and doing of what he will with his own."[158] Foreknowledge made predestination conditional, which in turn took out God's sovereign work. God saw "no faith, no obedience, perseverance, nothing but sin and wickedness" in humanity, "but what himself intendeth graciously and freely to bestow upon him."[159]

In terms of principle, the effects of election "cannot be the causes of election" because "nothing can be the cause and the effect of the same thing, before and after itself.

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[153] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 122.

[154] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 122.

[155] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:64.

[156] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:65.

[157] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:65.

[158] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:65.

[159] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:65.

. . . All our faith, our obedience, repentance, good works, are the effects of election, flowing from it as their proper fountain, erected on it as the foundation of this spiritual building."[160] Owen explained, "God bestoweth faith only on them whom he hath pre-ordained to eternal life."[161] Citing Romans 8:29-30, Owen added that God "also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son."[162] In this regard, faith was an outcome of election.

In sum, Owen saw that Arminians made salvation dependent on free will rather than divine sovereignty, and thus were Pelagian. From Owen's perspective, the Arminians made human agency the foundation of salvation by attacking predestination. Even if Arminians believed in the Trinity, the ultimate decider of salvation was not God but the human believer. Thus, Owen identified the Arminian attacks on predestination as a Pelagian threat to the Reformation of England. By defending predestination, Owen clarified that God is the final judge who elects believers to salvation.

Perseverance

Development in England

Reformed theologians emphasized that the elect of God were preserved in this salvation and persevere in faith, not by their own merits or strength but by God's free mercy in Christ. The Puritans stressed that all who are truly brought into union with Christ can never be severed from him and will forever continue in that union with all its benefits. John Flavel (1628-1691) answered the question regarding the end of perseverance: "It is

[160] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:65.

[161] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:66. On Arminius, who denied the explanation of election from Perkins, Owen called him a "sophistical heretic" who "falls foul on the word of God" (10:66).

[162] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:66.

a steady and constant continuance of Christians in the ways of duty and obedience, amidst all temptations and discouragements to the contrary."[163]

In 1652, Cromwell appointed Owen as the vice-chancellor of Oxford. Previously, Owen left Oxford to avoid Arminianism. Now, he returned to combat Pelagian errors and promote the Reformation of England. In 1654, Owen published *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* in response to John Goodwin (1594-1665), who argued that true believers could lose their salvation in *Redemption Redeemed* (1651).[164] Goodwin argued for the possibility of a true believer's defection from Christ because former believers were once dedicated yet became indifferent. In essence, from Goodwin's perspective, believers are responsible to work their salvation without the direct aid of God. Believers ultimately decide their salvation.

On the other hand, from Owen's perspective, the same Spirit who provided regeneration will surely preserve believers to the end. On the influence of Goodwin, Owen noted, "Nothing no great, not considerable, not some way eminent, is by any spoken of him, either consenting with him or dissenting from him."[165] As Oxford Reformer, Owen found it necessary to respond. His decision was voluntary in that there was no official request from Parliament.[166] While repudiating Arminianism, Owen nonetheless emphasized human responsibility. Brian Kay observed, "Most of Owen's use of

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[163] John Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 6:206.

[164] For more on Goodwin, see John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2008); Thomas Jackson, *The Life of John Goodwin* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872); Dewey D. Wallace Jr., "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965), 242-47. For clarification, John Goodwin was an Arminian, whereas Thomas Goodwin was Reformed. Thomas Goodwin was Owen's friend under Cromwell's leadership and participated in the Savoy Assembly.

[165] John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 11:13.

[166] By contrast, Parliament requested Owen to repudiate Socinianism. In 1655, Owen published *Vindiciae Evangelicae*.

Bradwardine actually comes in what is arguably his own most pastorally-motivated work, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*."[167]

Immutability of God

In October 1658, Owen participated in a synod of churches meeting at the Savoy Palace in London. He was appointed to the committee with other theologians. They prepared the draft of The Declaration of Faith and Order, or the Savoy Declaration (SDF). Owen and his colleagues affirmed perseverance. SDF 17.2 stated that perseverance depended not upon human free will "but upon the immutability of the decree of election; from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, and union with him; the oath of God; the abiding of his Spirit; and of the seed of God within them."[168]

Goodwin argued that perseverance was false because many believers defect from the faith. Owen acknowledged the existence of backsliders and apostates, but cautioned not to assume that all who profess faith in Christ are true believers. For Owen, Scripture taught true holiness in "an evangelical sense, for inward purity and real holiness."[169] By providing examples from Scripture, Owen examined passages describing people who fell away from the faith, concluding that they had never been true believers. He referred to apostates like Judas and Simon Magnus as "false hypocrites" because they

[167] Brian Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 95. See also Henry M. Knapp, "John Owen's Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6: Eternal Perseverance of the Saints in Puritan Exegesis," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34 (2003): 29-52; Suzanne McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election: Divine Election as Representing God to Others and Others to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Thomas Bradwardine (1300-1349) was an English cleric who served at Merton College. As one of the Oxford Calculators, Bradwardine took a logical and mathematical approach to philosophy. He defended predestination against Pelagians. Bradwardine argued, "God does not grant man eternal life on account of his future good works, but, on the contrary, He grants the good works that may bring him to eternal life." See Thomas Bradwardine, "The Cause of God against the Pelagians," in *Forerunners of the Reformation*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 160.

[168] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A. G. Matthews (London, 1658), 97.

[169] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:89.

have "changed as to their use, but not to their nature.[170] Thus, for Owen, biblical references to hypocrites did not falsify the perseverance of true believers.

One of the factors Owen considered was the immutable nature of God: since God was immutable, so were his promises in the covenant. Perseverance was among those promises that form the heart of the covenant of grace.[171] The covenant then becomes an unconditional promise of grace and perseverance for the believer through the mediatorial work of Christ.[172] As Mediator, Christ satisfied God's "vindictive justice," which referred to "a vindication of the sovereignty of God over the sinning creature."[173] Christ also formed the foundation of God's "distributive justice," which referred to the "perfection of his nature whereby he rendereth to every one according to what either his vindictive justice on the one side, or his uprightness and faithfulness on the other."[174] Christ has also "procureth the Holy Spirit" for believers.[175]

Owen emphasized the importance of the intercessory work of Christ regarding perseverance. In reference to John 17, he said that Christ's prayer was "a manifest declaration on earth of that which Christ lives in heaven to do."[176] If perseverance were false, Owen stated, then "either Christ is not heard in his request, or the Father cannot keep them by his power."[177] Owen observed, "That which the Lord Jesus, as mediator,

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[170] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:90. Owen mentioned 2 Pet 2:1 as a reference. The Geneva Bible translated, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you: which privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that hath bought them, and bring upon themselves swift damnation" (2 Pet 2:1).

[171] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:227.

[172] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:289.

[173] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:293-94.

[174] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:296.

[175] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:308.

[176] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:367.

[177] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:368.

requesteth and prayeth for continually of the Father, according to his mind, in order to the accomplishment of the promises made to him and covenant with him"[178] because Christ prays for the things the Father has willed in the covenant of redemption, which he fulfilled. In this regard, Christ continues to "intercede for the perseverance of believers, and their preservation in the love of the Father unto the end: therefore, they shall undoubtedly be so preserved."[179] In short, believers persevere in faith because the immutable God made promises in Christ, who continues to intercede for believers as the Mediator.

Covenant of Grace

Both Westminster and Savoy theologians affirmed the importance of the covenant of grace in perseverance (WCF 17.2; SDF 17.2). The agreement of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity was intimately connected with the covenant. This was because God revealed the order of the cooperative work of the Trinity through the incarnate Mediator in the covenant. In the opening statement on perseverance and the covenant of grace, Owen wrote, "The *principium essendi* of this truth, if I may so say, is in the decrees and purposes of God; the *principium cognoscendi*, in his covenant, promise, and oath, which also add much to the real stability of it."[180]

Trueman identified two correlations between two concepts. God's promises derived their efficacy and their reliability "from the fact that they are based upon God himself" and upon the agreements between the persons of the Godhead regarding the salvation of humanity.[181] Trueman added that Owen used the principles of being "as a means of safeguarding the personal God of history and of salvation, and he is able to do

[178] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:369.

[179] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:369.

[180] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:205. In this statement, *principium essendi* means "principle of its being or essence," and *principium cognoscendi* means "principle of knowing it." The former refers to God. In this case, the essence refers to God's decrees and purposes. The latter refers to God's revelation. In this case, revelation refers to God's promises.

[181] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 143.

this because of the important relationship in which God's attributes stand to the covenant of grace and thus to God's saving purposes."[182] Owen shared that he had five foundations for perseverance: God's nature, purposes, covenant, promises, and oath.[183] Based on Trueman's observations, the five are really one, reflecting the two principles of the covenant of grace.[184] As a promise of salvation, the covenant of grace reflected God's immutability, love, and justice because the covenant was anchored in the being of God. The Trinitarian God, who is eternal and immutable, created the covenant of grace to redeem humanity. Since God is immutable, humanity can truly receive assurance and hope of salvation as revealed in the covenant of grace.

Thus, in Owen's understanding, Scripture taught that the covenant was immutable because God founded it. Owen provided a few points. First, the covenant promised "the removal of all causes of alteration."[185] Second, considering that God and man were divided by sin, there was a need for "some mediator, some middle person, in whom and by whose blood" the covenant "must be ratified."[186] Third, the "faithfulness of God" promised to keep the covenant.[187] Once again, Owen made it clear that the Trinitarian God was involved in believers' lives through the covenant.

Since the immutable God made the promises in Christ, there was ground for perseverance. SDF 17.2 affirmed, "The nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof."[188] Thus, Owen saw that Scripture promised the perseverance of true believers. Specifically, he described them as "gospel

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[182] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 143.

[183] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:120.

[184] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 144.

[185] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:210.

[186] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:210.

[187] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:211.

[188] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 97.

promises," which are the "free and gracious dispensations" and discoveries of God's will and love to sinners through Christ "in a covenant of grace."[189] In these promises for believers, God "engageth himself to be their God, to give his Son unto them and for them, and his Holy Spirit to abide with them."[190] Owen called them "gospel promises, not as though they were only contained in the books of the New Testament, or given only by Christ," but rather "to distinguish them from the promises of the law."[191]

Owen provided several points on gospel promises. First, gospel promises "are free and gracious as to the rise and foundation of them."[192] Second, he called gospel promises "discoveries and manifestations of God's good-will and love."[193] Third, gospel promises "are made unto sinners, and that as sinners, under no qualification whatever."[194] Fourth, such "discoveries of God's good-will are made through Christ, as the only medium of their accomplishment, and only procuring cause of the good things."[195] Fifth, gospel promises "are discoveries of God's good-will in a covenant of grace."[196] Sixth, on the "foundation of the certainty and unchangeableness" of gospel promises, Owen noted that the "engagements" and "undertakings" of God were "the stock and unmovable foundation."[197] In addition, the Holy Spirit "often backs them with that property of God,

[189] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:227.

[190] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:227.

[191] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:227.

[192] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:227.

[193] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:229.

[194] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:229.

[195] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:230. Owen then described Christ as "the great messenger of the covenant."

[196] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:231.

[197] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:231.

'He cannot lie.'"[198] Seventh, God promised to be the God of his people in the covenant.[199] For Owen, the Trinitarian God worked in the gospel promises of perseverance through the Mediator of the covenant.

The Holy Spirit

As a covenant promise, Reformed theologians affirmed the importance of the Holy Spirit in perseverance. Westminster theologians stated that perseverance depends "upon the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them."[200] Similarly, SDF 17.1 stated, "They whom God hath accepted in his beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."[201] Nonetheless, Reformed theologians understood the difficulties of reality. SDF 17.3 stated how believers could "fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit," but still "shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."[202]

Owen also affirmed the importance of the Holy Spirit in perseverance. As Kay wrote, Owen emphasized that "the same Spirit who provided them habitual grace of regeneration will certainly preserve them to obedience to the end."[203] Owen stated, "To have this stamp of the Holy Ghost, so as to be an evidence unto the soul that it is accepted

[198] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:231.

[199] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:232.

[200] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechism* (Westminster Assembly, 1646), 17.2.

[201] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 96.

[202] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 97.

[203] Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 95.

with God, is to be sealed by the Spirit; taking the metaphor from the nature of sealing."[204] He added that people used seals "on that which they appropriate and desire to keep safe," which explained how believers were sealed "with God's mark, as his peculiar ones."[205] When God seals believers, they are marked for God "to be heirs of the purchased inheritance, and to be preserved to the day of redemption."[206] Therefore, for Owen, the Trinitarian God was the foundation of perseverance because he decided to save the elect. Owen wrote, "The Father gives the elect into the hands of Christ to be redeemed; having redeemed them, in due time they are called by the Spirit, and marked for God, and so give up themselves to the hands of the Father."[207]

Owen affirmed "a personality ascribed to the Holy Ghost."[208] The Spirit does "not assume our nature" but still "dwells in our persons, keeping his own and leaving us our personality infinitely distinct."[209] Owen called this "a spiritual union."[210] Through this union, believers have union with Christ. This union "is a participation of the divine nature."[211] In Owen's understanding, the Spirit is a fountain of grace who "ceases not until our spiritual life be consummated in eternity."[212] On the promises made by Christ, Owen summed, "He gives his Holy Spirit to his; who lives in them, and gives them such

[204] John Owen, *Of Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 2:242. Owen published this work in 1657.

[205] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:243.

[206] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:243.

[207] Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:243.

[208] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:334.

[209] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:336.

[210] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:336.

[211] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:337.

[212] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:354.

continual supplies of grace."[213] In short, from the Reformed perspective, perseverance was connected with Christ and the Holy Spirit. Perseverance was Trinitarian.

Conclusion

Overall, Reformed theologians treasured predestination as a major component of covenant theology. Predestination was directly linked to salvation. Predestination also revealed how a theologian viewed God's nature. In the Reformed tradition, God wills whatever he desires to do. In his providence, God executes his plan for creation and predestined certain people to salvation and others to condemnation. However, this was not evil because God does so out of his holy nature. God's predestination is part of his goodness. Contra Arminianism, Owen saw predestination not as a necessary evil, but a manifestation of the holy nature of God expressed through his providence. It was not because God had limited options, but because God wills everything according to his nature. Since God is good, predestination further reflected the goodness of God as he executes his plans for creation.

Reformed theologians connected predestination with the Trinity to illustrate how the Trinitarian God was involved in the salvation of sinful humanity. Predestination was rooted in the Trinity and a major tenet of the Reformation. Therefore, an attack on predestination was considered a threat to the Reformation. Arminius opposed predestination because he considered it contrary to Scripture. Naturally, Arminius faced opposition from Reformed theologians. For Owen, the Arminians influenced Oxford with their teachings. He saw the Arminians undoing the Reformation of England. In response, Owen vindicated predestination as a scriptural teaching.

The Reformed theologians affirmed that God decided who would be among the elect and the reprobate. The Reformed theologians taught predestination as a means of opposing any notion of human merit in salvation. There was no human merit involved.

[213] Owen, *Saints' Perseverance*, 11:354.

Predestination had Trinitarian implications. Predestination was also linked to perseverance. The Puritans understood that life was difficult, but ultimately there was hope. This was not because believers could save themselves; rather, the Trinitarian God faithfully worked in the lives of believers through the covenant by the Spirit. The confessional statements reflected the views of Owen and that of his colleagues.

In short, the Trinity was involved in the salvation of humanity through the covenant. Believers could persevere because the Trinitarian God worked in them through covenant. Without the Trinity, covenant theology would lose its foundation. Since God predestined the elect through the covenant, predestination had a Trinitarian foundation. In short, the Trinity was the foundation of all theology, and so Owen vindicated Trinitarian predestination to oppose Pelagianism. Therefore, Owen vindicated Trinitarian predestination as his basis for anti-Pelagian polemics.

CHAPTER 5

DIVINE AGENCY

Introduction

John Owen (1616-1683) pursued an anti-Pelagian reformation of England throughout his life and career. However, despite taking an anti-Pelagian stance, Owen emphasized the importance of a godly life that promoted the reformation cause. For example, after the execution of Charles I in 1649, Owen affirmed that "the magistrate ought not to make provision of any public places for the practice of any such worship as he is convinced to be an abomination unto the Lord."[1] To specify, Owen suggested, "Let Papists, who are idolaters, and Socinians, who are anthropolatrae, plead themselves."[2] For Owen, the doctrine of the Trinity was the ultimate foundation of covenant theology. Since the Socinians denied the Trinity, they directly attacked the reformation cause.

In the Reformed tradition, the Trinity built the foundations of covenant theology, which served to harmonize divine and human agencies. Thus, Owen opposed Socinians, who claimed to support the Reformation but deviated by attacking the Trinity. On the one hand, Arminians affirmed the Trinity but attacked predestination, in which the Trinity was involved. On the other hand, Socinians were more blunt and radical in their repudiation of the Trinity. Either way, Owen took issue with both Arminian and Socinian misunderstandings of the Trinity. Owen and his colleagues considered such deviation critical enough to consider them Pelagian.

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[1] John Owen, *Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 8:189.

[2] Owen, *Righteous Zeal*, 8:194.

This chapter examines Owen's Trinitarian theology in polemics against Socinians. There are four major parts. Two parts are dedicated to each of Owen's opponents. The remaining two parts are dedicated to Owen's position on Trinitarian theology. These examinations will reveal that Owen was developing his theology within a tradition. Opposing Roman Catholicism was necessary but not enough. To be considered Reformed, one had to oppose Roman Catholicism and support the fundamentals of the Reformed tradition, such as the Trinity. The primary conviction of the Reformed tradition was not anti-popery but their commitment to the Trinity and other important teachings in Scripture. Owen was Trinitarian throughout his works.

Socinianism

Early Development

Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) and Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), originators of Socinianism, taught that the Trinity was contrary to Scripture. Both born in Italy, they believed that the Trinity was a false doctrine to repudiate. Laelius, the uncle of Faustus, was a reformer in Italy. Laelius was on friendly terms with reformers such as Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) of Zurich and Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), Luther's colleague. But Laelius questioned some of the central tenets of the Genevan Reformation after exchanging letters with John Calvin (1509-1564).[3] He began to work out his doubts on paper, and after his death in 1562, Faustus inherited these writings.

In Italy, however, Faustus Socinus sensed a threat because of his views. Near the end of 1575, he left Italy and fled to Basel. However, the anti-Trinity position of Socinus was not welcome. For safety concerns, Socinus moved to Poland in 1579. At the time, Poland was not an ultra-Catholic nation. Sigismund II, a liberal ruler, provided a

[3] For Laelius Socinus, see Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 1:240-47; Mark Taplin, *The Italian Reformers and the Zurich Church, c.1540-1620* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003), 56-58; Frederic Church, *The Italian Reformers, 1534-1564* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 133-35, 161-64.

refuge for those who dissented from tradition, such as Anabaptists and anti-Trinitarians.[4] Due to their politically and religiously "exclusivistic" teachings, political authorities considered Anabaptists a "civic liability."[5] Anabaptists also became controversial for teaching believer's baptism that focused on personal transformation before baptism. Such a teaching excluded infant baptism and stirred up controversy.[6] Despite differences in teachings, both Anabaptists and anti-Trinitarians found refuge in Poland. Socinus founded the Racovian Academy in Rakow, where he further developed his position.

In 1605, the Socinians produced the *Racovian Catechism*, a compendium of Socinian teaching, through the Racovian Academy. The catechism was essentially anti-Trinitarian. Scholars provided observations on Socinianism. Philip Dixon noted, "The Socinians refused to accept any authority other than that of Scripture, and they insisted that disputes about the meaning of Scripture were to be settled by reason alone."[7] Sarah Mortimer explained, "Christianity, for Socinus, was a religion which took seriously human responsibility and freedom of choice. Christ came to persuade men to live moral lives and to encourage them by providing the perfect example of such a life."[8] If believers truly worked for holiness, God would bless them accordingly. For the Socinians, the Trinity was contrary to Scripture as well as to sound reasoning. In 1609, the Socinians dedicated the catechism to James I of England. The Socinians mistakenly believed James I to be "a

[4] For example, Menno Simons (1496-1561) was Trinitarian. He considered an attack on the divine nature of Christ "as an effort to crack the very foundation of the Christian faith." See William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 171.

[5] Anabaptists were part of the radical reformation. See Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 192.

[6] Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 196.

[7] Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 40.

[8] Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22.

model of religious toleration."[9] James was displeased and ordered the burning of the catechism.

The Socinians were unique in that they denied the Trinity. Early Socinians already challenged Continental Reformed churches. The first Socinians formulated their doctrine in Poland after failing to transform Italy. The founding leader, Faustus Socinus, influenced by his anti-Trinitarian uncle Laelius, left Italy to avoid persecution. Socinus developed his doctrine in Poland, which the Unitarian Church of Transylvania would embrace. Socinus consistently emphasized that religious faith and virtuous actions must be voluntary as a person unsatisfied with Reformed theology.[10] For example, if people were committed to following Christ, God would forgive their sins and give them eternal life.[11] True believers had to obtain salvation voluntarily.

Unsurprisingly, the Socinians also attacked other Reformed teachings. In addition, Socinus emphasized divine justice. For example, Christ died to inspire a hope of salvation and assistance in our struggles.[12] There was no forgiveness of sins through satisfaction because free forgiveness and satisfaction were incompatible. To the Socinians, someone who could freely forgive does not need satisfaction. Since God could freely forgive, Christ's death has no infinite value. However, if Christ's death had infinite value, then this meant that God's infinite nature itself suffered death, which was absurd.[13] Instead, the death of Christ was unique as a prime example, though it had no infinite value. In this manner, the Socinians attacked the Reformed faith.

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[9] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 40.

[10] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 16.

[11] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 20.

[12] Thomas Rees, *The Racovian Catechism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1992), 298.

[13] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 305.

Racovian Catechism

In the *Racovian Catechism*, the Socinians made it clear they were against the Trinity. For the Socinians, the Trinity was contrary to both Scripture and reason. As Dixon noted, "For them the doctrine of three persons in one God was tantamount to asserting that there were three individuals in the Godhead and hence three individual gods."[14] Since this was the case, the Socinians saw the Trinity as a demonstration of anti-Christian corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church. John McLachlan assessed, "Essentially, Socinianism is a development of humanism and the Reformation, a heretical child of both. Socinian writers considered themselves as representing a further stage in the Reformation, completing the work which Luther and Calvin had only begun."[15] In this regard, the Socinians respected the reformers and were aware of the traditional Reformed views on the Trinity. They hailed Socinus as "the Reformer of the Reformers."[16] The Socinians observed that traditional Christians affirm the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that "they infer that these three compose that one God."[17]

The Socinians taught that Christ was divine, but not in the Trinitarian way. The Socinians clarified, "If by the terms divine nature or substance I am to understand the very essence of God, I do not acknowledge such a divine nature in Christ; for this were repugnant both to right reason and to the Holy Scriptures."[18] On the other hand, if one intended "by a divine nature the Holy Spirit which dwelt in Christ, united, by an

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[14] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 41-42.

[15] John H. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 4. Based on their respect for Luther and Calvin, the Socinians saw themselves as reformers.

[16] Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*, 42. Another verse stated, "*Tota ruet Babylon; destruxit tecta Lutherus, Calvinus muros, sed fundamenta Socinus.*" The verse translated, "All Babylon shall fall; Luther destroyed the roofs, Calvin the walls, but Socinus the foundations." Translation mine. See McLachlan, *Socinianism*, iv.

[17] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 34. Many Socinian theologians, including Faustus Socinus, were involved in producing the catechism. To reflect their involvement, I will use the plural form to outline their position.

[18] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 55.

indissoluble bond, to his human nature, and displayed in him the wonderful effects of its extraordinary presence," the Socinians acknowledged such a nature.[19] They believed that "next after God it belonged to no one in a higher degree."[20] In short, Christ had supreme authority which was inferior only to God. In this regard, Christ had the second highest rank.

The Socinians provided a few reasons on the unreasonableness of the Trinity. First, "two substances endued with opposite and discordant properties," such as those of God and man, "cannot be ascribed to one and the same individual, much less be predicated the one of the other."[21] One cannot simply call "one and the same thing first fire, and then water, and afterwards say that the fire is water, and the water fire."[22] For the Socinians, the Trinity was confusing and unreasonable because the notion of divine and human natures were "essentially different" from the notion of body and soul.[23] They reaffirmed, "Again, neither the soul nor the body, separately, constitutes a person: but as the divine nature, by itself, constitutes a person, so also must the human nature, by itself, constitute a person; since it is a primary or single intelligent substance."[24] In other words, for the Socinians, Christ cannot be divine and human at the same time.

Arminius

From the Reformed perspective, Arminianism shared similarities with Socinianism for being Pelagian.[25] Both denied predestination and perseverance, despite

[19] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 55.

[20] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 56.

[21] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 56.

[22] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 56.

[23] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 56.

[24] Rees, *The Racovian Catechism*, 57.

[25] For those interested in Trueman's detailed treatment on Owen, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998).

their differences on the Trinity.[26] Nonetheless, Arminius demonstrated that simply affirming the Trinity does not indicate a Reformed stance. On the contrary, a misunderstanding of predestination indicated a misunderstanding of the Trinity. As Leiden professors Jacob Arminius (1559-1609) and Luke Trelcatius Jr. (1573-1607) indirectly engaged in another controversy on the Trinity from 1605 to 1606. Trelcatius Jr. was the new professor who succeeded his deceased father, Luke Trelcatius Sr. (1542-1602), who died in the plague.[27] One student examined competing positions from the two professors and sparked the dispute.[28] Trelcatius taught that the Son of God was properly described as "God from himself."[29] The same student heard Arminius denying such a view.

Arminius explained his understanding of personhood in the Trinity. The term *person* did not mean "appearing in a mask," a mere representation of another.[30] It was rather a reference to "an undivided and incommunicable subsistence, of a nature that is living, intelligent, willing, powerful, and active."[31] These properties are attributed "to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" in Scripture.[32] As the first person of the Trinity, the Father begat the Son "by communicating to him his Deity, which is his own nature."[33] A person could "beget" or "be begotten," but the nature applied to neither, but rather

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[26] Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, eds., *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 167.

[27] Both were Calvinists.

[28] Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32.

[29] Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 32. The exact dates do not appear in the work, but Arminius wrote these disputations at Leiden (37).

[30] James Arminius, *Twenty-Five Public Disputations*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:138.

[31] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:138.

[32] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:138.

[33] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:138.

"communicated."[34] For Arminius, when rightly understood, this communication "renders vain the objection of the Anti-Trinitarians" who accused traditional Christians of worshipping multiple gods.[35] This generation is "an internal operation and *ad intra*" and therefore "from all eternity."[36]

On the Son, Arminius described him as "the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, the Word of the Father, begotten of the Father from all eternity."[37] The Son proceeded from the Father "by the communication of the same Deity which the Father possesses without origination."[38] On the phrase "proceeded from the Father by generation," Arminius explained, "He is the Son, not by creation out of non-entities, or from uncreated elements; not by adoption, as though he had previously been some other things than the Son."[39] Rather, "as the Son," he is "by nature a partaker of the whole Divinity of his Father."[40]

On the Holy Spirit, Arminius recognized something with the wording. In its "first act and essence," the word *spirit* is "most subtle and simple."[41] But in its "second act and efficacy," the word *spirit* is "exceedingly active, that is, powerful and energetic."[42] While there are numerous descriptions of *spirit*, it is first "ascribed to God."[43] As "a pure and simple act," the Spirit "is the First and Supreme Being, as well as the First and

[34] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:139.

[35] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:139.

[36] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:139.

[37] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:139.

[38] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:139.

[39] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:140.

[40] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:140.

[41] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:140.

[42] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:140.

[43] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:145.

Supreme Agent."[44] By these expressions, Arminius observed that the Holy Spirit is "the Person by whom God the Father and the Son perform all things in heaven and earth" and who is "not only Holy in himself, but likewise Sanctifier of all things."[45]

Arminius recognized the personhood of the Spirit. The Spirit is "subsistent and a Person" and not a mere "quality and property" of God.[46] The Spirit, as a person, could also sense grief and blasphemy.[47] As a divine person, the Spirit is recognized "in the same series with the Father and the Son" throughout Scripture, such as baptism and the benediction.[48] As the "Third Member," the Spirit is third "in order, but not in time and degree."[49] In addition, "the Spirit of the Father and of the Son is said to be sent and given by the Father and the Son, and that the Father and the Son are said to work by Him."[50] Then Arminius concluded, "From all these particulars it clearly appears, that the Holy Ghost is of the same Divinity with the Father and the Son, and is truly distinguished by the name of God."[51] Overall, Arminius determined that the Trinity "contains a mystery which far surpasses every human and angelical understanding" if considered "according to the relation among them of origin and procession."[52] In believers' lives, the Trinity produced fruits "to the praise of God the Creator, the Son the Redeemer, and of the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier."[53] Despite accusations of heresy, Arminius upheld the Trinity.

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[44] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:145.

[45] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:145.

[46] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:145.

[47] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:147.

[48] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:147.

[49] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:147.

[50] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:147-48.

[51] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:147-48.

[52] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:149.

[53] Arminius, *Public Disputations*, 2:149.

During his Leiden years, possibly between 1603 and 1605, Arminius composed public disputations as a professor.[54] Throughout his works, Arminius was committed to classical Trinitarian orthodoxy. For example, Arminius affirmed that the *homoousios* of the Nicene Creed was regulative and thereby demonstrated his connection to the Reformed tradition.[55] As Richard Muller commented, "Arminius was certainly not a crypto-Catholic or a Jesuit sympathizer."[56] Although his teachings on Christ and the Trinity "did differ with Reformed theology," Arminius was not Socinian but Trinitarian.[57] Similar to other Reformed theologians, Arminius emphasized a scriptural basis. Nonetheless, from the Reformed perspective, his attacks on predestination signaled indirect assaults on the Trinity.[58]

Both Arminians and Socinians emphasized human responsibility as a primary contributor or the essence of salvation. Nonetheless, Arminians were inherently anti-Trinitarian. Arminius himself affirmed the Trinity. But the Arminians attacked predestination and other major tenets of the Reformed tradition, thereby undermining the Trinity, the foundation of those teachings. Arminians were more sinister, whereas the Socinians went even further and directly denied the Trinity. The degree of the undermining may differ, but both Arminians and Socinians undermined the Trinity. Consequently, Owen regarded both Arminians and Socinians as Pelagian opponents. From the Reformed

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[54] Richard Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 25.

[55] Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4:59-74. For an analysis on the variants of Union of Christ in Reformed theology, see J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

[56] Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 29.

[57] Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 30.

[58] See chap. 4. of this diss.

perspective, to the extent a theologian promoted human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty, to that degree he undermined the Trinity.

Socinianism in England

Development in England

John Biddle (1615-1662) was among the pioneering theologians of Socinianism in England. He was born in 1615 as the first son of Edward and Jane. He was baptized in January 1616 at St. Mary's church in Wotton under Edge, Gloucestershire. In 1633, Biddle entered Magdalen Hall, Oxford, and matriculated on June 27, 1634. In the same year, Biddle translated Virgil's *Bucolics* and the first two satires of *Juvenal* and published them together. Biddle obtained his Bachelor of Arts in June 1637, proceeded into Master of Arts in 1641, and later took a post as a schoolmaster at the Crypt School in Gloucester.[59] While serving in this position for three years, Biddle delved into Scripture and built up a non-trinitarian or antitrinitarian position. On the Trinity, Biddle believed that after "fervently imploring Divine Illumination," the Trinity was illogical and nonbiblical.[60]

In May 1644, the Presbyterian clergy reported Biddle's conclusion to the civil magistrates in Gloucester, resulting in Biddle's first incarceration. In this meeting, Biddle confessed, "There is but one Infinite and Almighty Essence, called God. . . . As there is but one Infinite and Almighty Essence, so there is but one Person in the Essence."[61] From this, Biddle summed, "Our Savior Jesus Christ is truly God, by being truly, really, and

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[59] Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38. See also J. Hay Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913); A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005).

[60] John Biddle, *The Faith of One God, Who Is Only the Father; and of One Mediator between God and Men, Who Is Only the Man Christ Jesus; and of One Holy Spirit, the Gift (and Sent) of God; Asserted and Defended* (London: 1691), 4-5.

[61] John Biddle, *A Short Account of the Life of John Bidle, M. A. Sometimes of Magd. Hall, Oxon* (London: 1691), 5. Though the modern spelling would be 'John Biddle,' I retained the original spelling of the work.

properly united to the only Person of the Infinite and Almighty Essence."[62] In other words, Biddle denied the three persons in the Godhead. He honored Christ as someone united to God, but not a divine person in the Trinity. According to John McLachlan, Biddle expressed gratitude to Luther and Calvin for "cleansing Christianity" from the Roman Catholic pollutions, "yet they did not go far enough."[63]

Biddle was brought before the Parliamentary Committee for examination in the same month. He was forced to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. At the examination, Biddle acknowledged that there are "three in that divine essence commonly called Persons," and he was allowed to return to the Crypt School.[64] In December 1644, Biddle wrote some "pithy Arguments against the supposed Deity of the Holy Spirit."[65] As a result, he was examined by the Parliamentary Committee and imprisoned until his release in December 1645.[66]

In September 1647, Biddle published a work that refuted the deity of the Holy Spirit.[67] In Argument Ten, he referred to the apostles as evidence that the Holy Spirit was not God. Biddle argued,

> The major is plain, for how can any be Disciples and Believers, according to the phrase of Scripture, and not believe in Him that is God? The minor is proved thus, Men have not so much as heard whether there were an Holy Spirit, and yet have been Disciples and Believers. . . . They have not believed in the Holy Spirit, and yet have been Disciples and Believers.[68]

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[62] Biddle, *A Short Account of the Life of John Bidle*, 5.

[63] McLachlan, *Socinianism*, 178.

[64] Biddle, *The Faith of One God*, 5.

[65] Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops Who Have Had Their Education in the University of Oxford; To Which Are Added the Fasti, or Annals of the Said University*, ed. Philip Bliss (London, 1813-1820), 3:594.

[66] Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 39.

[67] John Biddle, *Twelve Arguments Drawn Out of the Scripture, wherein the Commonly Received Opinion Touching the Deity of the Holy Spirit, Is Clearly and Fully Refuted* (London, 1647).

[68] Biddle, *Twelve Arguments*, 11.

Biddle clarified, "Certainly, the Apostle had a greater care both of the Truth of God, and the salvation of men, then to do so."[69] Biddle denied the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit. In response, Parliament ordered that the work be burned, and Biddle was brought for examination by the Committee of Plundered Ministers.[70] The Westminster Assembly was alarmed by Biddle's anti-Trinitarianism and sought to have him executed.[71] In May 1648, Parliament also passed the "Draconick Ordinance" that registered anti-Trinitarianism as a capital offense.[72]

However, Biddle had other anti-Trinitarians before him. Prior to Biddle's English translation of the *Racovian Catechism*, English Trinitarians faced anti-Trinitarian challenges, although there was little open advocacy. For example, in 1612, two anti-Trinitarians, Bartholomew Legate (1575-1612) and Edward Wightman (1580-1612), were executed for Arianism. In 1614, English authorities burned the Latin *Racovian Catechism* and banned its publication. Nonetheless, anti-Trinitarian books spread in England. Richard Muller observed that Biddle had no knowledge of Socinian writings but became anti-Trinitarian as he studied Scripture. Already an anti-Trinitarian, however, Biddle eventually embraced Socinianism when it spread and published the English translation of the *Racovian Catechism*.[73]

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[69] Biddle, *Twelve Arguments*, 11.

[70] In 1649, Charles I was executed. Cromwell was then officially the ruler of England. Owen and his Reformed colleagues envisioned their reform under his leadership. Many Reformed doctrines underwent challenges. See William S. Babcock, "A Changing of the Christian God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century," *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 133-46.

[71] Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 39. The Westminster Assembly was a gathering of Reformed theologians and members of Parliament. They assembled from 1643-1653 to reform the Church of England.

[72] Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 3:595.

[73] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:94.

Before the publication of the *Racovian Catechism*, Thomas Lushington (1590-1661) translated and published the Socinian commentary on the *Epistle to the Hebrews*.[74] In 1646, Thomas Edwards (1599-1647) reported that there was a flourishing trade of Socinian works among English and Dutch merchants. In 1650, perceiving danger, Francis Cheynell (1608-1665) remarked, "Therefore they who deny the Godhead of Christ, must rest upon their own righteousness and obedience for justification, and salvation, as the Socinians do, and then Christ will profit them nothing, because they overthrow the New Covenant and are fallen from Grace."[75] He identified the danger of Pelagianism in Socinianism. In 1672, Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) commented that Socinian books sold as openly as the Bible. By 1680, George Ashwell (1612-1694) complained that Socinian books had been widely dispersed. Given Owen's involvement in ministerial training at Oxford, it was natural for Owen to be sensitive to anti-Trinitarian thought. As Lee Gatiss observed, Owen was concerned with Socinian influences.[76]

Given its anti-Trinitarian stance and its attacks on other Reformed doctrines, it was not surprising for Owen and his colleagues to examine and refute Socinianism. Biddle dismissed Reformed theology and the subsequent councils/confessions as "fancies and interests of men."[77] In short, Socinianism was a comprehensive assault on the Reformed faith. Thus, Owen's involvement was not merely an abstract issue. It was both polemical

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[74] Lee Gatiss, "Socinianism and John Owen," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 4 (2016): 47. The publication date was not provided in the article.

[75] Francis Cheynell, *The divine trinunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or, The blessed doctrine of the three coessentiall subsistents in the eternall Godhead without any confusion or division of the distinct subsistences or multiplication of the most single and entire Godhead acknowledged, beleeved, adored by Christians, in opposition to pagans, Jewes, Mahumetans, blasphemous and antichristian hereticks, who say they are Christians, but are not declared and published for the edification and satisfaction of all such as worship the only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all three as one and the self same God blessed for ever* (London: 1650), 428.

[76] Gatiss, "Socinianism and John Owen," 47.

[77] John Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 12:7. Due to limited space, as well as the fact that Owen used Scripture throughout his works, I will not include Owen's quotes from Scripture unless necessary.

and practical. In Owen's eyes, Socinianism posed a qualitative threat to the Reformed tradition, although they were small in quantity.

As the "Oxford Reformer" (as Gribben put it), Owen promoted "Calvinistic piety"[78] that transcended the political and cultural division of the university. In 1651, for example, Owen outlined the qualities of "Calvinistic piety" when he preached. These sermons, which formed the basis for his later work *Of Communion with God* (1657), combined the theological mode with the devotional.[79] The invasion of Socinianism, however, brought about theological turmoil. After Biddle published the English translation of the *Racovian Catechism* in 1652, Owen took a polemical stance. Here, it is important to note that Socinian influence was present in England since a publication of a catechism generally required interaction with related authors and/or their works.

In response, Owen sought to deal with Socinianism. By March 1651, Parliament ordered Owen to scrutinize the *Racovian Catechism* for doctrinal errors. In addition, the Council of State commissioned Owen to refute Biddle's *Twofold Catechism*, which was deemed dangerous to both church and state. In response to the Socinian errors, Owen produced *Vindiciae Evangelicae* in 1655.[80] This was not because the Socinians were the only theological threats, but because they directly undermined the Reformation of England. For example, the Anglican John Edwards (1637-1726) noted that a man was either a

[78] Although not identical, "Calvinism" is used synonymously with "the Reformed" in this research. Calvinists were part of the Reformed tradition, but they adhered more specifically to the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564). On the other hand, Reformed theologians included those who followed Calvin, as well as other reformers such as Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) and Martin Bucer (1491-1551).

[79] Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 130.

[80] Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 182-83. Although *Vindiciae Evangelicae* was primarily about Christ, Owen also addressed the Holy Spirit. For Owen, while Christology was central, the whole Trinity had to be addressed.

Calvinist or a Socinian and defended the Trinity. In short, Socinianism disrupted Trinitarians both inside and outside the Church of England.[81]

Oxford Trinitarians

In the 1630s, English theologians became involved in European efforts to reunite the Reformation cause and articulate its fundamentals. In these years, Englishmen also came to see the value of Socinianism as a polemical target. Mortimer noted that "the Socinians were one of the few safe targets left" after the authorities banned controversial doctrines.[82] While this view has merit, Reformed theologians of England were striving to transform the nation, in which doctrine was a significant concern. For example, English delegates participated in the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) against Arminianism. In this regard, by attacking the distant Socinians, English reformers hoped to safeguard the central doctrines of the Trinity and other relevant teachings and thereby assist in their opposition against Arminianism and Catholicism.

In 1626, Charles I made a royal declaration that silenced controversial religious matters in England.[83] He also appointed Laud as university chancellor of Oxford in 1630 and then archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. But some Oxford reformers were persistent. John Prideaux (1578-1650), Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, was concerned with Socinianism. Prideaux realized that many of his English colleagues lagged behind their Continental counterparts in refuting Socinianism.[84] Prideaux decided to take on this task, probably influenced in his decision by the delicate political and ecclesiastic situation in

[81] Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 221.

[82] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 52.

[83] As late as 1628, Reformed theologians still considered Charles I as orthodox. See Patrick Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 97. Predestination was an important topic.

[84] For more details, see Kristine Louise Haugen, "Transformations of the Trinity Doctrine in English Scholarship," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 149-68.

which he found himself.[85] Prideaux was a devout Calvinist who opposed the policies of Archbishop Laud, and consequently, he found himself increasingly isolated in Oxford. Throughout the 1630s, Laud had put him under intense pressure to conform, but Prideaux fought for the Reformation cause. After Charles I made the Proclamation of 1626, it became challenging to criticize anti-Calvinism directly. In this situation, the Socinians were relatively easier to refute. Not only did everyone agree that they were heretical, even blasphemous, but it was entirely possible to oppose them using principles central to Reformed theology.[86]

To better inform his audience, Prideaux provided his them with an overview of Socinianism, as well as responses provided by Lutheran and Reformed scholars. But he was not content with the existing responses and decided to offer his own position against Socinianism. [87] He wanted to show that Socinianism could be prevented if students used the necessary theological tools to understand Scripture properly.[88] Prideaux argued that the Socinians fell into heresy due to their misunderstanding of Scripture, "a fault which stemmed from their poor grasp of the fundamental terms of metaphysics."[89] In 1632, he expressed indignation that the Socinians refused to admit the basic principles of metaphysics, including the distinctions between essence and subsistence, nature and suppositum. In 1634, in one sermon, Pideaux insisted upon correct definitions of "persona, suppositum and individuum."'[90] The implication was that these were stable, universal, and

[85] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 54.

[86] Nicholas Tyacke, "Religious Controversy," in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 4, *Seventeenth-Century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 587-89.

[87] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 55.

[88] John Prideaux, *Viginti-Duæ Lectiones de Totidem Religionis Captibus* (Oxford, 1648), 262-63; 277. For more details, see Christopher Hill, "'Reason' and 'Reasonableness' in Seventeenth-Century England," *The British Journal of Sociology* 20 (1969): 235-52.

[89] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 55.

[90] Prideaux, *Viginti-Duæ Lectiones*, 271.

necessary terms, and he maintained that the doctrine of the Trinity was coherent when used correctly.

Thomas Barlow (1608-1691), the Oxford reader in metaphysics and Owen's mentor during his student years, also repudiated the Socinians in the 1630s. Barlow decided to use metaphysics to discuss Socinianism. Instead of writing a new work, Barlow republished the work of the German Lutheran Christoph Scheibler (1589-1653). Scheibler's metaphysics were similar to those of the renowned Catholic theologian, Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). Scheibler had originally presented his textbook as a contribution to the Lutheran battle against the Calvinists.[91] Scheibler argued against Calvinist teachings on the Trinity and the union of Christ's natures, which was unacceptable for Barlow. Barlow redirected the target from the Calvinists to the Socinians. He replaced Scheibler's preface with one of his own in which he emphasized that it was the Socinians who had their Christology wrong and had to be countered.[92]

Owen: Christology

Goodwin: The Spirit's Role

Since the Socinians denied the Trinity, they deviated from Reformed teachings on Christ and the Spirit. Reformed theologians connected predestination to Christ, the second person of the Trinity. The Father and the Son agreed to redeem humanity in the covenant of redemption. In the covenant of grace, Christ served as the Mediator between God and man. In other words, predestination had Christological implications. As a friend of Owen and a participant of Savoy, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) shared the fundamentals of the Reformed tradition concerning Christology. Both Owen and Goodwin

[91] Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 55.

[92] Thomas Barlow, *Exercitationes aliquot Metaphysicae, De Deo* (Oxford, 1638).

were unique in that they connected the Holy Spirit to Christ when articulating their Christology.[93]

Goodwin taught that the Spirit sanctified the Son's human nature and constituted Him as Christ. The Spirit was the "immediate former" of the human nature of Christ.[94] The Spirit was also the "uniter of it to the divine, and sanctifier of it with all graces."[95] Though "the Son of God dwelt personally in the human nature," his "habitual graces" were from the Holy Spirit."[96] Owen had similar views. Stephen Holmes noted that, for Owen, Christ's human nature was sanctified by the Spirit: "The command to 'be holy as I am holy'" has a new force.[97] Now, the Jewish man Jesus Christ was worth imitating "because he was 'like us in every way, sin apart,' and so this Christology leads directly to a robust account of sanctification, a topic of particular interest to the Reformed, and another facet of their dispute with the Lutherans."[98]

Indeed, Owen's understanding of the Spirit's work in Christ is the consistent outworking of the Reformed insistence on both the integrity or perfection of the two natures and the unity of the person. He argues that "the only singular immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with

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[93] See Alan Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); Paul Blackham, "The Pneumatology of Thomas Goodwin" (PhD diss., University of London, 1995).

[94] Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 6:50.

[95] Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, 6:50.

[96] Goodwin, *Of the Holy Ghost*, 6:50. Michael Horton also made the connection between Christ's humanity and the Holy Spirit in a modern context: "This emphasis on the salvific humanity of Christ also opens up a wider space for pneumatology, pointing to the Spirit rather than merely the divine nature as the focus of Jesus' dependence." See Michael Horton, *Lord and Servant* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 176.

[97] Stephen Holmes, "Reformed Varieties of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*," in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Murray A. Rae (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), 81-82. The term literally means communication of properties. In theology, *communicatio idiomatum* is a Christological concept about the interaction of deity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

[98] Holmes, "Reformed Varieties," 81-82.

himself."[99] Thus, the Holy Spirit is the "immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature. Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit."[100]

Oliver Crisp admitted that "it could be argued that it is the Holy Spirit that enables the human nature of Christ to perform miracles, rather than Christ's divine nature."[101] However, he is careful to note, "This is not a conventional view of the means by which Christ was able to perform miracles. A conventional view would claim that Christ was able to perform miracles in virtue of the action of his divine nature in and through his human nature in the hypostatic union."[102] Crisp implied that Owen's Christology was unconventional. Nonetheless, both Owen and Goodwin were participants at Savoy. In other words, Owen's Reformed colleagues saw the differences as a difference in nuance rather than substance.

Owen: Trinitarian Agency

For Owen, predestination was closely linked with Christology. From Owen's perspective, though Arminians affirmed the Trinity, their attacks on predestination indicated a misunderstanding of Christ. In 1647, after leaving his Fordham ministry in 1646, Owen published another work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, which centered around the controversies of Thomas Moore's Arminianism. In this work Owen defended Christ's payment for sin.[103] According to Thomas Edwards (1599-1647), Moore was a "great Sectary, that did much hurt in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and

[99] John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 3:160.

[100] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:162. See also Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 195.

[101] Oliver Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25.

[102] Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 25.

[103] For our purposes, this chap. will highlight the divine nature of Christ.

Cambridgeshire; who was famous also in Boston, Lynn, and even in Holland, and was followed from place to place by many."[104] Owen showed urgency in that Arminianism had become a local threat that was "daily spreading of opinions here opposed about the parts where I live, and a greater noise concerning their prevailing in other places."[105]

Owen identified several effects of the death of Christ. First, Christ achieved reconciliation with God "by removing and slaying the enmity that was between him and us."[106] Second, Christ achieved justification "by taking away the guilt of sins, procuring the remission and pardon of them, redeeming us from their power, with the curse and wrath due unto us for them."[107] Third, Christ achieved sanctification "by the purging away of the uncleanness and pollution of our sins, renewing in us the image of God, and supplying us with the graces of the Spirit of holiness."[108] Fourth, Christ achieved adoption "with that evangelical liberty and all those glorious privileges which appertain to the sons of God."[109] Fifth, the works of Christ "leave us not until we are settled in heaven, in glory and immortality for ever."[110]

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[104] John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:140. The prefatory note allowed both *More* and *Moore*. As the writer of the preface, Edwards also opposed Arminianism. For our purposes, I will not include Owen's quotes from Scripture. For more on the atonement, see Edwin E. M. Tay, *The Priesthood of Christ: Atonement in the Theology of John Owen (1616-1683)* (Bucks, UK: Paternoster, 2014); Richard Daniels, *The Christology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2004); W. Robert Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 133-71; Joseph Uvai Mutisya, "Divine Sovereignty in John Owen's Doctrine of Atonement" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2015); Robert Keith McGregor Wright, "John Owen's Great High Priest: The Highpriesthood of Christ in the theology of John Owen, (1616-1683)" (PhD diss., The Iliff School of Theology and University of Denver, 1989).

[105] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:158.

[106] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:158.

[107] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:158.

[108] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:158.

[109] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:159.

[110] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:159.

Owen then identified that Arminians denied limited atonement. For Owen, if that were the case, "God and Christ failed of their end proposed, and did not accomplish that which they intended, the death of Christ being not a fitly-proportioned means for the attaining of that end."[111] Owen opposed Arminianism based on Trinitarian agency in the covenant. As Carl Trueman demonstrated, Owen's theology was profoundly Trinitarian applied to other theological issues.[112]

Within this context, Owen explained the role of each member of the Trinity in redemption. Simply put, the Father sends the Son and appoints him as Savior and Mediator. The Son humbles himself and bears the task of oblation and intercession. The Holy Spirit works in the incarnation, Christ's earthly ministry, and his resurrection. Owen asserted that the "chief author" of redemption is the "whole blessed Trinity; for all the works which outwardly are of the Deity are undivided and order being observed."[113] For Owen, the unity of the Trinity in working out redemption was essential to particular redemption (or the definite atonement). Indeed, the Son is the means by which the Father saves the elect. The Son and the Holy Spirit act in perfect harmony with the Father according to the divine eternal purpose of redeeming the elect.[114]

For Owen, the Trinitarian dynamic was clear. On the death of Christ, Owen introduced two general aspects. First, the Father and Christ intended it. Second, the death of Christ was effectually fulfilled and accomplished.[115] After introducing the divine intent for crucifixion, Owen explained the effects of Christ's death. According to Owen, first there was mankind's reconciliation with God. Second, there was justification. Third,

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[111] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:159.

[112] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 133.

[113] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:163.

[114] Jonathan D. Moore, "The Extent of the Atonement: English Hypothetical Universalism versus Particular Redemption," in *Drawn into Controversie*, ed. Michael Haykin and Mark Jones (Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 128.

[115] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:157.

there was sanctification. Fourth, there was adoption. Fifth, the effects of Christ's death do not leave us.[116] In short, the effects of Christ's death are there because the triune God intended and accomplished them.

Then Owen showed his concerns for proponents of general ransom, which claimed that Christ died to redeem everyone. According to proponents of general ransom, Christ not only seeks to redeem the church, the elect of God, but also the remaining posterity of Adam. For Owen, if this were the case, every person had to be saved. This meant that God failed to accomplish the purpose of Christ's death[117]; yet this was unthinkable for Owen. In Owen's understanding, the triune God was at work. In fact, Owen put the Trinity as the chief author/agent of mankind's redemption. On the agency of the Father, Owen assigned two peculiar acts related to the blood of Christ: the sending of the Son into the world for employment and the laying of punishment on the Son for sins.[118] In other words, the Arminian position of general atonement, like their position of conditional predestination, ultimately undermined the Trinity.

On the agency of the Son, Owen described it as a voluntary or willing undertaking of the office imposed on him. The works ascribed to the Son are the incarnation, oblation, and intercession.[119] Here, Owen described Christ as the propitiatory sacrifice for sins. The oblation is the foundation of intercession. Christ authoritatively presented himself before the Father and procured all spiritual things by his oblation.[120] On the agency of the Holy Spirit, there are also three works: the incarnation of the Son, oblation of the Son, and resurrection of the Son. By oblation, Owen called for a notion of

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[116] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:159.

[117] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:159.

[118] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:163.

[119] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:174.

[120] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:177.

particular offering and whole humiliation by voluntary obedience.[121] By intercession, Owen stated the application of all good things and every act of Christ's exaltation. By exaltation, Owen included the resurrection and all his majesty.[122] Owen described oblation as the basis for intercession; intercession was procured by oblation.

While oblation and intercession are distinct acts in themselves, Owen described a union between them. First, both are intended for obtaining and accomplishing the effectual bringing of many souls to glory. Second, both are intended to apply heavenly goods to the believer. Third, the oblation of Christ is the foundation of intercession, through which spiritual gifts are bestowed. For Owen, since Christ is perfect, the elect, for whom Christ died, actually have all good things purchased by Christ's death.[123] Spiritual benefits are not potential, but actual.

For Owen, to offer and to intercede, to sacrifice and to pray, are both acts of the same sacerdotal office. Both oblation and intercession require Christ to be a priest. Both are required to exercise the office. As the high priest, Christ must be an advocate who is the propitiation for sins. Due to its nature, Owen ascribed oblation and intercession to the priestly office of Christ.[124] So when Christ performs his office as high priest, the whole Trinity is involved and makes the redeeming work effectual.

On priesthood, Owen asserted that Arminianism made Christ an unfaithful priest. A sacrifice and intercession are "both acts of the same sacerdotal office, and both required in him who is a priest; so that if he omit either of these, he cannot be a faithful priest for them. . . . [Christ must be] an advocate to intercede, as well as offer a propitiary sacrifice, if he will be such a merciful high priest over the house of God."[125] A separation

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[121] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:179.

[122] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:180.

[123] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:181.

[124] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:183.

[125] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:183.

of "the death and intercession of Christ, in respect to the objects of them, cuts off all that consolation which any soul might hope to attain by an assurance that Christ died for him. . . . [The doctrine of] general ransom is an uncomfortable doctrine, cutting all the nerves and sinews of that strong consolation" from God who is "so abundantly willing that we should receive."[126]

As examined, the unity of the Godhead was crucial in man's redemption. God is at work—all three persons in unity. Owen names their functions. Here, the mediating role of Christ, through the offices, is essential. In sum, while the triune God worked out man's redemption, Jesus Christ carried out the task of redemption through the offices. It was Christ who bore the specific task of the atonement. It was Christ who died at the cross and communicated the triune God to humanity. As the Mediator, there are two major works of Christ. They are oblation and intercession.[127] Underlying these great works was the Trinitarian agency.

Although the Arminians did not assault Trinitarian agency itself, Owen immediately saw that the Arminian attack on Reformed theology threatened their understanding of the nature of Christ's work. The Arminian view undermined penal substitution and actual reconciliation, and instead posited an atonement which merely opened the way for God to offer a potential reconciliation conditioned on human response. In addition, Owen saw English hypothetical universalists moving in the same direction with their espousal of "a twofold reconciliation and redemption," thereby conceding that it is possible to have a satisfaction for sins that does not satisfy, as well as a reconciliation

[126] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:186.

[127] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:179.

that does not in fact reconcile.[128] For Owen, however, Scripture does not know such a view of redemption.[129]

Consequently, Owen goes to considerable lengths in defining the precise nature of Christ's satisfaction and reconciliation over against Grotian and Socinian teachings, as well as those of hypothetical universalism. For Owen, Christ died in the place of particular individuals, not just in an unspecific sense to produce general effects. Owen also argued that Christ's satisfaction is not simply a divinely determined equivalent (*solution tantundem*), but the same thing (*solution ejusdem*) as sinners deserve. By *solution ejusdem* Owen meant "essentially the same in weight and pressure, though not in all accidents of duration and the like."[130] For Owen, this constituted the perfection of Christ's sacrifice. As Jonathan Moore observed, "there was a relaxation of the law in so far as God accepts a substitution, but as concerning the satisfaction made by the substitute, there was no relaxation made."[131] Christ genuinely suffered God's wrath and secured God's elect from condemnation. It is not one's faith or response to Christ, but Christ's death itself that constitutes the power of satisfaction.

In short, Owen regarded a potential reconciliation impossible to achieve and meaningless. This is because reconciliation is the immediate effect and product of Christ's death. Therefore, reconciliation cannot be universal. Since some people are judged, claiming that everyone must be saved implies that Christ's death does not secure everyone's salvation. To consider Christ as the Mediator, such a notion also implies that Christ was supposed to secure everyone, but his oblation and intercessions were ineffective. This was unacceptable for Owen, who understood the atonement in light of

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[128] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:223. For more on hypothetical universalism in England, see Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[129] Moore, "The Extent of the Atonement," 132.

[130] Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:269-70.

[131] Moore, "The Extent of the Atonement," 133.

the Trinity. In Owen's understanding, the nature of the atonement demands that God actually saves whom he chooses.[132] Since the triune God planned redemption, God's people will surely be saved.

Owen: Christ and Spirit

Vindiciae Evangelicae: The Person of Christ

In March 1653, under the leadership of Cromwell, Owen published a refutation of Socinianism.[133] Owen's Reformed colleagues, such as Matthew Poole (1624-1679) and Francis Cheynell (1608-1665), responded to Socinianism. But Parliament instructed Owen "to prepare a definitive refutation of Socinian ideas."[134] In this work, Owen repudiated the teachings of the Socinians, "particularly the authors of the Racovian Catechism, John Crellius, and F. Socinus himself."[135] In 1655, Owen published another response to Biddle.[136] In this work, he directly responded to Biddle and addressed the issues of Socinianism. It was not an extensive work on the Holy Spirit, but Owen addressed the Spirit with regards to Christ, the second person of the Trinity. By doing so, he essentially repudiated Socinianism as well, since Biddle was its proponent.[137]

In *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, Owen provided his explanations on the meaning of personhood and divine persons within the Trinity. In response to Biddle, and ultimately Socinus, Owen explained the distinction of persons. First, Owen explained that the distinction of persons did not prove the difference of essence (divine nature) in any way.

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[132] Moore, "The Extent of the Atonement," 134.

[133] Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, 10:495.

[134] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 145.

[135] Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, 10:506. Owen primarily focused on the atonement. While relevant to Owen's theology, the topic itself is beyond the scope of this chapter.

[136] John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae or, the Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 85.

[137] Owen also refuted the teachings of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645).

Just because Christ is the Mediator, this did not mean Christ had a different nature from the Father. Owen admitted that there is only one person in one substance in a finite and limited sense. For a finite being, there is only one person in one essence. But the same principle cannot be applied to an infinite being.[138]

Another observation was that distinction and inequality in respect to the offices do not take away "equality and sameness of nature and essence." Both the Father and the Son are the same in terms of essence. Only in terms of the office is Christ inferior. In addition, the advancement and exaltation of Christ as Mediator is consistent with the essential honor he has in the Godhead. Though Christ was humbled, he was still one and the same. Christ is the one Lord of all Christians. Therefore, Christ is equal to the Father. In respect of personality, Christ is distinct from the Father, but Christ and the Father are one in essence (nature). The same applies to the Spirit. In short, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one.[139]

Therefore, Christ's office as Mediator does not hinder his equality with the Father. It is clear in Scripture (John 13:13; Acts 7:59; Rev. 22:22) that Christ is Lord who alone is worthy of worship. The apostle Thomas also confessed Jesus as his Lord and God. Other passages which pronounce there is no other God further show that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one.[140] There is one God in three distinct persons. Owen's Socinian opponent John Biddle claimed Christ is inferior to the Father because of the office of servanthood. In response, Owen made a similar distinction between office and essence.

On the servanthood of Christ, Benedict Bird commented that this subordination was "only in the economy, meaning God's activity vis-à-vis the created order, not within the personal relations or very being of God. . . . Owen always insists on the ontological equality of the persons of the Trinity, thereby rejecting not only Socinian subordinationism,

[138] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:170-71.

[139] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:171.

[140] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:172.

but all forms of subordinationism."[141] In this regard, Owen explained the unique tasks of Christ while affirming his deity.

Consequently, on Christ performing miracles, Owen acknowledged that the miracles themselves do not prove his deity. But in the case of Christ, the Father was with Christ when Christ performed miraculous works (John 10:37-38).[142] When Christ performed miracles, "the Father was so with him as that he was in him, and he in the Father," and there was a "divine indwelling which oneness of nature gives to Father and Son."[143] Therefore, the miracles are the works of Christ. At the same time, however, they are also the works of the Father. Owen connected the works of Christ to the works of the Father. The fact that Christ did the Father's will does not mean the Son is inferior. It rather means that the Son is one with the Father. The Son always does the Father's will because of oneness. As the begotten Son, the Mediator does everything in the Father's name, which means that the Son is one with the Father in terms of essence.[144]

Vindiciae Evangelicae: The Person of the Holy Spirit

Whereas the Socinians denied the person of the Holy Spirit, as if he were merely an energy force, Owen upheld the orthodox view. Owen affirmed the deity of the Holy Spirit. In his description, there is one Holy Spirit of Christians who is "exempted from all created spirits" and "reckoned as the object of worship."[145] The prerogative of the Holy Spirit is that of God. Only the Spirit of God could know the depths of God,

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[141] Benedict Bird, "John Owen's Taxonomy of the Covenants: Was He a Dichotomist or a Trichotomist?," *Foundations* 78, no. 5 (2020): 60.

[142] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:175. The King James Version translated, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:37-38). Owen directly quoted these two verses.

[143] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:175.

[144] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:176.

[145] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:334.

which is beyond the comprehension of angels and men.[146] In other words, to know all things is to be omniscient, which is an attribute of God. In addition, the Holy Spirit created, formed, and adorned this world, and is, therefore, God. Next, the Holy Spirit regenerates. As the regenerator, the Holy Spirit illumines, comforts, and guides believers, which all belong to God. Owen added that some passages explicitly call the Holy Spirit God.[147] In addition, the Holy Spirit dwells in believers, as God dwells in a temple. As the author of all grace, the Holy Spirit sanctifies, comforts, and mortifies sin.[148]

Against Socinian claims that the Holy Spirit is inferior to the Father for being sent, Owen observed that it is an analogy. Indeed, the Father sent the Holy Spirit, but this does not mean the Holy Spirit is bound to space and time. This is because the presence of God is everywhere. In fact, like Christ, the Holy Spirit engaged in the salvation of mankind, which is something only God can do.[149]

If the Holy Spirit had limits, and thus had limits in bestowing gifts, then believers remain helpless.[150] Unlike the Socinians, Owen contended that the general benefits of the Holy Spirit are common to all believers in respect of substance, though there may be differences in degree because the Holy Spirit is divine and does what he

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[146] For more on Owen's treatment of divine mystery, see Henry M. Knapp, "Understanding the Mind of God: John Owen and Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Methodology" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2002); Andrew Michael Leslie, "'Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ': Divine Authority, Scripture, and the Life of Faith in the Thought of John Owen (1616-1683)" (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2013); Coleman Cain Markham, "William Perkins' Understanding of the Function of Conscience" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1967).

[147] Owen did not quote from the Geneva Bible or the King James Version. Owen's Bible quotes stated, "By his Spirit hath he garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13); "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job 33:4); "Except we be born of water and of the Spirit, we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

[148] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:336.

[149] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:338.

[150] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:339.

wills.[151] If the Holy Spirit had limits, Owen pointed out that, then baptism is also in peril. If the Holy Spirit were a mere creature, then believers are baptized in the name of a creature, which is blasphemy. But Owen knew this is not what Scripture taught. As testified in Scripture, Owen pointed that Scripture is a production of God because the human authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit.[152]

As Owen affirmed the person of the Holy Spirit, he also affirmed the impotency of man in the things of God. Unlike the Socinians, who claimed that people had to work their way to receive the Spirit, Owen denied any notion of works-righteousness. The world cannot receive the Spirit. This was not because believers are not sincere enough, but because of the impotency of natural man.[153] As mentioned earlier, Owen was aware that there was only person in one existence in terms of finite personhood. Yet the divine mysteries are different from human schemes. From this, Owen acknowledged the plurality of the persons within the Godhead without denying monotheism. In short, Owen clearly accepted the divine mysteries despite limitations on his part as a finite human being.

Regarding Owen's view of the Trinity, Muller included Owen in the context of the Western tradition.[154] Robert Letham emphasized the influence of the Eastern tradition.[155] He posited that Owen's focus on the three persons "was and is missing from the West in general."[156] Letham pointed out that Holy Spirit received no mention in the

[151] Owen did not quote from the Geneva Bible or the King James Version. Owen's Bible quote stated that "if we have not the Spirit of Christ we are none of his" (Rom 8:9).

[152] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:340.

[153] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:344.

[154] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics.*

[155] Robert Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 186. For Letham's own articulation instead of a response, see Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 108-26.

[156] Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 196.

covenant of redemption. He added that the Western tradition has a weakness that "subordinated and depersonalized as merely the bond of love between the Father and the Son."[157] However, for Bird, Owen taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have "a single divine will, even as they covenant together, since they are of one divine essence or nature."[158] Indeed, Owen spoke of the wills of the Father and the Son as a single will when he said, "The will of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is but one."[159] Owen stated in respect of their "distinct personal actings," this single will "is appropriated to them respectively, so that the will of the Father and the will of the Son may be considered [distinctly] in this business."[160] For Owen, the single will of God had distinct applications to each divine person.

Owen did not mention the Holy Spirit as a member of the covenant, but this was not negligence. As Bird wrote, Owen did not mention the Spirit in the covenant "because only the Son was to take on human nature, an act which for God must necessarily involve condescension and humiliation."[161] As the Son took on human nature, he thereby brought into being "a new habitude of will in the Father and Son towards each other that is not in them essentially."[162] But that is not the case with the Spirit. In the covenant, the role of the Spirit is "one of eternal concurrence, which manifests itself in time in his work of applying to believers the benefits won for them by Christ's work."[163] As the third member of the Trinity, the Spirit concurs with the plan of the Father and the Son and is intimately

[157] Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 196.

[158] Bird, "John Owen's Taxonomy of the Covenants," 60.

[159] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:497.

[160] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:497. The term [distinctly] was written as printed.

[161] Bird, "John Owen's Taxonomy of the Covenants," 60.

[162] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:497.

[163] Bird, "John Owen's Taxonomy of the Covenants," 60.

involved at every point in working out man's salvation.[164] In short, Owen did not mention the Spirit in the covenant because each distinct person had distinct roles. For example, the Father did not take on human nature, and the Spirit did not die on the cross. However, this does not mean negligence. Rather, as Christ took on human nature and died on the cross, the Trinity was involved.

Pneumatologia: Divine Personality of the Spirit

After the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, Owen was no longer in power. Nonetheless, Owen continued his theological endeavors. In 1674, Owen published a work on the Holy Spirit entitled *Pneumatologia or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. This was not a direct response to Socinianism, but rather an articulation of his pneumatology. If the anti-Socinian polemic was a defensive response, this work was an active explication.

In his work *Pneumatologia*, Owen emphasized the importance of Scripture. While disputations have value in communicating the truth, "yet the minds of believers are little edified by them; for the most are unacquainted with the ways and terms of arguing, which are suited to convince or 'stop the mouths of gainsayers,' rather than to direct the faith of others. . . . In the revelation that he hath made of himself by the effects of his will, in his word and works, are we to seek after him."[165] By these revelations "are the otherwise invisible things of God made known."[166] The same applied to the Holy Spirit and his personality. Owen explained, "He is in the Scripture proposed unto us to be known by his properties and works, adjuncts and operations; by our duty towards him and our offences

[164] See Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:159-88; and *The Death of Death*, 10:178-79. Letham claimed that A. A. Hodge presented the Holy Spirit as if the covenant had been settled at "a divine committee meeting" in which the Spirit "sent apologies for absence." See Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 319.

[165] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:38.

[166] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:38.

against him."[167] Dale Stover observed, "Owen does not attempt to derive the doctrine of the Trinity from natural theology. His notion of revelation suggests true contingency, so that God is to be known only and simply according to his manifestation unto us."[168] In this case, God revealed himself through Scripture.

Pneumatologia: The Spirit and the Church

For Owen, Scripture informed believers that "the Holy Ghost rules in and over the church of God."[169] With regards to the church, Owen provided two points on the person of the Spirit. First, everything "necessary to this purpose are comprised in the solemn form of our initiation into covenant with God."[170] Owen referred to the Great Commission, in which Christ commanded his apostles to "disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[171] For Owen, this was

> the foundation we lay of all our obedience and profession, which are to be regulated by this initial engagement. . . . Besides, whatever is ascribed unto the other persons, either with respect unto themselves or our duty towards them, is equally ascribed unto the Holy Ghost; for whatsoever is intended by the name of the Father and of the Son, he is equally with them concerned therein.[172]

The intention was "the name of God," not the names of the Father or the Son.[173] By the name of God, "either his being or his authority is signified."[174] Since the Spirit was

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[167] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:38.

[168] Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967), 29.

[169] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:71. For more details, see Tae-Hyeun Park, "The Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit: A Study of Puritan Preaching in a Pneumatological Perspective" (PhD diss., Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2005).

[170] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:72.

[171] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:72.

[172] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:72.

[173] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:72-73.

[174] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

ascribed the same name as the Father, the Spirit "must be acknowledged to be the same with that of the Father. . . . He who hath the nature and authority of God is God," and thus "a divine person."[175] Trueman noted the importance of notion that all acts of God are acts of the whole God in Owen's theology: "An obvious implication of belief in the consubstantiality of the three persons of the Godhead."[176]

Accordingly, Owen emphasized the importance of the baptismal formula. In baptism, when the Spirit has believers baptized "into his name," no other "sense can be affixed unto these words but what doth unavoidably include his personality."[177] Owen identified two intentions on the Spirit's personality. First, there was "our religious owning the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in all our divine worship, faith, and obedience."[178] Owen commented,

> Now, as we own and avow the one, so we do the other; for we are alike baptized into their name, equally submitting to their authority, and equally taking the profession of their name upon us. . . . [Therefore, if] we avow and own the Father as a distinct person, so we do the Holy Ghost. . . . Again; by being baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we are scaredly initiated and consecrated, or dedicated, unto the service and worship of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.[179]

Owen saw baptism as "the foundation of all our faith and profession, with that engagement of ourselves unto God which constitutes our Christianity."[180] For Owen, baptism was "the pledge of our entrance into covenant with God, and of our giving ourselves unto him in the solemn bond of religion."[181] Anyone who refused to recognize

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[175] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

[176] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:93. In a marginal note Owen referenced early church theologians such as Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose as his authorities.

[177] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

[178] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

[179] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

[180] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

[181] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:73.

the Father and the Son as God "without the least note of difference as to deity or personality, is a strange fondness, destructive of all religion, and leading the minds of men towards polytheism. . . . [As believers] engage into all religious obedience unto the Father and Son herein," so believers "do the same with respect unto the Holy Ghost."[182]

Overall, Owen taught that each person of the Godhead plays a unique role in a specific economy. For Owen, the Trinity was the foundation of divine providence, for the Father creates and governs through the Son by the Holy Spirit.[183] As Trueman explained, the Western order of procession is integral to the whole scheme.[184] Against the Arminians, who affirmed the Trinity, Owen emphasized "the causal relationship of God's knowledge to His creatures."[185] By contrast, the Socinians denied the Trinity. Thus, Owen used a different tactic when repudiating the Socinians, who ascribed the act of creation to the Father alone. In response, Owen emphasized the Trinitarian nature of creation in the context of affirming Christ and the Spirit as members of the Trinity.[186] As Trueman noted about Owen, "God's external acts may, in one sense, be acts of God in unity, but they presuppose the nature of God as Trinity."[187] In essence, from Owen's perspective, both Arminians and Socinians had problematic views of the Trinity.

Savoy: Predestination and the Trinity

Owen and his Reformed colleagues, including Goodwin, formulated their position on predestination at Savoy. In 1658, Owen participated in a synod of churches meeting at the Savoy Palace in London to prepare the draft of The Declaration of Faith and

[182] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:74.

[183] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:93.

[184] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 120.

[185] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 120.

[186] Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:142-43.

[187] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 121.

Order, or the Savoy Declaration (SDF). The SDF was "a new confession of faith that would provide an adequate balance between orthodoxy and broad-mindedness, and which could be used to police a national established faith."[188] Owen and his Reformed colleagues demonstrated their commitment to Trinitarian predestination in these endeavors.

The Trinity was the foundation of theology. In addition, predestination had a Trinitarian foundation. In SDF chapter 2, the Reformed theologians stated, "In the Unity of the God-head there be three Persons, of one Substance, Power and Eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the holy Ghost. . . . [The Trinity is] the foundation of all our Communion with God, and comfortable Dependence upon him."[189] In SDF chapter 3, the Reformed theologians stated, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy Counsel of his own Will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass," but also noted that "neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the Creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."[190]

By God's decree, "some Men and Angels are predestined unto everlasting Life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting Death."[191] These predestined angels and people "are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished."[192] On those predestined to life, the Reformed theologians added, "God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose," has chosen them "in Christ unto

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[188] Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 196.

[189] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A. G. Matthews (London, 1658), 79.

[190] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 79.

[191] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

[192] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

everlasting Glory."[193] They were predestined "without any fore-sight of Faith or good Works, or perseverance in either of them or any other things in the Creature, as Conditions or Causes moving him thereunto, and all to the praise of his glorious Grace."[194] The Reformed theologians taught predestination to oppose any notion of human merit in salvation.

The Reformed theologians stated, "As God hath appointed the Elect unto Glory, so hath he by the eternal and most free purpose of his Will fore-ordained all the means thereunto. . . . [The elect] are effectually called unto Faith in Christ by his spirit working in due season," and "kept by his power, through Faith, unto salvation."[195] The Reformed theologians added, "Neither are any other redeemed by Christ," but "the Elect only."[196] As for the reprobate, "according to the unsearchable Counsel of his own Will, whereby he extendeth or witholdeth mercy," God was pleased "to pass by and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin."[197] The Reformed theologians affirmed that God decided who would be among the elect and the reprobate. There was no human merit involved.

Naturally, predestination had Trinitarian implications. For example, both the WCF and SDF affirmed the Trinity as the eternal foundation of salvation. WCF did not specify the covenant of redemption but asserted the Trinitarian implications in salvation.[198] WCF 8.1 stated, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and men, the Prophet, Priest,

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[193] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

[194] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

[195] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

[196] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

[197] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 80.

[198] Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 82. Trueman observed that there was a "lack of explicit reference" to the covenant of redemption in the WCF. This is not to say that WCF denied the covenant of redemption. For our purposes, suffice it to say WCF simply did not directly mention the covenant.

and King."[199]

For the Savoy theologians, predestination was also directly connected to the covenant. SDF 8.1 stated, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King."[200] Whereas the covenants of works and grace were between God and man, the covenant of redemption was between God and Christ. In this regard, the Trinity was more directly involved in the covenant of redemption.

For those redeemed, Christ applies and communicates the benefits of salvation, "revealing unto them in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation, effectually perswading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit."[201] The statements reflect the views of Owen and that of his colleagues. In covenant theology, the Trinity was involved in the salvation of humanity. Without the Trinity, covenant theology lost its foundation. Therefore, Owen vindicated Trinitarian predestination as his basis for anti-Pelagian polemics.

Conclusion

John Owen opposed Socinianism to safeguard the Trinity. The Socinians opposed Roman Catholic teachings and regarded themselves as reformers of the church. They saw themselves as reformers who would recover faithfulness to Scripture and reason. During this process, however, the Socinians developed their repudiation of the Trinity. They produced the *Racovian Catechism*, which served as their authoritative standard of anti-Trinity teachings. In the catechism, the Socinians argued that the Trinity was contrary

[199] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechism* (Westminster Assembly, 1646), 8.1.

[200] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 86.

[201] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 88. Original spelling retained.

to Scripture and reason. In England, there were other anti-Trinitarian developments, but Biddle became a pioneering leader of Socinianism in England. He was also responsible for the translation of the official Socinian catechism.

From the perspective of Owen and his colleagues, such anti-Trinitarian development was disturbing. Although the Socinians were not part of mainstream reformation, their anti-Trinitarian teachings directly assaulted the fundamentals of the Reformation in England. Many Reformed colleagues vindicated the Trinity and refuted Socinianism, but Parliament requested Owen to develop a definitive response. In this process, Owen produced a few works directly addressing Socinianism. In *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, for example, Owen directly responded to Biddle and ultimately to Socinus. In his works, Owen vindicated the persons of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and thereby the Trinity. Owen argued that the Trinity was rooted in Scripture.

After Owen left the political stage he continued to produce works on the Trinity. Later in life he produced works that primarily focused on the Holy Spirit. In *Pneumatologia*, for example, Owen articulated his views on the Holy Spirit from Scripture. Though he was aware of Socinians and other misunderstandings of the Holy Spirit, his primary focus was not refuting his opponents; rather, Owen focused on explicating his views of the Holy Spirit. In this work, Owen noted that the Holy Spirit was a divine person according to Scripture. Therefore, he vindicated the Trinity as his basis for anti-Pelagian polemics.

CHAPTER 6

HUMAN AGENCY

Introduction

Throughout his life, John Owen (1616-1683) pursued an anti-Pelagian Reformation of England. For Owen, covenant theology was the basis for anti-Pelagianism because the covenant harmonized divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Trinitarian God, foundational author of the covenant, works in and through the believers he predestined. Within the covenant, the elect would imitate Christ, which included following the law. However, though saved in Christ, believers still faced issues with sin. As a covenant promise, as well as the third member of the Trinity, the indwelling Holy Spirit works in believers so that they may become more like Christ.

The Reformed theologians, including Owen, promoted what they considered key teachings of the Reformation. They were the pillars of the Reformation that would help believers pursue godliness. Such a pursuit of godliness involved human agency in which believers would exercise their free will in a godly endeavor. Nonetheless, Owen did not consider this a Pelagian endeavor. While it is true that believers were brought into the covenant of grace by Christ, Owen argued that it was the Holy Spirit who enabled believers to perform the responsibilities of the covenant.[1] Throughout his works, Owen vindicated an anti-Pelagian position of human agency through covenantal pneumatology.

[1] In this chapter, *divine agency* means the agency of the Trinitarian God in the matters of salvation. On the other hand, *human agency* means the agency of humans in the matters of salvation. This is an artificial distinction. Owen himself did not use these terms, but I am simply naming them for our purposes.

The Meaning of the Law

Role of the Holy Spirit

Scholars focused on Owen's covenant theology and Trinitarian theology.[2] But much of the research was on the Christological context. While Christology is important, the Holy Spirit was critical in covenant theology. According to Sebastian Rehnman, Owen claimed that "the covenant of grace has its basis in the eternal covenant, pact, or transaction between the Father and the Son."[3] However, Rehnman did not address the Holy Spirit. Dale Stover directly connected Owen's pneumatology to his covenant theology and discussed how Owen formulated his covenantal thought,[4] but Stover grounded Owen's covenant theology in a contract theory rather than the Trinitarian counsel.[5] Alan Spence examined both divine counsels and the covenant as Trinitarian counsels in Owen's theology. He also emphasized how Owen used Trinitarian appropriations in the context of Christ's Incarnation. Though, Spence mostly focused on the Incarnation.[6]

This chapter will examine how the law functioned in Puritan life through covenantal pneumatology.[7] For Owen, believers were responsible to follow God's commands. The Spirit who personally indwells believers and helps them persevere is the same Spirit who personally helps believers follow the law.

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[2] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 113-14; Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008); Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998); Garth Wilson, "The Puritan Doctrine of the Holy Spirit" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1978).

[3] Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 168-69.

[4] Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967), 144-213.

[5] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

[6] Alan Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 28-30.

[7] Chap. 3 addressed covenant theology. See Laurence R. O'Donnell III, "The Holy Spirit's Role in John Owen's 'Covenant of the Mediator' Formulation: A Case Study in Reformed Orthodox Formulations of the Pactum Salutis," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 4 (2012): 91-115.

Development in the Reformation

One of the major issues of the Reformation was the meaning of God's law.[8] On the Puritan view of the law, Ernest Kevan argued, "The place occupied by the moral Law of God is observable in every department of theology, and particularly of Puritan theology. Sin is the transgression of Law, the death of Christ is the satisfaction of Law, justification is the verdict of Law, and sanctification is the believer's fulfillment of the Law."[9]

The Puritans sought to balance the tensions between divine sovereignty and human responsibility via covenant theology. An overemphasis on human responsibility was liable to the charges of Arminianism. On the other hand, an overemphasis on divine sovereignty was liable to the charges of Antinomianism. In essence, Antinomians taught that "the believer was completely free from all obligation to the Law," and thus, "any concession to legal duty was an infringement of free grace."[10]

Due to the reformers' emphasis on justification by faith, they faced accusations of deserting the importance of good works. In response, the reformers defended the use of the law. Even among the early reformers, Martin Luther (1483-1546) refuted the Antinomian teachings of the radical Lutheran Johannes Agricola (1492-1566), who argued that the law had no place in the believers.[11] Some Anabaptists, such as Hans Denck, argued, "Whoever thinks that he is a Christian must travel the path which Christ traveled."[12] Denck added that believers ought to fulfill the law in the body of Christ,

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[8] The meaning of God's law is not identical but related to the meaning of sanctification, good works, etc.

[9] Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), 21.

[10] Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 22.

[11] Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 23.

[12] Michael G. Baylor, *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 133. Anabaptists taught that baptism was valid only when candidates freely confess their faith in Christ. Also known as believer's baptism, this type of baptism is opposed to baptism of infants, who are not able to make a

because if its members "do not accept what the head accepts, things are not going well."[13] However, other Anabaptists demonstrated immoral excesses of Antinomian teachings.[14] Such extreme conduct was due to the belief that the believer had nothing to do with the law whatsoever. In this regard, the absence of human responsibility was just as unscriptural as the absence of divine sovereignty. Though believers, the elect, were saved by God's sovereign grace, Scripture was clear that human responsibility was important.

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Roman Catholics attacked the Reformation for granting a license to sin through its doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Roman Catholics implicitly accused the Reformers of abolishing the law for the Christian.[15] On Predestination, Canon XVII stated, "If any one saith, that the grace of Justification is only attained to by those who are predestined unto life," but the "others who are called, are called indeed, but receive not grace, as being, by the divine power, predestined unto evil; let him be anathema."[16] On Justification, Canon XIX stated, "If any one saith, that nothing besides faith is commanded in the Gospel," or "that the ten commandments nowise appertain to Christians; let him be anathema."[17] Likewise, Canon XXIV stated, "If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works," and if "the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained,

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conscious decision to be baptized. As a result, many people who were baptized as infants were re-baptized, and hence the title Anabaptists. Most Anabaptists opposed the interference of magistrates in religious matters. They also opposed military action. While Anabaptists varied on certain topics, they provided their general position in the Schleitheim Confession of 1527. Anabaptists were "Radical Reformers" in that they rejected magistrates and other traditional teachings. In contrast, Luther supported the cooperation of magistrates in the reformation, and was thus part of the "Magisterial Reformation." See Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 207-9.

[13] Baylor, *The Radical Reformation*, 135.

[14] George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 133, 202.

[15] Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons 19-21, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 2:114-15.

[16] Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canon 17.

[17] Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canon 19.

but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema."[18] From the Roman Catholic perspective, the reformers discarded human responsibility and promoted licentious ungodliness.

Owen on the Law

In 1642, Owen worked on *Two Short Catechisms* to instruct his church.[19] While Owen shared the fundamentals of the Puritan tradition, he did not hesitate to nuance differences. For example, for Owen, the law of God was "written with the finger of God in two tables of stone on Mount Horeb, called the Ten Commandments," and it binds us because it was "written in the hearts of all by the finger of God."[20] Owen explained that the Ten Commandments were still binding "to the uttermost tittle."[21] But due to man's "carnal" nature, none could perform the law, which was "spiritual" in nature.[22] As Gribben noted, Protestant theologians "did not agree on the relationship between the moral law given in Eden, the Ten Commandments given to Moses, and the new law of righteousness given by Jesus Christ."[23] In this case, Owen saw the Mosaic Covenant, or the Covenant of Sinai, as a binding law on believers. Owen argued the covenant at Sinai was not intended to abrogate the covenant of works; rather, the Sinai covenant "re-

[18] Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canon 24.

[19] John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*: *Wherein the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ Are Unfolded and Explained*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 1:465.

[20] Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, 1:476.

[21] Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, 476.

[22] Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, 476.

[23] Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 64.

enforced, established, and confirmed that covenant."[24] In short, the law still functioned in the covenant of grace as the old covenant.

Owen was a dichotomist with a trichotomous emphasis. The covenant of works was a pact between God and the First Adam. The covenant of grace was a pact between God and the Second Adam, Christ. In the covenant of grace there were two covenants. The Sinai covenant revived the covenant of works, but the two were not identical. Sinai functioned under the covenant of grace. In the new covenant, Christ actualized the redemption he executed through the covenant of grace. The new covenant was the fruit whereas the covenant of grace was the root.

Under the old covenant, God's commands required "universal holiness of us, in all acts, duties, and degrees of them, that upon the least failure," the law determined the lawbreaker "transgressors of the whole law."[25] Under the new covenant, though God "requireth universal holiness of us, yet he doth not do it in that strict and rigorous way as by the law."[26] But God "doth it with a contemperation of grace and mercy, so as that if there be a universal sincerity, in a respect unto all his commands, he both pardoneth many sins, and accepts of what we do, though it come short of legal perfection; both on the account of the mediation of Christ."[27]

Owen connected the law to God's character. According to Owen, "Authority, wherever it is just and exerted in a due and equal manner, carrieth along with it an obligation unto obedience."[28] Owen added, "He who commands us to be holy is our sovereign lawgiver, he that hath absolute power to prescribe unto us what laws he

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[24] John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 6:77.

[25] John Owen, *Pneumatologia*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 3:606.

[26] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:607.

[27] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:607.

[28] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:609.

pelaseth."[29] As the "sovereign lawgiver, God "is able to kill and keep alive."[30] Yet God requiring believers to be holy "is not to be considered only as an effect of power and authority, which we must submit unto, but as a fruit of infinite wisdom and goodness also, which it is our highest advantage and interest to comply withal."[31] In other words, the law was not simply a set of rules, but authoritative manifestations of God's character that naturally required obedience.

Savoy on the Law

Owen and his Reformed colleagues shared their views on the law in The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (SDF) in 1658. In SDF 19.1, Savoy theologians affirmed that "God gave to Adam a Law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil," which was the covenant of works.[32] The Law "so written in the heart, continued to be a perfect Rule of righteousness" after the fall of man, and was "delivered by God upon mount Sinai" in the Ten Commandments.[33]

In addition to the Ten Commandments, which contained the moral law, God provided "Ceremonial Laws" to Israel, which included various ordinances relating to worship and moral instructions.[34] However, under Christ, the SDF clarified that ceremonial laws were "abrogated and taken away."[35] God also provided Israel with "Judicial Laws,

[29] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:610.

[30] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:611.

[31] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:616.

[32] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A. G. Matthews (London, 1658), 99. Similar to Luther, the Savoy theologians supported the cooperation of magistrates (107).

[33] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 107.

[34] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 107.

[35] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 100.

which expired together with the State of that people."[36] Nonetheless, the moral law "doth for ever binde all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not onely in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the Authority of God the Creator, who gave it."[37] Christ did not dissolve the law in any way, but "much strengthen this obligation."[38] In other words, while Christ abrogated certain parts of the law because they expired with the nation of Israel, the moral law still bound believers. Christ strengthened the moral law for Christians.

Savoy theologians clarified that the law was relevant to believers, although the covenant of works was no longer relevant. SDF 19:6 was written, "Although true Believers be not under the Law, as a Covenant of Works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the Will of God, and their duty."[39] The law "is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin, and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect from them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the Law."[40] Savoy theologians made it clear that for believers, the law was not used to achieve salvation, but as a covenantal discipline.

Ryan M. McGraw observed that contrary to The Formula of Concord (1577), a Lutheran confession, the SDF "did not define gospel or law in terms of mutually exclusive categories of commands/threats and promises."[41] The use of law in believers does not contradict "the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ

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[36] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 100.

[37] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 100.

[38] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 100.

[39] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 100.

[40] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 100.

[41] Ryan M. McGraw, *John Owen: Trajectories in Reformed Orthodox Theology* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 80.

subduing and inabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully, which the will of God revealed in the Law required to be done."[42] Believers were no longer under the covenant of works, but the law still applied under the gospel. In this case, the Spirit of Christ enabled believers to willingly follow the law. From this, the Savoy theologians made a few implications. First, the gospel consists of both the threats and promises of the moral law for salvific ends. Second, the law entailed a Trinitarian God working in believers by referring to Christ's grace the Spirit's work.

The Meaning of Sanctification

Introduction

Another relevant issue related to God's law was sanctification.[43] For the Reformed, believers were no longer bound by the covenant of works, but they were bound by the covenant of grace. They were still responsible to perform the requirements of the covenant. But the covenant of grace also brought benefits to believers. One of the benefits was sanctification. For the Reformed, sanctification was to receive God's covenantal blessings to bring believers to glory after the new birth. In the covenant of grace, God "freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ."[44] Naturally, Reformed theologians of England emphasized the centrality of Christ in faith. John Flavel (1628-1691) wrote, "The soul is the life of the body, faith is the life of the soul, and Christ

[42] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 101.

[43] Though the nuances may differ from person to person, I would like to define some terms for our purposes. In the Reformed tradition, sanctification is the process in which the believer imitates Christ by fulfilling God's law in the covenant under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God's law is absolute and universal but applied in different ways. Every believer has unique strengths and weaknesses, and so the Holy Spirit provides guidance for each believer. For example, the love of neighbor applies to all believers. But whereas some believers may need to interact with other believers more often, others may need to introspectively reflect upon their conduct more often. In all cases, the Holy Spirit applies God's law to believers in their journey of following Christ.

[44] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 85.

is the life of faith."[45] He added, "Christ is the life of faith." Without Christ, faith is meaningless. Faith was alive only in Christ.

In England, reformers provided their positions on the meaning of sanctification. Sibbes and Perkins were among the early reformers who taught the importance of sanctification within the context of the covenant and the Spirit. Bulkeley was a contemporary of Owen who lived through the anti-reform policies of Charles I (1600-1649) and Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645). As a reformer, Bulkeley taught the meaning of sanctification within the context of the covenant and the Spirit. Owen, who joined the revolution of Cromwell, also promoted teachings of sanctification within the context of the covenant and the Spirit.

Sibbes: Biography

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was a Reformed theologian who permeated his works with pneumatology. He was born in 1577 to Paul and Joane Sibbes. In 1595, Sibbes entered St. John's College in Cambridge and finished his BA in 1599. He occupied many posts at St. John's. In 1601, Sibbes became a fellow of the college and finished his MA in 1602. From 1604 to 1608, he served as an examiner, and served as a senior fellow in 1619. In 1608, Sibbes was ordained both deacon and priest on the same day. Though prohibited by Canon Law, such ordinations were "a common practice."[46] From 1610 to 1617, Sibbes served as a lecturer at Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge. In 1626, Sibbes became master of St. Catharine's Hall, Cambridge. In 1633, Sibbes served as a vicar at Holy Trinity until he died in 1635.

Sibbes affirmed the Reformed teachings of election considering the Trinitarian agency. But due to his emphases on human responsibility and the Spirit, Sibbes was often

[45] John Flavel, *The Method of Grace*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 2:104.

[46] Mark Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in late Elizabethan and early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 35.

misunderstood. Paul Schaefer introduced three distinct views on Sibbes.[47] In the first view, in 1966, Norman Pettit argued that Sibbes elevated the natural powers of humanity in salvation. Pettit admitted, "Sibbes wants not so much to exalt natural man as to emphasize the indiscernible nature of divine activity," but still argued that "of all the English preparationists Sibbes was by far the most extreme in terms of the abilities he assigned to natural man."[48] In 1979, R. T. Kendall argued that Sibbes had an "essentially voluntaristic" attitude toward faith due to a shift from a theocentric to an "anthropocentric doctrine of faith."[49] Kendall explained, "While Sibbes believes only the Holy Spirit can create life, and that 'we cannot prepare ourselves,' he encounters men as if the act of faith is in themselves."[50]

In the second view, in 1965, F. Ernest Stoeffler described Sibbes as a "mystic" or someone with "mystical tendencies."[51] This was an assessment of Sibbes's emphasis on an affectionate relationship between the believer and Christ as the center of his piety. In 1969, Bert Affleck, noted Sibbes's personal and intimate language when describing the relationship between believers and Christ, though he did not describe Sibbes as mystical.[52] In the third view, in 2000, Mark Dever presented a view that resonated with the second view, but with a more nuanced sense of historical and theological context. Dever disliked the term "mystical" as a description of Sibbes's teaching on Christian piety, arguing that

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[47] Paul R. Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011), 164-66.

[48] Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 70-73.

[49] R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 105.

[50] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 109.

[51] F. Ernest Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1965), 82-83.

[52] Bert D. Affleck Jr., "The Theology of Richard Sibbes" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1969), 260.

such a term was "vague enough to make 'puritan' seem a precise term."[53] He preferred to describe Sibbes as affectionate rather than mystical. Ultimately, Dever considered Sibbes as thoroughly Reformed.

Sibbes: Trinitarian Agency

Kendall has pointed out Sibbes's relative silence on election compared to Perkins.[54] But Dever provided a context: "By 1622, James had begun the sporadic enforcement of a ban on most pulpit discussions of predestination which would continue in one form or another throughout the rest of Sibbes' life."[55] In fact, in August 1622, James (1566-1625) sent his "Directions to the Clergy" to Abbot. In the directions, largely composed by William Laud (1573-1645), the king limited Sunday afternoon meetings and prohibited preaching on "the deep points of predestination, election, reprobation or of the universality, efficacy, resistibility or irresistibility of God's grace."[56] Given the context, the fact that Sibbes even taught the absolute necessity of God's grace in salvation was a bold if not audacious move. As Schaefer noted, "While a conforming churchman, he nevertheless possessed a vision for the established church."[57] Sibbes "even forthrightly defended absolute predestination to election and reprobation in the eternal counsel of God."[58] In other words, Sibbes was relatively less vocal than Perkins because of his cautious approach to hostile surroundings.

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[53] Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 119-20.

[54] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 103-5.

[55] Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 69-70.

[56] Henry Gee and William J. Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (London, 1896), 516-18.

[57] Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood*, 169.

[58] Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood*, 170.

Sibbes was firm in his stance on God's sovereign grace in salvation. In terms of style, Sibbes was neither a controversialist nor a polemical theologian.[59] He primarily discussed sovereign grace connected to human needs rather than detailed arguments on predestination, though he sometimes did so.[60] Schaefer wrote, Sibbes "spoke of redemption not in anthropocentric but rather theocentric and trinitarian terms."[61] For example, in 1630, Sibbes wrote, "See here, for our comfort, a sweet agreement of all three persons: the Father giveth a commission to Christ; the Spirit furnisheth and sanctifieth to it; Christ himself executeth the office of a Mediator. Our redemption is founded upon the joint agreement of all three persons of the Trinity."[62] From the onset, Sibbes insisted upon the Trinitarian agency in the matters of salvation.

The work of the divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit in particular, not the human agency, was the foundation of a person's transformation. For example, in 1639, Sibbes stated, "So here we are transformed from glory to glory, all is by the Spirit of God, the third person. . . . We do all by the Spirit, as all things are wrought in us by the Spirit."[63] Sibbes articulated these pneumatological emphases considering the Trinitarian agency. The works of the Spirit in the elect arose as an application of the Father's call and the Son's accomplishment. Sibbes continued to emphasize the theocentric factor over the anthropocentric one. He warned his audience that believing one could "with his own industry water his own ground with somewhat in himself" robbed God of his glory.[64]

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[59] Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 14.

[60] Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 89-97.

[61] Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood*, 171.

[62] Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 1:43.

[63] Richard Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, 4:293.

[64] Richard Sibbes, *The Returning Backslider*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, 2:335.

This was because only "the dew of heaven" given freely by the Spirit could water the heart.[65] In essence, the Christian life is "nothing else but a gracious dependence."[66]

For Sibbes, human endeavors alone never sufficed. Sibbes criticized those who preached "mere morality," saying that such teaching resembled "the dark times" when the church was under "popery."[67] Moral reform may bring about a societal reformation of "many abuses" and give "reward and respect among men," but it never produced Christians. Ultimately, moralistic preaching "veiled" and "obscured" Christ, in whom salvation is found.[68] On producing Christians, Sibbes wrote, "Those ages wherein the Spirit of God is most, is where Christ is most preached, and people are always best where there is most Spirit; and they are most joyful and comfortable and holy, where Christ is laid open to the hearts of people."[69]

In an exposition of Ephesians 2:1, entitled "The Dead Man," Sibbes pointed out a double death. There was death "by the sin of Adam," or a "*damnati antequam nati*," a sentence of condemnation passed against all humanity under Adam, as well as the "corruption of nature as a punishment of that first sin."[70] For Sibbes, this corruption was "a death of all powers: we cannot act and move according to that life that we had at the first; we cannot think; we cannot will; we cannot affect; we cannot do anything savours of spiritual life."[71] On this, Schaefer commented, "By stating the depravity of human agents so badly, Sibbes declared his aversion to any anthropology that placed any native ability

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[65] Sibbes, *The Returning Backslider*, 2:335.

[66] Sibbes, *The Returning Backslider*, 2:335.

[67] Richard Sibbes, *A Description of Christ*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, 1:24.

[68] Sibbes, *Description of Christ*, 1:24.

[69] Sibbes, *Description of Christ*, 1:24.

[70] Richard Sibbes, *The Dead Man*, in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, 7:400.

[71] Sibbes, *The Dead Man*, 7:400.

in any faculty."[72] There was not only a lack of ability but also a lack of desire or any will to please God apart from his sovereign grace. In other words, while Sibbes emphasized human agency, it was rooted in the divine agency of the Spirit.

In sum, Sibbes emphasized human responsibility as a blessing of the covenant of grace from the Trinitarian God. More specifically, the Holy Spirit assisted and enabled believers to perform their duties of the covenant. Believers were responsible to perform their duties, but this was not merely a human endeavor because the ultimate foundation was the Trinitarian God. Covenantal pneumatology was present in the Reformed tradition.

Perkins: Foundations of Faith

William Perkins (1558-1602) defined faith as a "wonderful grace of God, by which a man doth apprehend and apply Christ and all his benefites unto himself."[73] Faith is a "perswasion that those things which we truly desire, God will graunt for Christ's sake."[74] Other types of faith included historical, temporary, and miracle-working faiths. Reprobates could practice these three faiths, which were of a "common" nature. But "justifying faith" was for God's elect.[75] True to the Reformed tradition, Perkins had a solid Christological core.

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[72] Schaefer, *Spiritual Brotherhood*, 173.

[73] William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian religion gathered into sixe principles*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthie Minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1631), 1:5. For more on Perkins's teachings on human agency, see R. David Lightfoot, "William Perkins' View of Sanctification" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984).

[74] Perkins, *The Foundation*, 1:8.

[75] William Perkins, *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles according to the tenour of the Scriptures, and the consent of orthodoxe Fathers of the Church*, in *Workes*, 1:125-26; Perkins, *A Cloud of Faithfull witnesses, leading to the heauenly Canaan, or, A commentarie vpon the 11 chapter to the Hebrewes*, in *Workes*, 3:1-2; Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition or Commentarie vpon the three first chapters of the Reuelation*, in *Workes*, 2:4.

Woolsey identified four points in this statement. The first was that Christ is the sole object of faith. Justifying faith is about "the application of Christ and his benefits."[76] In *The Exposition of the Symbole*, Perkins stated that Christ and his benefits were indivisible: "In effect, it is all one to say the saving promise and Christ promised, who is the substance of the covenant."[77] All the gospel promises pertaining to salvation were bound in Christ, and thus "faith apprehended the whole Christ."[78]

In *Cases of Conscience*, Perkins further nuanced the Christological significance: "Election, vocation, faith, adoption, iustification, sanctification, and eternall glory, are never separated in the salvation of any man, but like inseparable companions goe hand in hand."[79] Faith was the means "whereby a man is ingrafted into Christ, and Christ one with him." In addition to Christ being the covenant's essence, Perkins included the Holy Spirit in bringing the benefits of salvation.[80]

The second point on Perkins's definition of faith was the relationship of faith and assurance. Faith was persuasion granted by God, which other writings reflected. In *The Foundation of the Christian Religion*, Perkins stated that the application of Christ and his benefits is "done by assurance, when a man is verily perswaded by the holy Spirit of Gods favour towards himself particularly, and of the forgivenesse of his owne sinnes."[81] The way Perkins described the process by which faith is exercised in the heart further reflects this idea. The aim of faith is to reach "an especial perswasion imprinted in the heart

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[76] Andrew Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 480.

[77] Perkins, *Exposition of the Symoble*, 1:126.

[78] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 481.

[79] William Perkins, *A discourse of conscience wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to get and keepe good conscience*, in *Workes*, 2:21.

[80] Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 1:274.

[81] Perkins, *Foundation*, 1:5.

by the Holy Ghost, whereby every faithful man doth particularly applie unto himself those promises which are made in the Gospel."[82] In addition, such a "persawsion is and ought to be in every one."[83] The nature of faith "stands not in doubting, but in certentie and assurance."[84] Perkins did not deny the reality of doubting, but clarified that believers "should not, for God commands us to beleeve."[85]

In reality, doubts arise according to the degrees of faith.[86] Faith is not immediately perfected and is subject to assaults and temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.[87] Therefore, Christians should always seek a "full perswasion" of faith.[88] In response, Letham claimed there was "a deep-seated contradiction" in Perkins. Letham argued that Perkins's description of the desire of forgiveness as the "seede of faith" does not allow for the assurance Perkins described.[89] By contrast, Woolsey noted that such an argument "fails to keep assurance at the appropriate level of faith in the manner in which Perkins implied it should be kept."[90]

The third point of Perkins's definition of faith was that faith was "a wonderful grace of God." Faith is a gift from a divine initiative. Perkins claimed that "God ingrafts faith" in humbled sinners. This work is initiated when the Spirit produces "certain inward

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[82] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or the description of theologie: containing the order of the causes of saluation and damnation, according to Gods woord*, in *Workes*, 1:80.

[83] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:80.

[84] Perkins, *Cloud of Witness*, 3:4.

[85] Perkins, *Cloud of Witness*, 3:4.

[86] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:79-80.

[87] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:87-90.

[88] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:80, 114-15.

[89] Robert A. W. Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort" (PhD diss., Aberdeen Univeresity, 1979), 283.

[90] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 482.

motions in the heart," the seeds of faith.[91] Perkins also explained that the gospel has a twofold purpose for the repentant. First, the gospel is designed "to manifest the righteousness of Christ which had obtained salvation by fully satisfying the whole law of God."[92] Second, it is the work of the Holy Spirit "to fashion and derive faith into the soule: by which faith, they which beleeve, doe, as with an hand, apprehend Christs righteousnesse."[93] In accordance with this faith, the sacraments act as a seal that entitles men to the inheritance of God's children as promised in the covenant.[94]

Because the Spirit created saving faith for the elect, faith is "an infallible mark of election," an eternal gift of the Spirit.[95] For Perkins, faith and the receiving of the Spirit were linked so as to be practically indistinguishable in believers' lives. To say which preceded which has little meaning. Perkins said that when a sinner believes, he begins to receive the Spirit, and when he receives the Spirit, he begins to believe. It is "by faith we receive the Spirit," but "we must not imagine, that we may, or can beleeve of ourselves without the operation of the Spirit."[96]

In this manner, Perkins emphasized the covenant's sovereign grace and unilateral nature. For example, when Abraham heard God's call, he did not expect to belong to a covenant. Abraham's faith could only "be ascribed to Gods mere mercie."[97] The same applies to all people to all ages, for "of God have vouchsafed us the same grace, and taken us *to be his people*, and made a covenant of salvation with us . . . we

[91] Perkins, *Foundation*, 1:5-6.

[92] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 483.

[93] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:71.

[94] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:73.

[95] Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 1:290.

[96] Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition, vpon the fiue first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *Workes*, 3:13-14.

[97] Perkins, *Cloud of Witness*, 3:61.

must leave here to see where this favor is, and therefore to ascribe nothing to our selves, but give all the glorie to God."[98]

But Perkins also emphasized the conditional aspect of faith, which is the fourth point of his definition. Although faith is a divine initiative, faith is that by which man apprehends and applies Christ and all his benefits unto himself.[99] Perkins described this as man's responsibility as the second party in the covenant.[100] Perkins explained that the gospel binds men to believe. The gospel "bond is conditionall, according to the tenour of the covenant of grace: for we are bound to beleeve in Christ, if wee would come to life everlasting, or if we would be in the favour of God, or if wee would be good disciples and members of Christ."[101] The covenant has conditions, and within this context, Perkins held that the elect and reprobate must be distinguished. The commandment to believe is given to the elect to fulfill God's salvific intention.[102]

Perkins made the same emphases on repentance. What applied to justifying faith also applied to what arose from it; namely, good works, obedience, as well as repentance. All of these belonged to faith and were inseparable.[103] Woolsey commented, "All were included in the benefits of Christ as part of the substance of the covenant, and were the necessary effects of true faith."[104] No one could repent and render obedience to God "but such an one, as is the sight of God regenerated and iustified, and indued with true faith."[105]

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[98] Perkins, *Cloud of Witness*, 3:61.

[99] Perkins, *The Foundation*, 1:5.

[100] Perkins, *The Foundation*, 1:7.

[101] Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience wherein is set downe the nature, properties, and differences thereof: as also the way to get and keepe good conscience*, in *Workes*, 1:513.

[102] Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience*, 1:513.

[103] Perkins, *A Treatise Tending Vnto a Declaration Whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*, in *Workes*, 1:374.

[104] Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity*, 485.

[105] Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1:85-86.

Perkins clarified that repentance is not confined only to the initial conversion experience. There are two graces in a believer's journey of salvation: conversion whereby the soul is brought to faith and repentance and "the continuance of the first grace given"; namely, "perseverance in faith and repentance."[106] Therefore, Perkins believed that repentance is a lifetime work of "newe obedience," which is the fruit of the Spirit and a manifestation of the moral law.[107] In sum, Perkins built his view of salvation based on covenant theology. The Trinitarian God predestined to redeem certain people by establishing a covenant. Within the covenant, believers continued to pursue piety because of divine sovereignty. However, believers' pursuit of piety was ultimately anti-Pelagian, for the basis of piety was the Holy Spirit working in believers. In short, Perkins rooted this soteriology in covenantal pneumatology.

Bulkeley: Sanctification and the Covenant

Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659), a reformer of England, explicated the meaning of sanctification within the context of the covenant of grace. He argued that the covenant of grace was "the same in all ages of the Church," and the difference was the "manner of the dispensation. . . . "The Fathers before Christ were under the same covenant of grace as we be; not they under one covenant, and we under another."[108] There were two aspects: first, "that they had the same promise and hope of life and salvation as wee have . . . [and second] they had it upon the same ground, and in the same way, scil. by faith in the free grace of God by Christ."[109]

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[106] Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 2:15.

[107] Perkins, *Cases of Conscience*, 2:18-19.

[108] Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant; or The Covenant of Grace Opened* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1651), 102. In 1651, Owen became dean of Christ Church, Oxford. In September 1652, Cromwell appointed Owen as the university's vice-chancellor.

[109] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 102.

Among the benefits of the covenant was sanctification. Bulkeley noted, "The third Benefit of the Covenant, is the renewing and sanctifying of our natures, by the graces of the Spirit."[110] There was a connection between justification and sanctification. For Bulkeley, "The Lord having first justified us by his grace, in the forgivenesse of our sinnes, he then goes on to sanctifie us, that we might be an holy people unto him, to serve him, in holinesse and righteousnesse all our days."[111]

Bulkeley noted that sanctification was a natural outcome of justification according to God's promises. He explained,

> When he hath made us imputedly righteous, he will have us inherently righteous also. And by the promise of this benefit, the Lord answers another scruple . . . [that is] to forgive all my sin; But though the Lord should performe all this mercy unto mee, forgiving unto me all my former sins unto this day, yet I have such a vile sinfull nature within mee, that I shall returne and sin againe.[112]

For Bulkeley, God not only imputed righteousness to believers, but also promised to bring about inherent change. God was the foundational starting point of sanctification.

Bulkeley argued that the Holy Spirit was the primary agent of sanctification: "This renovation and sanctification of our nature, stands first in cleansing away our sinfull corruption, and then in an infusion and filling of us with the holy graces of the Spirit."[113] Believers, as vessels intended for honourable use, "first wee scoure and rinse out the filth that is in it, and then we sweeten it with other things, and so make it fit for service and use. . . . Hence it is that we are said to be made partakers of the Divine Nature" and renewed "with the renewing of the holy Ghost."[114] In this regard, for Bulkeley,

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[110] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 173.

[111] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 173.

[112] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 173.

[113] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 174.

[114] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 174.

"Sanctification is a blessing of the Covenant of grace."[115] In other words, in sanctification, believers became partakers of the divine nature by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Accordingly, Bulkeley argued that sanctification involved human responsibility: "True Sanctification as it doth sanctifie the whole man, so it doth forme the heart to a closing with the whole will of God without exception or reservation: when God writes his Law in our hearts, he writes all his Commandements there."[116] As God wrote the commands in the heart, "now we love all the Commandements of it, saying, as Paul, The Law is holy, and just, and good; now his Commandements are not burthenous or grievous, all are equall and right, we love all, embrace all, and labour to practice all."[117]

Bulkeley explained that the "duties of holinesse towards God, duties of love and righteousnesse towards men, goe hand in hand in the life of a sanctified Christian: He makes account he hath done but half his duty, if either of these be omitted."[118] If anyone neglected any of these duties, Bulkeley considered them "false sanctification" and a "cursed hypocrisie" in the form of religion.[119] He clarified, "True sanctification cleaves to the whole law, and to all the Commandements of it, seeking to doe and fulfill all: such an heart the Lord requires, Deut. 5.29. and such he works, where he works Grace in truth, 2 King. 23.25."[120]

Bulkeley emphasized human responsibility in the covenant but noted that divine sovereignty was the foundation. But divine sovereignty did not contradict human responsibility. For example, Bulkeley explained that the covenant "which passeth betwixt God and us, is like that which passeth between a King and his people; the King promiseth

[115] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 183.

[116] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 235.

[117] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 235.

[118] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 235-36.

[119] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 236.

[120] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 236.

to rule and govern in mercy and in righteousnesse; and they againe promise to obey in loyalty and in faithfulnesse."[121] Nonetheless, "now the soule having by faith believed his goodnesse towards us, is thereby reconciled unto him, it layes down all weapons of defiance, and submits in love."[122] Like a traitor who found "the gracious favour of his Prince, in pardoning his treacherous practises, his naughty heart which was before so full of treachery, is now overcome with this undeserved favour."[123] Due to such a transformation, "our heart is turned to him, our hatred is turned into love, faith working love causing us to love him, for that great love wherewith hee hath loved us in Christ."[124]

For Bulkeley, sanctification was rooted in God's covenant with believers in Christ. According to the promise of the covenant, believers were the object of God's sanctifying work in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Believers' covenantal relationship with God included both promises and obligations for the believer. The Spirit brought regeneration, but believers were called to produce the fruits of regeneration in their lives. Believers must be conformed to Christ's image within the context of the covenant of grace founded by God for his people. Like Sibbes, Bulkeley taught sanctification in the context of covenantal pneumatology.

Owen on Sanctification

Conflict with Sin

For Owen, before the fall, Adam was not only designed for a supernatural end but also possessed the means to achieve that end with habitual grace and original righteousness. After the fall, Adam lost his capacity to perform righteousness.[125] In

[121] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 310.

[122] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 313.

[123] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 313.

[124] Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant*, 313.

[125] John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:85.

addition, as Trueman wrote, "humans as they now exist are utterly corrupted, turned away from God, and committed to lives of ungodliness."[126] As the federal head, Adam's sin brought sin through imputation and our propagation.[127] Trueman raised a few points. First, the covenant of works was "itself essentially gracious."[128] Sinclair Ferguson noted that the rewards attached to perfect obedience in the covenant of works went beyond the anything Adam could merit.[129] Trueman added that Owen utilized "the scholastic nature-grace model of humanity" to explain that the "ability to fulfill the covenant conditions is predicated on human beings' possessing supernatural grace, by its very nature a gracious gift of God."[130] Therefore, even the covenant of works was based on God's sovereignty. For Owen, even the covenant of works was anti-Pelagian.

Trueman then pointed out Owen's emphasis on human sinfulness in the matters of salvation.[131] Due to original sin, the Trinitarian God must take the initiative if humanity were to receive grace. Owen correlated sin and incarnation and insisted "on the logical priority of the former," and further argued for "the need for seeing God's graciousness and love as the foundation of the decrees."[132] For Owen, election and reprobation were directly connected to God's saving purpose.[133] To achieve forgiveness, Christ took on the

[126] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 126.

[127] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:70-72.

[128] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 126.

[129] Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 22-24.

[130] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 126.

[131] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 126.

[132] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 127.

[133] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:63.

role of the Mediator as the Second Adam.[134] The Incarnation was critical. As a result, predestination was closely connected to Christ, and ultimately Trinitarian.[135]

Myoung Jin Kim noted the importance of the covenant of redemption in sanctification. First, the covenant produced "mutual relations and obligations."[136] The Father acquired authority "to prescribe to the Son what is needed to glorify himself through the difficult task of the elect's sanctification."[137] In Owen's words, "The Father was the prescriber, the promiser, the lawgiver; and the Son was the undertaker upon his prescription, law, and promises."[138] But the Father also provided assistance for the Son's mission.[139] Second, the Spirit is involved in this covenant as a "covenanting partner."[140] The Spirit was not the Mediator, but he formed the human nature of Christ, assist Christ's oblation, and resurrection.[141] The Spirit will "highlight the Son to the Father because Christ as a Mediator will continue to all eternity to be the vital Head and Husband of the Church."[142] The eternal gift that Christ will communicate to his church is the Holy Spirit. In other words, sanctification was rooted in Trinitarian agency and counsel.

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[134] John Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:481-624.

[135] Owen, *Hebrews*, 3:21-38.

[136] For more analysis on Owen's sanctification, see Myoung Jin Kim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification" (ThM thesis, University of Glasgow, 2007), 95.

[137] Kim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification," 95; Owen, *Hebrews*, 3:84-85.

[138] Owen, *Hebrews*, 3:85.

[139] Owen, *Hebrews*, 3:93.

[140] Kim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification," 95.

[141] John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 10:178-79.

[142] Kim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification," 96.

Mortification

Like other Reformed theologians, Owen vindicated an anti-Pelagian soteriology within the context of Trinitarian agency. At the outset, Owen's teachings may seem Pelagian due to his emphasis on human responsibility. But Owen was anti-Pelagian. Even the utmost human endeavors, works that required human agency, were ultimately anti-Pelagian because the Spirit worked in and through believers. As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit worked with the covenant of grace. For Owen, the divine agency of the Trinity had primacy over the human agency of believers. The divine agency was the foundation through which human agency performed its responsibilities. He continued to elaborate on the theology of the reformers in England even after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

In 1656, as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, Owen published *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*.[143] In chapter 1, Owen began with an explication of Romans 8:13.[144] Owen identified five points for the foundation of mortification. First, there was "a duty prescribed: 'Mortify the deeds of the body.'"[145] Second, there were people denoted, "Ye," and "if ye mortify."[146] Third, there was a promise "annexed to that duty: "Ye shall live."[147] Fourth, there was "the cause or means of the performance of this duty"; namely,

[143] For more details on the topic, see Randall Craig Gleason, "John Calvin and John Owen: A Comparison of their Teaching on Mortification" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992); Richard Mitchell Hawkes, "The Logic of Grace in John Owen, D. D.: An Analysis, Exposition, and Defense of John Owen's Puritan Theology of Grace" (PhD. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987); Jang-Hun Yoon, "The Significance of John Owen's Theology on Mortification for Contemporary Christianity" (PhD diss., University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2003).

[144] The original Greek stated, "εἰ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆτε μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν εἰ δὲ πνεύματι τὰς πράξεις τοῦ σώματος θανατοῦτε ζήσεσθε" (Rom 8:13). The Geneva Bible translated, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye mortify the deeds of the body by the Spirit, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). The King James Version translated, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). Owen used the KJV for this passage.

[145] John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 6:5. The full passage stated, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live."

[146] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:5.

[147] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:5.

the Spirit: "If ye through the Spirit."[148] Fifth, there was the "conditionality of the whole proposition," which read, "If ye."[149] In this single passage, Owen identified a duty that required human responsibility based on the divine agency of the Holy Spirit.

Owen commented, "The body in the close of the verse is the same with the flesh in the beginning."[150] Therefore the body "here is taken for that corruption and depravity of our natures whereof the body, in a great part, is the seat and instrument, the very members of the body being made servants unto unrighteousness thereby."[151] The intended meaning was "indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust."[152] Naturally, the deeds of the body included both "outward" and "inward" deeds which aimed at bringing forth "a perfect sin."[153] Owen considered "indwelling lust and sin as the fountain and principle of all sinful actions."[154]

To mortify the deeds of the body was "a metaphorical expression, taking from the putting of any living thing to death."[155] Compared to a person, indwelling sin "must be killed, put to death, mortified," that is, have its life "taken away by the Spirit."[156] This indwelling sin was, "meritoriously" and "by way of example, killed "by the cross of

[148] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:6.

[149] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:6.

[150] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:7.

[151] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:7.

[152] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:7.

[153] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8.

[154] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8. The original Greek stated, "Οἱ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰēsou Ἰησοῦ τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις" (Gal 5:24). The Geneva Bible translated, "For they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lusts" (Gal 5:24). The King James Bible translated, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24). But Owen's translation stated "passions and lusts" of the flesh (6:8).

[155] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8.

[156] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8.

Christ," in which the "old man" was "crucified with Christ."[157] But mortification "is by degrees to be carried on towards perfection all our days."[158] Owen asserted "that the mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh in the constant duty of believers."[159] On the promise of life, Owen remarked, "The vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh."[160]

Owen's explanations of mortification had implications connected to the covenant. In the covenant of redemption, the Father and the Son agreed to redeem humanity. In the covenant of grace, the Son took on the role of the Mediator and purchased redemption. As part of the covenantal promise, the Spirit indwelled believers to combat sin and conform to the image of Christ. As the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit was the divine agent who provided divine assistance in the believer, the human agent. Whatever believers performed as a covenantal duty was possible only in the Spirit. From the onset, Owen emphasized human responsibility. But this was rooted in the divine agency of the Holy Spirit.[161]

The Divine Nature of Sanctification

In 1674, Owen published *Pneumatologia or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. In this work he expounded the works of the Holy Spirit concerning both divine agency and human agency. In terms of divine agency, Owen explicated the divine features of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. In terms of human agency, Owen

[157] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8.

[158] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8.

[159] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:8.

[160] Owen, *Of Mortification*, 6:9.

[161] Owen provided detailed instructions on practicing mortification. But such an examination is beyond the scope of this research. For our purposes, this part will focus on the general principles. For a summary of Owen's instructions on mortification, see Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life,* 145-53.

explicated the works of the Holy Spirit in believers, who receive assistance from the Spirit to perform covenantal duties. Part of the blessings and duties of the covenant was sanctification.

In Book IV, Owen asserted, "The author of our sanctification, who only is so, is asserted to be God. . . . [God is] the eternal springs and only fountain of all holiness."[162] God created man "in his own image," and "to supposed that we can now sanctify or make ourselves holy is proudly to renounce and cast off our principal dependence upon him"[163] Owen observed,

> All men will pretend that holiness is from God; it was never denied by Pelagius himself: but many, with him, would have it to be from God in a way of nature, and not in a way of especial grace. . . . There is no other way whereby it may be brought about, nor doth it fall under the power of efficacy of any means absolutely whatever, but it must be wrought by God himself.[164]

In other words, God was the author of sanctification and the foundation of holiness in every way, in terms of both nature and works of grace. Sanctification was not rooted in human responsibility, but divine sovereignty. The sole author of sanctification was God, not believers.

Owen argued that God sanctified believers as "the God of peace."[165] Owen provided two reasons. First, the God of peace was working in believers because sanctification was the "fruit and effect of that peace with himself which he hath made and prepared for us by Jesus Christ; for he was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,

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[162] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:367.

[163] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:368.

[164] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:368.

[165] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:368.

destroying the enmity which entered by sin, and laying the foundation of eternal peace."[166] Second,

> God, by the sanctification of our natures and persons, preserves that peace with himself in its exercise which he made and procured by the meditation of Christ, without which it could not be kept or continued. . . . [because] in the duties and fruits thereof consist all those actings towards God which a state of reconciliation, peace, and friendship, do require. . . . [Therefore] God, as the author of our peace, is the author of our holiness.[167]

This sanctification was "done immediately by the Holy Ghost," who sanctified believers "universally and completely."[168] This meant that "our whole nature" was the subject of his work, and the work itself was "sincere and universal, communicating all parts of real holiness unto our whole nature, so it is carried on to completeness and perfection."[169]

For Owen, within the Trinity, the Holy Spirit was the immediate agent of sanctification who sought to transform believers according to his purpose. In short, Owen's teaching of sanctification was anti-Pelagian because of the Spirit. On the meaning of sanctification, Owen remarked,

> Sanctification, as here described, is the immediate work of God by his Spirit upon our whole nature, proceeding from the peace made for us by Jesus Christ, whereby, being changed into his likeness, we are kept entirely in peace with God, and are preserved unblamable, or in a state of gracious acceptation with him, according to the terms of the covenant, unto the end.[170]

Owen's definition of sanctification was rooted in covenantal pneumatology. Stover commented, "Christ serves as the systematic key and the true pattern. Our relation to God is ultimately based upon the covenant terms."[171] Within the covenant, sanctification took

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[166] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:368-69.

[167] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:369.

[168] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:369.

[169] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:369.

[170] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:369.

[171] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 252.

place “in each man's individual nature.”[172] The Trinitarian God was working in all believers.

Owen then provided some premises on sanctification. First, sanctification and holiness “is peculiarly joined with and limited unto the doctrine, truth, and grace of the gospel; for holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing, and realizing of the gospel in our souls.”[173] Second, it is the believers’ duty “to inquire into the nature of evangelical holiness, as it is a fruit or effect in us of the Spirit of sanctification, because it is abstruse and mysterious,” being “undiscernible unto the eye of carnal reason.”[174] Third, believers “are ofttimes much unacquainted with it, either as to their apprehension of its true nature, causes, and effects,” or about their “own interest and concernment therein.”[175]

The Progressive Nature of Sanctification

After describing the divine nature of sanctification, Owen moved on to its progressive nature. He provided another description of sanctification:

> Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ.[176]

From the start, Owen asserted that the Spirit was the immediate agent of sanctification. He actively participated in renewing the believer in God’s image, and actively enabled to build up spiritual habits of grace. With these habits, believers would become more like Christ and meet the requirements of the covenant by obeying God’s commands. Owen then added, “It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy

[172] Stover, “The Pneumatology of John Owen,” 252.

[173] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:370. Owen provided seven points total. But for our purposes, I will share the first three.

[174] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:372.

[175] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:373.

[176] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:386.

Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ."[177] Christopher Cleveland noted that Owen's understanding of infused habits of grace did not remain static. For Owen, the concept of habits was the means by which believers produced sanctification and grew in holiness.[178]

Cleveland noted that Owen used "a Thomistic distinction between infused habits and other habits."[179] Normal habits belonged to the "moral" area and acquired "by repetitious action."[180] But the habit of grace could not be obtained by repetition of action but "by divine infusion into the human soul."[181] Owen made it clear that holiness came from God, in this case, the Holy Spirit. As Cleveland noted, "Actions are evidence of obedience" that bring no regeneration, and when repeated, they serve as "evidence of holiness."[182] In short, "Holy action is the product of a holy state, not that which leads to a holy state.[183] For Owen, the Holy Spirit produced holiness, and believers work on holiness after receiving the Spirit's initiative.

Owen commented, "A habit, of what sort soever it be, qualifies the subject wherein it is, so that it may be dominated from it, and makes the actions proceeding from it to be suited unto it or to be of the same nature with it."[184] He quotes Aristotle who wrote, "Virtue is a habit which maketh him that hath it good or virtuous, and his actions

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[177] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:386.

[178] Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 100; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:469.

[179] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 101.

[180] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 101.

[181] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 101.

[182] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 103; Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:473-74.

[183] Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen*, 103.

[184] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:502.

good."[185] But unlike normal habits, spiritual habits were possible only with divine assistance. Owen explained, "God chooseth us from eternity that we should be holy" and "sets some men apart in his eternal purpose, as those unto whom he will communicate holiness."[186] Thus, Owen described holiness as "an especial work of God, in the pursuit of an especial and eternal purpose."[187] Owen continued, "That is holiness which God works in men by his Spirit because he hath chosen them, and nothing else is so."[188] Owen recognized the distinct role of the Spirit in the sanctification of believers. Whereas Christ took on the cross to redeem believers, the Spirit took on the role of sanctifying believers.

Savoy on Sanctification

Similarly, in the SDF of 1658, Savoy theologians emphasized the importance of sanctification. SDF chapter 13 said,

> They that are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, through the vertue of Christs death and resurrection, are also further sanctified really and personally through the same vertue, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them. . . . [In this process] the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened, and mortified, and they more and more quickened, and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.[189]

In this statement, Savoy theologians made it clear that the Holy Spirit was involved. They emphasized that the indwelling Word and Spirit sanctified believers. Sanctification was a human endeavor rooted in a Trinitarian agency.

The Savoy theologians further connected human responsibility to the covenant of grace. On repentance, SDF chapter 15 stated that God, "in their effectual calling," gave

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[185] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:502-3.

[186] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:504.

[187] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:504.

[188] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 3:504.

[189] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 92.

the elect "Repentance unto life."[190] While even the best of believers could "fall into great sins and provocations," there was still hope because "God hath in the covenant of Grace mercifully provided, that Believers so sinning and falling, be renewed through repentance unto Salvation."[191] Savoy theologians considered repentance as "the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of Grace."[192]

The Savoy theologians clarified the meaning of human responsibility. On good works, SDF chapter 16 stated,

> Good works are onely such as God hath commanded in his holy Word, and not such as without the warrant thereof are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon pretence of good intentions. . . . [These good works], done in obedience to Gods commandments, are the fruits and evidence of a true and lively Faith, and by them Believers manifest [various blessings, and] eternal life.[193]

Believers clearly had the duty to perform good works.

Nonetheless, Savoy theologians clarified, "We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal at the hand of God," but when do perform our duties, they are considered good because "they proceed from his Spirit."[194] However, Savoy theologians stated that works by the unregenerate "proceed not from a heart purified by Faith, nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word. . . . [Such works] are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God; and yet their neflect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God."[195] In other words, only works from the regenerate were pleasing to God.

In sum, Reformed theologians in England emphasized human responsibility as a blessing of the covenant of grace from the Trinitarian God. More specifically, the Holy

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[190] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 93.

[191] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 94.

[192] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 94.

[193] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 95.

[194] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 96.

[195] Savoy Assembly, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, 96.

Spirit assisted and enabled believers to perform their duties of the covenant. Believers were responsible to perform their duties, but this was not merely a human endeavor because the ultimate foundation was the Trinitarian God. Covenantal pneumatology was present in the Reformed tradition.

Owen on Prayer

Overview

For Owen and his Reformed colleagues, prayer was a blessing rooted in the covenant. On Puritan prayer practices, Alec Ryrie commented, "Such earnest self-emptying was beyond what mere willpower could achieve. True prayer, it was generally acknowledged, was neither a human 'work' nor a human response to God's work. Rather, it was itself God's work, drawing devotees into intimacy with himself."[196] However, despite requiring human agency, the Puritans considered prayer as God's work.[197]

The Use of Prayer

In Book VII of *Pneumatologia*, Owen explicated his teachings on prayer. In chapter 1, Owen identified regeneration and sanctification as "the general principles of all actings of grace or particular duties in them."[198] But there were also "especial works or operations of this Holy Spirit in and towards the disciples of Christ," which was "the aid or assistance which he gives unto us in our prayers and supplications."[199]

Owen noted that prayer, "in the whole compass and extent of it, as comprising meditation, supplication, praise, and thanksgiving, is one of the most signal duties of

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[196] Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101.

[197] For more details, see Gavin John McGrath, "Puritans and the Human Will: Voluntarism within Mid-Seventeenth Century English Puritanism as Seen in the Works of Richard Baxter and John Owen" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1989); David John McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination and its Contemporary Relevance" (ThD diss., University of Santo Tomas, 1995).

[198] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:251.

[199] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:251.

religion."[200] According to the "light of nature," concurring with Scripture, people "thought the duty of vows, prayers, and praises, incumbent on them, as the found occasion," and they found "external, ceremonious ways of solemnizing their devotions."[201] But it was "this duty of prayer alone which was their natural, necessary, fundamental acknowledgement of that Divine Being which they did own."[202] For Owen, prayer was "the most natural and most eminent way and means of our converse with God, without which converse we have no present advantage above the beasts that perish but such as will turn unto our eternal disadvantage in that misery whereof they are incapable."[203]

The Nature of Prayer

In chapter 4, Owen explicated the nature of prayer. On the meaning of prayer, he described, "Prayer at present I take to be a gift, ability, or spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight, and other graces, in a way of vocal requests, supplications, and praises unto God."[204] Owen affirmed that this "gift and ability" was from "the Holy Ghost."[205]

Owen ascribed "unto the Spirit" that he "supplieth and furnisheth the mind with a due comprehension of the matter of prayer, or what ought, both in general and as unto all our particular occasions, to be prayed for. . . . Without this it will be granted that no man can pray as he ought."[206] However, in general, people supposed that they knew

[200] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:251.

[201] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:251.

[202] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:251-52.

[203] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:252.

[204] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:271.

[205] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:271.

[206] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:271.

"well enough what they ought to pray for."[207] As a result, Owen lamented, "So great an unwillingness is there to allow him either place, work, or office in the Christian religion or the practice of it! . . . Wherefore, it is pretended that although men do not of themselves know what to pray for, yet this defect may be supplied in a prescript of words, prepared on purpose to teach and confine unto what they are to pray for."[208] Therefore, people may "dismiss the Holy Spirit and his assistance as unto this concernment of prayer."[209]

Owen acknowledged, "Whatever we ought to pray for is declared in the Scripture" in the form of "the Lord's Prayer; but it is one thing to have what we ought to pray for in the book, another thing to have it in our minds and hearts."[210] One of the defects in prayer was not knowing "our own wants."[211] Owen asserted, "The inward sanctification of all our faculties is what we want and pray for. Supplies of grace from God unto this purpose" made up "the principal matter of prayer as formally supplication."[212]

Conclusion

In 1684, after his death, William Payne published Owen's *Glory of Christ*. In this work, Owen reminded his readers, "One of the greatest privileges and advancements of believers, both in this world and unto eternity, consists in their beholding the glory of Christ."[213] This they do presently by faith in the Scriptures. Owen wrote, "For here in this life, beholding his glory, they are changed or transformed into the likeness of it."[214] It is

[207] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:271.

[208] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:272.

[209] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:272.

[210] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:272.

[211] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:272.

[212] Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4:274.

[213] John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 1:286.

[214] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:287.

from spiritual sight of Christ's glory that one's faith is exercised in "life and power," love for Christ does "arise and spring," and one finds "rest, complacency, and satisfaction."[215] Owen said that Christ is the "treasury of all that goodness, grace, life, light, power, and mercy" that the new creation needs.[216] The Holy Spirit dwells in Christ "in all fullness" and "immeasurably," and this same Spirit Christ "gives unto all believers, to inhabit and abide in them also."[217]

On the surface, Owen's teachings would make salvation dependent on human agency without the Holy Spirit. However, since he rooted human agency in the work of the Spirit, the utmost human endeavors are still works of divine sovereignty, and thus anti-Pelagian. In his treatment of covenantal responsibilities, Owen emphasized the dual elements of the covenant. One was divine agency and the other human agency. For each responsibility of the covenant, the Holy Spirit worked in believers through the covenant. The Holy Spirit is why Owen engaged in theological polemics to defend Reformed doctrines. Such an examination is also essential in understanding that anti-Pelagianism was compatible with human agency. Owen emphasized human agency not despite anti-Pelagianism grounded in the divine agency of the Trinity, but because of it.

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[215] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:291.

[216] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:362.

[217] Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:365.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

John Owen (1616-1683) vindicated an anti-Pelagian soteriology through covenantal pneumatology. Throughout his life, Owen vindicated an anti-Pelagian soteriology through covenantal pneumatology. While much Puritan research was available, most focused on covenant theology and Christology. The purpose of this research was to examine how the Holy Spirit was active in the covenant for believers. This research also intended to spark the interest of other researchers for further inquiry. While Christ accomplished salvation in the covenant, there is no application or guidance for believers without the Spirit. Owen was anti-Pelagian despite his emphasis on human agency in the covenant because of the divine agency of the Spirit. Owen was anti-Pelagian not despite but because of divine sovereignty.

Owen recognized Pelagianism as a significant threat to the Reformed teaching on salvation from his early Oxford years. Though Owen left few records of his personal life, his life and ministry demonstrate that he pursued an anti-Pelagian reformation of England. Some of his life choices highlight his convictions. For example, when Owen felt the influence of Archbishop Laud at Oxford, he left the university. Even before Owen had any power, he protested against Arminianism by his departure. After leaving Oxford, Owen unexpectedly experienced assurance. When Owen heard about a massacre in Ireland during Oliver Cromwell's campaign, Owen openly lamented the incident and called for a focus on gospel preaching. Owen knew that mere anti-Catholicism itself was not the reformation despite his opposition to Roman Catholics. One had to pursue the reformation principles as taught in Scripture actively. When Owen spoke against Cromwell, he was risking his political career. Though Owen was highly disagreeable and undiplomatic, he cared for the

reformation, even at the expense of his power. Owen followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his pursuit of reformation.

While Owen pursued an anti-Pelagian reformation, his teachings were grounded in a tradition. In the Reformed tradition, covenant theology was an instrument that conveyed the truths of Scripture. Reformed theologians utilized covenant theology as an interpretive tool to harmonize divine sovereignty and human responsibility. David Dickson and Patrick Gillespie were the first theologians to treat the covenant comprehensively. They identified that the covenant was a pact through which God interacted with humanity. The covenant has two parties involved that mutually obligate each other in the general definition. However, in the Reformed definition of the covenant, God binds himself to humanity with divine obligations while humanity follows God's commands. Understanding both absolute and conditional elements of the covenant is essential to understanding that Owen viewed human responsibility in light of divine sovereignty. For Owen, human responsibility did not contradict divine sovereignty.

As an early reformer of England, William Perkins pursued the reformation of England within his context. Unlike the nonconformist Owen, Perkins was a conformist, pursuing anti-Pelagian reform based on covenant theology. Consequently, the unilateral and bilateral aspects of the covenant are still anti-Pelagian since Christ represented the covenant according to divine sovereignty. Despite his attacks on Pelagianism, Owen understood the importance of human responsibility in Scripture. The foundation of the spiritual disciplines was the Holy Spirit, who worked in believers through the covenant. Therefore, for Owen, believers' exercise of human agency was anti-Pelagian because it was rooted in the divine agency of the Holy Spirit.

The covenants of works and grace had differed in that one emphasized human agency and the other divine agency. The first Adam was the federal head of the covenant of works. The second Adam, Christ the Son of God, was the federal head of the covenant of grace. However, in essence, both covenants emphasized divine and human agencies.

Understanding these covenants is essential as to why Owen was anti-Pelagian. For Owen, since the first Adam failed, humanity cannot achieve salvation without Christ as the federal head.

The covenant of redemption was unique in that there were no human agents but only divine agents. In this covenant, the Father and the Son agreed to save humanity. Based on this agreement, the Son became the federal head of humanity in the covenant of grace. As the federal head of humanity and as the Son of God, Christ was the Mediator between God and man. As the Mediator, Christ fulfilled the commands of righteousness and achieved salvation through his sacrifice. In this manner, the covenant of redemption was the foundation of the covenants of works and grace. Understanding this covenant is essential to understanding Owen's theology's anti-Pelagian foundation. Not only were the covenants of works and grace built on divine sovereignty, but the covenant of redemption, the foundation of all covenants, was rooted in the Trinity.

Unlike the other three covenants, Reformed theologians differed on how the Covenant of Sinai was related to the other covenants. Some theologians were dichotomist. In this view, the Sinai covenant revived the covenant of works, subservient to the covenant of grace. Others were trichotomist or Salmurian. Owen was a dichotomist with a trichotomous emphasis. In terms of substance, there were two covenants. In terms of distinction, there were three covenants. The three distinct covenants were the covenant of works, covenant of Sinai, and covenant of grace. Owen saw the Sinai covenant as a distinct covenant, but it revived the covenant of works. The two were not identical but shared the same substance. Therefore, there are two covenants in Owen in terms of shared substance. However, the distinction is real, so the Sinai covenant is distinct. Both the covenant of works and the covenant of Sinai shared the same substance with distinct features. Whereas the covenant of works came before the fall, the Sinai covenant came after the fall. The Sinai covenant was distinct in that it revived the covenant of works after the fall.

Arminius, the originator of Arminianism, created confusion within the Reformed camp by primarily attacking predestination. Though Arminius was anti-Catholic, Reformed theologians considered Arminius as a threat. In the Reformed tradition, predestination had significant implications for the salvation of humanity. The covenant of grace would lose its meaning because the Father and the Son did not agree to predestine believers to salvation. If God did not predestine salvation, then humanity would be left alone. For Owen, Arminianism was ultimately Pelagianism. In his response, Owen regarded predestination as a theological basis for anti-Pelagianism against Arminians.

Like England, Holland developed an anti-Catholic sentiment in their pursuit of the reformation. Contra England, Holland developed an anti-Catholic sentiment in their pursuit of independence against Spain. For example, in 1575, William of Orange (1650-1702) founded Leiden University to reward the city's victory over Spain. Leiden University was also a symbol of Protestant competition against the University of Leuven under Spanish control. It was from this context where Arminius developed the foundations of his theology.

Arminius considered himself a reformer by following the curriculum of his predecessor. However, he faced controversies due to his attacks on predestination. Nonetheless, Leiden colleagues recommended unity to combat Roman Catholics. Though Arminius attacked predestination, Leiden colleagues were tolerant as long as he affirmed other Reformed teachings due to the intense anti-Catholic sentiment in Holland. As Leiden rector, Arminius further wrought controversies by disputing predestination. The anti-Catholic sentiment was a double-edged sword for Arminius. Though Arminius considered himself a reformer, he further intensified confusion among Reformed theologians of Holland with his attacks on predestination. While Arminius became a rector because he was respected, there were still controversies concerning his attacks on predestination. The anti-Catholic stance was a fundamental position of the reformation in Holland. Arminius

himself openly opposed Roman Catholicism but was accused of what he opposed because he disputed predestination. Arminius was anti-Catholic but not Reformed.

Predestination was important to Owen because it formed the basis for divine sovereignty over human responsibility in the covenant. In 1642, after the assurance experience, Owen wrote his first anti-Arminian work to defend predestination. From Owen's perspective, the Arminian attack on predestination was a Pelagian attempt to subvert the reformation of England. For Owen, Arminianism was not a mere deviation but a blasphemous scheme, even though Arminians affirmed the Trinity. Owen's response to Arminianism demonstrates why he left Oxford in his early years. His departure was more than a theological disagreement or political status for Owen. It was his way of expressing his anti-Pelagian position. Owen's primary concern was the reformation of England.

Perseverance was rooted in predestination. There was no ground for perseverance and thus no ground to claim true salvation without predestination. As revealed in both Westminster and Savoy confessions, predestination was not a mere abstract dogma but practical theology that directly impacted believers' assurance of salvation. For Owen, divine sovereignty was critical in securing the blessings of the covenant. Like his Reformed contemporaries, Owen highlighted the covenant and Scripture in his defense of perseverance. The Trinity was involved in predestination as the author of the covenant. In this regard, attacking predestination attacked the covenant and potentially the Trinity. Owen saw both perseverance and predestination not as inventions of the imagination but rooted in Scripture. This reveals that Owen opposed Arminianism because he valued predestination as a reformation tenet of Scripture.

For Owen, vindicating the Trinity was his basis for anti-Pelagian polemics against Socinians. Thus, he emphasized the importance of the Trinity in the Reformation of England. Reformed theologians, including Owen, articulated their views in the Savoy Declaration of Faith of 1658. In the declaration, Reformed theologians established that

the Trinity was the foundation of covenant theology in their tradition. Humanity would be left alone to perform God's law without the Trinity in this position. Salvation becomes dependent on human responsibility if the Trinity does not predestine believers through the covenant. Consequently, the Trinity was the foundation of Owen's anti-Pelagian position against Socinianism.

Socinus, the originator of Socinianism, considered himself a reformer and sought to purify the church from Roman Catholic teachings. He regarded the Trinity as a false doctrine contrary to Scripture and reason. Socinus and his followers articulated his teachings culminating in the Racovian Catechism published in 1602. Like Reformed theologians who promoted a reformation that affirmed the Trinity, Socinians sought to realize what they considered true reformation by refuting the Trinity.

In the Racovian Catechism, the authoritative standard of Socinianism, the Socinians emphasized the importance of monotheism in Scripture. This catechism also provided their understanding of personhood. From the Socinian perspective, the teaching of three persons in one Godhead was contrary to Scripture and reason. While Socinians appreciated the reformers, they considered the reformation incomplete without repudiating the Trinity. The Socinians denied that Christ and the Holy Spirit were equal to the Father. In addition, the Socinians denied the personhood of the Spirit based on their understanding of personhood. The Socinians demonstrated that claiming a scriptural and anti-Catholic stance could lead to differing views on the Trinity through the catechism.

When Socinianism reached England, theologians already skeptical of the Trinity, such as John Biddle, embraced the anti-Trinitarian doctrine. In response, other Reformed theologians sought to suppress the anti-Trinitarian doctrine. In 1655, Parliament assigned Owen to refute Socinianism officially. As the vice-chancellor of Oxford, Owen opposed the Socinians of England not because they were a political majority but because Socinians undermined the Trinity, the foundation of covenant theology, and thereby the foundation of the reformation. The Trinity was the theological foundation of Owen's

anti-Socinian stance. In essence, when Owen refuted the Socinians in England, he also refuted Socinus himself. Both Owen and his Socinian counterpart, Biddle, respectively represented their given tradition. In defense, Owen identified the Trinity as the overarching theme.

In his anti-Socinian response, Owen defended the doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Owen emphasized both doctrines because Christ was the federal head of the covenant who redeemed sinners. The Spirit was the sole agent through which believers received the benefits of Christ secured in the covenant. While Owen acknowledged that Scripture attributes specific roles to Christ and the Spirit, they had different roles because they functioned uniquely as persons of the Trinity, not because they were inferior. Such operations were possible because Christ and the Spirit belong to the Godhead. Owen affirmed the divine personhood of Christ and that of the Spirit. Owen affirmed the Trinity through his understanding of Scripture and personhood through his response.

In his later life, after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Owen wrote extensively on the Spirit. Though Owen demonstrated awareness of Socinianism, his treatments were not a direct response to Socinianism but his affirmative teachings on the Spirit. Owen's anti-Socinian response was his defense of the Spirit as the third person of Trinity. However, Owen explicated how the Spirit was personally involved in believers in this treatment. When Owen affirmed the personality of the Spirit, he revealed how he understood personhood. In addition, when Owen affirmed the Spirit as the ruler of the church, he revealed how the Spirit could personally help believers in the covenant. In short, the Holy Spirit was the foundation on which Owen taught human responsibility.

Ultimately, Owen argued that believers exercised an anti-Pelagian human agency through covenantal pneumatology. Throughout the different stages of developing tradition, Reformed theologians faced accusations of abandoning the law for over-emphasizing divine sovereignty. In response, Reformed theologians emphasized the

importance of the law in believers. The law was not a contradiction or obstacle of faith but a means to exercise faith.

Owen was not operating from a vacuum but within a developed tradition that pursued the reformation in England. Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit and spiritual disciplines in his teachings. Despite emphasizing human responsibility in pursuit of godliness, Sibbes was ultimately anti-Pelagian because his teachings were rooted in Trinitarian agency. For Sibbes, the Holy Spirit was the primary agent of godliness. Similarly, Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659) emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers within the covenant. As part of covenant blessing and duty, Bulkeley taught that believers had the capability and responsibility to pursue godliness because of the Holy Spirit working in believers through the covenant. From the perspectives of Sibbes and Bulkeley, sanctification was ultimately anti-Pelagian because of the Holy Spirit working through the covenant.

Savoy theologians, including Owen, reflected this development in their confessional document. There was an emphasis on the human responsibility of following God's commands for godliness. There was also an emphasis on the primacy of the Holy Spirit in all human endeavors. Human agency was important, but it was possible because of the Spirit who worked through the covenant. For Owen, the Savoy event was the culmination of the Reformed teachings of his time.

On the surface, Owen's teachings would make salvation dependent on human agency without the Holy Spirit. However, since Owen rooted human agency in the work of the Spirit, the utmost human endeavors are still works of divine sovereignty, and thus anti-Pelagian. In his treatment of covenantal responsibilities, Owen emphasized the dual elements of the covenant. One was divine agency and the other human agency. For each responsibility of the covenant, the Holy Spirit worked in believers through the covenant. The Holy Spirit is why Owen engaged in theological polemics to defend Reformed doctrines. Such an examination is also essential in understanding that anti-Pelagianism

was compatible with human agency. Owen emphasized human agency not despite anti-Pelagianism grounded in the divine agency of the Trinity, but because of it.

Many scholars rightly researched Owen's Christology and covenant theology. While both doctrines are important, Owen reminded that the whole Trinity was involved in salvation. Realizing the importance of the Trinitarian involvement, more scholars started to treat Owen's doctrine of the Holy Spirit as well. Owen valued what Scripture valued, and he rooted his life accordingly. Owen was a man of vigor and conviction who devoted himself to the reformation of England in every sphere he could.

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ABSTRACT

DIVINE AND HUMAN AGENCY BY MEANS OF
THE COVENANT: THE ANTI-PELAGIAN
THEOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
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Chapter 1 presented the thesis and purpose of this research. Throughout his life, John Owen vindicated an anti-Pelagian soteriology through divine and human agencies in the covenant. Owen was anti-Pelagian despite his emphasis on human agency in the covenant because of the divine agency of the Spirit. Owen was anti-Pelagian not despite but because of divine sovereignty.

Chapter 2 examined the anti-Pelagian soteriology of Owen in his life and ministry. Examining the life and ministry of Owen was necessary to understand how he developed his anti-Pelagian soteriology. Owen considered theology as a comprehensive means to exercise faith. Other areas were important as well, but they served a greater purpose. For Owen, theology had political implications, but theology was more than political.

Chapter 3 examined the anti-Pelagian soteriology of Owen in his covenant theology. He regarded covenant theology as a theological basis for anti-Pelagianism. Examining the covenant theology of Owen was necessary to understand how he operated in the Reformed tradition. While Owen pursued an anti-Pelagian reformation, his teachings were grounded in tradition. Reformed theologians utilized covenant theology as an interpretive tool to harmonize divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Chapter 4 examined the anti-Pelagian soteriology of Owen in his polemics against Arminianism. Examining the views of Arminius was necessary to understand Owen's positional anti-Arminian stance regarding predestination. Though Arminius was anti-Catholic, Reformed theologians considered Arminius a threat. For Owen, Arminianism was ultimately Pelagianism. In his response, Owen regarded predestination as a theological basis for anti-Pelagianism against Arminians.

Chapter 5 examined the anti-Pelagian soteriology of Owen in his polemics against Socinianism. Examining the development of Socinianism was necessary to understand why Owen defended the Trinity against Socinian teachings. For Owen, vindicating the Trinity was his basis for anti-Pelagian polemics against Socinians. Owen argued that the Trinity was the foundation of covenant theology in their tradition.

Chapter 6 examined the anti-Pelagian soteriology of Owen in his affirmative teachings of human agency. Examining his teaching on human agency was essential in understanding how the Spirit worked in the covenant. As an anti-Pelagian, Owen argued that believers exercised an anti-Pelagian human agency through covenantal pneumatology.

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