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## CALVIN'S LUTHER

E.J. HUTCHINSON

Everybody knows that Calvin was closer to Zurich than to Wittenberg. What this essay presupposes is: maybe he wasn't? In fact, Calvin was neither Zwinglian nor Lutheran in the developed sense of those terms, but rather saw himself as one who might mediate between the two sides in their intractable debates, particularly over the nature of the Lord's Supper.

But what is perhaps most interesting, given contemporary ecclesiastical circumstances, is that Calvin saw himself as unabashedly part of *one church*—not just invisibly, but visibly—with all magisterial Protestants in Europe, and sought to make that visible unity more concrete through his literary and theological efforts, even if those hopes were in large measure frustrated.

At the same time, although Calvin was neither a Züricher nor a Wittenberger *tout court*, it is nevertheless true that Martin Luther, a quarter of a century older than Calvin, held a special and preeminent place in Calvin's mind as a herald of reformation—preeminent, yet, it should be noted, not above criticism. Calvin's intellectual posture reveals a combination of a son's devotion—in a 1545 letter to Luther, never delivered, he calls him a “most excellent pastor of the Christian church and my especially revered father”—and mature independence of judgment under the aegis of the Word, thus encapsulating his most important contribution to the Reformed tradition: reverence for the past sublimated by God's speech. Calvin's relationship to Luther was, in other words, an example of the critical appropriation of tradition. As Calvin himself put it to

the German Simon Grynaeus in 1539 in the dedicatory epistle to his commentary on Romans:

But we ever find, that even those who have not been deficient in their zeal for piety, nor in reverence and sobriety in handling the mysteries of God, have by no means agreed among themselves on every point; for God hath never favored his servants with so great a benefit, that they were all endued with a full and perfect knowledge in every thing; and, no doubt, for this end — that he might first keep them humble; and secondly, render them disposed to cultivate brotherly intercourse.



ANONYMOUS, "PORTRAIT OF A MAN" (JOHN CALVIN), 1550S. LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER, "MARTIN LUTHER," 1529.

Since then what would otherwise be very desirable cannot be expected in this life, that is, universal consent among us in the interpretation of all parts of Scripture, we must endeavour, that, when we depart from the sentiments of our predecessors, we may not be stimulated by any humour for novelty, nor impelled by any lust for defaming others, nor instigated by hatred, nor tickled by any ambition, but constrained by necessity alone, and by the motive of seeking to do good: and

then, when this is done in interpreting Scripture, less liberty will be taken in the principles of religion, in which God would have the minds of his people to be especially unanimous.<sup>1</sup>

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of the Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. and trans. by John Owen. URL: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.iii.html>.

Here Calvin makes clear that the “universal consent” of Christians is a *desideratum*, but not one that will be granted in this life—and that disagreement arises *despite* an equal “zeal for piety” on all sides. Thus the theologian must be prepared to do two things simultaneously: respect his fellows and be open to the possibility that some aspects of their thinking may need correction or modification.

How does Calvin’s view of tradition apply to his view of Luther? Calvin’s reverence for him is clear from several references to him in his 1543 treatise on *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*.<sup>2</sup> He writes there of the time “at the commencement, when God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation, and who, by their ministry, founded and reared our churches...”<sup>3</sup> Of all the men whom, he says, “God [had] raised up,” Luther—though not the only early reformer of significance (for he adds “and others”)—is the only one who receives the honor of being named.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he was the one who, having lighted “the way of salvation,” “founded and reared our churches.” Calvin saw the churches of Geneva, Strasbourg, and so on as *part of the same visible church* as the one in Wittenberg.

Again, later in the treatise Calvin speaks of “the time when divine truth lay buried under this vast and dense cloud of darkness.” He continues,

... then Luther arose, and after him others, who with united counsels sought out means and methods by which religion might be purged from all these defilements, the doctrine of godliness restored to its integrity, and the Church raised out of its calamitous into somewhat of a tolerable condition. The same course we are still pursuing in the present day.<sup>5</sup>

In the ellipse, Calvin lists particular areas in which Luther (“and after him others”) had led the way: worship, the doctrine of redemption, the administration of the sacraments, church government, pastoral care. Calvin sees himself as a follower of Luther, not on a similar path but on the *same* path: “We in the present day are still pursuing the *same course*.”<sup>6</sup>

Again, in a letter of February 1540 to Farel, he expresses his general preference for Luther over Zwingli, while not wishing to denigrate the latter:

Good men burn with anger if anyone dares to prefer Luther to Zwingli—as if the gospel should be lost to us if we deviate from

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2. John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844.

3. Calvin, *Necessity*, 12.

4. Bruce Gordon notes that this is customary of Calvin: Luther was not alone in urging the church toward Reformation, yet he receives a special place of honor. See “Martin Luther and John Calvin,” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Online publication date: March, 2017. URL: <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-313?rskey=HgmR2s&result=1>.

5. Calvin, *Necessity*, 40-1.

6. Calvin, *Necessity*, 41 (emphasis mine).

Zwingli in anything! But no injury is done to Zwingli in this. For if they are compared with each other, you know by how great a distance Luther excels.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, such respect did not prevent Calvin from offering correction where he thought Luther needed it. Thus in *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, Calvin asserts that Luther could have been more thorough in the correction of abuses:

When Luther at first appeared, he merely touched, with a gentle hand, a few abuses of the grossest description, now grown intolerable. And he did it with a modesty which intimated that he had more desire to see them corrected, than determination to correct them himself.<sup>8</sup>

He believed as well that Luther erred in his handling of the controversy over the Lord’s Supper (though he thought that of Oecolampadius and Zwingli, too). In his *Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper* (1540),<sup>9</sup> we learn that, in Calvin’s view, both sides in the debate made some legitimate points and could have spoken more clearly on others: Luther was right to emphasize the presence of Christ in the Supper, but “added similitudes which were somewhat harsh and rude.” However, Calvin quickly adds, “he was compelled to do so, as he could not otherwise explain his meaning.” It is difficult to discuss the Supper “without using some impropriety of speech.”

Likewise, Oecolampadius and Zwingli were correct to react against the dominant Roman view of “carnal presence” in the Supper and the implication of “execrable idolatry” in that view, since Christ was “worshiped as enclosed in bread.” But they became “engrossed” on this point, and thus “forgot to show what presence of Jesus Christ ought to be believed in the Supper, and what communion of his body and blood is there received.”<sup>10</sup>

The result, says Calvin, was that both parties became more concerned with defending their own positions than seeking “good ground” on which they might arrive at the truth together. Instead, “Luther failed on his side, and Zwingli and Oecolampadius on theirs.” Luther reacted with his “accustomed vehemence”; the other side showed “too great anxiety” to maintain that the bread and wine are signs, and forgot to add that “the reality is conjoined with them.”<sup>11</sup>

Calvin, then, sought the middle path that made for peace. We should not misunderstand his position, however: he did not want indifferentist compromise for its own sake. Rather, he wished to preserve the

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7. The letter can be found in Eduard Cunitz and Eduard Reuss, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum* 39 (Brunsvigae: Schwetschke, 1873), 24. The translation is my own.

8. Calvin, *Necessity*, 97.

9. In John Calvin, *Tracts*, vol. 2, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 163-98.

10. All quotations in the preceding two paragraphs from Calvin, *Short Treatise*, 195.

11. All quotations in the preceding paragraph from Calvin, *Short Treatise*, 196-7.

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truth that he believed was represented on each side of the debate. His was a principled position, for he believed that a potentially mediating formulation was required by Scripture.

In other words, Calvin sought unity under the authority of the Word, because to do anything less was to disobey God. The sort of unity Calvin sought requires a recognition that there will not be absolute *unanimity* on all points among all Christians, given our weaknesses, our finitude, and the differences of our gifts—and yet it is a unity for all that, a unity that can be preserved by agreement on fundamentals and fraternal charity. I shall let his closing words in the treatise stand as the closing words of this essay, for, though his desire for such a pan-Protestant concord was frustrated in his own lifetime, it nevertheless remains a laudable goal:

Meanwhile it should satisfy us, that there is fraternity and communion among the churches, and that all agree in so far as is necessary for meeting together, according to the commandment of God. We all then confess with one mouth, that on receiving

the sacrament in faith, according to the ordinance of the Lord, we are truly made partakers of the proper substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. How that is done some may deduce better, and explain more clearly than others. Be this as it may, on the one hand, in order to exclude all carnal fancies, we must raise our hearts upwards to heaven, not thinking that our Lord Jesus is so debased as to be enclosed under some corruptible elements; and, on the other hand, not to impair the efficacy of this holy ordinance, we must hold that it is made effectual by the secret and miraculous power of God, and that the Spirit of God is the bond of participation.<sup>12</sup>

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12. John Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper," in *Tracts*, Vol. 1, p. 197.

# AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN HUS'S *DE ECCLESIA* | BRADFORD LITTLEJOHN

*Taken from the new Davenant Institute publication, Reformation Theology: A Reader of Primary Sources with Introductions, pp. 60-63.*

If John Wycliffe anticipated many of Luther's reforms from a purely theological perspective, it was left to his Czech disciple John (or Jan, in Czech spelling) Hus to provoke the political and ecclesiastical showdown which illustrated just how difficult meaningful church reform would be. Whereas Wycliffe died in his bed in his sixties, Hus was to die a martyr's death in his early forties, consigned to the flames by the Council of Constance in 1415. The irony of his fate is that Hus was not nearly so theologically radical as Wycliffe; indeed, interpreters have long sharply debated just how much a disciple of Wycliffe he was or wasn't, with some arguing for complete dependence and others insisting that he was careful to distance himself from Wycliffe's errors and was simply misunderstood by a paranoid church bureaucracy. The truth, as it usually does, seems to lie somewhere between these extremes.

Hus was concerned, as Wycliffe was, for the practical reform of the church, ridiculed as it was with greed and superstition, and for the preaching of the Scriptures (and indeed, he played a part in producing a Czech translation of the Bible), but he did not follow Wycliffe in his more

radical positions, such as his denunciation of the Pope as Antichrist or, most significantly, his rejection of transubstantiation. Still, and crucially, Hus did come to oppose the power of indulgences, and like Wycliffe, to challenge the whole ecclesiology that lay behind them. But before examining his ecclesiology and his treatise *De Ecclesia*, it may be good to explain how the theology of Wycliffe ended up in far-off Bohemia (as the modern-day Czech Republic was then called), as well as the series of events that brought Hus to prominence and then to the stake.

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Wycliffe's influence in Bohemia was the unintended by-product of the marriage between King Richard II of England and Anne of Bohemia in 1382, after which a steady stream of Bohemian scholars were brought over to study at Oxford, where the influence of Wycliffe's disciples and writings remained strong until the end of the century. Initially, it was only Wycliffe's philosophical writings that made it to the University of Prague, where they made a strong impression and gained for Wycliffe a loyal following—a following apparently unaware of (or unconcerned about) the "heresy" of his other works. John Hus, who had begun teaching in the University toward the

end of the 1390s, was one of these early followers. By 1403, it appears, many of Wycliffe's theological writings, including some that had been denounced in England as heretical, had made their ap-

pearance in Prague, provoking a condemnation by the Archbishop of forty-five supposedly heretical Wycliffite teachings. Despite this condemnation, several members of the University, including Hus (by then a prominent preacher in the city) defended some of the teachings, recognizing in them themes that resonated with those of recent Bohemian reform movements. Still, few sought to endorse the whole of Wycliffe's reforming program.

The slow-simmering quarrel between defenders and opponents of Wycliffe might never have gone much further except for a series of events set in motion in 1409. That year, the Council of Pisa convened to try and end the Great Schism, deposing the two rival claimants to the papacy, Benedict XIII and Gregory XII, and electing in their place Alexander V (soon succeeded by John XXIII). As neither of the former claimants stepped down, there were now *three* rival popes, each supported by some kingdoms in Christendom. At the University of Prague, conflict raged between the Bohemian faculty, who followed the lead of their King Vaclav IV in endorsing Alexander V, whereas the Germans and Poles at the University supported Gregory. Vaclav responded by reorganizing the University to give the Bohemian faculty three votes and the other nations only one, to which the latter responded by leaving en masse. Of the new, now exclusively Czech university, Vaclav appointed John Hus as rector. Thus thrown into prominence, Hus found his Wycliffite leanings the object of intense scrutiny and suspicion, and his opponents on the faculty made common cause with Archbishop Zbynek against him. By 1411, Hus had been excommunicated, although Vaclav vigorously opposed what he saw as the meddling of the church authorities, and pressured the Archbishop into backing down. When Zbynek suddenly died in late 1411 and was replaced with a weak and ineffective successor, it looked like Hus might be left alone after all. That year, however, Pope John XXIII, Alexander's successor, authorized the preaching of indulgences to raise funds for a "holy crusade" against King Ladislaus of Naples, a supporter of his arch-rival, Pope Gregory XII. Hus and many in Prague were appalled at this shameless exploitation of the spiritual state of the common people to fund an unholy war between the popes, and fiercely opposed the indulgence preachers. When Hus took up his pen to denounce the indulgences, this sealed his fate. In 1412, not only was Hus excommunicated anew, but all of Prague was placed under interdict (a suspension of all the sacraments on which salvation depended) until they handed him over. His fate was delayed for three years by the weakness and internal division of the ecclesiastical forces arrayed against him and the fitful support of King Vaclav IV and other powerful allies. But

in 1415 he was summoned to answer for his heresies at the Council of Constance, which, having deposed all three rival popes, was now the supreme ecclesiastical authority. Despite a promise of safe-conduct, he was tried for heresy, quickly condemned, and burned at the stake.

It is devilishly difficult to sort out which "heresies" Hus might actually have been guilty of and which were false accusations, but much of the Council's ire was directed against the arguments so forcefully summarized in Hus's *De Ecclesia*, composed in the midst of controversy in 1413. Drawing heavily on the writings of St. Augustine and on Wycliffe's book by the same name (not to mention extensive and careful arguments from Scripture), Hus's *On the Church* was a revolutionary document and, perhaps more than even he realized, a full frontal attack on the late medieval Roman Catholic system. In it, he argued that, properly speaking, the church is not an institutional organization or the body of the clergy, but the whole body of the elect united to Christ their mystical head. As such, the true church is invisible, and the church that we see in history is a mixed multitude, consisting of true followers of Christ and those destined for perdition. This redefinition of the church along spiritual lines meant that not only were the papacy and the priesthood demoted to secondary importance, but their authority was in fact radically challenged. There was no guarantee that a priest or even a pope was among

the elect, and in fact, if he acted wickedly or commanded against the law of God, he probably was not. In such cases, his claims to authority were null and void, and indeed believers were obliged to disobey. Only insofar as the priest or pope commanded in line with the truth of Christ did he truly represent the authority of Christ. Thus, as Hus says in his masterful treatment of the power of the keys, (not included in the excerpt below, alas) "it is clear that no man may be loosed from sin or receive the remission of sins, unless God have loosed him or given him remission," no matter what the priest says. By assigning the highest power claimed by the Church—the power over sins and salvation—to Christ alone, Hus challenged the entire ecclesiastical edifice down to its foundations, though it would be another century before it began to crack.



ANONYMOUS. INITIAL "I" OF THE MARTINITZ BIBLE, 1430. JAN HUS, WITH MARTYR'S CROWN, ON PYRE. A PEASANT WITH A BIBLE IN HIS HAND LOOKS BACKWARDS AT HUS AS HE WALKS AWAY. THIS, AN ANONYMOUS ILLUMINATION OF THE INITIAL LETTER OF GENESIS IN A LATIN BIBLE, IS THE EARLIEST KNOWN REPRESENTATION OF HUS.

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# JOHN HUS'S *DE ECCLESIA*

TRANSLATED BY DAVID SCHAFF<sup>1</sup>

*Taken from the new Davenant Institute publication, Reformation Theology: A Reader of Primary Sources with Introductions, pp. 64–67.*

## CHAPTER 1: ON THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

As every earthly pilgrim ought faithfully to believe the holy catholic church just as he ought to love Jesus Christ, the Lord, the bridegroom of that church, and also the church herself, his bride; but as he does not love this, his spiritual mother, except he also know her by faith, therefore ought he to learn to know her by faith, and thus to honor her as his chief mother.

Therefore, in order to reach a proper knowledge of her, it is to be noted (1) that the church signifies the house of God, constituted for the very purpose that in it the people may worship its God, as it is written: “Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?” (1 Cor. 2:22). Or, to speak with Augustine: “Do you despise the church of God, the house of prayer?” (2) The church signifies the ministers belonging to the house of God. Thus the clerics belonging to one material church call themselves the church. But according to the Greeks, a church is a congregation held to gather under one rule, as Aristotle teaches when he says: “All have part in the church” (*Politics* 2:7). In view of this meaning, therefore, the congregation of all men is called the church. This appears in Matt. 25:31–33, which says: “When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all his angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be congregated all nations.” What a great congregation of all men under the rule of Christ the king that will be! Because, however, the whole of that congregation is not the holy church it is added, “and he will separate them, the one from the other, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

From this it is evident that there is one church of the sheep and another of the goats, one church of the righteous and another of the reprobate. Likewise the church of the righteous is on the one hand catholic, that is, universal, which is not a part of anything else. Of this I am now treating. On the other hand, it is particular, a part with

other parts, as the Savior said: “Where two or three are congregated together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). From this it follows that two righteous persons congregated together in Christ’s name constitute, with Christ as the head, a particular holy church, and likewise three or four and so on to the whole number of the predestinate without admixture. In this sense the term church is often used in Scripture, as when the apostle says: “To the church which is in Corinth, to the sanctified in Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:1). Likewise Acts 20:28: “Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church which he hath purchased with his own blood.” And in this sense, all the righteous now living under Christ’s rule in the city of Prague,

and more particularly the predestinate, are the holy church of Prague, and the same is true of other particular churches of saints of which Ecclesiasticus 24:2, speaks: “In the congregations of the Most High shall [wisdom] open her mouth,” and also 31:11: “All the congregation of the saints shall declare his alms.”

But the holy catholic—that is, universal—church is the totality of the predestinate or all the predestinate present, past, and future. This definition follows St. Augustine on John, who shows how it is that one and the same church

of the predestinate, starting at the beginning of the world, runs on to the apostles, and thence to the day of judgment. For Augustine says: “The church which brought forth Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, also brought forth Moses, and at a later time the prophets before the Lord’s advent and she, which brought forth these, also brought forth the apostles and our martyrs and all good Christians. For she has brought forth all who have been born and lived at different periods, but they have all been comprised in a company of one people. And the citizens of this city have experienced the toils of this pilgrimage. Some are experiencing them now, and some will be experiencing them, even to the end of the world” (*C. Recur.* 32:4). How clearly that holy man shows what the holy catholic church is! And, in the same place and in a similar way, he speaks of the church of the wicked. This, he says, “brought forth Cain, Ham, Ishmael, and Esau, and also Dathan and other like persons of that people. And she, which brought forth these, also brought forth Judas, the false apostles, Simon Magus, and other pseudo-Christians, down to these days—all obstinately hardened in fleshly lusts, whether they are mixed together in a union or are clearly distinguished the one from the other.” So much, Augustine.



JAMES GOSS (PHOTOGRAPHER), 2012. CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS AND JAN HUS MEMORIAL, PRAGUE

1. Taken from David Schaff, trans., *De Ecclesia: The Church by John Huss* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915).

From this statement it appears that the holy universal church is one, the church which is the totality of the predestinate, including all, from the first righteous man to the last one to be saved in the future. And it includes all who are to be saved who make up the number, in respect to the filling up of which number all the saints slain under the altar had the divine assurance that they should wait for a time until the number should be filled up of their fellow servants and brethren (Rev. 6:9-11). For the omniscient God, who has given to all things their weight, measure, and number, has predetermined how many shall ultimately be saved. Therefore, the universal church is also Christ's bride about whom the Canticles speak, and about whom Isaiah 61:10 [speaks]: "as a bridegroom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with jewels." She is the one dove of which Christ said: "My dove is one, my excellent one" (Song of Songs 6:9). She is also the strong woman whose maidens are clothed with double garments

THIS IS JERUSALEM, OUR MOTHER,  
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(Prov. 21:2). She is the queen, of whom the Psalmist says: "The queen stands at thy right hand in vestments of gold" (Psalm 45:9). This is Jerusalem, our mother, the temple of the Lord, the kingdom of heaven and the city of the Great King; and this whole church, as Augustine says, "is to be understood not only of that part which sojourns here, praising God from the rising to the setting of the sun, and which, after its old captivity, is singing the new song, but also of that part in heaven which, continuing true to the purpose for which it was constituted, has always been loyal to God, and has never felt misery from any fall. This part among the holy angels remains blessed and, as it behooves it to do, helps the part sojourning upon the earth, because she who is to be one by the companionship of eternity is now also one by the bond of love. And this whole church was constituted to worship God. Therefore, neither the whole nor any part of it wishes to be worshipped as God" (*Enchiridion*, 41). So far, Augustine.

# JOHN OWEN AND ENGLISH PURITANISM: EXPERIENCES OF DEFEAT, BY CRAWFORD

GRIBBEN

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016

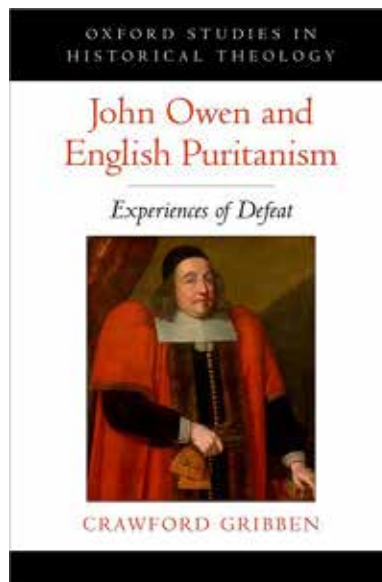
REVIEW BY DAVID T. IRVING

Crawford Gribben's *John Owen and English Puritanism* provides a chronological exposition of Owen's life and thought. While engaging Owen's entire life, Gribben focusses on 1640-1660 when Owen emerged as the intellectual leader of nonconformity.

Readers familiar with John Owen's theological writings may leave the book saying, "You aren't who we thought you were, John Owen." Surely the life of the man we imagine when we think of *Mortification of Sin* and *Communion with God* and *Meditations on the Glory of Christ* couldn't be summarized as "experiences of defeat?"

Through his narrative, however, Gribben makes a strong case that the subtitle is well-chosen. However disconcerting this may be to readers who know Owen as a theologian, it's also the case that Gribben's portrayal is true to the most basic principles of Christianity. Is it not fitting that one who so seraphically described "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" was so beleaguered by defeat?

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay," Paul reminds us, "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." The contingency and fragility of Owen's life and work show the strength of the Lord whom he sought to serve.



The other strength of this book lies in Gribben's ability to provide context for Owen: he presents Owen not as a theologian outside history, but as a man whose texts were embedded in contexts both historical and personal, in a literary, ecclesial, and political world that changed rapidly over the course of his life and career. This treatment reveals more plasticity and development in Owen than is often acknowledged.

Gribben situates Owen's birth and early years within the framework of disappointed Puritan hopes for early seventeenth century England. Owen witnessed the rising influence of Laudianism at Oxford and lost the patronage of his Royalist uncle after declaring support for Parliament. Owen experienced conversion in 1642 under the ministry of an unknown country preacher

substituting for Edmund Calumy. The young Owen was a precocious and diligent nonconformist, often on the disadvantaged side of social, political, and theological unrest.

Gribben is an expert in seventeenth century print culture, and he calls on this expertise to help readers understand Owen's participation in that culture. In chapter 2, he discusses Owen's early publications including *A Display of Arminianism*. Apparently as a result of this work, Parliament's Committee on Religion offered Owen the parish of Fordham in Essex in 1643. Owen's next publication, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, came in 1644 and is important for understanding his transition from presbyterianism to independency.

Gribben goes on to examine Owen's "frustrating" pastorates at Fordham and Coggeshall. Because of the latter, Owen was invited to preach to Parliament in 1646. This sermon evidenced Owen's migration towards independency and his advocacy of religious toleration, themes that would recur throughout his ministry. Owen's writing on the church and the atonement were born amidst national and personal conflict, including ill-health, famine, war, and the death of his children.

Gribben then chronicles Owen's work among the parliamentary army during the Civil War. Growing in influence, Owen preached before Parliament following Charles I's execution. Owen became one of parliament's key religious spokesmen. In 1649, Owen joined Cromwell and the New Model Army in Ireland. In Owen's own estimation, this was his most fruitful preaching. This period also showcased Owen the controversialist. His 1650 work *Of the Death of Christ* was written with his theological opponents Richard Baxter and John Davenant in mind.

A description of Owen's Oxford years follows: he served first as Dean of Christ Church and then as Vice Chancellor. Owen preached regu-

larly at Oxford, including sermons that became *Of Communion with God*. Gribben calls this work, "one of the most radical interventions in Trinitarian theology within mid-seventeenth-century protestant orthodoxy." Owen's Oxford years were marked by millennial hope and expanding Puritan influence in university and nation.

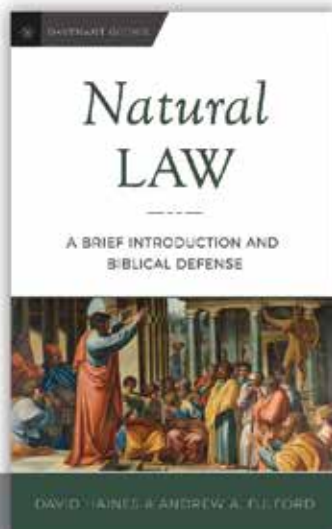
This expanding influence coincided with Owen's peak political influence in Cromwell's England. "In Owen's Oxford," Gribben writes, "scholarship was the continuation of war by other means." Owen faced challenges from Socinians and Royalists and opposition to his Oxford reforms. He preached sermons that became *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. Despite his close connection to Cromwell, Owen wrote on behalf of army officers to urge him not to take the crown.

Owen's wave crested with Cromwell's. As the Protector's health worsened, Owen's influence declined. Owen was replaced as Dean and as Vice Chancellor, and he returned to pastoral ministry, now over a gathered congregation at Wallingford House. The Army officers in Owen's congregation helped to overthrow Parliament in 1659, reinstate the Rump Parliament, and

end Richard Cromwell's rule as Protector. These events unintentionally paved the way for the restoration of the Stuart Monarchy. In the same period, Owen defended the inspiration of Scripture and authored the Savoy Declaration. Characteristically, his political activity and theological writing emerged side-by-side.

Though his influence waned, his work continued during the restoration. Owen managed to survive the purges during the early years of Charles II's reign, and he even warmed to the Monarchy. Gribben sees in this shift Owen's penchant for molding and adapting to his context. Owen endured the 1662 Act of Uniformity and corresponding Ejection relatively unscathed. He served a gathered congregation in his home and maintained influential contacts throughout English society.

## READERS MAY FIND GRIBBEN'S PORTRAYAL STARTLING GIVEN WHAT THEY'D IMAGINED OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE "PRINCE OF THE PURITANS."



*"They show that the*  
**WORK OF THE LAW**  
*is written on their hearts..." —Romans 2:15*

AS CHRISTIANS, we affirm that Scripture is our supreme guide to truth and righteousness. Some wish to go further and assert that it is our only guide. But how then can we account for the remarkable insight and moral integrity that many unbelievers seem to display? Enter the doctrine of natural law.

*"Fulford and Haines have provided an outstanding work that must get a wide readership if Christians are to re-engage the public square thoughtfully and appropriately. . . . I thank God for Fulford and Haines who took great effort and much time to serve the church with this resource."*—J.P. Moreland, Talbot School of Theology

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Owen continued writing and publishing throughout his final years. Works composed in this period include the commentary on Hebrews and reflections on indwelling sin. Owen promoted toleration in the face of the Conventicles Acts, and managed to be associated with the regicidal Rye House plot of 1683. He wrote *Mediations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* in 1683 before he died on August 24 of that year.

Gribben's conclusion synthesizes Owen's life in terms of recurring experiences of defeat. His massive output did not transform the future evangelical landscape as he might have hoped. Owen's experiences of defeat provide crucial context were crucial for his life and writing and are necessary for understanding Owen today.

There are few things to criticize in Gribben's work. Among them is Gribben's tendency to portray Owen as driven by selfish careerism. We simply do not know the motives behind Owen's decisions. While Gribben is to be congratulated for his generally disciplined avoidance of biographical speculation, he did indulge the speculative impulse at this point. Too, the book might have benefited from more engagement with Owen's better-known devotional writings. That said, Gribben acknowledges that this is not his focus in this volume.

But these are minor critiques of an overwhelming success. Gribben's work is in a league of its own among Owen biographies. Peter Toon's work offers a thematic study of Owen's life and thought. Carl Trueman approaches Owen from the perspective of the history of ideas. Gribben, though, has written a thorough chronological account of Owen's life and work, the assessment of which is rooted in Owen's historical and theological contexts. Owen is portrayed as a brilliant mind whose doctrine and politics developed and matured as his contexts changed. Gribben's understanding of print culture and examination of contemporary diaries shows how Owen was received in his own day. While we long to know more about Owen's personal

life, Gribben gives as much as can be known without veering into too much speculation.

Perhaps Gribben's most helpful contribution is his chronological/contextual approach to Owen. Owen has too often been read out of context, as a timeless incarnation of his ideas. Such a reading misses much of Owen's significance, development, and contribution. Gribben's contextual approach also shows the diversity of seventeenth-century English Protestantism. Gribben notes that there were almost as many books written against Owen as by him. Owen was a controversialist whose ideas and reforms were not universally embraced, not the spokesman for a homogenous Puritanism.

The subtitle of Gribben's book, "experiences of defeat," is a surprising summary of Owen's career. Some readers may find Gribben's portrayal startling given what they'd imagined of the life and work of the "prince of the puritans." Such a response likely reveals a deficiency in our understanding of Owen, a deficiency which Gribben's work so helpfully addresses. The soul searcher of *Mortification*, the rapturous author of *Meditations* and *Communion*, is also the Oxford Vice Chancellor, pastor to regicides, and preacher of religious toleration; a man whose convictions developed over time, and a Christian who experienced extraordinary loss and defeat. Gribben provides the necessary depth, context, and nuance that his subject deserves. Crawford Gribben's *John Owen and English Puritanism* is a groundbreaking addition to the corpus of Owen biography.

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*For more on John Owen's thought, see Daniel Hyde, "John Owen: Prayer as Politics by Other Means," in Ad Fontes 2.1*

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