

**Christ Exhibited and the Covenant Confirmed:
The Eucharistic Theology of John Owen**

John C. Bellingham, MDiv
Faculty of Religious Studies
McGill University, Montreal
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There is a reception of Christ as tendered in the promise of the gospel; but here [in the Lord's Supper] is a peculiar way of his exhibition under outward signs, and a mysterious reception of him in them, really, so as to come to a real substantial incorporation in our souls. This is that which believers ought to labour after an experience of in themselves; they submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in a peculiar manner, giving him the glory of his *kingly office*; mixing faith with him as dying and making atonement by his blood, so giving him the glory and honour of his *priestly office*; much considering the sacramental union that is, by his institution, between the outward signs and the thing signified, thus glorifying him in his *prophetical office*; and raising up their souls to a mysterious reception and incorporation of him, receiving him to dwell in them, warming, cherishing, comforting, and strengthening their hearts.

– John Owen, DD, *Sacramental Discourses* XXV.4

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Abstract	v
Résumé	vi
Introduction: John Owen and the Lord's Supper	1
Chapter 1: The Life and Times of John Owen	9
Chapter 2: John Owen's Sixteenth Century Inheritance	35
Chapter 3: The Lord's Supper in Reformed Orthodoxy	80
Chapter 4: John Owen's Eucharistic Theology	96
Conclusion	133
Bibliography	137

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Abstract

As one of seventeenth century England's premier Reformed theologians, John Owen drew upon his rich sixteenth century inheritance to develop a theology of the Eucharist which addressed the unique challenges of his own generation. The following thesis analyzes Owen's contribution to Reformed Sacramental theology during the era of Reformed Orthodoxy in England. Instead of capitulating to a highly subjective and pragmatic theology of the Supper, Owen went beyond many of his Puritan contemporaries in reasserting its objective efficacy in uniting the believer with the ascended Christ, and in strengthening faith. A careful analysis of Owen's Works shows that he consistently affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Supper and stressed the efficacy of the elements in sealing the Covenant of Grace and uniting believers to Christ in a unique way.

The first chapter sets the Eucharistic writings of John Owen in historical context, tracing Owen's development from his student years at Laudian Oxford, through his rise to prominence during the English Interregnum, to his mature ministry as the Pastor of an illegal Congregationalist conventicle in the years following the *Act of Uniformity* (1662). Whereas previous analyses of Owen's Eucharistic theology have tended to stereotype him as either 'Zwinglian' or 'Calvinist', chapter two presents Owen as the benefactor of a rich and highly nuanced theological inheritance. In this chapter the sixteenth century Eucharistic theology of Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, John Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli is outlined as the foundation for a more accurate analysis of Owen's contribution as a Reformed theologian in the next century. The third chapter probes the influence of Peter Ramus on the Puritan theology of the Eucharist, arguing that the anti-Aristotelianism of the Ramist method lends itself to the memorialist theology of the Eucharist which was promoted by many seventeenth century Congregationalists. Finally, chapter four analyzes the development of Owen's mature theology of the Lord's Supper from primary source documents. This chapter shows how Owen made use of his Aristotelian training at Oxford to assert a more objective view of the Sacraments than many of his Congregationalist contemporaries. Two collections of Owen's Eucharistic Sermons that were edited, compiled and published posthumously were transformed by eighteenth century Orthodox non-Conformists into powerful pieces of deliberative rhetoric that were used to wage war against a new generation of Socinian 'memorialists'. Through the posthumous republication of Owen's Eucharistic sermons, his theological influence on the Eucharist extended well into the eighteenth century.

Résumé

En tant qu'un des théologiens réformés de l'Angleterre du dix-septième siècle, John Owen a puisé de son héritage riche du seizième siècle pour développer une théologie de l'eucharistie qui adressait les défis uniques de sa génération. La thèse qui suit analyse la contribution d'Owen à la théologie réformée relatifs aux sacrements lors de l'ère de l'orthodoxie réformée en Angleterre. Au lieu de capituler à une théologie de la Sainte Cène hautement subjective et pragmatique, Owen a surpassé plusieurs de ses contemporains puritains dans la réaffirmation de son efficacité objective à unir le croyant avec le Christ et à augmenter la foi. Une analyse du "*Works*" d'Owen démontre qu'il affirmait d'une manière cohérente la réelle présence du Christ dans la Cène et mettait une emphase sur l'efficacité des éléments à sceller l'Alliance de la Grâce et unir les croyants au Christ de façon unique.

Le premier chapitre place les écrits eucharistiques de John Owen dans leur contexte historique, retraçant son développement dès ses années étudiantes à Oxford, à travers son ascension pendant l'inter règne anglais, jusqu'à son ministère mature en tant que pasteur d'un conventicule congrégationaliste illégal dans les années suivant *l'acte d'uniformité* (1662). Alors que les analyses antérieures de la théologie eucharistique d'Owen avaient tendance à le conformer aux stéréotypes "zwingliens" ou "calvinistes," le deuxième chapitre présente Owen comme bénéficiaire d'un héritage théologique riche et très nuancé. Dans ce chapitre, la théologie eucharistique du seizième siècle d'Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, Jean Calvin et Pierre Martire Vermigli est exposé en agissant de fondation pour une analyse plus exacte de la contribution d'Owen en tant que théologien réformé du prochain siècle. Le troisième chapitre sonde l'influence de Pierre de la Ramée sur la théologie puritaine de l'eucharistie, avec l'argument que l'antiaristotélisme de la méthode ramiste se prête à la théologie mémorialiste de l'eucharistie qui était promu par plusieurs congrégationalistes du dix-septième siècle. Finalement, le quatrième chapitre analyse le développement de la théologie mature eucharistique d'Owen à partir de sources primaires. Ce chapitre révèle comment Owen a utilisé sa formation aristotélicienne à Oxford pour affirmer une vue plus objective des sacrements que beaucoup de ses contemporains congrégationalistes. Deux collections des sermons d'Owen sur la Cène qui ont été éditées, compilées et publiées à titre posthume ont été transformées par des non-conformistes orthodoxe du dix-huitième siècle en de puissantes pièces de rhétorique délibérative. Ces collections ont été utilisées pour mener une guerre contre une nouvelle génération de 'mémorialistes' socinienne. À travers la republication posthume des sermons eucharistiques d'Owen, son influence théologique sur la Cène s'étendra jusqu'au dix-huitième siècle.

Introduction

John Owen and the Lord's Supper

According to Carl Trueman's recent assessment, John Owen (1616-1683) was "without a doubt the most significant theological intellect in England in the third quarter of the seventeenth century and one of the two or three most impressive Protestant theologians in Europe at the time."¹ Given Owen's elevated stature in England as the Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University during the English Interregnum (1649-1660), it is remarkable how little scholarly attention he has received. During the course of his career as a Pastor, military Chaplain and Academic, Owen wrote many important theological and exegetical treatises and sermons which fill a hefty twenty-four volumes in William Goold's nineteenth century edition of his *Works*.² Among his later writings, dating after the passage of the momentous *Act of Uniformity* in 1662, is a collection of twenty-five *Sacramental Discourses* and three additional Eucharistic sermons which were collected and published posthumously in the eighteenth century. These sermons, along with Owen's *Catechisms* and the *Savoy Declaration*, constitute the most important primary source documents which shed light on the substance of Owen's Eucharistic theology. By analyzing these documents, along with scattered references to the sacraments throughout the remainder of his written corpus, we will see that Owen's marked emphasis on the objective activity of God working through the sacramental elements went

¹ Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007), 1.

² John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-1855). An earlier edited collection of Owen's Works was published in 1826: John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. Thomas Russell, 21 vols. (London: Paternoster, 1826). Goold's nineteenth-century collection was reprinted by Banner of Truth in the 1960s. In this reprint, Owen's Latin writings, which were originally printed in volumes 16 and 17, are omitted and the remaining English material from volume 17 was relocated to volume 16. All citations from Owen's *Works* made in the present thesis will refer to Goold's edition, published in 24 volumes.

beyond many of his Congregationalist contemporaries. Owen consistently affirmed the real (but not corporeal) presence of Christ in the Supper and stressed the efficacy of the elements in sealing the Covenant of Grace and uniting believers to Christ in a unique way when they partake of them in faith. In this sense Owen's Eucharistic theology bears a striking resemblance to that of Peter Martyr Vermigli.³

As the most influential Puritan theologian in England in the latter half of the seventeenth century, an accurate assessment of Owen's Eucharistic theology is essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of the ecclesiastical polity of late seventeenth century English Non-Conformity. Many Non-Conforming denominations contemporary with Owen, such as the Baptists and the Congregationalists, tended to magnify the *subjective* or human response to the sacraments, thereby using them in a pragmatic way to guard the purity of the visible church.⁴ As one of England's leading Puritan theologians, Owen's writings on the Eucharist helped to shift the emphasis back toward the objective component of instrumental efficacy.⁵ Their usefulness in accomplishing this goal was clearly perceived by his eighteenth century disciples who continued to publish his writings on the Eucharist long after his death.

Although there is a modicum of critical scholarship on the Eucharistic theology of the seventeenth century English Puritans, Owen's teaching on the Eucharist has been largely overlooked or ignored. To cite one notable example, Bryan Spinks neglects to mention Owen at

³ Pietro Martire Vermigli, *The Oxford Treatise and Disputation on the Eucharist, 1549*, ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press, 2000). Joseph C. McLelland, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli, A.D. 1500-1562* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

⁴ So argues Holifield: "Most Puritan preachers of the early seventeenth century neglected the technical distinctions of sacramental doctrine. Their sermons and meditations were not intended as commentaries on the whole range of traditional issues. They concentrated instead on the practical benefits of the sacraments and the requirements for admission." E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Seventeenth Century New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 40.

⁵ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 126-33.

all in his otherwise insightful monograph on seventeenth century English sacramental theology.⁶ One explanation for this neglect may be the relatively small percentage of material within Owen's massive corpus of writings which is overtly related to the sacraments. A second explanation may be the general lack of interest in ecclesiology and the sacraments among many Evangelical admirers of Owen who trace their heritage back to English Puritanism.⁷ A third explanation may be the trend among a number of twentieth century scholars such as Brian Armstrong, Basil Hall and R.T. Kendall, to classify Reformed Orthodoxy as a scholastic corruption of the so-called 'golden age' of Calvinism.⁸ According to this group of historians, the theological contribution of Reformed Orthodoxy, beginning with Theodore Beza and William Perkins, is at best a regression from the advances of Renaissance Humanism to medieval obscurantism, and at worst a theological aberration in which the doctrine of predestination swallows up any notion of Christian assurance with terrifying speculations into the hidden decrees of God.⁹ The scholarly contributions of Richard A. Muller have presented a formidable challenge to the previous generation of scholarship which pitted Calvin against the 'Calvinists',

⁶ Bryan D. Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies, and the Stuart Divines: Sacramental Theology and Liturgy in England and Scotland 1603-1662* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁷ In his endorsement of Jon Payne's volume on Owen's Eucharistic Theology, Carl Trueman of Westminster Seminary alludes to this problem within much of Conservative Protestantism: "While recent evangelical appropriation of the thought of John Owen is to be welcomed, it has tended on the whole only to pick up on those bits and pieces of his thought which suit the modern evangelical ethos. Thus significant portions of his writings go unread or unused. One such area is that of the church and sacraments.... If evangelicalism is ever to move beyond a narrow focus on individual experience to a more rounded, biblical piety, then the teaching of the great theologians of the past on church and sacraments needs to be addressed." Jon D. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004).

⁸ Brian Armstrong, for example, asserts that "Both the methodology and content of the teaching of Calvin and Amyraut were found to contrast sharply with those of orthodox Calvinists of the seventeenth century. The latter showed themselves to be much more interested in metaphysics and systematization, and so were preserving elements of medieval scholasticism quite in contrast to the humanistically shaped thought of Calvin and Amyraut." Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), xiix.

⁹ R.T. Kendall argues vigorously for this point: "The teaching of limited atonement is preponderantly the doctrine which forfeits faith as assurance ... Since there is no way, apart from extraordinary revelation, that one can know he was one of those for whom Christ died, one must do certain things and infer his assurance." R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 75.

and have thus paved the way for seventeenth century Reformed Orthodoxy to be viewed in a more constructive light by a new generation of scholars.¹⁰ Carl Trueman is in basic agreement with Muller's assessment, asserting that such "a simplistic, binary approach rests on a category mistake and serves only to distort historical analysis."¹¹

Those few writers who have reflected on Owen's contribution to seventeenth century sacramental theology have offered various interpretations of his position on the Eucharist. Writing in the nineteenth century, John Nevin points to a certain "ambiguity" in Owen's theology "as it regards a real participation in the substance of Christ's humanity". While noting the "sense of an objective force," Nevin concludes that Owen's expression on the Eucharist still "falls short altogether of the firm, clear utterances of Calvin and the Church of the sixteenth century."¹² Brooks Holifield regards Owen in a slightly more positive light as an Independent Puritan who stressed the objective nature of the sacrament and the real presence of Christ over and above the subjective component. In this respect, Holifield views Owen as standing very close to the mature Eucharistic theology of John Calvin as expressed in the 1559 *Institutes*. He classifies Owen as one of the later seventeenth century Puritan Divines who helped blaze a trail away from the earlier Puritan tendency toward a subjective Zwinglian 'memorialism'.¹³ This interpretation of Owen as a Puritan who affirmed Calvin's 'instrumental realist' view of sacramental efficacy has also been championed by Sinclair Ferguson and Jon Payne in two

¹⁰ See Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1986) and Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 1: Prolegomena of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

¹¹ Trueman, *John Owen*, 14.

¹² John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (Philadelphia: S.R. Fisher & Co., 1867), 102-103.

¹³ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 130-31.

popular level books, written and published for an Evangelical audience.¹⁴ Payne goes beyond both Holifield and Ferguson, however, in acknowledging the significant influence of Peter Martyr Vermigli on the development of English sacramental theology and polity.¹⁵ Only one short journal article, written by Stephen Mayor and published in 1965, has focused on Owen's Eucharistic theology.¹⁶ Mayor acknowledges that a portion of Owen's language parallels that employed by Calvin, but claims that much of this verbiage is simply formalized expression which masks a more subjective emphasis on the sacraments than Calvin would ever have countenanced. Mayor concludes, on this basis, that Owen's position on the sacraments is a small step away from the memorialist theology of Zurich, even though much of his language may resemble that of the Genevan Reformer.¹⁷ The sheer neglect of Owen's sacramental theology and the diversity of interpretations put forward both at the scholarly and popular level, demand a fresh look at Owen's writing on the Lord's Supper.

Previous analyses of Owen's Eucharistic theology mentioned above have been deficient in a number of important respects. One significant problem has been the tendency to reduce Reformed views on the Eucharist to two highly stereotyped options: 'Calvinism' and 'Zwinglianism'. Even Jon Payne, who acknowledges the influence of Vermigli on Owen, tends to conflate the carefully nuanced positions of Calvin and Vermigli into a single position which

¹⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987); John D. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004).

¹⁵ Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper*, 25-28.

¹⁶ Stephen Mayor, "The Teaching of John Owen Concerning the Lord's Supper" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18.2 (June, 1965): 170-181.

¹⁷ "It is possible to advance from Owen's position to the doctrine, which he rejected, that this rite was simply a commemoration of a long-past event; or even to the doctrine, which he abhorred, that one might just as well recollect the Passion without the trouble of celebrating the Lord's Supper at all." Mayor, "The Teaching of Owen Concerning the Lord's Supper," 181.

he refers to as the “Calvinistic-Vermiglian system of doctrine”.¹⁸ The present thesis will present an analysis of Owen’s theology that recognizes, to a greater degree, the wide diversity of opinion within the Reformed tradition concerning the doctrine of Eucharist.¹⁹ Another challenge which immediately confronts those who classify Owen straightforwardly as a “Calvinist” is the fact that he hardly refers to the Lord’s Supper in his *magnum opus* on the Holy Spirit. Such a glaring omission would seem to indicate more discontinuity between Owen and Calvin than has previously been acknowledged since the ministry of the Spirit in uniting the communicant on earth with the exalted Savior in heaven is central to Calvin’s mature position. In order to redress these methodological flaws, the second chapter of the present thesis will provide an analysis of the major views on the Eucharist as held by Owen’s Reformed forefathers, including Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, and Vermigli. It is only when we examine Owen’s teaching on the Supper against the rich, and highly nuanced backdrop of sixteenth century Reformed sacramental theology that we will be in a position to begin to appreciate Owen’s unique contribution to the Reformed tradition in the seventeenth century.

Aside from one passing references in Payne’s treatment, not enough attention has been afforded in past treatments to the Aristotelian underpinnings of Owen’s sacramental theology.²⁰ Having been formally educated at Oxford University during the Laudian era, and tutored in his formative years by the esteemed metaphysician Thomas Barlow, Owen was more influenced by

¹⁸ Payne, *John Owen on the Lord’s Supper*, 40.

¹⁹ Brian Gerrish has been more sensitive to the variety of Reformed positions on the Eucharist, classifying all of the views into three basic positions: “We need to distinguish within the Reformed camp three conceptions of sacramental signs: symbolic memorialism, symbolic parallelism and symbolic instrumentalism. In all three the shared component is the notion that a sign or symbol “points to” something else. They differ in that the reality pointed to is variously thought of as a happening in the past, a happening that occurs simultaneously in the present, or a present happening that is actually brought about through the signs. The three ways of looking at the Lord’s Supper are by no means mutually exclusive. But without the instrumental language, you do not have a fully Calvinistic doctrine of the Sacrament.” Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 167.

²⁰ Payne, *John Owen on the Lord’s Supper*, 36.

Aristotelian logic and metaphysics than many of his Congregationalist contemporaries whose theology had been shaped by the pragmatic and anti-Aristotelian methodology of the French logician Petrus Ramus.²¹ The third chapter will suggest that the streamlined and pragmatic methodology of Ramism lends itself more readily to the subjective, “memorialist” viewpoint of Zwingli and Bullinger than to the objective emphasis on the real presence that we find in the writings of Calvin, Bucer and Vermigli. Owen’s affinity for Aristotelian methodology, which is evident throughout his written corpus, sets him apart from many of his Congregationalist brethren on both sides of the Atlantic who relied heavily upon William Ames’s *Marrow of Theology* – a standard theological textbook among Puritan Independents which was steeped in Ramist dialectic.²²

Finally, previous analyses of Owen’s sacramental discourses have not adequately called into question the historical reliability of the primary source documents. Editorial prefaces that have been preserved from previous publications of Owen’s *Works* state that these discourses were based upon notes taken by Sir John Hartopp, a member of Owen’s congregation, and published posthumously nearly eighty years after the death of the great Puritan Divine.²³ Given the textual history of Owen’s Eucharistic sermons, we must consider the possibility that they have been shaped or edited by the eighteenth century Non-Conforming minister who first prepared them for the press and by the memory and skill of Hartopp, who first wrote them down in note form while attending Owen’s Independent congregation on Leadenhall Street. Any

²¹ “Consistent with the approach of his tutor, Owen is also typical of the Reformed Orthodox tradition on this point, using the language and distinctions of medieval theology for his own particular theological purposes. In addition, he drew deeply upon the medieval metaphysical tradition, with a particular liking for the thought of Thomas Aquinas.” Trueman, *John Owen*, 22.

²² Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, “Practical Divinity and Spirituality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 192-193.

²³ See ‘Prefatory Note’ in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 9 (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1851), 518-520.

evaluation of Owen's Eucharistic theology which is so heavily indebted to documents of this nature must take into consideration the rhetorical situation which occasioned their initial publication and any possible biases that were introduced into the discourses at that time. The fourth chapter of this thesis will analyze Owen's sacramental theology from the primary source documents and will employ the methods of rhetorical criticism to address this final methodological weakness.

Chapter 1

The Life and Times of John Owen

Any analysis of Owen's sacramental theology needs to be placed within the volatile political and ecclesiastical context of seventeenth century England. During this eventful phase of English history, the celebration of the Eucharist had become a flashpoint of contention between the High-Church party represented by Archbishop Laud, and the Puritan party represented by pastors and theologians of varying ecclesiastical conviction such as John Owen and Thomas Goodwin (Congregationalist), Richard Baxter and Thomas Manton (Presbyterian) and James Ussher (Episcopalian). Just as the Puritans were not fully unified on matters of church polity and governance, so there was a spectrum of views on the Eucharist which ranged from highly subjective formulations reminiscent of Ulrich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, to more objective points of view which promoted the real presence of Christ in the sacramental elements.

Early Life and Education

John Owen was born in 1616 in the town of Stadham (or Stadhamton) as the second son of Henry Owen, a Puritan vicar of Welsh descent whom Owen described as “a non-conformist all his days.”¹ Other than this single autobiographical comment buried within one of his theological treatises, no first-hand details about Owen's upbringing have been preserved as he was not prone

¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 13 (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1852), 224. (Hereafter: *Works of Owen*, XIII. 224)

to indulge in autobiography.² Because so little personal information can be gleaned from Owen's own pen, any account of his life relies heavily upon second-hand accounts which were passed down to biographers from his parishioners, friends and acquaintances. With the exception of Anthony à Wood's unflattering entry on Owen in his *Athenae Oxonienses*, the earliest attempts at preserving the details of Owen's life for future generations of Dissenters, verge upon hagiography and must therefore be interpreted with a healthy dose of skepticism, recognizing that they are *encomiums* which were written in order to confirm Owen's virtuous character and to establish a foundation for memorial and honour.³ When prefixed to published editions of Owen's *Works*, during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, these sympathetic biographies function as a *deliberative* form of rhetoric, commending the Reformed Orthodoxy of Owen and the Puritans to new generations of Non-Conformists.⁴ The anonymous biographer who wrote the first of these summaries of Owen's life in 1720, claimed to be "one who had the honour to know him well, and to hear him frequently" and assured the reader that he had gleaned additional information about Owen's life from "a person of quality, who was long intimate with the doctor, and a member of his congregation; with some memoirs from others of the doctor's friends, and what cou'd be collected from his own writings."⁵ Many of the details recorded about Owen in this initial biography were repeated in subsequent biographical efforts.⁶

² Peter Toon has rightly observed that "it is exceedingly difficult to get to know John Owen as a man, a father, a College principal, or a pastor. One cannot, as it were, get beneath the views of the great theologian to the human being himself." Peter Toon, ed., *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683)* (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1970), v.

³ Anthony à 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 university* (London, 1692). Early English Books Online (accessed February 7, 2012), 556-564.

⁴ For Aristotle's discussion of the three basic genres of rhetoric see Richard McKeon ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 1335.

⁵ Anonymous, "The Life of the Late Reverend and Learned John Owen, D.D.," in *Seventeen Sermons Preach'd by the Reverend Dr. John Owen: with the Dedications at Large. Together with the Doctors Life*, vol. 1.iv, London, 1720. Early English Books Online (accessed 30 January 2013). It is possible that the source for this first biography

John Asty, a Non-Conforming admirer who penned a slightly longer, and more detailed biography in 1721, describes Owen as a youngster of “extraordinary genius” who “was very early ripe for the University”.⁷ Owen and his older brother began their formal education at a private academy in Oxford under the tutelage of Edward Sylvester, but in 1628 John went on to enroll in The Queen’s College, Oxford at the unusually young age of twelve.⁸ The young John Owen was privileged to have Thomas Barlow for a tutor at Oxford, an Aristotelian Calvinist of great erudition who was later to become the Bishop of London.⁹ During his course of studies, Owen proved to be a diligent student who limited himself to four hours of sleep so that he could devote himself fully to his studies.¹⁰ He graduated MA in 1635 and was ordained deacon by Archbishop John Bancroft, a clergyman who was no friend of the Puritans. Having completed his MA, Owen enrolled in the seven-year course to attain the Bachelor of Divinity degree.¹¹ In addition to his academic ambition, Owen was also something of an athlete and musician during his early years at Oxford, “diverting himself, for his health, by leaping, throwing the bar, ringing of bells, and other robust exercises”¹² and also received lessons on the flute from Dr. Thomas

was Sir John Hartopp, a friend of Owen and a member of his congregation. William Goold cites Hartopp as the most important source for biographical material which appeared in Asty’s Memoir in 1721. *Works of Owen*, I.x-xi

⁶ Major biographical works on John Owen were written by John Asty (1721), William Orme (1820), Andrew Thompson (1850) and Peter Toon (1973).

⁷ 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.*, iii (London, 1721). Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (accessed 30 January 2013).

John Asty was a dissenting minister whose father, Robert, was a member of the Congregation in Coggeshall during the 1660s. Three letters which have been preserved indicate John Owen’s personal acquaintance with Robert. Peter Toon, *Correspondance of John Owen* (London: James Clarke & Co, 1970), 161.

⁸ Thomson, Andrew, “Life of Dr. Owen,” in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold, xxiii (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850).

⁹ Thompson, “Life of Owen,” xxiii. In the seventeenth-century educational system, the role of the tutor was the most important influence on a student’s education. Peter Toon, *God’s Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen, Pastor, Educator, Theologia* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 6.

¹⁰ Thompson, “Life of Owen,” xxiv.

¹¹ Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 6.

¹² Anonymous, “Life of Owen,” vi.

Wilson.¹³ Due to the meager financial resources of his immediate family, Owen's university education was funded by a wealthy uncle from Wales who had specifically chosen John to be his heir.¹⁴

Conversion to Puritanism

It was as a student at Oxford that Owen underwent his first crisis of conscience as a young man of growing Puritan sympathies. The Puritan movement, of which Owen was soon to become the leading theologian, is inextricably linked with the vast religious and cultural changes that swept through Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁵ Although the English Reformation had made swift advances after the death of Henry VIII, the untimely death of his son Edward and the accession in 1553 of his Roman Catholic daughter Mary halted the Protestant advance in England and forced the fledgling movement to seek refuge underground. During the reign of Mary Tudor, many English Protestants who were faced with capital punishment or imprisonment lived as exiles in the Reformed strongholds of Geneva, Strasbourg and Zurich where their theological convictions and vision for a thoroughly Reformed Church in England were allowed to foment for more than a decade.¹⁶ When Queen Elizabeth succeeded to the English throne and reinstituted the Protestant faith in 1558, many of these 'Marian exiles' returned to their motherland with a great sense of optimism. Their dreams of an English Geneva were to be thoroughly dashed, however, when the Protestant Queen refused to concede to their demands, particularly with regard to the outward liturgy, organization and discipline of the English

¹³ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxiv.

¹⁴ Asty, "Memoirs," iii.

¹⁵ John Craig, "The Growth of English Puritanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 34.

¹⁶ John Brown, *The English Puritans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 9-11.

Church.¹⁷ What became known as the ‘Elizabethan Settlement’, a more moderate form of Reformed Protestantism than what was previously instituted under Edward, inspired intense dissatisfaction with the established Church and thus marks the origin of what we know today as ‘Puritanism’.¹⁸

Although Puritanism has been defined somewhat tongue-in-cheek by H.L. Mencken as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy,”¹⁹ and is still commonly associated with political revolution, bigotry and religious intolerance, the English Puritans can be broadly defined as those theologians and clergy in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries who sought to ‘purify’ the Church of England by ridding it of the remnants of what they perceived to be idolatrous Roman Catholic ceremony.²⁰ Unlike the mature John Calvin who wrote in his 1559 *Institutes* that the true Church was defined by the two principal marks of biblical preaching, and the right administration of the sacraments, many Puritans sought to add church discipline as a third essential mark due to their disappointment with the moderate Elizabethan reform.²¹ The resulting Puritan movement in England can be broadly classified into three groups: Conforming Episcopalians who sought to reform ecclesiastical discipline from within the Church of England, Presbyterians who desired uniformity and a national Church, but argued vehemently for the need

¹⁷ William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 6-8.

¹⁸ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of Christianity*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 810-12. See also Torrance Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007).

¹⁹ Quoted in Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 292.

²⁰ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, vol. 2, 813-15. “‘Relics of the Amorites’ or *adiaphora*? The authority of Peter Martyr Vermigli in the Elizabethan Vestiarian Controversy of the 1560s,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review: Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 6.3 (2004), 313-326.

²¹ “The puritans...maintained that in discipline as well as in doctrine nothing should be imposed as necessary which could not be proved from Scripture....They could not accept as indifferent, but rejected as unlawful, rites and ceremonies which, as experience shewed, tended to idolatry and superstition.” Brown, *English Puritans*, 24-25. For Calvin’s definitive position on the marks of the true Church cf. *Institutes*, 4.1.9. It is interesting to note that in an earlier letter to Cardinal Sadolet Calvin mentions discipline as a third essential mark of the true Church. John Owen clearly viewed discipline as a third mark. *Works of Owen*, XV.10, 323

to bring Church government in conformity with their interpretation of Scripture, and Independents (primarily Congregationalists and Baptists) who eventually formed Non-Conforming conventicles of visible saints in protest against the corruption that they perceived within the Elizabethan Church. Many Congregationalists, like Owen, had a vision for a national Church which would extend toleration to Reformed Protestants who disagreed on matters of polity.²²

A resurgence of Puritan optimism occurred at the accession of James VI of Scotland who had been raised by Presbyterians during his formative years. At the fateful Hampton Court Conference early in James's reign, a handful of Puritan representatives presented the Calvinist King with a document known as the *Millenary Petition*, signed by a thousand ministers throughout the land who earnestly desired further reforms in worship and discipline.²³ To their dismay, the *Petition* was met with a hostile response from James who vigorously renewed Elizabeth's demand for conformity among the clergy. In the wake of the failed *Millenary Petition*, about eighty Non-Conforming ministers were ejected from the Established Church by 1609.²⁴ Although James remained a convinced Calvinist throughout his life, he despised Puritan ideals and the strict Presbyterian discipline of his childhood and went on to install John Bancroft, a champion of Episcopacy, as the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1604.²⁵ Although Bancroft proved to be a great foe of the Puritan cause, he was succeeded by George Abbot, a staunch Calvinist who sympathized to a much greater degree with the Puritan vision for a fully Reformed Church. Having been largely rebuffed by the monarchy in their efforts to bring further reform to

²² Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 16-17.

²³ Brown, *The English Puritans*, 116.

²⁴ Tom Webster, "Early Stuart Puritanism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 49.

²⁵ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power" in *Catholics Anglicans and Puritans: 17th Century Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 48.

the polity and discipline of the Church of England, the English Puritans increasingly turned toward their elected Parliament for political support against the Stuart Kings.²⁶

If James had sought to assert his own kingly authority over and above that of the Parliament, his son Charles I, who ascended the throne in 1625, took his father's policies to a new extreme. Charles's controversial reign in England was characterized by continual skirmishes with the Parliament which resulted in two Civil Wars and his own beheading in 1649. Strongly asserting the Divine Right of Kings like his father before him, Charles attempted to rule England by the use of prerogative courts as a means to bypass the democratic power of Parliament.²⁷ While the Parliament became increasingly sympathetic to the Puritan cause during the 1620s, Charles surrounded himself with a progressive group of Royalist clergy such as Richard Neile, Matthew Wren and William Laud who desired to moderate the staunch Calvinism of George Abbot and to impose the full uniformity established under the Elizabethan Church.²⁸

Charles's first assault on the Calvinist establishment occurred in 1628 when he outlawed any preaching or writing on the subject of predestination, a doctrine which had been affirmed in the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Church.²⁹ In 1633, the Calvinist party received a second blow to their fortunes when the Arminian clergyman William Laud was selected by the King to succeed

²⁶ Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.

²⁷ Hill, *God's Englishman*, 15

²⁸ "When Bancroft died in 1610, no one suggested that the formidable but abrasive Neile should be his successor. But if Neile did not succeed Bancroft at Canterbury, he succeeded him as an effective leader of the clerical party in the Church, and by the early 1620s that party was organized in his household. He was not – since 1617 – the Bishop of Durham; he declared himself an admirer of Grotius; and he had gathered together, at his London house, Durham House in the Strand, as his chaplains, a group of young Cambridge men, enthusiastic not to say aggressive Arminians." Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power," 61.

²⁹ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 7-8.

George Abbot as Archbishop of Canterbury.³⁰ Laud's influence on the Church of England, which dramatically increased in the late 1620s, was driven by his desire for order, uniformity, and outward beauty in worship. He vigorously enforced subscription to the *Book of Common Prayer* and required the clergy to wear the vestments which had proved to be so controversial in the previous century.³¹ But the primary symbol of Laud's conformist agenda, which provoked the ire of outspoken polemical Puritans such as William Prynne, was his zeal to reform the Eucharist by relocating the communion tables from their position in the nave, to the east wall of the chancel, 'altar-wise' (oriented to the east with the table-ends facing north and south). He also made provisions to fence the altars with wooden rails since the rubrics required the laity to kneel as they received the sacramental elements.³²

Many of the Puritan clergy within the Established Church suspected Laud of entertaining Roman Catholic sympathies and objected that his new liturgical policy regarding the Lord's Supper was illegal, because it violated the 1552 *Prayer Book* rubric and trampled upon the Elizabethan injunction of 1559 to remove altars from all parish churches.³³ Laud would later pay a high price for these liturgical innovations by being imprisoned in the Tower and then publicly executed on the gallows in 1645.³⁴ With the sudden rise to power of the Laudian party during the reign of Charles I, the Eucharist became a symbol of the strife which existed within the English Church.

³⁰ Webster, "Early Stuart Puritanism," 56; "The real distinguishing mark of Laudianism was its single-minded systematic support of royal authority." Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power," 116.

³¹ For the story of John Hooper and the 'Vestment Controversy' refer to chapter 2 of Brown, *The English Puritans*.

³² Webster, "Early Stuart Puritanism," 56; "To the Arminian, as to the Catholic, the pulpit was a utilitarian feature, secondary to the altar, which was invested with an aura of mystery. To the Calvinist, the order was reversed: the function of the Church was preaching. The altar was the utilitarian feature – often a mere table, brought into the body of the church for the occasion." Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power," 94.

³³ Fincham & Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 23, 34, 222.

³⁴ Maurice Ashley, *England in the Seventeenth Century: 1603-1714* (London: Penguin, 1952), 77.

The Laudian revolution of worship during the 1630s also had a profound impact on the University of Oxford where Laud was elected as Chancellor in April 1630, a mere two years after John Owen had enrolled in Queen's. Prior to his installation as Chancellor, Oxford was a bastion of Conformist Calvinism, under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Prideaux. Arminian theology had exerted a much stronger influence at Cambridge during the reigns of James and Elizabeth, but now the tides were beginning to shift.³⁵ The assassination of Cambridge's Chancellor, the Duke of Buckingham, dealt a severe blow to the Arminian grip on that institution, while the appointment of Laud as Chancellor increased their influence considerably at Oxford.³⁶ And so, the balance of Arminian influence in England shifted from Cambridge to Oxford just as John Owen was preparing for ordained ministry at Queen's. Under Laud's leadership, Oxford's college chapels were drastically refurbished and altars were restored and fenced. Lavish carpets, artwork and stained glass were installed to add external 'beauty of holiness', and long-neglected rites and ceremonies, considered by the Puritans to be a harbinger of 'popery', were now rigorously enforced under the Archbishop's watchful eye.³⁷ Although Owen's Puritan sympathies had not yet fully solidified into Non-Conformity, the innovations imposed by William Laud at Oxford alarmed him, just as they must have deeply grieved the Puritan sensibilities of his father Henry. Owen's internal struggle during this crucial period of change is described by his anonymous biographer:

Dr. Laud, then Archbishop of Canterbury, and Chancellor of Oxford, imposed several of his superstitious rites upon the university and commanded them to be observ'd on pain of expulsion. Mr. Owen, tho' hitherto bred according to the Church of England, was not

³⁵ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power," 65-66, 76.

³⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Laudianism and Political Power," 77-78.

³⁷ Kenneth Fincham, "Oxford and the Early Stuart Policy," in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume 4: Seventeenth-century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 201-207.

able to digest those impositions which led him to very great straits: It was his worldly interest to comply, but he cou'd not in conscience do it.³⁸

John Asty cited Laud's influence at Oxford as a key catalyst which pushed John Owen away from Conformity, for it was at this time that "his friends" began to look upon him as "one infected with Puritanism."³⁹ The earliest biographies assert that Owen was forcibly expelled from Oxford, but Thompson writes later on that he was "self-exiled for conscience sake."⁴⁰ Whether or not Owen was compelled to leave Oxford by the administration, his departure from the university set the course for a long and fruitful career as a leader within the Puritan movement.

Owen's decision to follow his conscience out of Oxford had profound consequences on the course of his future ministry. The emotional turmoil of the ordeal threw him into a deep depression which lasted nearly five years and even incapacitated him at times.⁴¹ Adding to his emotional distress was a breach in his relationship with his wealthy patron at the outbreak of the first English Civil War in 1641. John Owen's political allegiance was with the Puritans and the English Parliament, while his Welsh uncle was a staunch supporter of Charles. The breach of fellowship left the young cleric in a precarious position without any financial resources or inheritance.⁴²

In spite of these emotional and financial struggles, Owen had found a means to engage in ministry outside of the Established Church by accepting a chaplaincy within the household of Sir

³⁸ Anonymous, "Life of Owen," vi.

³⁹ Asty, "Memoirs," iv.

⁴⁰ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxviii.

⁴¹ Asty, "Memoirs," iv.

⁴² Anonymous, "Life of Owen," ix.

Robert Dormer of Ascot.⁴³ From here he went to the home of Lord Lovelace in Berkshire, but was soon forced to give up his employment when Lovelace took up arms in solidarity with the Royalist cause.⁴⁴ From Berkshire Owen moved to London where he wrote his first polemical treatise, *A Display of Arminianism* (1642), against the Laudian party and their Arminian sympathies.⁴⁵ Dedicated to the Committee of Religion in the House of Lords, the treatise did much to advance Owen's reputation with the Parliament. Still mired in a mild state of depression, Owen went one Lord's Day to St. Mary's Aldermanbury to hear a sermon from the famed Presbyterian pastor, Edmund Calamy. To his dismay, Calamy did not make an appearance in the pulpit that morning, but was replaced by an unknown preacher who spoke from Matthew 8:26: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" This sermon proved to be a turning point in Owen's spiritual formation as it is reported to have "resolv'd his doubts, quieted his conscience, and laid the foundation of that spiritual peace and comfort which he afterward enjoy'd during the course of his life."⁴⁶ From this point on, John Owen resolved to follow in the footsteps of his father and to give himself fully to the Puritan cause in England.

Early Pastoral Ministry

Owen's treatise against Arminianism helped to gain him his first pastorate in Fordham, Essex in 1643. The Parliamentary committee, having relieved the previous minister from his duties, arranged to have Owen take charge of the vacant post.⁴⁷ It was during this pastorate that Owen

⁴³ Taking a Chaplaincy was a common way for Puritan clergy to avoid clashes with the church hierarchy while still continuing to teach and promote Calvinist theology. Toon, *God's Statesman*, 10.

⁴⁴ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxix.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, "Life of Owen," x.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, "Life of Owen," x-xi.

⁴⁷ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxxii-xxxiii.

married Mary Rooke. Together they had eleven children, but tragically, only one daughter survived to adulthood. This sole surviving daughter of the Owen's passed away within the lifetime of her parents, leaving Owen with no heirs at the time of his death.⁴⁸ Owen's earliest sacramental writings appear at this phase of pastoral ministry as he composed two *Catechisms* for use in his parish to instruct children and adults in the basic tenants of the Reformed faith.⁴⁹ As Owen's reputation grew, he was summoned to preach the first of many sermons before the Parliament on 29 April 1646 and was well on his way to becoming one of England's leading clergymen.⁵⁰

Owen's second pastorate was in Coggeshall, Essex where he preached regularly to a crowd of nearly 2000 people. While ministering in Coggeshall, Owen obtained a copy of John Cotton's *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644), and was subsequently converted from Presbyterianism to the Congregationalist polity which had come to dominate the religious landscape in Puritan New England.⁵¹ Owen's new commitment to Congregationalism, which was to endure throughout the remainder of his life, is most clearly reflected in *Eschol: a Cluster of the Fruity of Canaan* (1647). It was also during this pastorate in Coggeshall that Owen published a massive defense of the doctrine of 'Limited Atonement' called the *Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, a scholastic treatise which brought him into conflict with another notable Puritan Divine named Richard Baxter who accused him of Antinomianism.⁵² Owen's Oxford

⁴⁸ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxxiii.

⁴⁹ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxxiv.

⁵⁰ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxxiv-xxxv.

⁵¹ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xxxvi.

⁵² Antinomian Puritans such as Tobias Crisp emphasized monergistic soteriology to such a degree that they affirmed that the justification of God's Elect occurred in eternity past. Although John Owen explicitly repudiated this doctrine, Baxter was relentless in his accusations. For a detailed analysis of the controversy between Owen and Baxter see Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2011).

training in scholastic and Aristotelian methodology shines through in many of his theological works which were written around this time. His willingness to draw on the methodology of Aristotle and the medieval scholastics sets him apart from many other Puritan Congregationalists who had been deeply influenced by the anti-Aristotelian methodology of Peter Ramus.

Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentary Wars

As the second Civil War commenced, General Fairfax and the Parliamentary army besieged the town of Colchester in the summer of 1648, with Fairfax and his officers residing within Owen's parish. Upon the Royalist surrender of Colchester ten weeks later, Owen was called upon to preach two sermons of thanksgiving, one to the army and the other to a Parliamentary committee which had been liberated from the town.⁵³ In August of 1648, the New Model Army, led by Oliver Cromwell, won a decisive victory at Preston which broke the back of the Royalist forces and within the span of several months King Charles was captured, tried and condemned with Oliver Cromwell signing the death warrant. The King was beheaded on 30 January 1649, and in the wake of this shocking turn of events John Owen was called upon by the Parliament to preach a sermon the following day, which he entitled "Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection". Although Owen selected his words very carefully on this most precarious occasion of his public career, the sermon makes clear that his allegiance lay squarely with the Parliament, and an epistle to the Commons which was published alongside the sermon exudes Owen's eschatological optimism that the millennial Kingdom would be imminently established.⁵⁴

⁵³ Richard L. Greaves, "Owen, John (1616-1683)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21016> (accessed January 26, 2012).

⁵⁴ Asty tells us that "the management of which discourse deserves to be recorded as a perpetual monument of his great integrity and wisdom. He appeared before a numerous assembly; it was a critical juncture, and he was not ignorant of the tempers of his principal hearers; he was then a rising man, and to justify the late action was the

On 19 April 1649, Owen was once again summoned to preach before Parliament and later on at the residence of General Fairfax, Cromwell and Owen met for the first time. Oliver Cromwell, much impressed with Owen's sermon, is reported to have remarked: "Sir, you are the person I must be acquainted with," to which came Owen's modest reply: "That will be much more to my advantage than yours." Cromwell took the occasion to inform Owen of his intention to bring him to Ireland as an army Chaplain. When Owen's congregation hesitated to release their beloved pastor for this commission, Cromwell resorted to commands that could not easily be refused.⁵⁵ Cromwell's infamous military campaign in Ireland is remembered primarily for the brutal massacre at Drogheda.⁵⁶ Owen remained with the army in Ireland for the entirety of the nine month campaign, but spent the majority of his time and effort in Dublin assessing the needs of the university and preaching to the Irish people. He was deeply distressed by the dearth of Protestant influence in Ireland, but returned with the army and happily resumed his ministry at Coggeshall at the conclusion of the campaign.⁵⁷ In September 1650, Owen was once again conscripted by Cromwell to accompany the army on another brutal, but overwhelmingly successful, campaign to Scotland.⁵⁸ While the Parliamentary forces were occupying Edinburgh, Owen preached repeatedly at St. Giles Cathedral and attempted to dissuade his Presbyterian brethren from resisting the providence of God, which Owen clearly felt was on the side of

infallible road to preferment. But his discourse was so modest and inoffensive, that his friends could make no just exception, nor his enemies take an advantage of his words another day." Asty, "Memoirs," viii.

⁵⁵ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xlii.

⁵⁶ "Brutal though the massacres in these towns are in the British context, in a wider context of European warfare they are not outstanding... At Drogheda Cromwell summoned the governor to surrender... According to the accepted conventions of warfare, if a garrison inflicted casualties on a besieging army after refusing a summons to surrender, and it was then taken by storm, the victors were justified in exacting retribution for the unnecessary losses they incurred." David Stevenson, "Cromwell, Scotland and Ireland" in *Cromwell and the Interregnum*, ed. David L. Smith, 192 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

⁵⁷ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 41.

⁵⁸ Asty, "Memoirs," x.

Cromwell and the English Parliament.⁵⁹ After Cromwell's crushing defeat of the Scots at Dunbar on 3 September 1650, Owen was permitted to return to Essex, and for a short time resumed his pastoral ministry at Coggeshall. But this happy reunion was short-lived, for on 18 March 1651 John Owen was appointed by Parliament to be the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.⁶⁰

Vice-Chancellorship at Oxford

Owen's responsibilities at Oxford were only to increase over the next few years, as Oliver Cromwell, nominated him as the Vice-Chancellor in September 1652.⁶¹ On 23 December 1653 the degree of D.D. was conferred on him by the university, and thus in a strange twist of providence, the Puritan student who was forced out of Oxford during the Laudian era was now compelled to forsake his pastoral responsibilities and return to his *alma mater* as a Puritan reformer!⁶² Asty summarizes the irony of this situation well:

This is the man that was for his non-conformity driven from the College, deserted by his friends, disappointed of a good state, seized with deep melancholy, exercised with spiritual troubles, sinking under bodily distempers, and grappling with other difficulties and hardships, now become Dean of Christ's-Church, and Vice-chancellor of that University, which for conscience sake he had been forced to quit.⁶³

When Owen began to govern Oxford, the University was in a state of disarray as it had been used as a military headquarters by the Royalist army during the war. Much of the treasury had been depleted by Charles I to fund his campaign against Parliament, leaving the institution in

⁵⁹ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xlv; During his stay in Scotland, Owen helped to persuade Alexander Jaffray, provost of Aberdeen, that the Scots had defied God's Providence in supporting the Stuart Kings. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

⁶⁰ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xlvi.

⁶¹ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xlvi.

⁶² Blair Worden, "Cromwellian Oxford" in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume 4, Seventeenth-century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke, 737 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶³ Asty, "Memoirs," x-xi.

a state of financial crisis.⁶⁴ In terms of academics, Oxford had suffered a significant loss in prestige as the Parliament had evicted many notable scholars during their first ‘visitation’ in 1647.⁶⁵ In addition to a heavy burden of administrative responsibility, Owen took up the task of preaching alternate Sundays at St. Mary’s, the University Church, along with his Congregational colleague Thomas Goodwin who had been appointed President of Magdalen College.⁶⁶ Serving together at Oxford, Owen and Goodwin were branded by their enemies as the “two Atlases and Patriarchs of Independency”, a characterization which was not altogether inaccurate.⁶⁷ Together these two Puritan reformers exerted an incredible influence on ecclesiastical policy during the Interregnum by introducing a system of ‘Triers’ and ‘Ejectors’, who had the legal authority to examine clergy and to remove them from their positions if they were deemed unfit for the ministry.⁶⁸ As a result of Owen’s influence on the Cromwellian Church, most of the Laudian innovations of the 1630s were reversed and the Puritan ideals of simplicity in worship were partially realized. The future looked very bright for Puritan Independents who had long dreamed of toleration.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ian Roy and Dietrich Reinhart, “Oxford and the Civil Wars” in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume 4, Seventeenth-century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke, 695-713 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶⁵ Worden, “Cromwellian Oxford,” 749; For a list of some faculty members who were expelled during the Visitation see Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 51.

⁶⁶ Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 55.

⁶⁷ Anthony à 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 university* (London, 1692). Early English Books Online (accessed February 7, 2012), 556.

⁶⁸ Worden, “Cromwellian Oxford,” 737; “The Triers included 11 laymen together with 14 Congregationalist, 10 Presbyterian and 3 Baptist ministers.” Hill, *God’s Englishman*, 185.

⁶⁹ “By the late 1640s, most Laudian bishops were either dead, imprisoned, or in hiding, and there were few visible signs of the changes introduced in the 1630s. However, Laudian ideals remained very much alive.” Fincham & Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 274.

Although Owen's administrative effectiveness at Oxford has been the subject of some debate, his tremendous influence on the Church of England is beyond question.⁷⁰ Blair Worden considers the impact that Oxford exerted on the Cromwellian Church under his leadership to be "at least as great as that which it had exerted on the Laudian church before it."⁷¹ Owen's admirers who penned his early biographies lauded his accomplishments at Oxford in glowing, if not exaggerated terms. Asty, to cite one example, claimed that Owen "took care to restrain the loose, to encourage the sober and pious, to prefer men of learning and industry, and under his administration it was visible, that the whole body of that University was reduced to good order, and flourish'd with a number of excellent scholars, and persons of distinguish'd piety."⁷² He also mentions that Owen was a firm disciplinarian, going so far as physically to drag an unruly *Terrae-filius* off stage with his own hands after the student had disregarded the Doctor's instruction to "avoid profaneness and obscenity."⁷³ Thompson credits Owen as "the chief agent in raising the university from the brink of ruin," and is eager to celebrate his irenic spirit toward both Presbyterians and Episcopalians with whom he strongly disagreed on matters of polity:

Among other honourable facts, it is recorded that he allowed a society of Episcopalians to meet every Lord's day over against his own door, and to celebrate public worship according to the forms of the liturgy, though the laws at that period put it in Owen's power to disperse the assembly; and there were not wanting those of a less enlarged and unsectarian spirit to urge him to such a course. In the same wise and conciliatory spirit he won the confidence of the Presbyterians, by bestowing upon their ablest men some of the vacant livings that were at his disposal, and taking counsel of them in all difficulties and emergencies.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Toon, *God's Statesman*, 79.

⁷¹ Worden, Blair, "Cromwellian Oxford," 737.

⁷² Asty, "Memoirs," xi.

⁷³ Asty, "Memoirs," xi-xii.

⁷⁴ Thompson, "Life of Owen," li.

Not everyone was as impressed with Dr. Owen's accomplishments at Oxford as his Non-conformist biographers. The inflammatory biographer Anthony à Wood experienced Owen's Vice-Chancellorship as a student at Oxford and later provided written testimony which casts the Vice-Chancellor in a far less flattering light.⁷⁵ Wood makes much of an unsuccessful campaign that Owen waged against 'Habits, Formalities and all Ceremony.'⁷⁶ With a tone of disgust, he reminisces how Dr. Owen, "instead of being a grave example to the University scorned all formality, undervalued his office by going in *quirpo* like a young scholar, with powdered hair, snakebone bandstrings, (or bandstrings with very large tassels), lawne band, a large set of ribbands, pointed, at his knees, and Spanish leather boots, with large lawne tops, and his hat mostly cock'd."⁷⁷ If nothing else, Wood's testimony helps to undermine the false stereotype that all of the Puritans were opposed to fashionable clothing! Wood also takes the time to rehearse an old piece of gossip (vehemently denied by Owen during his lifetime) that the Vice-Chancellor was a "so great enemy to the *Lord's Prayer*, that when some preachers concluded their own with it, which was very seldom done by any, especially the Presbyterians and Independents, (because it was looked upon, forsooth, as formal and prelatical so to do) he would with great sneering and scorn, turn aside or sit down and put on his hat."⁷⁸ In spite of these criticisms of Owen, Wood's assessment was not altogether negative. Even his detractors found some aspects of his ministry worthy of praise:

But what I myself knew of him, which may, I hope, be mention'd without offense, envy or flattery is (let rash and giddy heads say what they please) that he was a person well skil'd in the Tongues, Rabbinical learning, Jewish rites and customs; that he had a great command of his English Pen, and was one of the most gentle and fairest writers, who

⁷⁵ Worden, "Cromwellian Oxford," 771.

⁷⁶ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 556.

⁷⁷ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 556.

⁷⁸ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 557; Although Owen denied this charge as slanderous, the rumour persisted among his enemies. Toon, *God's Statesman*, 58.

have appeared against the Church of England, as handling his adversaries with far more civil, decent and temperate language than many of his fiery brethren, and by confining himself to the cause without the unbecoming mixture of personal slanders and reflection... His personage was proper and comely, and he had a very graceful behaviour in the Pulpit, an eloquent Elocution, a winning and insinuating deportment, and could by the persuasion of his oratory, in conjunction with some other outward advantages, move and wind the affections of his admiring auditory almost as he pleased.⁷⁹

According to Blair Worden's more recent assessment of Owen's achievements at Oxford, his failure to implement lasting change in the university was largely owing to the fact that he did not successfully reform the heads of the colleges. Although Magdalen was conformed to Puritan ideals under the leadership of Goodwin, Queen's and Balliol remained bastions of Royalist support throughout the entire Interregnum. Even Christ Church remained a difficult college to govern in spite of Owen's aggressive campaign for moral and spiritual reform as the Dean.⁸⁰

Owen's primary theological contribution during the Oxford phase of his career was his polemical writings against a wave of heresy known as 'Socinianism', which he perceived to be the greatest threat to Orthodox Calvinism in England. Socinian doctrine, as summarized in the *Rachovian catechism*, denied the doctrine of the Trinity, the full deity of Jesus Christ, and the substitutionary nature of the atonement.⁸¹ In 1652, Owen openly declared war on the Socinians by submitting a petition to Parliament condemning the *Rachovian catechism* and laying the foundation to interrogate and expel any ministers who had strayed from their moorings in

⁷⁹ Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 558-59.

⁸⁰ Worden, "Cromwellian Oxford," 763-67.

⁸¹ "In the last decades of the seventeenth century the Socinian challenge to the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity gained the support of a large section of the intellectual community in England. None of the responses put forward from the ranks of orthodox theologians in the prolonged debate was able to challenge seriously the Socinian dominance of the intellectual scene. One consequence was that English Presbyterianism, the community that had drawn up the Westminster Catechism and had hopes at one time of assuming control of the state Church, was almost wholly won over to Unitarianism in the decades that followed." Alan Spence, "The Significance of John Owen for Modern Christology" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, 173 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

Reformed Orthodoxy.⁸² Several years later, Owen's battle against the Socinians reached a climax with the publication of *Vindiciae evangelicae* (1655) which he wrote to refute the catechism of John Biddle.⁸³ Asty boasted that, with this work, Owen had successfully "cut the sinews of the Socinian cause and stabb'd it to the heart."⁸⁴ The subsequent history of eighteenth century English Dissent, however, shows that this was not actually the case as the Reformed Orthodoxy of the Puritans increasingly lost ground to Unitarianism within the new intellectual milieu of rationalist philosophy.⁸⁵

Owen's Vice-Chancellorship came to a close soon after Parliament's drafting of the *Humble Petition and Advice* which offered to crown Oliver Cromwell as the new King of England.⁸⁶ Both Owen and the army were immensely displeased with this proposal and he joined with Colonel Pride in vocally opposing it.⁸⁷ Owen drafted a petition on behalf of the officers that effectively forced Cromwell to refuse the crown and to receive instead the lesser title of 'Lord Protector'.⁸⁸ Owen's political involvement in this chain of events led to an enduring breach in his friendship with Oliver Cromwell. His fall from grace is evidenced by the fact that when the Lord Protector was inaugurated at Westminster Hall, Owen was not asked to participate in the ceremony, nor was he even present as an invited guest.⁸⁹ In July 1657, Owen

⁸² *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

⁸³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

⁸⁴ Asty, "Memoirs," xiii.

⁸⁵ Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1990), 81-82.

⁸⁶ "In many ways it was a tension within Cromwell's own vision, between his commitment to parliament and his pursuit of liberty of conscience, that doomed both to failure. He was trying to embrace as 'fundamentals' two objectives that were ultimately incompatible. It is uncertain how far he ever perceived this." David L. Smith, "Oliver Cromwell, the First Protectorate Parliament and Religious Reform" in *Cromwell and the Interregnum*, ed. David L. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 181.

⁸⁷ Hill, *God's Englishman*, 181.

⁸⁸ Hill, *God's Englishman*, 184.

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Works of Owen*, lxvi-lxvii.

voluntarily resigned his position as Vice-Chancellor and was soon after deprived by Parliament of the Deanery of Christ Church.⁹⁰

Champion of Non-Conformity

As Oliver Cromwell was facing his final battle with illness in August 1658, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin were preparing for a gathering at the Savoy Palace along with a number of other influential Congregationalist leaders to formulate a Confession of Faith for the Independent Puritan congregations of England.⁹¹ The *Savoy Declaration*, which resulted from this conference, builds upon the previous work of the Westminster Assembly, often following the *Westminster Confession* verbatim.⁹² Because of Owen's leadership role in the drafting of the *Savoy Declaration*, it is an important source from which we can discern his views on the Lord's Supper.

Oliver Cromwell died on 3 September 1658 on the anniversary of his military victories in Scotland. His son Richard, who succeeded him, proved to be an ineffective leader and was compelled to resign the Protectorship. Owen was rumoured to have been partially responsible for the downfall of Richard, although this was a charge he adamantly denied.⁹³ After Parliament forced Richard Cromwell to resign, the army took control of the government. Unhappy with the military rule of the English Commonwealth, General Monk marched on London and orchestrated

⁹⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen."

⁹¹ It has also been suggested that the *Savoy Declaration* was an effort, on the part of the Congregationalists, to provide a confessional document for the national Church that would supplement the *Humble Petition (1657)*. Ryan Kelly, "Reformed or Reforming? John Owen and the Complexity of Theological Codification for Mid-Seventeenth-Century England" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 18.

⁹² Thompson, "Life of Owen," lxix-lxx.

⁹³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

events which led to the restoration of Charles II and the Stuart monarchy on 29 May 1660.⁹⁴

Except for some segments within English Puritanism who were deeply committed to the Commonwealth and saw their dreams of religious toleration slipping away, Charles was received by the English people with much rejoicing.

With the Stuart King back on the throne, and a Royalist Parliament in power, Owen quietly retired to his private estate in Stadham. Aside from writing many of his greatest treatises during this final phase of ministry, Owen preached to a small congregation which met in his home.⁹⁵ In spite of the King's promises in 1660 to extend political toleration to Presbyterians, a series of Parliamentary acts known as the *Clarendon Code* ushered in a terrible era of persecution for Presbyterians and Congregationalists alike. The *Corporation Act* of 1661 required all public officials to denounce the Solemn League and Covenant which had been in effect since 1643.⁹⁶ The *Act of Uniformity* in 1662 required all clergy to use the *Book of Common Prayer* in their services and stipulated that only those who had been ordained by an Episcopal bishop could officiate within the English Church. On St. Bartholomew's day, 1662, two thousand ministers were ejected from the Church of England for their refusal to conform. Deprived of their livelihood, some of these ministers emigrated to the colonies in search of religious liberty, and others lived out their days in poverty or went to prison for civil disobedience.⁹⁷ The *Conventicle Act* of 1664 forbade religious meetings of more than five people, in an effort to suppress illegal congregations.⁹⁸ Finally, the *Five Mile Act* of 1665

⁹⁴ Asty, "Memoirs," xvii.

⁹⁵ Thompson, "Life of Owen," lxxviii.

⁹⁶ Gerald R. Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660-1688* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 7.

⁹⁷ Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution*, 8-9.

⁹⁸ Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution*, 11-12.

restricted any ejected minister from living within five miles of any town where he had formerly ministered to a congregation.⁹⁹ For many Puritan pastors the *Five Mile Act* was the most painful part of the *Clarendon Code* as it effectively sentenced them to exile within the borders of their own country.

In 1665, John Owen was indicted by the government for maintaining an illegal conventicle at Stadham, but, enjoying the protection of powerful friends in government, he was not imprisoned like some of his Dissenting brethren who were less well known and respected.¹⁰⁰ During this difficult period of persecution, Owen received a call from John Cotton's Congregational Church in Boston to become their new pastor, but "the providence of God diverted him from that purpose."¹⁰¹ Owen remained in his native country and put his pen to work, writing a massive exegetical commentary on the book of Hebrews, a formidable treatise on the Holy Spirit and many other writings defending the Non-Conformist cause and pleading for political toleration.¹⁰² After the terrible plague and fire which devastated much of London in 1665-66, Owen and his family moved to the city and pastored another illegal congregation that met in the home of Charles Fleetwood. This conventicle included a number of former army officials.¹⁰³ It was during this pastorate that Owen preached his series of twenty-five *Sacramental Discourses* which form the bulk of his writings on the Eucharist. The sermons were reportedly taken down in note form by Sir John Hartopp, who was a member of Owen's congregation at that time.

⁹⁹ Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

¹⁰¹ Asty, "Memoirs," xxiv.

¹⁰² Owen's plea for religious toleration extended to New England, where he wrote to the governor of Massachusetts pleading that the Baptists should be free to worship according to their conscience providing they did not disturb the peace. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

¹⁰³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "John Owen"

Even as an active leader of Independency and Non-Conformity in and around London, John Owen enjoyed the respect and friendship of many high officials within the Church and the government, including an ongoing friendship with Thomas Barlow, his old Oxford tutor. Owen used his political influence to help his brethren who were in prison, even advocating for the release of John Bunyan, the Baptist pastor who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*.¹⁰⁴ Asty informs us that Owen and King Charles enjoyed a cordial relationship and that the King expressed a degree of sympathy for the plight of Owen and the Dissenters.¹⁰⁵ In 1672, a declaration of Indulgence was issued by the King, and as a consequence, Non-Conformist ministers were licensed to gather congregations outside of the Episcopal system; but soon thereafter the King was forced by Parliament to withdraw the olive branch and the suppression of the Dissenters resumed.¹⁰⁶

In 1673, Owen merged his congregation with that of his recently deceased friend Joseph Caryl, and began to organize meetings on Leadenhall Street.¹⁰⁷ During these final years, Owen's health rapidly declined and he was frequently unable to preach because of asthma and kidney stones.¹⁰⁸ His wife, Mary, died in 1676 and he retired to Kensington and Ealing with his second wife. On the day before his death, Owen dictated a letter to his old friend Charles Fleetwood encouraging him to persevere in the face of state-mandated persecution: "I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm; but whilst the great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live, and pray, and hope, and wait patiently, and do not despond; the promise stands invincible, that He will never leave us, nor forsake us."¹⁰⁹ In one final irony, Owen died

¹⁰⁴ Asty, "Memoirs," xxx.

¹⁰⁵ Asty, "Memoirs," xxx.

¹⁰⁶ Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution*, 18-21.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xc.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, "Life of Owen," xcv.

¹⁰⁹ Toon, *Correspondance of John Owen*, 174.

on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1683 at the age of sixty-seven and was buried in Bunhill Fields alongside many of his Dissenting brethren.¹¹⁰

Preaching at his funeral, David Clarkson, who was Owen's associate at Leadenhall, gave the following eulogy about his distinguished friend and mentor:

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 luster to his other accomplishments; it shined in his whole course, and was diffused through his whole conversation. I need not tell you of this that knew him, and observed that it was his great design to promote holiness in the power, life, and exercise of it among you. It was his great complaint that the power of it declined among professors. It was his care and endeavour to prevent or cure spiritual decays in his own flock. He was a burning and a shining light, and you for a while rejoiced in his light; alas! That is was for but a while, and that we can't rejoice in it still!¹¹¹

Most of John Owen's extant writings on the Eucharist derive from the end of his career, and were delivered in the context of pastoral ministry in a London conventicle. Owen's Eucharistic theology was forged in the crucible of Civil War, political turmoil and ecclesiastical strife within the English Church. It is also significant to observe that most of his Eucharistic writings were written after he had transferred his allegiance from Presbyterianism to a Congregational polity. Although many Puritan Congregationalists had been deeply influenced by the pragmatic theology and methodology of Peter Ramus, and had emphasized the utility of the sacraments in guarding the purity of the visible Church, Owen's Oxford education and his willingness to draw from the wells of Aristotelian logic and metaphysics gave him the intellectual resources he needed to reaffirm the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper without conceding the corporeal presence. Because of his willingness to swim against the

¹¹⁰ Anonymous, "Life of Owen," xxxvii.

¹¹¹ John Owen, *A complete collection of the sermons of the Reverend and learned John Owen, D.D. Formerly published: with an Addition of many others never before printed. Also several valuable tracts, now first published from manuscripts: and some others, which were very scarce. To which are added his Latin Orations, whilst Vicechancellor at Oxford, taken from his own Copies. And to the whole are prefix'd Memoirs of his life: some written by him upon special occasions: and his funeral sermon, preach'd by Mr. David Clarkson* (London, 1721). Eighteenth Century Collections Online (accessed 18 April, 2013).

current, Owen presented a notable alternative to the subjective and pragmatic Eucharistic theology of his Puritan brethren in both England and New England.

Chapter 2

John Owen's Sixteenth Century Inheritance

Differences regarding the meaning and purpose of the Eucharist which began to emerge between Swiss and German Protestants in the early stages of the Reformation solidified after the failed Marburg Colloquy of 1529. After this pivotal meeting, Lutherans and Reformed Protestants began to forge increasingly independent identities in spite of substantial areas of theological alignment in their common struggle against the Roman Catholic Church.¹ In this respect, G.R. Potter expressed an important insight when he wrote that “[t]he dispute at Marburg was much more than a dispute about words; the meaning of the Lord’s Supper involved the whole Christian faith.”² At Marburg it became evident that the two Magisterial Reformers, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, possessed fundamentally different presuppositions when it came to the relationship between spiritual and material reality. Zwingli, having been strongly influenced by Erasmian transcendentalism in his early career as a Reformer, erected a dividing wall between the physical and the spiritual – a decision which was ultimately to fix the boundaries of his sacramental theology, and by extension, the boundaries of Reformed Protestantism in general as his mantle passed to the second generation of Protestants who shared this basic presupposition.³

¹ At the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529, Zwingli and Luther were able to agree on fourteen points of doctrine. On the fifteenth point relating to the Lord’s Supper, they agreed on the abolition of the mass and the offering of both elements to the communicants, but disagreed sharply on the question of the “real presence” of Christ in the bread and wine. Hans Hillerbrand ed. *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. “Marburg, Colloquy of.”

² G.R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 342.

³ The sharp division between physical and material in Zwingli’s theology has been noted by various scholars and attributed variously to Erasmian Humanism (cf. Ulrich Gabler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and Work*, trans. Ruth C.L. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 37; Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 83-86; W.P. Stephens, *Zwingli:*

Within the sixteenth century matrix of Reformed Protestantism, a variety of positions developed which distinguished between the sign and the thing signified, while affirming to a greater degree than Zwingli the real presence of Christ in the sacramental elements.

Previous attempts to analyze the Eucharistic theology of John Owen and the English Puritans have been hindered by the tendency to reduce the Reformed tradition to the binary categories of ‘Zwinglianism’ or ‘Calvinism’.⁴ In actual fact, the sixteenth century Protestant tradition offers a rich spectrum of nuanced positions on the Eucharist with the so-called ‘memorialist’ view of Ulrich Zwingli standing at one terminus and the corporeal ‘realist’ position of Martin Luther occupying the other. It is the purpose of the present chapter to lay the foundation for a more nuanced analysis of Owen’s Eucharistic theology by seeking to understand his sixteenth century Reformed inheritance.⁵ To accomplish this aim, the Eucharistic theology of Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, John Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli will be carefully analyzed, because they represent key *loci* for the treatment of this theme within the Reformed tradition. The influence of Bucer and Vermigli upon Reformed sacramental theology is particularly important with respect to Owen and the Puritans, since both of these men emigrated from the Continent to England at the invitation of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and were afforded distinguished faculty positions at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford.⁶ Bucer and Vermigli left an enduring imprint on the course of the English Reformation through the clergy whose sacramental theology they helped to shape and through their indelible influence on the

An Introduction to His Thought (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 73. On Nominalism cf. Cyril C. Richardson, *Zwingli and Cranmer on the Eucharist* (Evanston, Illinois: Seabury Western Theological Seminary, 1949), 10. On Platonism/Neoplatonism cf. Hillerbrand ed., s.v. “Zwingli” and on Aristotelianism cf. Gabler, *Huldrych Zwingli*, 37.

⁴ This flaw is particularly evident in Stephen Mayor’s analysis of Owen’s Eucharistic theology.

⁵ In his treatise on the *Means for Understanding the Mind of God*, Owen cited Bucer, Calvin, Martyr and Beza as “the principal and most eminent” expositors of Scripture in these “latter days”. *Works of Owen*, IV.229

⁶ Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “Polemical divinity and doctrinal controversy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 208.

First *Book of Common Prayer*.⁷ Any attempt to analyze Puritan sacramental theology apart from the contributions of Bucer and Vermigli is bound to be seriously deficient.

The Eucharistic Theology of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

Although Zwingli has rightly been credited as the “founder” of Reformed Protestantism,⁸ the extent of his influence on the reform movement in Switzerland and England which followed his death on the battlefield at Kappel in 1531 has been vigorously debated by various scholars over the years.⁹ The label “Zwinglian”, moreover, assumed a distinctly pejorative hue in sixteenth century polemics which became associated with political dissidents and Anabaptist “radicals” who emptied the sacramental bread and wine of any “real” presence of Christ’s body and blood.¹⁰

In spite of his massive influence in the early debates surrounding the Eucharist, Ulrich Zwingli is probably the least appreciated and most misunderstood of the Magisterial Reformers, especially with respect to the nature of his beliefs on the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli’s colleague and earliest biographer, Oswald Myconius, alluded to these early misconceptions which have

⁷ Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies, and the Stuart Divines*, 11.

⁸ Hillerbrand ed., s.v. “Zwingli.”

⁹ Cyril C. Richardson, to cite one example, investigated the extent to which Zwingli’s Eucharistic theology influenced Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and the development of the Anglican Liturgy. cf. Cyril C. Richardson, *Zwingli and Cranmer on the Eucharist* (Evanston: Seabury Western Theological Seminary, 1949). The extent to which Bullinger’s Eucharistic theology reflects that of his predecessor in Zurich is also something of an enigma. Some scholars have argued that Bullinger’s signing of the *Consensus Tigurinus* in 1549 indicates a departure from the pristine Eucharistic theology of Zwingli to a position closer to that of the more irenic Martin Bucer: “Zwinglianism changed under Bullinger. However since Bullinger, in his more than forty years in office, never failed to proclaim his loyalty to his predecessor, and never uttered a word of criticism or correction, these changes were not obvious. His insistence that he was only carrying on Zwingli’s work was often believed, even though that is out of the question, since it was in fact Bullinger’s interpretation of Zwingli that was being carried on. It was in this form that Zwingli’s influence lived on.” Gabler, *Huldrych Zwingli*, 156.

¹⁰ “The word ‘Zwinglian’ is most often linked with Zwingli’s view of the sacraments, usually to imply that whereas Luther was positive and affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, Zwingli was negative and affirmed the real absence!” W.P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 76.

persisted for centuries when he wrote: “Certain scholars had called [Zwingli] a dogmatist in teaching, principally because of his doctrine of the Eucharist. I do not doubt if ever they could have read sympathetically and weighed faithfully what he wrote to the German princes assembled at Augsburg many would have judged him differently.”¹¹ Born one year apart from Luther in 1484, into a relatively wealthy family, Zwingli was afforded the opportunity to study at the University of Vienna and the University of Basel, where he received his BA in 1504 and his MA in 1506. Unlike Luther, who was trained in the nominalist tradition of Gabriel Biel, often called the *via moderna*, Zwingli was trained in the realist tradition known as the *via antiqua*, and came into contact early in his theological formation with Renaissance Humanism and Greek philosophy.

The earliest teaching that we have from Zwingli on the subject of the Eucharist comes from the publication and exposition of his *Sixty-seven Articles* following the First Zurich Disputation in 1523. Article eighteen of this document states “That Christ who offered himself up once as a sacrifice, is a perpetual and valid payment for the sin of all believers; from this it follows that the mass is not a sacrifice, but a memorial of the sacrifice and a seal of the redemption which Christ has manifested in us.”¹² In his exposition of *Article 18*, Zwingli expressed his personal dislike for the term “sacrament” because of the confusion which had surrounded its definition throughout the medieval period. Significantly, Zwingli defines a “sacrament” here in terms of an “oath” which God makes with his people. In this way, he relates

¹¹ Oswald Myconius, “The Original Life of Zwingli,” in *Ulrich Zwingli: Early Writings*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, trans. Henry Bennet (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1980), 17.

¹² Ulrich Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Faith,” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill and Henry P. Van Dusen, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 92.

true “sacraments” directly to the promises of God in an effort to exclude ceremonies falsely called “sacraments” such as confirmation and extreme unction.¹³

Having defined the sacraments in a way that excludes the Roman Catholic mass, Zwingli proceeds to define the Eucharist as “nothing other than a sincere thanksgiving for the great deed and a memorial of his humble suffering by which he has united us with God.”¹⁴ Unlike a sacrifice which confers grace to the communicant in the *present*, a memorial reminds us of a sacrifice which has already conferred grace in the *past*. Another notable aspect of Zwingli’s theology in this early exposition is his affirmation that the visible act of partaking of the elements results in the strengthening of faith. It must be observed, however, that he qualifies this affirmation on the basis of John 6, so that this strengthening can occur with, or without the sacramental elements. Zwingli goes so far as to argue here that the elements are most beneficial to “the simple of heart” who need an outward sign to bolster their faith.¹⁵ It is also notable, that in this early exposition Zwingli seeks to minimize his differences with Luther on the Eucharist, choosing rather, to see Luther as a common ally in the battle against ‘false religion’. At the same time, he forges a distinct identity from that of Luther by acknowledging that “[Luther] concedes a great deal to those who are weak in the faith and that he would act differently than I would in things in which I am not of his opinion.”¹⁶

Zwingli’s second major exposition on the sacraments is found in his *Commentary on True and False Religion* published in 1525 – the same year that the mass was legally abolished

¹³ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Sixty-Seven Articles,” 98-99.

¹⁴ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Sixty-Seven Articles,” 111.

¹⁵ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Sixty-Seven Articles,” 115.

¹⁶ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Sixty-Seven Articles,” 118.

in Zurich.¹⁷ The Erasmian distinction between material and spiritual comes to full fruition in Zwingli's discussion of the sacraments in the *Commentary* as he states: "They are wrong [i.e. Roman Catholics], therefore, by the whole width of heaven who think that sacraments have any cleansing power."¹⁸ Zwingli goes on to apply the same Erasmian presupposition in refuting the Lutheran view: "Therefore this second view [i.e. Lutheran] has not value, which supposes that the sacraments are signs of such a kind that, when they are applied to a man, the thing signified by the sacraments at once takes place within him."¹⁹ Zwingli repudiates this efficacious view of the sacraments as channels of grace since, in his opinion, binding the Holy Spirit to any material element would place an intolerable limit on the sovereign freedom of God. On this point of doctrine, it is possible to detect a real divergence between Zwingli on the one hand, and Calvin and Bullinger on the other, since the *Consensus Tigurinus* defines the sacrament as an instrument of divine, sanctifying grace.²⁰ As will be shown, the "instrumental" efficacy of the Eucharistic feast, rejected here by Zwingli in his *Commentary*, was strongly affirmed by Calvin in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*.²¹

When Zwingli comes to the section of his sacramental exposition dealing directly with the Eucharist, he begins by acknowledging an obvious shift in his manner of expression: "Two years ago I wrote among sixty-seven articles one, the eighteenth, on the Eucharist, in which I

¹⁷ Hillerbrand, ed., s.v. "Zwingli."

¹⁸ Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 182.

¹⁹ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 183.

²⁰ Hillerbrand, ed., s.v. "Consensus Tigurinus."

²¹ "I indeed admit that the breaking of bread is a symbol; it is not the thing itself. But, having admitted this, we shall nevertheless duly infer that by the showing of the symbol the thing itself is also shown. For unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him. Therefore, if the Lord truly represents the participation in his body through the breaking of bread, there ought not to be the least doubt that he truly presents and shows his body." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2006), 4.17.10. (Hereafter: *Institutes*, 4.17.10).

wrote many things with a view rather to the times than to the thing itself.”²² In light of this change of emphasis, Zwingli clarifies that “what I offer here, in the forty-second year of my age, shall outweigh what I offered in the fortieth.”²³ In 1523, he had expressed his conviction that the Eucharist was useful both for strengthening of faith through visible symbols (the objective aspect), and for remembering Christ’s sacrifice as a memorial (the subjective aspect). Now, in the *Commentary*, the emphasis has shifted completely to the subjective function of the Eucharist which he defines as “nothing but the commemoration by which those who firmly believe that by Christ’s death and blood they have become reconciled with the Father proclaim this life-bringing death, that is, preach it with praise and thanksgiving.”²⁴ Zwingli appears to have totally eliminated the objective component from the Lord’s Supper in an effort to distinguish even more sharply between the material and the spiritual.

To further reinforce this separation of the material “sign” from the “thing signified”, he expressly denies that believers “eat spiritually” at the Lord’s Table: “Why, pray, do we burden pious hearts with words of this kind, which no intellect can comprehend? ‘Spiritual body’ man comprehends as little as if you were to say ‘bodily mind’ or ‘fleshly reason.’ ... We eat spiritually when through the grace of God we come to Christ. To eat the body of Christ spiritually, then, what is it but to trust in Christ?”²⁵ The subject of “spiritual eating” introduces a critical exegetical component of Zwingli’s sacramental hermeneutic; namely his interpretation of Jesus’ teaching in John 6. According to Zwingli’s exegesis, the “eating” and “drinking” which Jesus

²² Zwingli, *Commentary*, 198.

²³ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 198.

²⁴ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 237.

²⁵ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 250.

describes in v. 56 of this passage is not sacramental, but spiritual.²⁶ The exegetical linchpin to Zwingli's entire sacramental hermeneutic from this point forward is found in v. 63: "The flesh profiteth nothing."²⁷ This biblical citation becomes a central motif which is repeated over and over again in all of his polemical writings in order to deny the 'corporeal' or 'carnal' presence of Jesus in the sacrament, as he himself testified: "I saw no more effective armor for this conflict than the sixth chapter of John. There that indestructible adamant, 'The flesh profiteth nothing,' is so firmly imbedded in its form and substance that it stands uninjured, however you beat upon it, and all opposing weapons are shattered without even making a dent in it."²⁸ For Zwingli, to "eat" the body and to "drink" the blood of Christ is simply to believe in Christ and to rest in his finished work of redemption.

Using John 6:63 as his hermeneutical key, Zwingli insists that Jesus' words of institution, "this is my body" demand a figurative sense: "The entire difficulty, then, lies not in the pronoun 'this,' but in a word no larger as far as number of letters is concerned, namely, in the verb 'is.' For this is used in more than one passage in the Holy Scriptures for 'signifies.'"²⁹ We see therefore, in the *Commentary* the three fundamental elements of Zwingli's sacramental hermeneutic, viz. his radical distinction between material and spiritual reality, the words of Jesus in John 6:63 against the Judaizers who, like the Roman Catholics, misunderstood Jesus' words to imply corporeal eating, and finally, the figurative interpretation of the substantive verb "to be" in Jesus' words of institution.

²⁶ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 206.

²⁷ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 205-216. "The flesh of Christ profiteth very greatly, aye, immeasurably, in every way, but as I have said, by being slain, not eaten. Slain it has saved us from slaughter, but devoured it profiteth absolutely nothing." Zwingli, *Commentary*, 209.

²⁸ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 248.

²⁹ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 224.

By 1526, Zwingli's teaching on the Eucharist was being vigorously attacked by both Roman Catholics and Lutherans, who in spite of their differences, both affirmed the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacramental elements.³⁰ In order to make his Eucharistic theology accessible to a larger constituency and to defend himself from charges of heresy, Zwingli published a new treatise *On the Lord's Supper* in German. The most significant advance that this treatise makes on Zwingli's Eucharistic theology is a new argument from Christology which he derives from the physical ascent of Jesus into heaven as taught in the New Testament Gospels and also in the *Apostles' Creed*. Since one evangelist affirms that Jesus visibly ascended into heaven before a crowd of witnesses (Mark 16) and another evangelist affirms that he is present "even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28), Zwingli concludes on the basis of the *analogia fidei*, that Jesus ascended to heaven with respect to his human nature, but remained omnipresent with respect to his divine nature.³¹ Perceiving his vulnerability on this point to the charge of Nestorianism, he is quick to assert his own Chalcedonian orthodoxy: "For note well, good Christian, that in Christ there are two different natures, the divine and the human: and yet the two are only the one Christ."³²

Thus, through Zwingli's influence, the fifth century debate between the Alexandrian school which emphasized the unity of the two natures in the hypostatic union, and the Antiochian school which emphasized the distinction of the two natures, was resurrected and brought centre

³⁰ While Roman Catholics affirmed the doctrine of 'transubstantiation' which had been official dogma since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Luther affirmed in his *Large Catechism* (1527) the real, corporeal presence of Christ "in, with, and under" the sacramental bread and wine. Hillerbrand, ed., s.v. "Consubstantiation."

³¹ "According to his divine nature he did not need to ascend up to heaven: for he is omnipresent. . . . According to his [human nature] he was lifted up on the cross, and with it he ascended up into heaven. This nature was a guest in heaven, for no flesh had ever previously ascended into it." Ulrich Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill and Henry P. Van Dusen, trans. G.W. Bromiley, 212-213 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953). The view, that Christ was omnipresent with respect to his divine nature, while he was residing locally in Palestine with respect to his human nature is also a prominent element in Calvin's Eucharistic theology, and was later dubbed the "extra Calvinisticum" by his Lutheran opponents. (*cf. Institutes* 4.17.30)

³² Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," 212.

stage in the sixteenth century Eucharistic controversy. Lutherans began accusing their Reformed brethren of the Nestorian heresy and Zwinglians in turn, accused their Lutheran brethren of reviving the Eutychian heresy. In the course of the heated polemical exchange between Zwingli and Luther, the former assumed the Antiochian position which denied that all of Christ's divine attributes were communicated to his humanity within the hypostatic union.³³ Omnipresence, according to this view, could not be communicated to Christ's humanity, without destroying it. Because Scripture testifies that Christ had ascended in his physical body and is now seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father, Zwingli argued ferociously that Christ could not be corporeally present in the Eucharistic bread and wine, for such a view would inevitably undermine the true humanity of Christ and lead to a form of Docetism.³⁴ Luther, on the other hand, took the Alexandrian position and readily affirmed the *communicatio idiomatum* to explain how Christ could be physically present in heaven and in the Eucharistic elements at the same time. Luther's position on the real presence "in, with and under" the sacramental elements was given the label "ubiquity" since it implied that Jesus was corporally (but invisibly) omnipresent in a manner that defies human reason.³⁵

Between the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529 and Zwingli's death in 1531, two additional summaries of faith were published that dealt specifically with the Eucharist. Zwingli's *Account of Faith*, was written rapidly in 1530 to be submitted to the Emperor at the Diet of Augsburg.

³³ Unlike Nestorius who objected to the title '*theotokos*' (God-bearer) for Mary, Zwingli affirmed the *genus idiomaticum* by which "the properties of each nature are ascribed to the person, using any of his names or titles. For example, the Lord of glory was crucified (1 Cor. 2:8)." Walter Elwell ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), s.v. "Communication of Attributes, *Communicatio Idiomatum*."

³⁴ "If we wish to argue that Christ's body is in the bread in the same way it was born of the Virgin Mary and passed through closed doors, etc., then we either have to say that his passion did not cause him any hurt, that he did not experience it, or else we have to accept the heretical doctrine of Marcion." Zwingli, "On the Lord's Supper," 219.

³⁵ Hillerbrand ed., s.v. "Christology;" For a short summary of the Christological controversy leading up to the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus see Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 164-69.

Although Zwingli maintains his uncompromising transcendental hermeneutic and continues to deny that the sacraments function as channels of saving or sanctifying grace,³⁶ there are some strikingly positive statements on the Eucharist that are too often overlooked by Zwingli's harsher critics. First, he affirms the real spiritual presence of Christ in the mind of the communicant, writing that "the true body of Christ is present by the contemplation of faith" so that "everything done by Christ becomes as it were present to them by the contemplation of faith."³⁷ Zwingli also makes it clear that the sacramental elements are to be "religiously cherished" and "highly valued and treated with honor."³⁸ Evidently he did not believe at this stage that the sacraments were superfluous, nor did he ultimately affirm an 'empty memorial' as is sometimes suggested.³⁹

The second publication, Zwingli's *Exposition of the Faith*, was written in 1531 for the benefit of King Francis I and the Protestant churches in France. Zwingli's positive expression on the Eucharist reaches the high water mark in this final work. First, Zwingli openly speaks in this work of both "spiritual" and "sacramental" eating: "Hence the body of Christ is not eaten by us naturally or literally, much less quantitatively, but sacramentally and spiritually."⁴⁰ Spiritual eating is defined here in much the same way as it was in the *Commentary*, namely, "trusting with heart and soul upon the mercy and goodness of God through Christ."⁴¹ Spiritual eating may occur with or without the aid of visible elements, but this does not in any sense render the

³⁶ Ulrich Zwingli, "An Account of the Faith of Huldreich Zwingli Submitted to the German Emperor Charles V, at the Diet of Augsburg," in *Zwingli: On Providence and Other Essays*, ed. S.M. Jackson and W.J. Hinke (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 46.

³⁷ Zwingli, "An Account of the Faith of Huldreich Zwingli," 49.

³⁸ Zwingli, "An Account of the Faith of Huldreich Zwingli," 48.

³⁹ One of the weaknesses in McLelland's work is his tendency to caricature Zwingli's theology in this way: "What Martyr wishes to avoid is that 'Christ-absent' sacramental teaching of the Swiss." Joseph C. McLelland, *The Visible Words of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 165. "The sacraments are not superfluous, nor mere signs of something past: they have a real and positive effect." *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴⁰ Ulrich Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill and Henry P. Van Dusen, trans. G.W. Bromiley, 257 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953).

⁴¹ Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," 258.

elements useless or diminish their value. Sacramental eating, however, constitutes a considerable revival of the objective element of Zwingli's Eucharistic theology which he defines as "eat[ing] the body of Christ with the heart and the mind in conjunction with the sacrament."⁴²

In 1523, Zwingli had affirmed the utility of the sacrament in strengthening faith, but this element of his sacramental teaching had completely vanished by 1525. Now, in the year of his death, Zwingli once again emphasized that "the sacraments augment faith and are an aid to it."⁴³ This happens, however, not through the operation of the Holy Spirit as Calvin was later to assert, but through the physical senses: "In the Supper, the four most important senses, indeed all the senses, are at once released and redeemed from the desires of the flesh and placed under the obedience of faith."⁴⁴ Lest the instrumental connection between the sacramental elements and faith be misunderstood by his opponents to function *ex opere operato* according to the view maintained by Roman Catholicism as formulated at the Council of Trent, Zwingli clarifies that they are only able to give "historical faith", meaning that "they remind us of some event, refreshing the memory like the feast of the Passover among the Hebrews or the remission of debts at Athens."⁴⁵

Another striking development in this final summary of faith is Zwingli's affirmation that the physical elements undergo a *sacramental change* when they are consecrated: "The bread is no longer common, but consecrated. It is called bread, but it is also called the body of Christ. Indeed, it is in fact the body of Christ, but only in name and signification, or as we now say,

⁴² Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," 258.

⁴³ Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," 263.

⁴⁴ Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," 263.

⁴⁵ Zwingli, "An Exposition of the Faith," 260.

sacramentally.”⁴⁶ This logically implies that the sacramental bread is of higher value than common bread since “[t]he value of all signs increases according to the value of that which they signify.”⁴⁷ This positive emphasis concentrated in Zwingli’s later writing has caused Cyril C. Richardson to conclude that “[g]reat injustice is frequently done to Zwingli by the assertion that his view differed from those of the other notable Reformers in a denial of the presence of Christ at the Supper.”⁴⁸ We are in agreement with Richardson’s analysis insofar as Zwingli did come to affirm the real or ‘spiritual’ presence of Christ in the mind of the communicant, instrumentally mediated by the physical symbols of bread and wine “which is something that could not happen to the same degree or with the same harmony apart from the use of the sacraments.”⁴⁹

The Eucharistic Theology of Martin Bucer (1491-1551)

Making a reluctant entrance onto the sixteenth century Eucharistic battlefield, Martin Bucer wrote a letter to the Lutheran polemicist John Brenz in order to “strongly urge harmony concerning the Eucharist, since it is intrinsically most unworthy for the symbol of supreme unity and concord to be made the focus of dissensions and the see-plot of animosities.”⁵⁰ The irenic spirit of Martin Bucer and his desire for peace and unity among his deeply divided Protestant brethren was to develop throughout his illustrious career as a Reformer in Strasbourg, and remains part of his enduring legacy within the Reformed tradition.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Faith,” 263.

⁴⁷ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Faith,” 262.

⁴⁸ Richardson, *Zwingli and Cranmer on the Eucharist*, 16.

⁴⁹ Zwingli, “An Exposition of the Faith,” 264.

⁵⁰ Martin Bucer, “The 1526 Apology,” in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. and trans. D.F. Wright, 316 (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972).

⁵¹ Hastings Eells makes the point in his biography that Bucer’s irenic spirit was not always evidenced in his earlier years: “Today Martin Bucer is known as a conciliator, a man who strove above others to restore peace on the

Born in 1491, Martin Bucer spent his formative years under the care of his grandfather Nicholas.⁵² A precocious child who was eager to learn, but living in very meager conditions, Bucer decided to become a Dominican monk where he had a chance to further his education. Within the walls of the Heidelberg monastery, Bucer devoured the writings of Erasmus and pursued the ideals of Renaissance humanism as best he could under the circumstances. The year 1518 proved to be decisive in the life of Martin Bucer, as Luther made the journey to Heidelberg to defend himself against accusations of heresy. Bucer, who was present that day, was spellbound by the Wittenberg Reformer and deeply influenced by his theology, although he remained a moderate Catholic for a time and worked for reform from within the established Church.⁵³ In the face of mounting tensions with his superiors, Bucer was excommunicated in 1523, and rejoined his parents in Strasbourg where he teamed up with Matthew Zell in his efforts to reform the Roman Catholic worship in that city.⁵⁴ With the blessing and protection of the city magistrates, Bucer was installed as a pastor in 1524 and began to lecture on a daily basis, much to the dismay of his enemies.

In addition to his very demanding pastoral and academic responsibilities, much of Bucer's career in Strasbourg was devoted to managing his relationship with the radical Anabaptists who sought refuge in the city, and by mediating the increasingly volatile relationship between the Lutherans in Germany and the Zwinglians in Switzerland regarding the Eucharist. During his lengthy career in Strasbourg, Bucer had a formative impact on both John Calvin and

doctrine of the Lord's Supper. But in the first years of the strife he was far from being a peacemaker – he was a Zwinglian and an active Zwinglian, uncompromisingly convinced that his own side was right, and that the other side was wrong.” Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 86.

⁵² Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 2.

⁵³ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 4.

⁵⁴ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 17-25.

Peter Martyr Vermigli, who both resided in the city for a time ministering alongside Bucer and learning from him.

Bucer's influential career came to a conclusion in England where he spent the final years of his life. Arriving on English soil in 1549 as a refugee from his beloved Strasbourg, Bucer was warmly welcomed by Archbishop Cranmer and installed as Regius Professor of Theology at the University of Cambridge, where he functioned as the academic counterpart to Peter Martyr at Oxford.⁵⁵ Bucer's legacy in the English Reformation was perhaps most pronounced in his shaping of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, which has been described as "little more than a translation of Bucer's Cologne liturgy into English."⁵⁶ Martin Bucer died in 1551, having made an indelible mark on the course of the Protestant Reformation in general, and on the Eucharistic controversies in particular. Because of his important role in those controversies on the Continent, we now turn to an analysis of his Eucharistic theology.

Although Bucer's conversion to the Protestant faith was initiated by Martin Luther, his early sacramental theology fell more in line with the views of Zwingli and Oecolampadius because he too affirmed a sharp dualism between the physical and the spiritual. The early Bucer can be thus located squarely within the Reformed tradition which denied the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacramental elements. Although Bucer had embraced the "sacramental dualism" of the Zwinglians by 1524, his first significant exegetical treatise on the Eucharist was not penned until 1526.⁵⁷ This document, known as the *1526 Apology* was written in defense of Oecolampadius' teaching on the Eucharist which had been vigorously attacked by the Lutheran ubiquitarian John Brenz. In this relatively brief work Bucer enters the debate by focusing on the

⁵⁵ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 403.

⁵⁶ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 411.

⁵⁷ Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies, and the Stuart Divines*, 3.

words of institution in the Gospels and by defending the Zwinglians against the fierce rhetoric of Brenz.⁵⁸

The *1526 Apology* shows, above all else, Bucer's commitment to the authority and inspiration of the Biblical Canon. He cites the analogy of faith (*'analogia tes pisteos'*) as his foundational interpretive principle and repeatedly reminds his audience of its importance: "we have kept fixed before our eyes 'the standard of faith', as presented by the whole of Scripture, with which this singular phrase 'This is my body' (for three Evangelists and Paul recount that it was said once only by Christ) must be in agreement."⁵⁹ Bucer's primary emphasis on the subjective aspect of the sacraments is evident throughout this work as he maintains that "it is quite clear that both the observance of the Supper of Christ and baptism, which are the only symbols of our religion that we possess, are attestations of faith, and *mnemosuna*, memorials, as it were of the blessings of God."⁶⁰ Just as Zwingli could describe the sacramental elements as outward pledges or oaths, so Bucer contended that the Lord's Supper is primarily concerned with the outward "confession of our faith" and with the "nourishing and fostering of the unity of the Church."⁶¹

Throughout the *Apology*, Bucer maintains a strong separation between the material and the spiritual, refusing to concede that the sacraments have any intrinsic ability to augment faith.⁶² Rather, faith is given and maintained directly by the Holy Spirit and not by any physical element: "As faith is begotten by the operation of the Spirit, so it is increased and confirmed by the same,

⁵⁸ Bucer, "1526 Apology," 315-317.

⁵⁹ Bucer, "1526 Apology," 318-319.

⁶⁰ Bucer, "1526 Apology," 319.

⁶¹ Bucer, "1526 Apology," 327.

⁶² "For if Christ is to be sought in the realm above, that is, in the spiritual realm and not in the elements of the world – which is the substance of Paul's exhortation to the Colossians in chapter 3 – we would scarcely conform to the standard of the new covenant and the ministry of the Spirit if we strongly emphasized the carnal presence of Christ in the bread and the wine, which the ungodly receive in common with ourselves." Bucer, "1526 Apology," 326.

while the Spirit himself is granted and imparted by the Father by virtue of the merit of Christ and not in the least by virtue of the use of the sacraments.”⁶³ As with Zwingli, so for Bucer, to eat the body of Christ and to drink his blood is simply to believe the gospel promises and nothing else. He reinforces this point with vivid rhetorical flourish:

For if the cup is the blood of the new covenant, the blood, that is by which the new and eternal covenant between us and god is founded, it certainly behooves the blood of Christ to be consumed by faith, not by mouth. For though you drank even the very blood which dropped from the cross, you would nevertheless not be drinking the blood of the new covenant unless you believed that by that blood the new covenant was ratified.⁶⁴

In spite of many striking similarities between the early theology of Zwingli and Bucer’s *1526 Apology*, there is one notable divergence. Whereas Zwingli refused to concede any sacramental reference in John 6, Bucer disagrees:

I know of course that important writers set John 6 aside when the Eucharist is being discussed because they think it contains not one syllable which is relevant here, on the grounds that it deals with the spiritual eating of Christ, that is, with faith in the incarnate Word. However, the authority of the Scripture impels us to the conviction that also in the institution of the Eucharist, the eating of faith was taught, except that symbols of bread and wine were used at the same time. Therefore we cannot possibly exclude that chapter from this discussion.⁶⁵

Bucer’s fundamental exegetical conclusion is that all eating of the body and blood of Christ is spiritual eating. He also concludes that the physical elements of bread and wine are nothing but outward tokens through which one’s confession of faith is proclaimed and Church unity is fostered. The Zwinglian themes which clearly resound within the *1526 Apology* are undeniable and we conclude that Bucer entered into the Eucharistic controversy with both feet firmly planted in the theology of Zurich.

⁶³ Bucer, “1526 Apology,” 320.

⁶⁴ Bucer, “1526 Apology,” 324.

⁶⁵ Bucer, “1526 Apology,” 327.

Bucer's sympathies with Zwingli's early teaching on the Eucharist were further solidified in 1528 when he participated in a public disputation in Bern defending the thesis "That the body and blood of Christ as actually and bodily received in the bread and of the Eucharist may not be proved from Scripture."⁶⁶ Although his participation in this disputation would come back to haunt him in later attempts to reconcile his own position with that held by the Lutheran party, Bucer claimed (perhaps disingenuously) that he "contended against nothing else than the crasser formulas of Luther and others, and asserted a true, real, spiritual presence."⁶⁷

A turning point in Bucer's conception of the sacraments occurred in 1528, when he came to the conclusion that he had not understood Luther's teaching on the Supper correctly. As a consequence, Bucer claimed that he had mistakenly conflated the Lutheran conception of the real presence with the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation, and had therefore polemicized a straw man.⁶⁸ Having received this epiphany, the Strasbourg Reformer became increasingly convinced that the Lutheran and Zwinglian parties were extremely close in the actual content of their Eucharistic theology although they differed in their outward mode of expression. So close were they, Bucer had persuaded himself, that he energetically worked toward a formal expression of unity between the two parties at the Colloquy of Marburg (1529). If unity in doctrine could be achieved between Luther and Zwingli, it was hoped that political solidarity would follow in order to strengthen the Protestant cause against the growing military threat from the Catholic

⁶⁶ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 86.

⁶⁷ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 86.

⁶⁸ Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 87; See also Bucer's written account of the Wittenberg Concord in 1536: "But from the time when we had come to realize from their more recent writings that Luther and his supporters explicitly denied a natural union of the Lord's body with the bread and were not confining Christ locally to the bread, and made the sacraments channels of divine grace in such a way that the whole of this work was ascribed to God and only the administration left to the ministers – from that time on, therefore we had freely and openly confessed this very fact to others both in writing and in preaching, and for over seven years now had labored unceasingly to impart the same realization to others too." "Concord of Wittenberg," in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. and trans. D.F. Wright (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 358.

Emperor. Ultimately the Colloquy of Marburg failed to achieve its lofty aims, with Luther adamantly refusing to extend the right hand of fellowship to Zwingli. But in spite of his disappointment, Bucer's tenacity in working toward reconciliation eventually issued in a second attempt at unity known to history as the *Wittenberg Concord* of 1536.

By 1536, it had become clear to all parties that the dispute on the Eucharist was more than a mere disagreement over words. The primary doctrinal issue which separated the two parties at this stage was the *manducatio indignorum*. If Christ was truly present 'in, with, and under' the sacramental elements, the logical implication was that the body of Christ was consumed by both the righteous and the wicked when they ate the Eucharistic bread and drank the wine. The Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity allowed for Christ to be corporally present in, with and under the elements of bread and wine, but the Zwinglian insistence that Jesus was localized in heaven with respect to his physical body ruled out that possibility. The result was a virtual impasse between the two parties. Whereas the Lutherans insisted that the wicked consumed the body and blood of Christ by partaking in the sacramental meal, the Zwinglians vehemently denied it and found the concept to be both repulsive (akin to cannibalism) and blasphemous. Seeking to break through the dividing wall, Bucer proposed a creative solution to Luther. He henceforth divided the wicked into two classes which he called the "unworthy" and the "unbelievers".⁶⁹ Bucer was willing to concede that the unworthy ate the body and blood of Christ in the sacramental meal, but he was unwilling to say that unbelievers received any nourishment at all from the elements. It was on the basis of this subtle Bucerian distinction

⁶⁹ "Concerning the eating by the ungodly, . . . we all held that those who overturn the ordinance and words of the Lord receive nothing but bread and wine in the Supper, but that those who adhere to the words and institution and exercise faith in the sacrament, even though by failing to evince true and life-giving faith they receive this sacrament unworthily and therefore become guilty of the Lord's body, none the less do receive not only bread and wine but also the true body and blood of the Lord, in accordance with their belief that that body is presented to them in fulfillment of the Lord's words . . ." *Concord of Wittenberg*, 361.

between the “unworthy” and the “ungodly” that the *Wittenberg Concord* was drafted by Phillip Melanchthon as a document upon which unity might finally be achieved. The third head of doctrine was critically important because it addressed the *manducatio indignorum* in a way that Bucer felt would be acceptable to the Swiss:

Wherefore as Paul says that the *unworthy* also eat, so they maintain that the Lord’s body and blood are truly offered to the *unworthy* also, and that the *unworthy* receive them when the words and institution of Christ are observed. But such persons partake to their own judgment, as Paul says, because they abuse the sacrament in using it without repentance and faith.⁷⁰ (emphasis mine)

In the wake of the negotiations with Luther and Melanchthon, Bucer was entrusted with the task of garnering support for the *Concord* in Switzerland – a responsibility which ultimately proved to be impossible because Bullinger was utterly unwilling to endorse it.⁷¹ At this time Bucer made further concessions to the Lutheran party by inserting carefully worded retractions in his *Commentaries* and by modifying their form and content in order to bring them in line with the wording of the *Wittenberg Concord*.⁷² If the content of his Eucharistic theology had not substantially changed by 1536 as Bucer himself claimed, certainly we must admit that his mode of expression had been swayed in a distinctly Lutheran direction.⁷³

There is a palpable tension in Bucer’s theology as expressed in 1536, whereby he could “unreservedly condemn as erroneous the statement that in the holy Supper, when it is celebrated according to the word of the Lord, nothing but bread and wine is given and received”, but then

⁷⁰ *Concord of Wittenberg*, 362-363.

⁷¹ Bullinger had two primary objections to the *Wittenberg Concord*: 1) He felt that the Swiss Confession was sufficient. 2) He felt that Bucer’s interpretation of the *Concord* was not the same as Luther’s. Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 213.

⁷² Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 211.

⁷³ “We would, however, retract, and indeed had already done so, every point whereon we were conscious of having erred in respect of doctrine taught or the persons teaching it.... But it was totally impossible for us to recant any such dogma which we neither recognized as our own nor had ever taught. For nowhere in our writings could be found the teaching that there is nothing in the holy Supper but bread and wine.” *Concord of Wittenberg*, 358.

affirm in the very next sentence that “the Lord’s body is not united naturally with the bread, nor locally confined to the bread, nor presented as food for the stomach.”⁷⁴ For Bucer, the true body and blood of Christ is received “with” the bread and wine, but is not localized “in” the elements. For this reason his Eucharistic theology in 1536 is neither fully Zwinglian, nor fully Lutheran, but a third option which draws from both traditions and constitutes his own unique contribution as a Reformed theologian.⁷⁵

Near the end of his life two additional writings help us to clarify Bucer’s mature thinking on the Lord’s Supper. In *A Brief Summary of Christian Doctrine*, written in 1548 at the end of his tenure in Strasbourg, we see a distinct progression in Bucer’s theology from the subjective Zwinglian emphasis of his early career to a much more objective emphasis wherein the sacramental elements are useful to “strengthen faith and life in Christ.”⁷⁶ That element of development in Bucer’s Eucharistic theology being noted, the *Summary of Christian Doctrine* also demonstrates that his fundamental distinction between the spiritual and the material had never really changed over the years. At the end of his career he was still insistent that “there are two realities in the holy sacrament, an earthly, the bread and wine... and a heavenly, the true body and the true blood of Christ.”⁷⁷ On the distinction between the physical and the spiritual, Bucer remained true to the end.

Writing from his post at Cambridge University in 1550, Bucer gave his final word on the Eucharist in a document known as the *Confession in Aphorisms*. In this *Confession*, one’s attention is immediately drawn to the word “mystery” which is repeatedly attributed to the

⁷⁴ *Concord of Wittenberg*, 363.

⁷⁵ Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies, and the Stuart Divines*, 5.

⁷⁶ Martin Bucer, “A Brief Summary of Christian Doctrine,” in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. and trans. D.F. Wright (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 87.

⁷⁷ Martin Bucer, “A Brief Summary of Christian Doctrine,” 87.

sacraments. Here the objective aspect of the sacrament is brought to the fore, as Bucer invokes the Pauline concept of *koinonia*, and contends that the communicant receives through the sacramental elements a special “communion with the Father and the Son and with all the saints.”⁷⁸ An even more stunning advance in Bucer’s theology as evidenced in this brief *Confession* is his explicit rejection of the Aristotelian concept of “place” when used to defend the localization of Jesus’ glorified body in a metaphysical heaven.⁷⁹ Parting ways with the Zwinglian application of Aristotle’s *Physics* on this point, Bucer contends that, “the Scriptures define [the heavens] only in terms of divine majesty and blessedness, not of spatial extension.”⁸⁰ With this clever philosophical twist, he is still able to agree with the Zurich theologians that the risen and ascended Christ cannot be localized within the physical elements. But he is equally willing to affirm, in concert with the Lutherans, that “the true body and blood of the Lord, that is, Christ himself, God and man, are given and received... in order that we may more fully abide and live in him and he in us.”⁸¹

In the final analysis, Bucer argued that the true body and blood of Christ is always offered and exhibited along with the physical elements of bread and wine, but is received in no other way than by faith. In light of this analysis, we must conclude that Bucer’s Eucharistic theology is neither Zwinglian nor Lutheran. But neither is it Calvinist, since Bucer does not speak of the sacramental elements as instruments, used by the Spirit to augment and nourish faith. Whereas Bucer attempted to forge a *via media* between the extremes of Luther and

⁷⁸ Martin Bucer, “The 1550 Confession in Aphorisms,” in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. and trans. D.F. Wright (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 389.

⁷⁹ For Aristotle’s discussion of ‘place’ see Book 4 of the *Physics*. McKeon ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, 269-282.

⁸⁰ Bucer, “Confession in Aphorisms,” 392.

⁸¹ Bucer, “Confession in Aphorisms,” 394.

Zwingli, often using ambiguous language which clouded the issue rather than clarifying it, Calvin went beyond his mentor by performing a radical synthesis between the two positions.

The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin (1509-1564)

Born on 10 July 1509 in Noyon France, John Calvin received an education steeped in Renaissance Humanism at the University of Paris where he was first exposed to the writings of Erasmus and Jacques Lefevre d'Etapes. Between 1528 and 1533, the young Calvin pursued studies in Law at Bourges and Orleans, his humanistic pursuits coming to full fruition in 1532 with the publication of his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*.⁸² After converting to Protestantism and fleeing Paris for his life, Calvin sought temporary refuge in Basel and published the first version of his *Institutes* in March 1536, a work which would continue to grow in size and evolve in theological content and arrangement until 1559 when the definitive Latin edition was published in Geneva. The 1536 edition of the *Institutes* bears a certain resemblance to Luther's *Small Catechism* of 1529 and is a testimony to the tremendous influence Luther's work exerted on Calvin's theological formation in the years immediately following his Protestant conversion.⁸³ The 1536 *Institutes* contain an entire chapter on the sacraments which sheds considerable light on Calvin's earliest view regarding the Lord's Supper.

A comparison of Calvin's discussion on the sacraments in 1536 with the parallel section in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* reveals a remarkable amount of continuity. This sets him apart from both Bucer and Zwingli whose sacramental theology evolved in stages over the course of their respective careers. In this first edition of the *Institutes* Calvin provides two

⁸² William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 9-10.

⁸³ Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 201.

definitions of a sacrament. First, a sacrament is defined as “an outward sign by which the Lord represents and attests to us his good will toward us to sustain the weakness of our faith.”

Second, he explicitly connects the sacramental sign with the promises of God’s Word by describing it as an “appendix” to those promises: “From this we also understand a sacrament never lacks a preceding promise but is rather joined to it by way of appendix, to confirm and seal the promise itself, and to make it as it were more evident to us.”⁸⁴ Here, in seed form we can discern a Chalcedonian emphasis in Calvin which would later become even more explicit, *viz.*, just as the human and divine nature in Christ cannot be separated, neither can the Word be separated from the sacramental sign – indeed, the sacramental sign is a “visible word”.

Calvin’s definition of a sacrament in terms of an “appendix”, a metaphor which endured until the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, immediately raises important questions regarding the sufficiency of the Word and the necessity of the sacramental sign. If the Word of God is sufficient communication of the content of God’s great and precious promises, why must a physical sign be added at all? This form of logical deduction, which finds its starting point in the all-sufficiency of the Word of God, appears to have led Ulrich Zwingli to teach that the sacraments, while beneficial as memorials and outward testimonies wherein vows of the faithful were continually and publically renewed, were in no sense “appendices” to the Word. For Zwingli, to eat was simply to believe in the promises of God made manifest in Christ. As shown above, this point was forcefully emphasized in Zwingli’s exegesis of John 6, the key to his entire sacramental hermeneutic: “The flesh profiteth nothing.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), revised edition transl. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 87.

⁸⁵ Zwingli, *Commentary*, 205-216.

Such is not the case for Calvin as this initial version of the *Institutes* makes plain.

According to Calvin, the sacraments, while neither adding nor taking away from the promises of God, are nevertheless necessary on account of the weakness of our flesh and the frailty of our faith. The sacraments, therefore, ought to be viewed as an instance of divine *accommodation* which God has mercifully provided for fallen human persons, living out their days on earth in the “prison house of the body”:

Here our merciful Lord so tempers himself to our capacity that (since we are creature who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual) he leads us to himself even by these earthly elements, and in the flesh itself causes us to contemplate the things that are of his Spirit.⁸⁶

Calvin further dismisses the accusation that he has made the sacraments superfluous by employing the imagery of a sealed document. As we will see, the language of “sealing” is also central to John Owen’s Eucharist theology. The fact that a “seal” (in Latin “*sacramentum*”), which is added to an official government document, neither adds nor detracts from the content of the document itself does not in any sense render the seal superfluous. Quite the contrary, Calvin reasons – the seal functions to confirm what has already been written! The same is true, he argues, of the Eucharist, which seals the promises of God on our hearts.⁸⁷ A second enduring image that Calvin uses as early as 1536 to explain the necessity of the sacraments is that of a “mirror” by which we “may contemplate the riches of God’s grace, which he lavishes upon us.”⁸⁸ Since we are unable to view the glory of God directly, He has graciously condescended to us by ordaining temporary, physical symbols which communicate something of His true nature. Just as a mirror becomes the *instrument* through which we are able to perceive a dim reflection

⁸⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 87.

⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 87.

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 88.

of reality, so the sacramental bread and wine are *instruments* through which we are better able to contemplate Christ, weak as we are in our fallen and depraved condition.

Calvin's polemical stance toward the theology of Zurich becomes particularly sharp in his discussion of the relationship between the sacramental elements and the faith of the communicant. Whereas Zwingli in his earlier writings, tended to downplay or deny any objective value of the sacraments for augmenting faith, Calvin always was careful to insist that "sacraments have been set forth by God in order to serve our faith, namely, to nourish, exercise, and increase it."⁸⁹ Unlike Zwingli, who held a static view of faith as being either present or absent in the heart of a person through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, Calvin held a dynamic view in which faith granted by the Holy Spirit could increase or decrease over the course of the Christian life.

Calvin, while affirming the absolute freedom of the Spirit in concert with Zwingli, contends, in contrast with Zwingli, that the Spirit has freely chosen to nourish and strengthen faith through the sacraments in an *instrumental* fashion.⁹⁰ In this sense, the physical symbols do have a kind of objective efficacy, not in the Roman Catholic sense of *ex opere operato*, but through the working of the Holy Spirit who dispenses sanctifying grace through external means such as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments:

God uses means and instruments which he himself sees to be expedient that all things may serve his glory, since he is Lord and Judge of all. He therefore feeds our bodies through bread and other foods, he illumines the world through the sun, and he warms it through heat; yet neither bread, nor sun, nor fire, is anything save in so far as he distributes his blessings to us by these instruments. In like manner, he nourishes faith

⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 88.

⁹⁰ Brian Gerrish has named Calvin's position "symbolic instrumentalism", which is to be distinguished from both "symbolic memorialism" (Zwingli's view) and "symbolic parallelism" (Bucer's view). Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 167.

spiritually through the sacraments, whose one function is to set God's promises before our eyes to be looked upon.⁹¹

In his refusal to completely sever the sign from the thing signified, as did Zwingli and Oecampadius, we see a Chalcedonian hermeneutic at work in maintaining the sense of paradox and mystery which Zwingli attempted to bring to a logical resolution. In this fashion, Calvin guards himself more carefully than Zwingli did, against the charge of Nestorianism.

Having refused to sever the physical sign from the spiritual promises signified therein, Calvin turns his attention, in the 1536 *Institutes*, to the opposite 'Monophysite' heresy of the Roman Catholics who confuse the sign with the thing signified. Just as by confounding the divine and human natures in Christ Eutyches fell into the Christological heresy opposite to that of Nestorius, so "we must be reminded that... there are those who attach to the sacraments some sort of secret powers with which one nowhere reads that God has endowed them."⁹² Those who embrace this heresy are of two varieties, according to Calvin. The first group (presumably Roman Catholics), erroneously teach that the sacraments "justify and confer grace, provided we do not set up a barrier of mortal sin."⁹³ The second group (presumably Lutherans), "do not err so perniciously", yet still err intolerably by teaching that a "hidden power is joined and fastened to the sacraments to distribute in them the graces of the Holy Spirit, just as wine is proffered in a cup."⁹⁴ The Monophysite error detected here by Calvin results from the physical identification of the body of Christ with the sacramental elements through Roman Catholic *transubstantiation* or Lutheran *consubstantiation*. Whereas Calvin, Bucer and Zwingli interpreted the words of

⁹¹ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 90.

⁹² Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 91.

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 91.

⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 91.

institution, “this is my body” as an instance of metonymy, Luther and the Roman Church interpreted it with a crass and uncompromising literalism.

Both transubstantiation and consubstantiation, which associate the sacramental elements with the local (or corporeal) presence of Christ’s body, inevitably lead to the so-called *manducatio indignorum* which Calvin rigorously denied, even at this early stage of his career:

“For the sacraments are messengers which do not bring but announce and show those things given us by divine bounty. The Holy Spirit (whom the sacraments do not bring indiscriminately to all men but whom the Lord exclusively bestows on his own people) is he who brings the graces of God with him, gives a place for the sacraments among us, to make them bear fruit.”⁹⁶

According to Calvin, there is no sense in which the wicked and impious partake of the body and blood of Christ during the sacramental meal for the simple reason that they are devoid of faith.

A sacramental sign such as bread or wine which is severed from faith has no efficacy whatsoever. Although Calvin respected Bucer, on the Eucharist he felt that he had given too much ground to the Lutherans and Catholics, telling him in a letter dated 12 January 1538 that “if you want to create a Christ who pleases everyone, then you’ll have to create a new gospel.”⁹⁷

Unlike Bucer, Calvin did not subscribe to the *Wittenberg Concord*.

In summary then, Calvin taught from this early point in his career that the sacramental signs must be distinguished from the spiritual realities that they signify, but that they must never be separated from one another. Using this Chalcedonian hermeneutic, he avoids the two extremes of Zwingli on the one hand and of Luther and the Papacy on the other by creating a remarkable synthesis. Although Calvin certainly opposes the Lutheran doctrine of the Eucharist

⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* (1536), 92.

⁹⁷ Matthieu Arnold, “Calvin and Strasbourg” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, trans. Judith J. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 74.

in 1536 using arguments previously articulated by Zwingli against the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity, his primary concern at this stage is to distinguish his sacramental theology from Zwingli's symbolic memorialism.⁹⁸ The young John Calvin showed a marked sympathy toward the Lutheran emphasis on the objective value of the sacrament in "exhibiting" Christ to the communicants in the 1536 *Institutes*. Corresponding to this is his disdain for Zwingli and the Zurich theology concerning the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

If the 1536 *Institutes* hinted at Calvin's affinity for the Lutheran position, his *Short Treatise*, written in 1540 from Bucer's Strasbourg and published in 1541, unveils this tendency in Calvin's early theology to a much greater degree.⁹⁹ The accent in the *Short Treatise* lies on the *real* presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a doctrine which Luther uncompromisingly insisted upon, but Zwingli adamantly denied. In the eleventh section of the *Treatise*, Calvin declares somewhat provocatively that Jesus is the "substance of the sacrament":

But as the blessings of Jesus Christ do not belong to us at all, unless he be previously ours, it is necessary, first of all, that he be given us in the Supper, in order that the things which we have mentioned may be truly accomplished in us. For this reason I am wont to say, that the substance of the sacraments is the Lord Jesus, and the efficacy of them the graces and blessings which we have by his means.¹⁰⁰

He goes on in the next section to further distance himself from the theology of Zurich which he now is willing to brand as a heresy, since "to deny that a true communication of Jesus Christ is

⁹⁸ "As long as he considered a consensus with the Lutherans feasible, Calvin formulated his ideas of the Lord's Supper as closely as possible to those of Luther, while he distanced himself from all Zwinglian symbolism. After the fiasco of *Cons. Tigur.* as an effort to bridge the gap between Zwinglians and Lutherans, the picture was inverted proportionally: in the 1550s the core of Calvin's thinking was pro-Zwinglian and anti-Lutheran." Wim Janse, "The Lord's Supper" in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, trans. Gerrit W. Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 353.

⁹⁹ There is some evidence which even suggests that Luther himself read portions of the *Treatise* and viewed it favorably even though he and Calvin never had the occasion to discuss the issue face to face. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 141.

¹⁰⁰ John Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord," in *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church*, vol 2. ed. & trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 169.

presented to us in the Supper, is to render this holy sacrament frivolous and useless – an execrable blasphemy unfit to be listened to.”¹⁰¹

Desiring to explain his conception of the *real* or *substantial* presence of Christ in the Eucharist without being misunderstood as holding to a *local* presence, Calvin introduces yet another illustration in the *Short Treatise*, viz. the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus which appeared “under the form of a dove.” Here, John the Baptist testifies that he had witnessed the Spirit of God descending on that occasion, but in reality, says Calvin, “we shall find that he saw nothing but the dove, in respect that the Holy Spirit is in his essence invisible. Still, knowing that this vision was not an empty phantom, but a sure sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, he doubts not to say that he saw it...because it was represented to him according to his capacity.”¹⁰² The invisible essence of the Spirit, Calvin argues, must be distinguished from the physical form of the dove, but at the same time, he insists that the physical sign is intimately connected to the spiritual reality signified, such that the Holy Spirit was *really* present, even if not *locally* restricted to the dove’s physical body at the moment of Jesus’ baptism. Calvin’s conception of divine accommodation comes through clearly once again in this analogy of the dove as he struggles to explain the mode of Christ’s presence in the sacrament. As in the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin consistently denies throughout his *Short Treatise* that the sacraments are superfluous in any sense. Rather, they are necessary and gracious instances of divine condescension on account of human frailty and the physicality of our bodies.

¹⁰¹ Calvin, “Short Treatise,” 170.

¹⁰² Calvin, “Short Treatise,” 171.

Calvin's eagerness, later in his career, to find common ground with Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger came to a climax in 1549 with the drafting of the *Consensus Tigurinus*.¹⁰³ Unlike the *Wittenberg Concord* (1536) signed by both Bucer and Luther, which officially endorsed the *manducatio indignorum*, the *Consensus* explicitly repudiates any local presence of Christ in the sacramental elements.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, the *Consensus* did not include, due to the express wishes of the Zurich theologians, any reference to Christ being *substantially* present in the Eucharist. The language of *substantia* which Bullinger rejected outright, had freely been used by Calvin in his *Short Treatise* as we have already seen. In short, the *Consensus* probably represents the extreme limit of Calvin's own sacramental theology, and therefore should not be taken as completely representative of his personal views at the time of its publication.¹⁰⁵ The fact remains, however, that Calvin signed this document instead of the *Wittenberg Concord*, demonstrating that by 1549 he identified more with moderate Zwinglians in Zurich than with Bucer and the Lutherans. The signing of the *Consensus Tigurinus* represents a notable shift in the emphasis of Calvin's Eucharistic theology which should not be downplayed or ignored, and was an event which triggered an increasing divergence between Reformed and Lutheran forms of the Protestant faith.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Hillerbrand ed., s.v. "Consensus Tigurinus." For the text of the Consensus Tigurinus see Torrance Kirby, "The Zurich Agreement: an English translation of the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549," In Emidio Campi and Rudi Reich, eds. *Consensus Tigurinus: Die Einigung zwischen Heinrich Bullinger und Johannes Calvin über das Abendmahl: Werden—Wertung—Bedeutung* (Zurich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2009), 258-267.

¹⁰⁴ Hillerbrand ed., s.v. "Wittenberg Concord."

¹⁰⁵ "To arrive at an understanding with the Zwinglians was not easy... Nearly ten years were taken up by negotiations, exchanges of documents and proposals of all kinds before the conclusion of the famous Consensus Tigurinus of 1549, which established in twenty-six articles a basis of agreement upon the sacramental problem." Francois Wendel. *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Phillip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 101-102.

¹⁰⁶ One notable exception is that of Philip Melancthon, who was perhaps closer to Calvin's position than he was to that of Luther by the end of his career.

In considering the Christological underpinnings of the Eucharistic controversy, several heads of agreement in the *Consensus* are of particular interest. First, the ninth head shows the influence of Calvin's unwavering Chalcedonian hermeneutic in that the signs are said to be "distinct" from the things signified but not "disjoined" from them.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, the thirteenth head of doctrine affirms the efficacy of the sacramental symbols as instruments of sanctifying (but not justifying) grace: "They are indeed instruments by which God acts efficaciously when he pleases, yet so that the whole work of our salvation must be ascribed to him alone."¹⁰⁸ These heads of doctrine in the *Consensus*, which are at odds with some of Zwingli's early sacramental theology as expressed in his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, show that the Zurich theologians after 1549 were tremendously influenced by Calvin's point of view and abandoned some of the subjectivism of Zwingli's early Eucharistic theology. It must be admitted, however, that Zwingli's legacy looms large in this document. For example, the necessity of the sacraments is downplayed in the *Consensus*, and the role of the Holy Spirit in uniting believers on earth with the physical body of the risen and ascended Christ in heaven through the sacrament is hardly mentioned at all. Rather, the *Consensus Tigurinus* affirms that the sacraments function "by bringing the object in a manner directly before [the senses] while they bring the death of Christ and all his benefits to our remembrance."¹⁰⁹ However far the Zurich theologians were willing to bend in coming to the point where they would acknowledge instrumental efficacy in the sacraments, the Eucharistic theology expressed in the *Consensus* still falls short of Calvin's conception of sacramental instrumentality wherein the believer is lifted to heaven through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰⁷ "Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments," in *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church*, vol 2. ed. & trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 215.

¹⁰⁸ "Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments," 216.

¹⁰⁹ "Mutual Consent in Regard to the Sacraments," 214.

The *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which were finally completed and published in Latin in 1559 after two decades of continuous expansion, republication and theological reworking, is generally esteemed by scholars to be the most definitive statement of Calvin's mature theology that we possess. Calvin's definition of a sacrament in the 1559 *Institutes* is modified slightly to combine his earlier emphasis on the instrumental efficacy of the elements in strengthening and nourishing faith, with his later 'Zwinglian' sympathies in which the sacrament serves as an outward testimony before men: "[A sacrament] is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels *and before men*." (emphasis mine)¹¹⁰ Calvin is adamant, however, just as he was in the 1536 edition, that the primary role of the sacraments is related to the strengthening of the believer's faith: "Now, the first point is that the sacraments should serve our faith before God; after this, that they should attest our confession before men."¹¹¹ Although Calvin seems to take a significantly more irenic stance toward Zwingli in the 1559 *Institutes* than he did in his 1541 *Short Treatise*, he continues to differentiate his own view carefully from that of Zwingli in a number of respects, not the least of which is his exegesis of John 6: "For there are some who define the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of his blood as, in one word, nothing but to believe in Christ. But it seems to me that Christ meant to teach something more definite, and more elevated, in that noble discourse in which he commends to us the eating of his flesh."¹¹² The primary difference between Calvin and the Swiss disciples of Zwingli is summarized in the *Institutes* as follows: "for them eating is faith; for me it seems rather to follow from faith. This is

¹¹⁰ *Institutes* 4.14.1

¹¹¹ *Institutes*, 4.14.13

¹¹² *Institutes*, 4.17.5

a small difference in words, but no slight one in the matter itself.”¹¹³ To the very end of his career, Calvin did not want his position to be misunderstood to imply that the sacraments were somehow superfluous or redundant. For Calvin, the external means of grace were an essential component of the Christian life, ordained by God for the progressive sanctification of every true believer.

Calvin’s steadfast commitment to his Christological presuppositions endured until this final version of the *Institutes*. Even a decade after he had signed the *Consensus Tigurinus*, he still viewed himself in 1559 as having transcended the binary division between Zwingli and Luther: “Now here we ought to guard against two faults. First, we should not, by too little regard for the signs, divorce them from their mysteries, to which they are so to speak attached. Secondly we should not, by extolling them immoderately, seem to obscure the mysteries themselves.”¹¹⁴ Even though Calvin clearly viewed Zwingli’s sacramental theology to be seriously impoverished, most of the polemical heat in the 1559 *Institutes* is reserved for Westphal and the Lutherans, who, since the signing of the *Consensus Tigurinus* had become Calvin’s bitter opponents. For this reason, there is a lengthy refutation of Lutheran errors in the 1559 *Institutes*. His repudiation of the Lutheran doctrine of *ubiquity* is inextricably linked with his Christology which renders it a form of Docetism. Calvin’s rhetoric against the Lutherans for obliterating the true humanity of the glorified Christ is heightened here to the point of comparing them to both Eutyches and Servetus, the latter an anti-Trinitarian Anabaptist who was burned at the stake in Geneva several years earlier!¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Institutes*, 4.17.5

¹¹⁴ *Institutes*, 4.17.5

¹¹⁵ *Institutes*, 4.17.30

Through the previous analysis of Calvin's writings on the Eucharist, we have had occasion to observe that he maintained to the very end of his career, a profound sense of mystery and paradox in the Eucharist that he was unwilling to resolve by capitulating to either extreme. Calvin transcended the binary categories of the sixteenth century Eucharistic debate in a way that Bucer had failed to do. For Calvin, the Eucharist was a great mystery which was better experienced than understood, and the proper response in his view was one of humility and worship:¹¹⁶ "Therefore, nothing remains but to break forth in wonder at this mystery, which plainly neither the mind is able to conceive, nor the tongue to express."¹¹⁷ The mystery of the Eucharist was for Calvin, analogous to the mystery of the two natures in Christ. Just as Christ's divine nature must be distinguished from his human nature, but never separated, so the sacramental symbols must always be distinguished from the things signified but not severed from them.

The Eucharistic Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562)

Born in 1499 in the Italian city of Florence, Peter Martyr Vermigli entered the Augustinian order in 1516 and studied theology and Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Padua, graduating with a Doctorate of Divinity in 1526. Vermigli's giftedness was quickly recognized by his superiors and he was ordained to the office of preacher within his order and later given a promotion as the abbot of Spoleto where he remained until 1536 as a faithful son of the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹⁸ In 1537, Martyr was promoted once again to a wealthier and more influential monastery in Naples. It was here that his evangelical convictions began to develop as

¹¹⁶ *Institutes*, 4.17.32

¹¹⁷ *Institutes*, 4.17.7

¹¹⁸ John Patrick Donnelly, Frank A. James III and Joseph C. McLelland eds., *The Peter Martyr Reader* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 1999), 1.

he came under the influence of Juan de Valdes, a Roman Catholic humanist who had been deeply influenced by the writings of Erasmus.¹¹⁹

The earliest indication that we have of Vermigli's exposure to Reformed theology is provided in Josiah Simler's biography, which states that during his stay in Naples from 1537 to 1541 he read several of Martin Bucer's biblical commentaries along with Zwingli's *Commentary on True and False Religion* and some works of Erasmus.¹²⁰ Like John Calvin, several years earlier, Vermigli sought refuge in Bucer's Strasbourg after escaping the Inquisition, where he arrived on 16 November 1542 and was immediately employed as a lecturer in Old Testament at the College of St. Thomas.¹²¹ It was in this German city where the Protestant Reformation had already gained significant traction that Vermigli came under the direct influence of Bucer. According to Simler's testimony, Bucer strove to achieve peace and unity by using ambiguous terminology that he knew could be variously interpreted by the rival Protestant factions, and he encouraged Peter Martyr to do the same.¹²² Martyr followed Bucer's example for a period of time in his teaching on the Eucharist,

but soon recognized the danger of this approach and changed his view. For he saw that on this basis it was impossible to satisfy those who are set on a crass and carnal presence of Christ's body in the Supper unless one also accepts their crude statements along with their whole base interpretation. Again, he also found by experience that the weaker brethren were in part gravely offended by this ambiguity of speech and were in part so implicated and disturbed that they hardly knew what they ought to think on the question."¹²³

¹¹⁹ Mariano DiGangi, *Peter Martyr Vermigli 1499-1562: Renaissance Man, Reformation Master* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993), 36-40.

¹²⁰ Simler, Josiah, "Life of Peter Martyr Vermigli," in *Life, Letters, and Sermons*, Peter Martyr Library, vol. 5, ed. & trans. John Patrick Donnelly (Kirkville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 1999), 19-20.

¹²¹ DiGangi, *Peter Martyr Vermigli*, 65.

¹²² Simler, "Life of Martyr," 30.

¹²³ Simler, "Life of Martyr," 30-31.

A definite turning point in Martyr's teaching regarding the Lord's Supper occurred on 2 March 1549 during his lecture series in 1 Corinthians as witnessed firsthand by John Ab Ulmis, a student at Oxford who immediately passed the news on to Bullinger:

Peter Martyr has openly declared to us all, on this very day on which I write this letter, what was his opinion upon this subject [of the Lord's Supper]; and he seemed to all of us not to depart even a nail's breadth from that entertained by yourself. Nay more, he has defended that most worthy man, Zuingli, by the testimony of your opinion, and taken part with him against his adversaries, who falsely object to him that he makes the sacrament a mere sign.¹²⁴

Vermigli's theological opponents at Oxford such as the Jesuit John Rastell gave similar testimony regarding his sudden "Zwinglian" conversion, although they tended to attribute it to the influence of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer: "So was Peter Martir at his first cumming to England a Lutheran only, but perceiving afterwards, the Superiour powers to fansie an other way, he followed also them with all the wit he had, and became an open Zuinglian."¹²⁵ It was during his tenure at Oxford from 1547 to 1553, that Peter Martyr first began to make a significant contribution to the Eucharistic controversy through the *Oxford Disputation* in 1549. A reconstructed transcript of the *Disputation* was rapidly published in England along with a comprehensive *Treatise* on the Eucharist, which laid out Martyr's own position.¹²⁶ The theology articulated by Martyr in these two publications exercised a decisive influence on the Anglican Liturgy as it was developing under Cranmer's leadership.¹²⁷ Martyr's theology, as expressed in

¹²⁴ Joseph C. McLelland, "Oxford Treatise and Disputation on the Eucharist, 1549 by Peter Martyr Vermigli: Translator's Introduction," in *The Oxford Treatise and Disputation*, Peter Martyr Library, vol. 7, ed. & trans. Joseph C. McLelland (Kirkville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2000), xxi.

¹²⁵ Philip M.J. McNair, "Peter Martyr in England," in *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Italian Reform*, ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Waterloo, Ontario: Sir Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 103.

¹²⁶ J.P. Donnelly, "Introduction: Eucharistic Controversy in the Reformation," in *Dialogue on the Two Natures of Christ*, Peter Martyr Library, vol. 2, ed. & trans. J.P. Donnelly, xii (Kirkville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995). Donnelly points out that the publication history of these documents provides solid evidence of the acceptance of Martyr's theology by both Bullinger and Calvin.

¹²⁷ "Peter Martyr's doctrine...as endorsed by Cox and Cranmer, was now the recognized doctrine of the Church, and therefore normative for the drawing up of the Second Edwardian Prayer Book of 1552 and the Forty-Two Articles of

the *Disputation* also marked a growing theological divergence from Martin Bucer. In a letter sent to Bucer on 15 June 1549 with a copy of the *Treatise* and *Disputation*, Vermigli expressed some concern that his old friend and colleague might be offended by certain aspects of his teaching: “One thing only remains at which you might take offense: namely, my assertion that it is not appropriate for the body of Christ, so greatly glorified, to be in many places.”¹²⁸ Indeed, Bucer was put off by the *Treatise* as indicated by a letter to the Lutheran theologian Johannes Brenz: “I am sorry for master Martyr’s book as anyone can be.” He also added that Martyr was influenced by certain men who “confine [Christ] to a certain limited place in heaven, and talk so rapidly about His exhibition and presence in the supper...that they appear to believe that nothing else but the bread and wine is there distributed.”¹²⁹ Evidently Bucer also felt that Martyr’s theology had shifted in a decidedly ‘Zwinglian’ direction.

Like Calvin and Bullinger, Martyr refused to sign the *Wittenberg Concord*, explaining to the Strasbourg Academy in 1553 that “I cannot grant, through the word of God and conscience, that those who are destitute of faith eat the body of Christ in receiving the sacrament.” In the same letter he expresses concern that his affirmation of the *Wittenberg Concord* would also “seem to condemn the Church of Zurich, Basel, Berne, Geneva and England, and all the brethren scattered throughout Italy and France.”¹³⁰ Peter Martyr’s refusal to capitulate to the Lutheran party in Strasbourg and his eventual request to the Senate to be released from his official duties in order to accept a teaching position in Zurich alongside Bullinger, provides solid evidence that by 1553, Peter Martyr was willing to declare his theological alignment publicly with the

1553.” Joseph C. McLelland, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli A.D. 1500-1562* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 22-23.

¹²⁸ J.C. McLelland and G.E. Duffield eds., *The Life, Early Letters & Eucharistic Writings of Peter Martyr* (Abingdon, Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1980), 338.

¹²⁹ McLelland, “Oxford Treatise and Disputation: Translator’s Introduction,” xxxvii.

¹³⁰ McLelland and Duffield eds., *Life, Early Letters & Eucharistic Writings*, 319-320.

Reformed party. A letter to Bullinger two years earlier dated 25 April 1551, further confirms Martyr's self-identification as a Reformed theologian: "What you [and Calvin] have mutually agreed upon respecting the sacrament of the Eucharist [i.e. the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549)] is very gratifying to me; and I desire nothing more than that a plain and perspicuous statement upon that subject may be set forth in the churches of Christ: as far as my own opinion is concerned, I go along with you altogether."¹³¹ Based on the sum of this biographical evidence, it would appear that Peter Martyr's position on the Eucharist was fully compatible with the position held by both Bullinger and Calvin, but diverged from that of Martin Bucer.¹³²

While serving as a professor in Zurich between 1556 and 1562, Vermigli entered a heated polemical exchange with the Lutheran ubiquitist Johannes Brenz, in a series of events somewhat reminiscent of the earlier exchange between Luther and Zwingli in the mid-1520s. Vermigli's *Dialogue on the Two Natures in Christ* was Martyr's principle contribution to the campaign against Brenz, which pushed him further away from the Lutherans, while he gained the respect of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva.¹³³ Beza and the aged Vermigli were later to represent the Reformed position on the Eucharist together at the Colloquy of Poissy in 1561 in

¹³¹ McLelland and Duffield eds., *Life, Early Letters & Eucharistic Writings*, 341.

¹³² McLelland's thesis that "these three Reformers, Bucer, Calvin and Martyr, represent a unified theology of ecumenical dimensions and purpose" seems to be an overstatement, given Bucer's assent to the *Wittenberg Concord*. McLelland, *Visible Words of Christ*, 280. Salvatore Corda's more nuanced thesis makes a similar error through his close theological association of Martyr and Bucer: "[Vermigli] should be placed, if this terminology is permissible, between Bucer and Bullinger, perhaps closer to the former in his positive, and to the latter in his negative, formulations. Salvatore Corda, *Veritas Sacramenti: A Study in Vermigli's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1975), 77.

¹³³ J.P. Donnelly, "Introduction: Eucharistic Controversy and the Reformation," xx. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Dialogue on the Two Natures in Christ*, ed. J.P. Donnelly (Kirkville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1995).

support of the persecuted Huguenots in France – a fact which further reinforces the acceptance Vermigli’s Eucharistic theology had gained in Calvin’s Geneva by the end of his career.¹³⁴

A close comparison of Peter Martyr’s Eucharistic theology with the mature, full-orbed sacramental theology expressed by Zwingli reveals significant areas of continuity, especially in terms of his hermeneutical approach in countering the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. It also reveals several areas of discontinuity where Vermigli’s theology appears to be much closer in both its tone and content to that of John Calvin.

Unlike the early Zwingli, Vermigli did not express any hesitation in describing the Eucharist as a “sacrament” although he readily accepts the same Augustinian definition as Zwingli did, *viz.* “the sign of a holy thing, and a visible form of an invisible grace.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, Martyr, like Zwingli before him, argues from this definition that the “sign” or “symbol” must be distinguished from the “thing signified”, thereby overturning any theological position which conflates the two: “For that common received definition [of a sacrament] proves that what we see in the Eucharist are signs of the body and blood of the Lord, unless we would remove the Eucharist itself from the list of sacraments.”¹³⁶ For Martyr, as for Zwingli and Calvin, there is no sense in which Christ is present “corporally” or “carnally in the sacramental elements.”¹³⁷ Because the physical symbol must be distinguished from the spiritual reality that it signifies, Martyr interprets the words of institution figuratively, using metonymy and

¹³⁴ Hillerbrand ed., s.v. “Poissy, Colloquy of”; Calvin openly endorsed Vermigli’s writing on the Eucharist, stating that the entire discussion “was crowned by Peter Martyr, who has left nothing to be desired.” Quoted in McLelland, “Oxford Treatise and Disputation: Translator’s Introduction,” xxx-xxxii (footnote 53).

¹³⁵ Donnelly, James and McLelland eds., *The Peter Martyr Reader*, 155. cf. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The Oxford Treatise and Disputation*. Peter Martyr Library, vol. 7, ed. & trans. Joseph C. McLelland (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2000), 54.

¹³⁶ Donnelly, James and McLelland eds., *Peter Martyr Reader*, 155.

¹³⁷ McLelland, *Life, Early Letters & Eucharistic Writings*, 321.

synecdoche.¹³⁸ The body of Christ is “signified” by the sacramental element: “‘This is my body’ should be explained in this way: ‘This,’ clearly that which is being pointed to, ‘signifies my body, or is the sacrament of my body.’”¹³⁹ This, symbolic emphasis, in turn, frequently leads him to define the Lord’s Supper as a “memorial” and a thanksgiving feast: “Beyond doubt in this rite the Church commemorates the death of the Lord, as Christ himself commanded when he established the Supper, and thanks are given to God for such a great benefit.”¹⁴⁰ Because of this commemorative nature, Vermigli, in concert with Zwingli, frequently places the accent on the effect the symbols have on the mind and the memory: “Therefore let the meaning be, I give you bread to eat, while offering my body to be fastened to the cross, so that with faithful memory and attentive mind you may spiritual eat among yourselves; and as with the body you eat bread, so with the mind will you eat my flesh.”¹⁴¹ This Zwinglian emphasis on the role of the mind, which logically follows from the division between physical and spiritual, appears in Martyr’s teaching on the believers’ “twofold mouth”: “One [mouth] is physical, by which they bring profane or ordinary bread into their belly to feed and nourish the body itself. They have another mouth, to use an elegant metaphor rather than to speak literally, which pertains to the *rational part of the soul*.” [emphasis mine]¹⁴² Several lines later, Vermigli equates “eating” with “believing”, an emphasis found in Zwingli, which is explicitly repudiated by Calvin: “So eating Christ’s body

¹³⁸ “If you take the whole thing [i.e. ‘this is my body’], bread and what is offered through bread, that is, the body of Christ, we admit synecdoche... But if you refer the saying to the bread, which signifies and offers us Christ’s body to be eaten, it will be the figure of metonymy.” Vermigli, *Oxford Treatise*, 66.

¹³⁹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Dialogue on the Two Natures in Christ*. Peter Martyr Library, vol. 2, ed. & trans. John Patrick Donnelly (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995), 201.

¹⁴⁰ Vermigli, *Dialogue*, 191.

¹⁴¹ Vermigli, *Oxford Treatise*, 66.

¹⁴² Vermigli, *Dialogue*, 189.

and drinking his blood mean truly and effectively believing that they were offered for our sake by God unto death on the cross.”¹⁴³

Vermigli’s polemic against the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity differs very little from that offered by Zwingli and Calvin. In this respect, all three men hold firmly to what later became known as the *extra-calvinisticum*: “Granted that the divine nature is everywhere by its immensity, it always has conjoined to it the humanity, but the humanity is not present in every place that the divinity fills.”¹⁴⁴ For Vermigli, as for Zwingli and Calvin, the fact that Christ ascended corporeally to heaven rules out any possibility of the corporeal presence of Christ in the elements.

Vermigli’s adamant denial of the corporeal presence of Christ in the elements leads him, to deny over and over again the *manducatio indignorum* – a conviction which ultimately distanced him from Martin Bucer and prevented him from signing the *Wittenberg Concord*. For Vermigli true faith is indispensable to communion in the Eucharist, for “we truly receive in communicating when with full and solid assent of faith we grasp those things offered by the signification of words and signs.”¹⁴⁵ It is utterly impossible for the sacramental elements to function *ex opere operato* or to be of any benefit to non-believers.

In spite of the fact that Martyr’s theology shares many of the fundamental hermeneutical presuppositions of Zwingli, there is a real sense in which he goes further in his conception of the immediate efficacy of the sacramental elements and the role of the Holy Spirit in uniting believers on earth with the risen and ascended Christ in heaven. In this way, Zwingli’s theology

¹⁴³ Vermigli, *Dialogue*, 189 cf. Calvin: “But here is the difference between my words and theirs [i.e. Zwingli’s]: for them to eat is only to believe; I say that we eat Christ’s flesh in believing, because it is made ours by faith and that this eating is the result and effect of faith.” *Institutes*, 4.17.5

¹⁴⁴ Vermigli, *Dialogue*, 25.

¹⁴⁵ Vermigli, *Oxford Treatise*, 20.

has a distinctly Calvinist flavour which sets him apart from Zwingli and especially from the Swiss Anabaptists. Martyr affirms repeatedly that the physical elements of bread and wine undergo a “sacramental mutation” and are used by the Holy Spirit as “instruments” to increase faith: “By his words and institutions, [the physical elements] become sacraments, that is instruments by which the Holy Spirit excites faith in our minds, so that we may be spiritually yet truly fed and sustained by his body and blood.”¹⁴⁶ Martyr is very careful, throughout his articulation of the instrumental efficacy of the sacramental elements, to preserve the freedom of the Spirit, which was of great concern to Zwingli: “Sometimes [the Spirit] works in our souls completely without instruments by himself, either begetting faith or inflaming a languishing faith. But for the most part and in the usual way, he uses the external word and the sacraments so that the elect may be powerfully moved to attain heavenly goods.”¹⁴⁷

Martyr develops his conception of the immediate efficacy of the sacraments through the language of “union” with Christ. This affirmation that a believer’s union with Christ can be augmented through the Eucharist is perhaps Martyr’s most significant contribution to the development of Reformed theology: “But there is a third kind of union, on which we enter with Christ by eating him spiritually. They [disciples of Zwingli] do not often speak of this, though they are not entirely silent.”¹⁴⁸ This mystical union with Christ is effected by the Holy Spirit who unites believers on earth with the risen and ascended body of Christ:

Therefore what obstacle could spaces of places – between heaven, where Christ abides, and ourselves – now offer to our having the true fruition of his body and blood, being made alive thereby? Surely nothing at all if we have faith, by which our minds are helped by the Word of God and the sacraments, carried up to heaven and there refreshed

¹⁴⁶ Vermigli, *Oxford Treatise*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ Vermigli, *Dialogue*, 190.

¹⁴⁸ Vermigli, *Oxford Treatise*, 120.

with the spiritual meat and drink of the body and blood of Christ, and restored to eternal life.¹⁴⁹

As a result of this emphasis, Vermigli can affirm with Calvin and in marked contrast to Zwingli, a sacramental change in which the consecrated elements “signify effectively...offer and exhibit the body and blood of the Lord to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵⁰

As a theologian in the Reformed tradition, there is little question that Peter Martyr Vermigli is deeply indebted to the sacramental hermeneutic of Ulrich Zwingli. Vermigli’s Eucharistic theology is firmly built upon a Zwinglian foundation, as is clear by an examination of his hermeneutical presuppositions and polemical approach. Nevertheless, Vermigli’s teaching about the mystical union which is effected instrumentally by the Holy Spirit through the consecrated elements, goes well beyond Zwingli’s concession that the sacraments augment “historic faith”. While Zwingli acknowledges that the sacraments assist greatly in bringing to mind the believer’s union with Christ which was effected *in the past* through the vicarious suffering and death of Jesus, Martyr teaches that the sacraments augment faith *in the present* as the believer is increasingly united with the ascended body of Christ while (s)he partakes of the sacramental elements. In this sense, Peter Martyr’s Eucharistic theology bears a striking resemblance to that expressed by John Calvin, while adding to it the emphasis of the believer’s unity with Christ through the Supper.

From the preceding analysis of several major contributions to the development of sixteenth century Reformed Eucharistic theology, we can see that simple binary classifications such as “Calvinism” and “Zwinglianism” are utterly insufficient in any thoughtful analysis of Puritan sacramental theology. In reality, the Reformed teaching on the Lord’s Supper cannot be

¹⁴⁹ McLelland, *Life, Early Letters & Eucharistic Writings*, 323-324.

¹⁵⁰ Vermigli, *Oxford Treatise*, 77.

neatly categorized, and the seventeenth century Reformed Othodoxy of John Owen and the Puritans must be analyzed against this rich and highly nuanced backdrop which was part of their intellectual and theological inheritance.

Chapter 3

The Lord's Supper in Reformed Orthodoxy

As Reformed theology made the journey across the English channel and the baton of the Reformation passed from one generation to the next, the thesis is frequently put forward that, the dogma, inherited from Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Bucer, was fundamentally altered by Reformed 'scholastics' such as Theodore Beza, Peter Martyr Vermigli and William Perkins. Puritan theology, it is argued, thereby came to rest upon radically different philosophical presuppositions than those embraced by the earlier Reformers who were the true sons of the Renaissance.¹ The thorny issue of continuity and discontinuity between Calvin and his scholastic successors in England has provoked a tremendous amount of discussion among scholars and has exerted a corresponding influence on the course of Puritan historiography.² Given the strong scholastic flavour of Owen's written corpus and his early theological formation at Queen's College under the tutelage of Thomas Barlow, it is surprising that the question of continuity and discontinuity between Owen and the Continental Reformers has not been addressed more thoroughly in past treatments of his sacramental theology. It is equally surprising that more attention has not been paid to the influence of Aristotle and Aquinas in

¹ "Unfortunately, after [Calvin's] death forces were already at work, not only in the small city-republic of Geneva but also in those parts of Europe where Calvin's disciples were established, which altered Calvin's carefully prepared balance of complementary doctrines." Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*. ed. G.E. Duffield, 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

² Richard A. Muller has pointed out that "Much American scholarship in the field of Protestant orthodoxy rests upon the definitions given in Brian Armstrong's *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*....Armstrong's arguments are supported by the preference of many seventeenth-century Reformed theologians for a synthetic over an analytic order in systematic theology. Against this definition we note that not all of these characteristics can be found in the words of each of the thinkers commonly referred to as 'Protestant scholastics.'" Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 11.

shaping his mature Eucharistic theology.³ A metaphysician of Barlow's stature would certainly have exerted a formative influence on his young pupil, especially considering the central role that tutors occupied in the educational paradigm of seventeenth century Oxford.⁴ Although Barlow and Owen came to disagree on matters of ecclesiastical conformity, they shared the same high-Calvinist theology, and the historical evidence suggests that they remained friends throughout their lives in spite of their differences on ecclesiastical polity.⁵

Calvin vs. Calvinism?

The thesis which has postulated radical discontinuity between the 'humanist' Reformers and their 'scholastic' disciples has been put forward most forcefully by three twentieth century scholars, R.T. Kendall, Brian Armstrong and Basil Hall. In his controversial book *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Kendall credits Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin in Geneva, with introducing a fundamental alteration in the Reformed tradition which led to supralapsarianism, particular atonement, and a loss of assurance.⁶ Central to Kendall's argument is the assumption that Calvin promoted a *general* theory of the atonement (i.e. Christ died for every single individual) while Beza promoted the *particular* (or 'limited') theory of the

³ Payne mentions Owen's "Aristotelian tendencies", but does not expand on how this affects the presentation or content of his Eucharistic theology. Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper*, 36.

⁴ Stephen Porter, "University and Society," in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume 4: Seventeenth-century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke, 67 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). During the 1630s, Barlow gained a reputation at Oxford as a teacher of philosophy and logic, writing an important treatise on metaphysics in 1637. John Spurr, "Barlow, Thomas (1608/9-1691)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1439> (accessed 18 April 2013).

⁵ During the Interregnum, Owen appears to have protected his former tutor from expulsion, and after the Restoration Barlow returned the favour by assisting the former Vice-Chancellor when he was harassed for preaching illegally in his own home. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Thomas Barlow"

⁶ "Beza introduced other rigid teachings into Reformed theology, among them supralapsarianism, a limited atonement, and the immediate imputation of Adam's sin. These all, to some degree, represent a distortion of Calvin's teaching. As the years passed, they became more and more rigidly espoused in international Calvinism." Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 41-42.

atonement (i.e. Christ died only for the elect). Whereas Calvin could point people directly to the atonement of Christ as the infallible ground for assurance, Beza held that individuals must “make their calling and election sure” through self-examination and the employment of deductive syllogisms. For this reason, Kendall credits Beza’s with introducing the *practical syllogism* into the later Reformed tradition which subtly shifted Calvin’s emphasis from God’s grace to human works:

Beza directs us not to Christ but to ourselves; we do not begin with Him but with the effects, which points us back, as it were, to the decree of election. Thus, while Calvin thinks looking to ourselves leads to anxiety, or sure damnation, Beza thinks otherwise. Sanctification, or good works, is the infallible proof of saving faith... Thus Beza resorts to the practical syllogism. It therefore precipitates a distinction between faith and assurance and paves the way for what the writers in this tradition will term the reflex act.⁷

If Kendall is correct in his assertion that the doctrine of limited atonement is a scholastic corruption of Calvin’s theology, the indictment would certainly extend to John Owen, whose treatise *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, still stands as the most formidable articulation and defense of limited atonement that has yet been written.⁸

In a similar vein to R.T. Kendall, Brian Armstrong argued in his monograph *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, that there is a radical disjunction between Calvin’s humanism and the scholasticism re-introduced into the Reformed tradition by Beza:

Both the methodology and content of the teaching of Calvin and Amyraut were found to contrast sharply with those of orthodox Calvinists of the seventeenth century. The latter showed themselves to be much more interested in metaphysics and systematization, and so were preserving elements of medieval scholasticism quite in contrast to the humanistically shaped thought of Calvin and Amyraut.⁹

⁷ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 33.

⁸ J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay,” in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959).

⁹ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, xiix.

Central to Armstrong's thesis is his close identification of 'Protestant scholasticism' with the philosophy of Aristotle. He identifies four key characteristics of all Protestant scholastics, which would extend to seventeenth century Puritans such as John Owen: 1) Syllogistic reasoning which is based on "an Aristotelian philosophical commitment" which relates back to the medieval scholastics; 2) "The employment of reason in religious matters, so that reason assumes at least equal standing with faith in theology"; 3) "The sentiment that the Scriptural record contains a unified, rationally comprehensible account and thus may be formed into a definitive statement which may be used as a measuring stick to determine one's orthodoxy."; 4) "A pronounced interest in metaphysical matters, in abstract, speculative thought, particularly with reference to the doctrine of God."¹⁰ Although Armstrong "lays much of the blame" for this scholastic corruption at the feet of Theodore Beza, he also indicts Peter Martyr Vermigli – an accusation which is significant when we consider the magnitude of Martyr's contribution to Reformed Eucharistic theology in England.¹¹

The greatest scholarly challenge which has been leveled against the 'Calvin vs. the Calvinists' approach described above has been put forward by Richard A. Muller. Muller critiques the attitude implicit in much of twentieth century Puritan scholarship, that Calvin somehow constitutes the unimpeachable standard, against which all subsequent Reformed theology must be measured:

We do not criticize Ritschl for not being true to Schleiermacher or Barth for not being true to Ritschl. So also should we cease to ask Polanus or Ames or the Synod of Dort or the Westminster Assembly to be true to Calvin. The historical analysis of Protestant orthodoxy must describe development and change, continuity and discontinuity; it ought not to postulate golden ages or optimum moments from which all else is decline.¹²

¹⁰ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 32.

¹¹ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 38.

¹² Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 180, cf. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 38, 45.

While recognizing clear elements of methodological discontinuity between Calvin and his successors, Muller argues that confessional and doctrinal codification was both a logical and necessary consequence of the Reformation, in which “the great theological insights” of the early Reformers were preserved intact, while “forms and methods of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries” were increasingly employed.¹³ As the teaching of the first two generations of Continental Reformers were subjected to polemical attacks from the Roman Catholic Church, it was necessary for the heirs of the Reformation to take up the tools of scholasticism in order to defend Protestant Orthodoxy within an academic context.¹⁴ Muller laments the misuse of the term “scholastic” in the debate, denying that ‘scholasticism’ and ‘Aristotelianism’ are synonyms and insisting that the term “refers to an academic style and method of discourse, not a particular theology or philosophy.”¹⁵ Even the anti-Aristotelian Ramists were true “scholastics” in the sense that they were using a method to promote Reformed theology within a polemical context.¹⁶ Muller also attacks the radical disjunction that is made between Renaissance Humanism and Medieval Scholasticism, arguing persuasively that the Reformers did not jettison Aristotelian logic and metaphysics as has been commonly suggested.¹⁷ Richard Muller has presented a compelling case for taking a more nuanced and appreciative approach to Puritan theology, in contrast with the binary and largely negative approach of a previous generation of scholars who

¹³ Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 27-28.

¹⁴ Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 65-66.

¹⁵ Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 30.

¹⁶ “Ramism emerges, therefore, not as an opposition to Protestant scholasticism but as a significant element in its framework and fashioning.” Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 183.

¹⁷ Muller points toward Martin Bucer, a Dominican monk who was trained as a Thomist, suggesting that he stands in a more positive relation to the medieval tradition than either Zwingli or Bucer. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 55.

posited a false dichotomy between the Renaissance Humanism of Calvin and the Medieval Scholasticism of Beza and Perkins.¹⁸

The validity of Muller's criticisms is further reinforced when we examine the curriculum at Oxford during the seventeenth century. Mordechai Feingold laments that "the most pervasive misconception concerning the seventeenth century curriculum is that it survived and flourished as a relic of medieval scholasticism."¹⁹ Taking these critiques into consideration, we are able to discern significant theological continuity between John Owen and his sixteenth century predecessors without ignoring or minimizing the scholastic development which helped Reformed theology adapt to the seventeenth century context. Although Owen's *Works* betray a clear affinity for Aristotle and are written in a heavy scholastic style that could weary his most enthusiastic disciples, it would be a grave error to classify him as a full-blooded medieval scholastic or as a fundamentalist obscurantist.²⁰ As Trueman has put it, John Owen was a true "Renaissance man", equally versed as Calvin and Bullinger in the patristic tradition, having an understanding of medieval theology and philosophy superior to Calvin's, and having more

¹⁸ "It is simply untenable to make the claim that the Reformers were humanists and their successors scholastics – just as it is untenable to associate scholasticism or humanism with particular theological or philosophical claims, when scholasticism and humanism are understood as methods and when it is recognized that these methods coexisted, sometimes in bitter controversy between faculties, in the universities of the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries." Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 189.

¹⁹ Mordechai Feingold, "The Humanities," in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume 4: Seventeenth-century Oxford*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke, 212 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Andrew Thompson says the following about Owen's treatise *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated*: "We concur, indeed, to a certain extent, in the censure which has been charged against that part of it which treats of the nature of justifying faith, as tending to perplex a subject whose very simplicity makes explanation equally impossible and unnecessary. The censure, however, ought not to be confined to Owen; for on the subject of faith the Puritan divines, with their scholastic distinctions, were far inferior to the theologians of the Reformation. The great difficulty about faith is not a metaphysical but a moral one; and there is truth in the observation, that elaborate attempts to describe it are like handling a beautiful transparency, whose luster disappears whensoever it is touched." Thompson, "Life of Owen," xcvi. William H. Goold, who edited a collection of Owen's *Works* in the 1850s states in the General Preface that Owen's "style in general is deficient in grace and vivacity. His mode of discussing a subject is often tedious and prolix." *Works of Owen*, I.vii

expertise in the original languages.²¹ Although Owen was willing to make use of Aristotelian distinctions if they suited his theological purposes, his works are also filled with appeals to classical literature, and his library catalogue bears witness to an immense range of interests in the humanities and sciences.²² As the leading Reformed theologian of the seventeenth century, Owen was far more balanced in his philosophical commitments than has previously been assumed by scholars in the tradition of Kendall, Armstrong and Hall.

Aristotelianism and Ramism in the Puritan Tradition

Given Owen's early educational formation at Oxford, it should not come as a surprise that his theological method was more informed by Aristotelian logic than many of his Puritan contemporaries who took degrees at Cambridge, where the anti-Aristotelian method of Peter Ramus was more warmly received.²³ The progress and influence of the Ramist method in England is closely associated with Christ's College, Cambridge, where "the line of Ramists who studied and in almost every case taught at Christ's extends backward in time from Ames, Downham, and Perkins to Gabriel Harvey and Laurence Chaderton."²⁴ Because Ramism had become associated with polemical controversy and dissent, it made significantly less headway

²¹ Trueman, *John Owen*, 127.

²² Trueman, *John Owen*, 16,22; Crawford Gribben has expressed caution about relying too heavily on the catalogue of Owen's books, *Bibliotheca Oweniana*, which was an advertising pamphlet written by auctioneer Edward Millington after Owen's death in order to sell the contents of his library. Gribben suggests that the catalogue is incomplete and that the enterprising Millington may have tried to sell some books under Owen's name that never really originated from his personal library. Crawford Gribben, "John Owen, Renaissance Man? The Evidence of Edward Milington's *Bibliotheca Oweniana* (1684)" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, 98-108 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

²³ "In England [Ramism] made little progress at Oxford, which was devoted to Aristotle, but Cambridge proved more hospitable." Frank Pierrepont Graves, *Peter Ramus and the Educational Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 212.

²⁴ Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), 212,247.

among conforming Calvinists and Puritans at Oxford.²⁵ Although Owen undoubtedly received a more enthusiastic introduction to Aristotle at Oxford than many of his Puritan brethren at Cambridge, Feingold cautions against the temptation to stereotype seventeenth century Oxford as an institution that was rigidly bound to medieval Aristotelianism.²⁶ Like Cambridge, Oxford had a strong humanist influence in the seventeenth century which must be recognized. The increasing influence of the Laudian party at beginning in the 1620s ensured that all Oxford undergraduates received a solid grounding in the classical languages and literature and added to a curriculum which was already “quintessentially humanistic in nature.”²⁷ Although the mastery of dialectic and rhetoric were first in the order of studies, the highly specialized and technical logic of the late Middle Ages had given way to a more balanced philosophy of education which placed a greater emphasis on language and literature.²⁸ As a student in seventeenth century Oxford, Owen would have received a well-rounded Humanist education which acquainted him with medieval theology in addition to the well-worn scholastic methodology of Aristotle.

Although Owen had no reservations in using Aristotelian language when unleashing his pen against Roman Catholics, Arminians and Socinians, many of his Puritan brethren were far less sympathetic to Aristotle and Aquinas, and instead turned for guidance to the French Professor Pierre de la Ramée, known in England as Peter Ramus. Peter Ramus was born in 1515

²⁵ “The seductive appeal of Ramist dogmatism and simplicity to radical puritans is well documented. Less appreciated is the fact that the contentiousness bred by such a union through the constant and deliberate provocation of hot-headed disciples further discredited Ramism not only in the eyes of conformists, but among some puritans as well. It became a truism that many debates were concerned only marginally with genuine intellectual issues and that for most protagonists, Ramism was a thinly disguised assault on the religious establishment and its educational seminaries.” Feingold, “The Humanities,” 291.

²⁶ Feingold, “The Humanities,” 212.

²⁷ Feingold, “The Humanities,” 213.

²⁸ Feingold, “The Humanities,” 276-277.

at Cust, Picardy, into a peasant family.²⁹ While studying at the College of Navarre, he had become disillusioned with formal dialectics and academic disputations which he considered to be tedious and a waste of time.³⁰ After graduating, Ramus launched a polemical attack on the Aristotelian methodology which he had imbibed during his college education and published two controversial books in 1544: *Dialecticae Institutiones* and *Aristotelicae Animadversiones*.³¹ Although King Francis attempted to suppress both of these works, his death in 1547 cleared the way for Ramus's rise to prominence within the University of Paris where he was named Royal Professor of Philosophy and Eloquence by Henry II.³² It is widely agreed that the defining characteristic of Ramus' philosophical method was pragmatism, leading his opponents to brand him with the nickname of *usuarius* (utilitarian).³³ Ramus sought to remove all redundancy from the Aristotelian method and to distinguish sharply between rhetoric, logic and grammar, subordinating the art of rhetoric to logic.³⁴ Whereas Ciceronian rhetoric had been traditionally broken into five constituent parts, Ramus retained only *style* and *delivery* as elements properly belonging to rhetoric. *Invention* and *arrangement* were wholly transferred from rhetoric into the field of logic to avoid what he perceived to be unnecessary redundancy.³⁵

²⁹ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 19; James Skalnik makes the following unflattering comments about Ramus' humble origins: "Born a peasant, he displayed the virtues and vices of the peasantry until the day he died. His bluntness, his awkwardness, and even his frugal attitude toward money were so many indelible signs of his origin. In short, Ramus was a yokel, and neither he nor anyone else ever forgot it." James Veazie Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform: University and Church at the End of the Renaissance* (Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press, 2002), 25.

³⁰ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 108.

³¹ Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 41.

³² Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 41-42.

³³ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 57; "While Ramus was far from being a Marxist in any sense of the word, he would have endorsed the classic Marxist dictum that the task of the philosopher was not to explain the world but to change it." Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 7.

³⁴ Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 47.

³⁵ Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, 127, 148.

The Ramist method, which was to exert a decisive influence upon Congregationalist Puritans in England and New England, was based upon three fundamental axioms or laws. The *lex veritatis* allowed only for propositions which were true at all times.³⁶ This axiom was rooted in the Platonic notion that the arts must rest upon eternal and unalterable ideas.³⁷ The *lex justitiae* reflected Ramus's determination to separate from one liberal art any proposition which belonged to another, thereby eliminating redundancy.³⁸ The application of this maxim resulted in a new textbook on logic which was one-tenth the size of Aristotle's.³⁹ The *lex sapientiae* maintains that the general should precede particular, leading to an emphasis on deductive logic and the syllogism.⁴⁰ The tell-tale sign of Ramist methodology was the bifurcation of a subject into a series of dichotomies. Ramists began by dividing a logical class into two subclasses which were opposed by contradiction, and those subclasses were further bifurcated, starting with the general and moving toward the specific.⁴¹ Ramus believed that the outcome of his challenge to Aristotelian hegemony was a brief, clear and cost-effective educational curriculum that would retain the interest of the student and assist his memory. Others have suggested that Ramus' method was little more than a form of "academic iconoclasm" which appealed greatly to other varieties of "iconoclasts", such as the Puritans, who employed the Ramist method with great enthusiasm in tearing down prelacy in England.⁴²

In 1561, Ramus converted to the Protestant faith as a result of the Colloquy of Poissy, in which Peter Martyr Vermigli and Theodore Beza defended the Reformed position on the Lord's

³⁶ Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, 151.

³⁷ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 111.

³⁸ Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, 151.

³⁹ Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 46.

⁴⁰ Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, 152, 159.

⁴¹ Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, 162.

⁴² Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 118; Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 34.

Supper. From this point on, he demonstrated a particular interest in the Eucharist, declaring to a close friend that “two things have been especially misunderstood and distorted by all Christians of latter days, to wit, the sacrament of the holy Supper, and the second commandment in the law which forbids all worship of images; so much so that, in these two respects, under the pretext of piety, we have fallen more and more into an execrable idolatry.”⁴³ After his Protestant conversion, Ramus made an effort to apply his methodology to theology. The result was his *Commentariorum de religione christiana*, written in four books dealing respectively with the Apostles’ Creed, the Decalogue, the Lord’s Prayer, and the sacraments.⁴⁴ Characteristic of his system of bifurcation, Ramus divided the books into two parts: Doctrine (Book 1) and Discipline (Books 2-4), treating the sacraments as a pragmatic component of Christian obedience which flows from faith. The partitioning of Christian theology into two distinct parts, faith and observance, set a precedent for Puritans such as William Ames, who applied his methodology to Christian doctrine with far greater theological prowess.⁴⁵ Ramus’s conception of the Eucharist as an ‘action’ performed by faithful Christians, betrays an extremely subjective view of the sacraments in which the physical elements are seen first and foremost as outward signs and pledges rather than efficacious instruments which unite the believer on earth with the Lord Jesus in heaven.

Apart from the dialectical structure of Ramus’ *Commentary*, the content of his teaching on the sacraments in the fourth book reveals a doctrine which is remarkably subjective in its emphasis. Ramus defines a “sacrament” in a way that places the emphasis almost completely on the outward profession of faith: “A sacrament is a public act of faith by a sensible sign and a

⁴³ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 73-75

⁴⁴ Keith L. Sprunger, “Ames, Ramus and the Method of Puritan Theology,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 59 (1966): 136.

⁴⁵ Sprunger, “Ames, Ramus and the Method of Puritan Theology,” 145.

solemn rite of His Church instituted by God to commemorate the death of Christ.”⁴⁶ Writing more specifically about the Lord’s Supper, the subjective side of the Eucharist is again brought to the forefront: “The Lord’s Supper is the sacrament by which through the gracious acts of God we use the bread and wine for *professing* that we have been raised up into eternal life through the crucified body of Christ and his blood which was spilled for us.”⁴⁷ (emphasis mine) Not surprisingly, Zwingli’s successor, Heinrich Bullinger, looked very favourably upon Ramus and his Eucharistic doctrine, writing in his diary on 28 August 1569 that “Professor Petrus Ramus of the famous University of Paris exhibited for my judgment some books he had written on the subject of religion and especially on the sacraments. They pleased me.”⁴⁸ An examination of the theology of William Ames (1576-1618), Ramus’ most enthusiastic disciple within the Puritan tradition, reveals that he also promoted a highly subjective doctrine of the Supper which is articulated in the *Marrow of Theology* (1629). In this highly influential theological textbook, Ames emphasizes the ongoing spiritual presence of Christ with the believer, rather than the real and unique presence of Christ in the sacramental meal.⁴⁹ Ames’ *Marrow*, which is steeped in Ramist dialectic, exerted an enduring influence on Puritan Congregationalism.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Quoted in Peter Sharrat, “Peter Ramus and Imitation: Image, Sign and Sacrament” *Yale French Studies* 47(1972): 31.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 198.

⁴⁸ Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 115.

⁴⁹ “The spiritual nourishment in this sacrament does not require that the bread and wine be changed into the body and blood of Christ, or that Christ be corporally present with them. It is required only that they be changed in their application and use, and that Christ be spiritually present with those who receive them in faith.” William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, edited and translated by John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 212.

⁵⁰ Hambrick-Stowe, “Practical Divinity and Spirituality,” 192; “Ames also relies on Ramus’ schemes of division. The simplest and most logical way to conceive an area of knowledge, according to Ramus, is to be mindful of its subordinate parts. One begins with the two major components of the area in question. Each of these components has two components, and these two, two more each, and so on, until the original term is laid out in an extensive series of coupled parts – a kind of reverse tennis tournament chart.” William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1629. Edited and translated by John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 212.

Although Ramus was warmly received by Bullinger in Zurich, his reception in Geneva can only be described as frigid. Ramus and Beza had clashed over the Eucharist in a public contest, and Beza, himself very fond of Aristotle, distanced himself from the French Professor going so far as to refuse him a faculty position in the Genevan Academy.⁵¹ Aside from their different postures toward Aristotelian logic, the main point of divergence between Ramus and Beza was Ramus's unrelenting emphasis on the subjective, human perspective in all matters related to Christian doctrine.⁵² It is interesting that the very issue that made Ramus's method repulsive to Theodore Beza rendered it attractive to many of the Puritans in England and New England who, like Ramus, desired a practical and subjective faith which was free of 'unnecessary' metaphysical complexities.⁵³ This aversion to fine scholastic distinctions within the Puritan tradition has been rightly discerned by Holifield: "Most Puritan preachers of the early seventeenth century neglected the technical distinctions of sacramental doctrine. Their sermons and meditations were not intended as commentaries on the whole range of traditional issues. They concentrated instead on the practical benefits of the sacraments and the requirements for admission."⁵⁴ Whereas Beza had attempted to *explain* the relationship between the sacramental sign and the thing signified using the fourfold causality of Aristotle, many of the

⁵¹ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 200; Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 111.

⁵² "What was to the Calvinists the realization and embodiment of God's eternal and incomprehensible decrees, was to Ramus the expression of man's subjective relationship with his creator and savior. The observation holds true whether we investigate the general tone of the Commentaries or concentrate on Ramus' interpretation of specific points of doctrine such as the Eucharist and predestination." Skalnik, *Ramus and Reform*, 126.

⁵³ "The English Puritans maintained [Ramus'] ideas until after the middle of the seventeenth century, and the New Englanders were still using his texts at Harvard into the Enlightenment. This may well be due to Ramus's Congregationalism, but I would suggest that the nature of New England society was perhaps even more important as a reason for the continued success of Ramism there. What it implied about the importance of talent and merit, the need for widespread and accessible education, the necessity of wide participation in social institutions, and above all the ultimate value of achievement and hard work, all made it better suited to New England." Graves, *Peter Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 158.

⁵⁴ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 40.

Puritans in England showed little interest in philosophical speculation which did not immediately impact Christian *experience*.⁵⁵

The influence of Ramus (himself a strong advocate of Congregational polity among the French Huguenots), was most pronounced on the Congregationalist or Independent strain of Puritanism.⁵⁶ Among these Puritans, who placed a premium upon the purity of the visible Church, Ramus's highly pragmatic approach to the sacraments fit well with their ecclesiastical polity. Among many seventeenth century Congregationalists, the Eucharist came to function as pragmatic tool which could help to separate the sheep from the goats, and for this reason the faithless and unprepared were strictly forbidden to take part in the sacramental meal.⁵⁷ Just as Ramus had developed a scholastic method which subordinated rhetoric to dialectic, so too, many Puritan Independents applied this same framework to the Lord's Supper with the consequence that the outward symbols of bread and wine were subordinated to the spiritual reality they signified. The strong separation between the physical and the spiritual, so characteristic of Zwingli's theology, was further reinforced by Ramus' strong Platonism and by his dialectical methodology which could be used to cleanly sever the external signs of bread and wine from the spiritual reality they signify.⁵⁸ The close connection between Ramist methodology and the Congregationalist strain of Puritanism may well have contributed to a weak sacramental theology which leaned heavily in a subjective, memorialist direction.

⁵⁵ For an excellent study of the influence of Aristotle on the development of Beza's Eucharistic theology see Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza: Development of the Reformed Doctrine* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 36-41, 70-73. For a discussion of the contrasting Puritan ambivalence toward Aristotelian explanations of the Eucharist see Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 55-57.

⁵⁶ Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation*, 200

⁵⁷ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 56.

⁵⁸ "The absence of a pervasive sacramental piety [among New England Puritans] was a consequence not simply of New England ecclesiology [i.e. Congregationalism], or of theological predispositions, but also of a distrustful posture toward visible symbols of any kind." Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 168.

By the end of the seventeenth century, there were three broad views on the Eucharist that were embraced by the Puritans. Congregationalists following the lead of William Perkins and William Ames (both Ramists) taught a highly pragmatic doctrine where a concern for the purity of the covenanted Church community tended to overpower the objective emphasis that we find in the writings of Calvin, Bucer and Vermigli. Other Puritans in New England, represented by Solomon Stoddard, went even further in their subjective pragmatism and began teaching that the Eucharist was a ‘converting ordinance’ that should be offered to the regenerate and unregenerate alike.⁵⁹ Stoddard and his followers asserted that the primary use of the Lord’s Supper was to fulfill an evangelistic function by “teaching [the unregenerate] and stirring their emotions, thereby evoking internal assent to doctrines that they had known before only as cold, lifeless propositions.”⁶⁰ A third group within Puritanism reaffirmed the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine and placed the main emphasis upon the objective efficacy of the Eucharist in uniting the believer on earth with the risen and ascended Christ.⁶¹ As we will see in the next chapter, John Owen belonged to this third group, and in this sense his sacramental theology diverged in its emphasis from many of his Congregationalist brethren on both sides of the Atlantic who had interpreted the Eucharist through the grid of pragmatic Ramist methodology. A close examination of Owen’s theology reveals that he made a significant contribution to Congregationalist sacramental theology, not only by employing Aristotelian terminology to explain the relationship between the sign and the thing signified, but also by encouraging a “sacramental renaissance” within his own denomination which placed the main emphasis on the objective efficacy of the sacramental elements in nourishing faith and uniting the believer with

⁵⁹ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 560-561.

⁶⁰ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 213.

⁶¹ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 109.

Christ in a unique way.⁶² For Owen, the Lord's Supper was far more than an outward profession of faith, a converting ordinance, or a means to preserve the purity and unity of the visible Church; it was a real participation in the body of Christ.

⁶² The term "sacramental renaissance" is taken from Holifield to describe the effort among some Puritan leaders to reaffirm the objective efficacy of the sacramental elements in a tradition which had lost much of this emphasis. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 138.

Chapter 4

John Owen's Eucharistic Theology

Having laid the foundation of our study by examining the development of Reformed Eucharistic in the sixteenth century, and by probing the influence of Ramism and Aristotelianism within the English Puritan tradition, we now turn to an analysis of John Owen's theology of the Lord's Supper from the primary source documents. Whereas past treatments of Owen's Eucharistic theology have tended to gravitate toward a collection of twenty-five *Sacramental Discourses* which were delivered during the latter part of Owen's ministry, and published posthumously under Owen's name, the following survey will begin with references to the sacraments and the Supper in works that were published during his lifetime, under his own supervision.¹ After examining the most reliable documents in their historical context we will turn to an evaluation of the *Sacramental Discourses*. We proceed with the conviction that these posthumous publications ought to be treated with more caution given the fact that they were originally recorded as sermon notes by a member of Owen's congregation and later transposed into longhand from his memory without (so far as we know) the assistance or approval of Owen. A second consideration that must be kept in mind is the fact that these manuscripts were published nearly eighty years after his death by two Dissenting ministers in England who were attempting to reassert Reformed Orthodoxy during a period of growing 'apostasy' from the faith of their Puritan forefathers. Given the eighteenth century context during which Owen's *Sacramental Discourses* first went to the press, they may be considered not merely as a recapitulation of

¹ Sinclair Ferguson writes the following in his chapter on Owen's sacramental theology: "The only material in Owen's *Works* on the Lord's Supper is gathered in his sacramental discourses, published posthumously from notes taken by members of his congregation, and three brief sermons anonymously written, but with good reason attributed to Owen." Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 220.

Owen's teaching on the Supper, but also as a potent form of *deliberative rhetoric* which served an apologetic purpose at the hands of the Dissenting ministers who prepared them for publication, and appended them to their own polemical works on the Supper.

Early Eucharistic Theology: *Greater and Lesser Catechisms* (1645)

The earliest extant writings from John Owen which give us significant insight into his Eucharistic theology are two *Catechisms* written in 1645 for the benefit of his first parish in Fordham, Essex. At this point in his ministry Owen was still of Presbyterian sympathies although he was to embrace the Congregational way within the span of two years. The *Lesser Catechism* was written for the instruction of young children and the *Greater Catechism* was written for the instruction of adults.²

In chapter twenty-one of the *Greater Catechism*, Owen answers the question "What are the privileges of believers?" in the following way: "First, union with Christ; secondly, adoption of children; thirdly, Christian liberty; fourthly a spiritual, holy right to the seals of the new covenant; fifthly, communion with all saints; sixthly, resurrection of the body unto life eternal."³ From Owen's earliest statement on the sacraments, we can discern a number of threads which run through all of his later works. In the first place, he readily acknowledges the believer's union with Christ apart from the sacramental seal, but never concludes from this that the sacraments are in any way unnecessary or superfluous within the Christian life. Quite to the contrary, Owen insists in the *Catechism* and elsewhere that it is both the "privilege" and "holy right" of every believer to have the promises of the "covenant" sealed in their hearts through the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

² *Works of Owen*, I.464

³ *Works of Owen*, I.489

The second theme which resounds throughout all of Owen's subsequent writings is his description of the sacramental elements as "seals." Although the language of "sealing" seems to point away from a subjective memorialist emphasis, we must be hesitant to jump prematurely to conclusions given the spectrum of sacramental views which existed among the Puritans. Although Calvin understood sacramental sealing in terms of the objective authentication of government documents, Zwingli used the same vocabulary in a much more subjective sense to connote the believer's outward testimony of faith.⁴ Thankfully, Owen's *Catechism* goes into greater detail about what this "sealing" actually entails, explaining that "God in [Christ] confirmeth the promises of the covenant to all believers".⁵ Because this sealing, or confirmation, derives from God's sovereign initiative and not from human obedience, the conclusion follows that Owen is using the word "seal" in an objective sense.

Within the Puritan tradition, a theology of the Spirit's 'sealing', which was distinct from the sacraments, was developed in a way that went beyond the earlier teaching of the Reformers. Some English Divines, such as Thomas Goodwin and Richard Sibbes, taught that the seal of the Spirit was a second work of grace given directly to believers in order to bring them from spiritual anxiety to a firm sense of assurance that they were among the elect of God.⁶ Although Owen did not agree with the exegesis of his brethren on Ephesians 1:13-14 when it came to the sealing of

⁴ Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 26.

⁵ *Works of Owen*, I.490

⁶ "Most Puritan writers believed that sealing came with assurance, even though early Reformers had clearly maintained a one-to-one correlation between those regenerated by the Spirit and those sealed by the Spirit. Calvin for example, would have refuted the Puritan notion that it was possible to believe without being sealed with the Spirit by declaring that the seal is the Holy Spirit Himself and that the sealing work of the Spirit belongs to the essence of faith." Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 201.

the Spirit,⁷ his *Catechism* does affirm a kind of spiritual sealing which is unrelated to the sacramental elements, stating that the Spirit “seals unto us the promises of God, and rais[es] up our souls to an assured expectation of the promised inheritance” thereby helping us to come to know our adoption.⁸ Because Owen does not go into detail here about how this form of spiritual sealing differs from sealing accomplished through the sacraments, the question naturally arises why a unique sacramental sealing would be necessary or advantageous at all.⁹ As we will see in his later works, the tension between the activity of the Spirit working through the preaching and reading of inspired Scripture, and the activity of the Spirit working through the sacraments, is never fully resolved by Owen, although he consistently and firmly insists that the sealing effected through the ordinances is “peculiar” and that neglect of the Supper constitutes a grievous form of apostasy.¹⁰

In chapter twenty-two, of the *Greater Catechism* Owen goes into greater detail about the nature of the two sacraments, describing them as “visible seals and pledges”.¹¹ Even though the word “pledge” was used in a subjective sense by Zwingli, when he defined the sacraments as oaths, or pledges of allegiance which the believer makes before God and others, Owen does not

⁷ Owen criticizes some Puritan teaching on the Spirit’s sealing in the following passage: “That we may have full assurance of the truth and irrevocableness of the promise, God gives us the Spirit to satisfy our hearts of it; and thence is he said to seal us, by assuring our hearts of those promises and their stability. But, though many expositors go this way, I do not see how this can consist with the very meaning of the word. It is not said [in Ephesians 1:13-14] that the promise is sealed, but that we are sealed; and when we seal a deed or grant to any one, we do not say the man is sealed, but the deed or grant.” *Works of Owen*, II.242-243

⁸ *Works of Owen*, I.489

⁹ Stephen Mayor makes this point in his assessment of Owen’s Eucharistic theology. Although Mayor readily acknowledges language that closely reflects Calvin’s teaching on the sacraments, he still detects an impulse in Owen to diminish the *present* significance of the Supper as the believer is partaking. For this reason, he concludes that “[i]t is possible to advance from Owen’s position to the doctrine, which he rejected, that this rite was simply a commemoration of a long-past event; or even to the doctrine, which he abhorred, that one might just as well recollect the Passion without the trouble of celebrating the Lord’s Supper at all.” Mayor, “John Owen on the Lord’s Supper,” 181.

¹⁰ *Works of Owen*, XIII.79

¹¹ *Works of Owen*, I.490

intend to convey this meaning. It is God in Christ who makes the pledge through the sacramental seals, although Owen would certainly agree that a right partaking of the Supper entails obedience on the part of the believer. For Owen, the sacraments are first and foremost gifts of God's grace and not human responses to that grace, and in this sense his strong emphasis on the unilateral nature of the covenant, and of the action being performed in the sacrament, diverges sharply from Zwingli's early sacramental theology. Owen goes on in his *Catechism* to ask: "How does God by these sacraments bestow grace upon us?"¹² The question itself is notable because it suggests a conception of the sacramental elements operating in an instrumental fashion. Owen's Catechetical response has polemical overtones as he attacks the Lutheran and Roman Catholic insistence upon the corporeal presence of Christ, asserting instead that grace is bestowed "not by any real essential conveying of spiritual grace by corporeal means, but by the way of promise, obsignation, and covenant, confirming the grace wrought in us by the Word and Spirit."¹³ Remaining well within the bounds of orthodox Reformed Christology, Owen refuses to concede that Christ can be in heaven and in the sacramental elements simultaneously, for such would be a denial of the true humanity of the risen and ascended Christ.

In contrast to both Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism, Owen's early Catechisms teach that grace is conferred in the sacrament, not *ex opere operato*, nor through the corporeal eating of the body and blood of Christ, but rather by a special sealing (which he calls 'obsignation') and confirmation of grace that has already been "wrought" in the heart of the believer by the Word and the Spirit. In other words, the sacramental elements confer a form of *sanctifying* grace in the present which bears testimony to the *justifying* grace which has already been imputed to the believer in the past. It is also important to note that for Owen the activity of the Spirit in the

¹² *Works of Owen*, I.490

¹³ *Works of Owen*, I.490

sacraments cannot be separated from the promises contained in the Word of God. The sacraments do not point beyond the Word, but rather point directly to the Word by way of “promise, oblation, and covenant.” As we will see throughout his later *Works*, the covenantal structure of Scripture is the foundation of Owen’s sacramental theology. By articulating a Reformed theology of the Eucharist which takes into account the scholastic development of Federal theology in England, Owen goes beyond Calvin, Bucer and Vermigli and makes his own unique contribution to seventeenth century doctrine.

Although it is beyond the scope of the present work to trace the historical development of federal theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, both Sinclair Ferguson and Carl Trueman have underscored the centrality of the covenantal framework within the writings of John Owen, and this is certainly the case with respect to his Eucharistic theology. Owen’s teaching on Baptism and the Lord’s Supper is rife with references to the Covenant of Grace.¹⁴ By the mid-seventeenth century when Owen was at the pinnacle of his public ministry, the Puritans in England had embraced a systematic framework of three theological covenants which helped them to explain God’s unfolding plan of redemption in Scripture.¹⁵ The first of these covenants, the *Covenant of Redemption*, is defined as “the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given him.”¹⁶ The second covenant, known as the *Covenant of Works*, is a pre-fall covenant which was transacted between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden. In this legal

¹⁴ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 20-27; Trueman, *John Owen*, 67-82.

¹⁵ “According to Heppie the first work which contained the federal representation of the way of salvation was Bullinger’s *Compendium of Christian Religion*; and Olevianus was the real founder of a well developed federal theology, in which the concept of covenant became for the first time the constitutive and determinative principle of the entire system. From the Reformed Churches of Switzerland and Germany federal theology passed over to the Netherlands and to the British Isles, especially Scotland.” L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1963), 212.

¹⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 271.

covenant, eternal life was promised to Adam, the Federal head of humanity, in exchange for his perfect obedience.¹⁷ Finally, the *Covenant of Grace* underscores God's promise to send the Son to be a mediator for Adam and his fallen progeny, and to make atonement for the sin of God's elect people. Although the Covenant of Grace has been realized in several different administrations, such as the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant in Christ, God's promises contained in the one, unifying Covenant of Grace remain unchanged throughout the ages.¹⁸

Although the Lord's Supper seals the Covenant of Grace – the theological Covenant which relates to the redemption of the elect – Owen also uses sacramental language with respect to the other theological covenants described above. For example, he speaks in question five of the *Greater Catechism* of God's covenant with Adam being sacramentally sealed by the tree of knowledge of good and evil.¹⁹ Two years before his death, in 1681, Owen was still reflecting upon the sacramental nature of the two trees in Eden, indicating that the Federal underpinnings of his sacramental theology remained remarkably consistent over the course of his entire ministry.²⁰ For Owen and the Puritans, the establishment of a divine covenant was always accompanied by a visible token, given by God as a pledge to seal the promises contained therein for his elect people. Because the Covenant of Grace has been administered in various ways over the course of redemptive history, it logically follows that regenerate Jews living before Christ were given sacramental seals which functioned as analogues to Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Owen affirms in his *Greater Catechism* that the sacraments observed under the Abrahamic and

¹⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 213-217.

¹⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 278-283.

¹⁹ *Works of Owen*, I.474

²⁰ "So, first, [God] appointed a church-state for man in innocency, and completed its order by the sacramental addition of the two trees, – the one of life, the other of the knowledge of good and evil." *Works of Owen*, XV.229

Mosaic Covenants differ from Christian sacraments “accidentally only, in things concerning the outward matter and form” and “not essentially, in the things signified, or grace confirmed.”²¹ Invoking the Aristotelian distinction between ‘substance’ and ‘accident’, he explains the basic continuity which ties together the previous administrations of the *Covenant of Grace*. The Biblical references which Owen appended to this portion of his *Catechism* identify a number of Jewish sacraments which sealed the Covenant in the past, viz. the pillar of cloud, the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, unleavened bread and circumcision. Although the sacramental signs changed *accidentally*, with circumcision and the Passover being replaced in the New Covenant by Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the promises sealed and the grace confirmed remain *substantially* unchanged.

When Owen turns to a more detailed discussion of the Lord’s Supper in Chapter twenty-four of the *Greater Catechism*, he begins by defining it as “an holy action instituted and appointed by Christ to set forth his death, and communicate unto us spiritually his body and blood by faith, being represented by bread and wine, blessed by his word, and prayer, broken, poured out, and received of believers.”²² The mention here of “holy action” points for the first time, to the subjective component of the Lord’s Supper which is intended to “set forth his death” each time it is observed. Although Owen does not deny that there is a subjective element of remembrance and commemoration in the Lord’s Supper as the death of Christ is dramatized and “set forth”, the sacramental meal is certainly more than a ‘mere memorial’, for in the Supper the body and blood of Christ are spiritually communicated to believers when the elements are partaken by faith. In his treatise on *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (1677), Owen forcefully drives home the point that the sacraments are no empty symbols: “God appoints

²¹ *Works of Owen*, I.490

²² *Works of Owen*, I.491

nothing for an end that shall do nothing. His sacraments are not ‘*arga semeia*’ but, by virtue of his institution do exhibit that grace which they do not in themselves contain.”²³ Evidently, Owen did not want his Eucharistic theology to be branded with the ‘Zwinglian’ label as was done to Peter Martyr, and he is careful to differentiate his position on the Supper, from the memorialist view which is found in Zwingli’s early theology.

The concept of ‘spiritual communion’ introduced by Owen in this chapter of the *Catechism*, is a corollary of his convictions regarding the nature of Christ’s glorified body and his physical ascent into heaven. Christ’s bodily ascension rules out the Lutheran and Roman Catholic insistence upon the corporeal presence. His insistence here upon the *spiritual* nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper also excludes another key Lutheran conception – the *manducatio indignorum*. Owen, like Calvin, Zwingli and Vermigli, is unwilling to countenance any notion that non-believers partake corporally of the body and blood of Christ in the sacramental meal. Rather than a corporeal presence, Owen affirms that a “spiritual change” in the elements is “wrought by the faith of the receiver” and “not the words of the giver.”²⁴ Without faith on the part of the participant, there is no efficacy whatsoever in the Lord’s Supper. Because the physical elements are of benefit only to those who have faith in the spiritual reality that they signify, Owen teaches that the only ones who have a “true right to the signs” are the ones who also “have a holy interest in Christ, the thing signified.”²⁵ The Lord’s Supper is for believers only, and Owen’s insistence on this point would only deepen as his convictions on church polity changed from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism. On his explicit and repeated denial of the corporeal presence, Owen’s theology diverges in emphasis from Bucer who was willing to

²³ *Works of Owen*, V.116

²⁴ *Works of Owen*, I.492

²⁵ *Works of Owen*, I.492

concede that the ‘unworthy’ partook of the body of Christ in the Supper. Owen, like Vermigli before him, would not have been able to sign the *Wittenberg Concord* in good conscience.

From Owen’s early *Catechisms*, we glean a great deal of insight into the broad contours of his sacramental theology which remained remarkably constant throughout his career. Although he freely acknowledged the subjective component of the Eucharist in commemorating Christ’s death, the emphasis throughout the *Greater Catechism* is on the activity of God in the sacramental meal, conferring grace upon the faithful, through the physical elements. The grace bestowed through the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper confirms and seals the promises of the Covenant of Grace on the hearts of all believers, be they Jews living under the Old Testament dispensation of types and shadows, or Christians living under the New Covenant in Christ.

Eucharistic Theology during the Interregnum: *Savoy Declaration of Faith* (1658)

Between John Owen’s first pastorate at Fordham and his resignation as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, almost nothing he wrote adds to our knowledge of his sacramental theology. Indeed this important period of Owen’s public career shows a marked lack of scholarly engagement on the nature or meaning of the sacraments. In spite of this silence, one document which helps us to mark the boundaries of his theology during the Cromwellian Interregnum is the *Savoy Declaration of Faith* (1658). Having adopted a Congregationalist polity in the mid-1640s, Owen gathered at the Savoy Palace a decade later with five other leading Independent theologians to draft a *Declaration of Faith* on behalf of one hundred and twenty Independent Congregations in England. Aside from Owen, the *Declaration* was drafted by Philip Nye and Joseph Caryl (graduates of Oxford), as well as Thomas Goodwin, William Bridge and William Greenhill, who

had taken degrees at Cambridge where Ramism had been more prevalent.²⁶ Because Nye, Caryl, Bridge and Greenhill represented the Congregationalist minority in the Westminster Assembly, it is not surprising that the *Savoy Declaration* bears a striking similarity to the *Westminster Confession* in its theology of the sacraments.²⁷

Aside from the absence of Aristotelian language, the *Savoy Declaration* differs very little in substance from Owen's *Catechism* which was written over a decade earlier. The *Declaration* defines the sacraments as "holy signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace", whereas Owen had previously defined them as "visible seals and pledges" through which God confirms his Covenant with believers.²⁸ Owen had previously affirmed that the sacraments "bestow" grace, and the *Declaration* affirms that grace is "exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used."²⁹ The word 'exhibit', brings the language of the *Declaration* in line with the vocabulary used by Calvin, Bucer and Vermigli to emphasize the real presence of Christ in the sacrament.³⁰ In Owen's later writings, the term 'exhibit' becomes one of his favorite words to describe how Christ is present in the Supper and is thus repeated over and over again. Without employing terminology of *substance* and *accident* that Owen had previously used in the *Catechism*, the *Declaration* reaffirms Owen's point, that the "sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard to the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were for substance the same with those of the

²⁶ Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, 272.

²⁷ Beveridge, William Beveridge, *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1904), 21-22.

²⁸ John Owen and William Nye, A declaration of the faith and order owned and practiced in the Congregational Churches in England agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, October 12, 1658. London, 1659. Early English Books Online (accessed 24 April, 2013), 29.

²⁹ Owen and Nye, *Savoy*, 30.

³⁰ The importance of the term 'exhibere' has been noted by Bryan Spinks: "Already in 1527 Bucer had started to use the term exhibere/furtragen, which becomes a key term." Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies, and the Stuart Divines*, 4.

new.”³¹ Just as Owen had affirmed a spiritual communion with Christ in the Lord’s Supper and had repudiated any notion of the corporeal presence, so too does the *Savoy Declaration*: “Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ...”³² The affirmation here of the ‘real’ presence of Christ goes beyond the earlier language that Owen had used in his *Catechism*, and once again approaches the strong objective emphasis that we find in the writings of Calvin, Bucer and Vermigli.

When compared with the *Westminster Confession*, the slight modifications found in the *Savoy Declaration* all relate to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper within the context of Independent Churches where only covenanted members of a local congregation would be permitted to participate in the sacramental meal. The most obvious example of this divergence between *Westminster* and *Savoy* is found in their respective chapters dealing with the Lord’s Supper. The *Westminster Confession* contains a paragraph which begins with the following words: “Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament; yet, they receive not the thing signified thereby.”³³ The corresponding paragraph in the *Savoy Declaration* omits those words completely, beginning instead with the following: “All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ, so are they unworthy of the Lord’s Table, and cannot without great sin against him, whilst they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries...”³⁴ This omission reflects the deep concern among Puritan Congregationalists to preserve the purity of the visible church by ensuring that unbelievers

³¹ Owen and Nye, *Savoy*, 30.

³² Owen and Nye, *Savoy*, 32.

³³ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Inverness: Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1976).

³⁴ Owen and Nye, *Savoy*, 32.

would not have access to the sacramental elements without giving a credible testimony of faith to the Elders.³⁵ As we will see in Owen's later writings, he fully embraced the Congregationalist concern for church discipline and purity, but did not capitulate to a subjective view, as did some of his Independent brethren who related the Lord's Supper more to the outward profession of faith and sealing of a church covenant than to the objective sealing of the Covenant of Grace.³⁶

That Owen could endorse the *Savoy Declaration* as a suitable Confession of Faith to be used by Congregationalist churches in England demonstrates how little his Eucharistic theology had changed over the course of his Vice-Chancellorship at Oxford. The *Savoy Declaration*, although employing vocabulary that had been previously used by Calvin, Vermigli and Bucer, affirms the same theology of the Eucharist that Owen had taught his parishioners in Fordham a decade earlier. It departs from the theology of Bucer and the *Wittenberg Concord* in repudiating the *manducatio indignorum* and any notion that the 'unworthy' partake of the body and blood of Christ. It must be admitted, however, that the *Declaration* does not emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit to the same degree as Calvin in uniting the believer on earth with the exalted Christ in heaven.

Post-Restoration Eucharistic Theology

Although Stephen Mayor is correct in his observation that "the sacraments were not at the centre of [Owen's] theology" a close examination of Owen's voluminous tracts and treatises reveals

³⁵ Horton Davies contends that the Puritan concern for a pure church tended to weaken their sacramental theology: "The fourth factor weakening the appreciation of the Lord's Supper was the high wall with which it was surrounded. This produced the gravest anxiety among many potential communicants, since their knowledge of Christian doctrine, the reality of their faith and repentance, and their experience of converting grace were all challenged, privately if they were women, and publically if they were men." Horton Davies, *The Worship of the American Puritans, 1629-1730* (New York: P. Lang, 1990), 168.

³⁶ "The New England ideal of pure churches, composed of members who had been reborn of the Spirit and bound together by explicit covenants, stood in tension with historic conceptions of sacramental efficacy and traditional patterns of sacramental practice." Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 140.

dozens of references to the Lord's Supper which provide a wealth of information from which to reconstruct his mature teaching on Baptism and the Lord's Supper.³⁷ Whereas Mayor concluded, somewhat negatively in his study, that "a good deal of what Owen wrote about the Lord's Supper is rather formal and perfunctory, the expression of what was now a mature tradition,"³⁸ numerous passages in Owen's *Works* reveal the heart of a concerned pastor and theologian who was convinced that regular observation of the ordinances was indispensable to spiritual health and communion with God, and that it was an essential mark of the Church. Indeed, Owen repeatedly emphasizes that "they are the only outward means whereby the Lord Christ communicates his grace unto us, and whereby we immediately return love, praise, thanks, and obedience unto him; in which spiritual intercourse the actings of our spiritual life principally do consist, and whereon, by consequence, its growth doth depend."³⁹ To conclude with Mayor that "the word 'seal' has become [for Owen] a mere passing reference, whereas for Calvin it was full of meaning," does not seem to be a fair evaluation of Owen's sacramental theology when we take into consideration the many passages and sermons where his pastoral enthusiasm for the Supper exudes from the printed page.⁴⁰

In attempting to explain why such a small percentage of Owen's Works are devoted to the sacraments, we must bear in mind the seventeenth century context in which he lived. Owen rose to prominence at a time when the heated Eucharistic debates of the sixteenth century had cooled down, especially in England where Reformed theology had gained a considerable foothold among both Conforming and Non-Conforming clergy early. Even the Puritan struggle

³⁷ Mayor, "John Owen on the Lord's Supper," 170.

³⁸ Mayor, "John Owen on the Lord's Supper," 124.

³⁹ *Works of Owen*, VII.250

⁴⁰ Mayor, "John Owen on the Lord's Supper," 171.

against the Archbishop Laud centered more upon the use of liturgy and outward ritual than it did upon the corporeal presence of Christ in the bread and wine. We should be hesitant to conclude, therefore, that the Lord's Supper was any less important to Owen than it was to Calvin. Rather, a more plausible explanation is that the polemical pressure on Calvin to defend the Supper against his Lutheran and Roman Catholic opponents was far greater in his sixteenth century Genevan context than it was a century later in Cromwellian England. During the 1650s, when Owen fell silent on the sacraments, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Laudianism were no longer perceived as imminent threats to the English church. Far more important for the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, was the darkening cloud of Socinianism which had the potential to envelope a new generation of English clergy. It should not surprise us, therefore, that England's leading theologian would focus his attention on the most pressing issues that were facing the English Church rather than to reopen well-worn theological debates that were not of immediate concern. After the fall of Richard Cromwell and the restoration of the Stuart Monarchy, Roman Catholicism was once again perceived as a threat by the Dissenting minority. Owen's writing on the Lord's Supper becomes far more frequent and polemical during the post-Restoration phase of his ministry as evidenced by his sermon *The Chamber of Imagery in the Church of Rome Laid Open* (1682). In this sermon, an elderly Owen who is deeply anxious about the future of the English Church presents a theology of the sacraments which is sharply polemical. When we locate Owen's sacramental writings within the rapidly changing political and theological climate of seventeenth century England, a picture emerges of a theologian who was sensitive to his theological context and selective in his battles, rather than a theologian who was less concerned than Calvin about the Eucharist.

An examination of references to the Supper scattered throughout Owen's written corpus from the post-Restoration period reveals a number of recurring themes and emphases which are of great assistance in piecing together his mature thinking on this subject. In 1679 Owen published a major treatise defending orthodox Christology against the Socinians which was entitled *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*. This treatise, written in the twilight of Owen's life, expounds his point of view regarding the *communicatio idiomatum*, and his convictions about the nature of Christ's humanity after the resurrection and ascension – Christological issues which have direct bearing on the nature of Christ's presence in the physical elements. With regard to the hypostatic union and the communication of idioms, Owen is clear that “each nature doth preserve its own natural, essential properties, entirely unto and in itself; without mixture, without composition, or confusion, without such a real communication of the one unto the other, as that the one should become the subject of the properties of the other.”⁴¹ Making his case for orthodoxy against the Socinians in the familiar language of Chalcedon, Owen concludes that “the divine nature is not made temporary, finite, limited, subject to passion or alteration by this union; nor is the human nature rendered immense, infinite, omnipotent. Unless this be granted, there will not be two natures in Christ, a divine and a human; nor indeed either of them, but somewhat else, composed of both.”⁴² Owen's Antiochian Christology places him at variance with the Lutheran concept of ubiquity and any other notion of the literal, corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper. The anti-Lutheran overtones in this treatise with regard to Christ's human nature are practically indistinguishable from the polemical emphases of Zwingli, Calvin and Vermigli a century earlier: “To ascribe to [Christ's glorified body] what is inconsistent with its essence, is not an assignation of glory unto its state and condition, but a

⁴¹ *Works of Owen*, I.234

⁴² *Works of Owen*, I.234

destruction of its being. To affix unto the human nature divine properties, as ubiquity or immensity, is to deprive it of its own.”⁴³ Also reinforcing Owen’s denial of the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacramental bread and wine is his belief that the risen body of Christ is localized in a ‘place’ which the Scriptures call “heaven”:

The *place* wither he thus ascended is on high. ‘He ascended up on high,’ Ephesians 4:8, that is, heaven. He went ‘into heaven,’ Acts 1:11, and the ‘heaven must receive him,’ chap. 3:21; not these aspectable heavens which we behold, for in his ascension ‘he passed through them,’ Hebrews 4:14, and is made ‘higher than they,’ Hebrews 7:26, but into the place of the residence of God in glory and majesty.⁴⁴

Owen’s unyielding assertion of the human properties of Christ’s glorified body and the need to distinguish between the divine and human natures without dividing them sounds the Chalcedonian notes which were so central to Calvin’s Eucharistic theology. Any affirmation of the corporeal presence or the *manducatio indignorum* is anathema to Owen. Rather, he insisted throughout his ministry that this “especial and peculiar communion with Christ, and participation with him, is spiritual and mystical, by faith, not carnal or fleshly. To imagine any other participation of Christ in this life but by faith, is to overthrow the gospel.”⁴⁵

Another theme which surfaces in a number of Owen’s treatises is the relationship between the sacraments and the grievous sin of apostasy. On the one hand is the danger of fixating on the physical elements to such a degree that the spiritual truths they signified are either minimized or forgotten altogether. The opposite danger is to fixate so strongly on the spiritual truths that the outward sacramental seals are neglected as being redundant or superfluous. In his 1676 treatise *The Nature of Apostasy*, Owen condemns both errors as two roads which inevitably lead to apostasy. In avoiding the extreme of Laudianism and Catholicism on the one hand, and

⁴³ *Works of Owen*, I.238

⁴⁴ *Works of Owen*, I.248

⁴⁵ *Works of Owen*, VIII.560

Quakerism on the other, Owen attempted to chart a middle course for his Independent Puritan brethren to follow:

If we neglect or despise [the ordinances], we cast off the yoke of Christ, and have no ground to look for his acceptance of us or concernment in us. It is but folly for them to pretend a hope in his mercy who defy his authority. And if, on the other hand, we so rest in them as to countenance ourselves in any of the evils mentioned, we shall succeed into their room who, under the name and pretense of the church and its privileges, fell into an open apostasy from Christ and the gospel... There is a middle way between these extremes, which whoso are guided into will find rest and peace unto their souls.⁴⁶

From first to last, Owen's holds tenaciously to the *regulative principle* in worship so characteristic of the Puritans.⁴⁷ Anything that Scripture does not explicitly sanction in the worship of God is to be avoided as a form of apostasy from the gospel and ordinances of Christ. In accordance with this principle, Owen's *Works* betray a clear and consistent ambivalence toward the use of unsanctioned images in worship, most likely stemming from his experience with the Laudian party during his student days at Oxford: "Many there are who, not comprehending, nor being affected with, that divine, spiritual description of the person of Christ which is given us by the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, do feign unto themselves false representations of him by images and pictures, so as to excite carnal and corrupt affections in their minds."⁴⁸ By the end of his life, Owen had become firmly persuaded that the use of 'unscriptural' images in worship and an experience of the transforming power of God in the life of a believer are inversely proportional. Whenever a "loss of an experience of the power of religion" occurs, the spiritual worship of Christ is rejected, and "a shadow or image" is erected in

⁴⁶ *Works of Owen*, VII.254

⁴⁷ Owen expresses the regulative principle in the following way: "When in every ordinance we consider his appointment of it, and submit our souls and consciences unto his authority therein; which if we observe any thing in his worship but what he hath appointed we cannot do. Not formality, not custom, not the precepts of men, not any thing but the authority and command of God, is to be respected in this obedience. This is the first thing that faith regards in divine worship; it rests not in any thing, closeth not with any thing, but what it discerns that God hath commanded and therein it eyes his authority as he requireth it." *Works of Owen*, XV.456

⁴⁸ *Works of Owen*, I.159

its place.⁴⁹ The end result is a confusion of the outward sign with the thing signified, leading inevitably to spiritual darkness, superstition and idolatry.⁵⁰ In Jesus' selection and institution of the sacramental elements of bread and wine, Owen saw a glorious wisdom from God which guards against this human tendency toward idolatry. He argues that images such as a crucifixes and statues which plainly depict the life and death of Christ act as poor substitutes for faith in what we cannot see: "Had he chosen... an image or a crucifix, or any such actions as did, by a kind of natural and sensible resemblance, show forth his passion, and what he did and suffered, there had been no need of faith in this matter."⁵¹ By contrast, Christ's use of bread and wine to 'exhibit' himself to us in the Supper is well suited to the kind of faith that pleases God. In the observance of the Supper, Owen was deeply concerned about the potential of some Christians to "rest in these outward things, and proceed no farther in the worship of God by them than the actions and words that are used." But regardless of the danger of turning the Supper into a form of idolatry, Owen affirms that the sacramental elements "are, as appointed by Christ, '*animae vehicula*,' means of leading and conveying the soul unto an intimate communion with God."⁵² Unlike the early Zwingli who severed the sign from the thing signified, Owen affirms that there

⁴⁹ *Works of Owen*, VIII.549

⁵⁰ The problem with both Roman Catholic and Episcopal worship, says Owen, is that the "internal, effectual operations of the Spirit of grace have the outward dispensations of ordinances shuffled in their place and stead; regeneration is baptism; growth in grace is episcopal confirmation; the application, by faith, of the blood of Christ, once offered in a holy sacrifice for us, must give way unto the daily sacrifice of the mass....; disciplines and some outward bodily severities must supply the place of the mortification of sin..." *Works of Owen*, VII.5. Owen's critique of Roman Catholic worship is what he perceives to be a confusion of the sign for the thing signified. Instead of adequately distinguishing between the invisible spiritual reality and the visible sacramental seal, the outward component of worship overshadows the spiritual reality, and true worship of God is replaced by idolatry.

⁵¹ *Works of Owen*, VIII.562

⁵² *Works of Owen*, VII.220

is a “mystical relation” between the “the outward symbols of the ordinance and the Lord Christ himself.”⁵³

One final theme which emerges strongly in Owen’s later writings on the Eucharist is his concern for the purity of the visible church. In *His Inquiry into the Original Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches* (1681), Owen’s Eucharistic theology shows the influence of his Congregationalist polity, especially when this work is compared with his early *Catechisms*, written while he was still within the Presbyterian fold. Now at the end of his career, Owen wrote the *Inquiry* to defend Congregationalist polity against the criticisms of his Presbyterian opponents. Owen takes the occasion to provide a definition of the Church which is in line with his Congregationalist convictions. In Owen’s view the Church is

an especial society or congregation of professed believers, joined together according unto his mind, with their officers, guides, or rulers, whom he hath appointed, which do or may meet together for the celebration of all the ordinances of divine worship, the professing and authoritatively proposing the doctrine of the gospel, with the exercise of the discipline prescribed by himself, unto their own mutual edification, with the glory of Christ, in the preservation and propagation of his kingdom in the world.⁵⁴

In the following paragraph, Owen further expounds this Congregationalist definition by means of an appeal to Aristotelian causality. The “material cause” of the church is “visible believers”. The formal cause is “their voluntary coalescency into such a society or congregation.” The “end of it” (or ‘final cause’) is “presential local communion in all the ordinances and institutions of Christ.” Further expanding upon the final cause of the Church, Owen cites four specific ‘ends’ which include the Eucharist: 1) “The preaching of the word”; 2) “Administration of the sacraments, or all the mystical appointments of Christ”; 3) “Evangelical discipline”; 4) Visible

⁵³ *Works of Owen*, VII.220-221

⁵⁴ *Works of Owen*, XV.262

“subjection unto Christ in the world by the observation of his commands.”⁵⁵ By the end of his ministry, Owen had come to affirm four marks of the Church, the Lord’s Supper being cited here as one of the ‘final causes’. A Church without a vibrant sacramental life was unthinkable, since the sacraments constitute “its spiritual food, whereon its life doth depend.”⁵⁶ These are hardly the sentiments of a pastor for which the Supper had become a formalized tradition.

Another document which interprets the Eucharist through the lens of seventeenth century Congregationalism lens is Owen’s *Brief Introduction to the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches in the New Testament* (1667). This series of questions and answers, informally branded as the ‘Independents’ Catechism’, was published anonymously by Owen after the *Clarendon Code* had been put into effect. It was written for the benefit of many illegal conventicles which were springing up throughout England in spite of the persecution.⁵⁷ Much of the sacramental theology we’ve already considered is repeated in this Catechism with a few notable progressions in Owen’s manner of expression. Once again, Owen emphasizes the relationship between the sacramental elements and the Covenant of Grace, only now he prefers the language of ‘exhibition’ which we first saw in the *Savoy Declaration*.⁵⁸ Compared with his *Greater Catechism* of 1645, there is a greater emphasis on the uniqueness of the grace conferred to the believer through the Supper, using the word ‘exhibit’ which was not present in his earliest theology: “God in Christ proposeth himself in an intimate manner to the believing soul as his God and reward; and his love in Christ, in an especial manner, in some ordinances. So doth

⁵⁵ *Works of Owen*, XV.262

⁵⁶ *Works of Owen*, XV.358

⁵⁷ *Works of Owen*, XV.446

⁵⁸ *Works of Owen*, XV.458

Christ exhibit himself thereunto: Revelation 3:20.”⁵⁹ Although Christ is certainly “set forth” through the preaching of the Word, Owen is now more careful to differentiate his ‘peculiar’ exhibition in the sacraments. Owen’s emphasis on the objective efficacy of the Sacrament comes to a climax in this final Catechism, as he affirms with Calvin that “Faith...directed by the word to rest in God, to receive the Lord Christ in the observation of his ordinances, is excited, increased, [and] strengthened.”⁶⁰

Having made plain the objective nature of the ordinance and its efficacy in exhibiting Christ, confirming the Covenant, and strengthening faith, Owen turns to the more subjective side of the Sacrament that is demanded by his Congregationalist polity. Just as there is a stronger emphasis on the objective aspect of the Supper in terms of the vocabulary that is used, so there is a stronger emphasis in his later writings on the subjective, or pragmatic function of the Eucharist in the life of the individual believer and in the life of the covenanted Church community. Not only does the Lord’s Supper confirm the Covenant of Grace, but it is also perfectly suited to affirm the unity of each local Church, being “designed by the Lord Christ for the testification of their love and union among themselves: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.”⁶¹ On the level of the individual Christian, Owen affirms that the sacraments have a pragmatic use in testing the genuineness of one’s profession: “God hath given his ordinances of worship as the touchstone and trial of its faith and obedience; so that they by whom they are neglected do openly refuse to come unto God’s trial.”⁶² Following his embrace of Congregationalist polity, Owen did not abandon the strong objective emphasis that he taught in his early pastoral ministry even as he

⁵⁹ *Works of Owen*, XV.461

⁶⁰ *Works of Owen*, XV.461

⁶¹ *Works of Owen*, XV.462

⁶² *Works of Owen*, XV.472

increasingly emphasized, in his later years, the subjective component. Unlike many Independent Puritans in England and New England, Owen refused to allow a pragmatic view of the sacraments to overshadow the activity of God working in and through them to seal the Covenant and to confirm and strengthen faith.

With regard to the practical administration of the Supper within a Congregationalist polity, we learn from Owen's *Catechism* that the Eucharist is only to be administered "in the church, or assembly of the congregation, to all the members of it, rightly prepared and duly assembled, or to such of them as are so assembled."⁶³ Here, Owen is careful to emphasize the importance of membership in a covenanted body of believers, and the requirement of adequate preparation to ensure that no un-confessed sin would hinder the efficacy of the Supper, or bring down the judgment of God upon the Church as happened in Corinth. The *Independents'* *Catechism*, recommends observance of the Supper "every first day of the week" (a practice which Calvin unsuccessfully attempted to institute in Geneva), although Owen does not go beyond the bounds of Scripture in demanding weekly observance as a rigid law.⁶⁴ The dates on his *Sacramental Discourses* suggest that the Supper was observed bi-weekly in Owen's London conventicle.⁶⁵

Posthumously Published *Sacramental Discourses*

The final sources that contribute to our understanding of Owen's sacramental theology are two collections of sermons delivered during the post-Restoration period. Both of these collections

⁶³ *Works of Owen*, XV.512

⁶⁴ In Congregationalist churches, Owen believed that the Supper must be administered "at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained." *Works of Owen*, XV.512

⁶⁵ *Works of Owen*, IX.518-622. Notice, for example, that Discourse II is dated November 26, 1669 and Discourse III is dated December 10, 1669.

were published for the first time posthumously, in the middle of the eighteenth century, by Dissenting clergymen who were sympathetic to Owen's theology and deeply concerned about the increasing influence of Unitarianism and Arianism within English Dissent. The larger of these two collections, consisting of twenty-five *Sacramental Discourses*, was first published in 1760 by the Rev. Richard Winter, pastor of the Independent Congregation in New Court, Carey Street.⁶⁶ Editorial comments dating from the nineteenth century affirm that these sermons were originally taken down in note form from a well renowned member of Owen's congregation named Sir John Hartopp, and were later "transcribed into long-hand".⁶⁷ The Rev. Winter tells us in his original preface to the collection, that he received Hartopp's manuscripts from Mrs. Cooke of Stoke Newington who had received them from her grandfather.⁶⁸

The smaller of the two collections was published in 1750 under the title *Three Discourses Suitable to the Lord's Supper*.⁶⁹ The preface from the original publication was written by an individual named J. Greene from Chipping Ongar, Essex. Greene claimed to have received the original manuscripts from "a worthy gentleman, who assured [him] they were taken from Dr. Owen's mouth by one who was a member of the Church of which he was Pastor."⁷⁰ Together, these two collections of Eucharistic sermons attributed to John Owen, constitute the only portion of Owen's *Works* which is exclusively devoted to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. In spite of

⁶⁶ John Owen, *Twenty Five Discourses Suitable to the Lord's Supper, Delivered just before the Administration of that sacred Ordinance. By the Reverend and Learned John Owen, D.D. of the last Age. Never before Printed*, (London: J. Buckland et al, 1760). Eighteenth Century Collections Online (accessed April 16, 2012).

⁶⁷ *Works of Owen*, XV.520

⁶⁸ Owen, *Twenty Five Discourses suitable to the Lord's Supper*, ii.

⁶⁹ J. Greene, *The Lord's Supper fully considered, in a review of the history of its institution. With Meditations and Ejaculations suited to the several parts of the Ordinance. To which are prefixed three discourses delivered at the Lord's Table, by the Reverend and learned John Owen D.D. Never before published: and some remarks of the Plain account of the sacrament*, (London: J. Buckland, 1750). Eighteenth Century Collections Online (accessed April 16, 2012).

⁷⁰ The original source for these documents was most likely Sir John Hartopp who transcribed many of Owen's sermons.

their murky origins and posthumous publication by eighteenth century Dissenters, previous analyses of Owen's Eucharistic theology have viewed them as authentic compositions of Owen without seriously calling their reliability into question.⁷¹ Before surveying the themes contained within these Eucharistic sermons, we must consider the possibility that the theology within them was shaped or even altered by John Hartopp when he transcribed his sermon notes into longhand and determined which ones would be included in the final collection. We must also consider the motivations and goals of the eighteenth century Dissenters who felt the need to make them public so many years after Owen's death.

As mentioned above, the influence of Sir John Hartopp on the preservation and rhetorical shaping of Owen's legacy and homiletical material has not been adequately emphasized in previous treatments of his sacramental theology. Hartopp was a primary source of information for John Asty's "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen"⁷² and was also the individual responsible for the preservation of most, if not all, of Owen's sermons which were published during the eighteenth century. In the dedication of a collection of Owen's sermons published in 1721, Asty praises Hartopp for the key role he played in the preservation of Owen's sermon manuscripts and his legacy:

The long and intimate acquaintance you had with Doctor Owen, his particular relation of a Pastor to you, your mutual affection during his life, and the just esteem you have always shewed for his memory, as also the special concern you have in the furtherance of this Work, do all justify the presenting it to you in this way. It is fit the world should know, how much they are indebted to your great industry and care for the valuable

⁷¹ Although Jon Payne tells the publication history as found in the editorial comments of Goold's nineteenth-century collection of Owen's Works, he does not call into question the authenticity of these documents and accepts them at face value. The collection of Twenty-five *Sacramental Discourses* is republished in Payne's book with the following prefatory endorsement: "Where one gains the clearest picture of Owen's theology on the Lord's Supper, however, is in his pre-communion sermons... These short sermons preached between 1669 and 1682 were preparatory and instructional in nature... In them we see Owen's teaching that the Supper is a demonstration of the love of God the Father, who has prepared a table of blessing for His people, the Son of His love being the spiritual meal for nourishment and salvation." Payne, *John Owen on the Lord's Supper*, 74.

⁷² Toon, *Correspondence of John Owen*, v.

Manuscripts which make up so great a part of this Volume, and for all other assistances you have given to the work; which I doubt not will be recompensed with the lasting pleasure of your own mind, as the result of that good service you have done to the Church of God.⁷³

Asty was not the only person who thought highly of John Hartopp. Three personal letters from John Owen addressed to Hartopp in 1674 have been preserved which indicate his familiarity and friendship with the Hartopp family during the period in which these *Sacramental Discourses* were preached. In one of the letters, dated 21 August, Owen writes the following: “And as for you I am sure I have noe need to tender you any new assurance of my cordiall respects and love unto your selfe and your Lady. My duty, my obligations and my inclination do all concur in the esteeme I have for you both and I doe make mention of you daily in my poore supplications.”⁷⁴ Although we do not know for certain when Hartopp first made the acquaintance of Owen, he was an active member in Owen’s illegal conventicle on Leadenhall Street, which was one of the “most aristocratic of the London Nonconformist congregations”.⁷⁵ Sir John Hartopp was a Non-Conforming layman of significant means, being third baronet and an elected representative of Leicestershire. A Dissenter by conviction, Hartopp and Charles Fleetwood were fined the astronomical sum of £7000 in 1686 for holding illegal conventicles at Stoke Newington. But aside from his generous patronage toward English Non-Conformity, Hartopp was an amateur theologian who tried his hand at homiletics and “entertained his family in the evening worship on the Lord’s day with excellent discourses.” When he died on 1 April 1722, Sir John Hartopp

⁷³ John Owen, *A complete collection of the sermons of the Reverend and learned John Owen, D.D. Formerly published: with an Addition of many others never before printed. Also several valuable tracts, now first published from manuscripts: and some others, which were very scarce. To which are added his Latin Orations, whilst Vicechancellor at Oxford, taken from his own Copies. And to the whole are prefix’d Memoirs of his life: some written by him upon special occasions: and his funeral sermon, preach’d by Mr. David Clarkson* (London, 1721). Eighteenth Century Collections Online (accessed 18 April 2013).

⁷⁴ Toon, *Correspondence of John Owen*, 160.

⁷⁵ Stephen Wright, ‘Hartopp, Sir John, third baronet (bap. 1637, d. 1722)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12502> (accessed March 11, 2013).

made one final contribution to the cause of English Non-Conformity by bequeathing £10,000 for the training of Dissenting ministers in England.⁷⁶

Hartopp's initiative in functioning as Owen's stenographer was not an uncommon practice in the seventeenth century. In actual fact, many Puritan sermons which went to press were not derived from the author's own manuscript, but from the notes of one of their faithful disciples.⁷⁷ But given the fact that Puritan sermons could last for a full hour or more, we may wonder how accurate and comprehensive these sermon notes could possibly be.⁷⁸ In addressing the question of accuracy, Gerald Cragg has pointed out that the Puritan habit of outlining sermon material in a painstaking and tedious manner that would be frowned upon by most modern homiletics, was a tremendous aid to the memory of seventeenth century auditors who frequently took detailed notes. According to Cragg, it was also a common practice in Puritan households for the men to commit the main points of the morning sermon to memory, and then to repeat them a second time to their families on Sunday evening.⁷⁹ Although it is unlikely that any posthumously published sermon which was transcribed from shorthand notes would preserve the minister's words verbatim, it is not at all improbable that the main points and overall structure of the sermon could be written down and committed to memory with some degree of accuracy. This would be true especially with respect to Owen's *Sacramental Discourses*, which were shorter homilies, delivered immediately before the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

⁷⁶ Unfortunately, Hartopp's final wishes were not honoured by his family. His heirs discovered a legal loophole which they used to appropriate the bequest, although half the sum was eventually restored to its intended purpose. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Hartopp, John"

⁷⁷ Haller, *Rise of Puritanism*, 136.

⁷⁸ A century earlier in Geneva, Calvin's sermons were preserved in a similar way. Unhappy with some of the transcriptions that were being produced by note-takers, Calvin hired Denis Raguenier to record his sermons in shorthand. Over the course of his career in Geneva as Calvin's stenographer, Raguenier committed 2,042 sermons to writing. Wim Moehn, "Sermons" in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, trans. Gerrit W. Sheeres, 175-176 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁷⁹ Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution*, 217-218.

A number of factors when taken together present a cumulative case that supports the general reliability of these *Sacramental Discourses*. First of all, we must take into consideration Owen's cordial relationship with Hartopp as evidenced by their personal correspondence. Owen appears to have known John Hartopp well and to have respected and trusted him as a friend. It is unlikely that a man who had earned the respect of Owen during his lifetime would betray his confidence after death by intentionally twisting and distorting his words. Secondly, several sermons show evidence of the same scholastic style that is found throughout Owen's *Works*.⁸⁰ Thirdly, a close examination of the *Discourses* reveals themes and vocabulary which are found in other treatises that were published during Owen's lifetime, under his own supervision. A notable example of this kind of internal consistency is found in the tenth *Discourse* where the author affirms Christ's presence in the Supper "by obsignation". This is a distinctive term denoting God's sealing of the Covenant which was used years earlier by Owen in the *Greater Catechism*.⁸¹ Rather than adding something unique to his Eucharistic theology, the *Sacramental Discourses* serve to reinforce key elements and themes that are found elsewhere in Owen's written corpus.⁸² Fourthly, it is significant that each sermon contained within the collection is given a specific date which ranges between 10 October 1669 and 20 September 1682 – a detail which carries with it a certain ring of authenticity. The first six homilies in the collection are dated between 1669 and 1670, some of them being preached less than a month apart.⁸³ The dates

⁸⁰ The second Discourse, to cite one example, explains the sacrament by means of Aristotelian causality. *Works of Owen*, IX.525-526

⁸¹ *Works of Owen*, IX.572 cf. I.490

⁸² In his nineteenth-century edited edition of Owen's *Works* Goold points to internal consistency as the strongest argument in favour of their reliability: "It needs but a glance at the three discourses in order to feel assured, from internal evidence, that they belong to Owen." *Works of Owen*, XVII.595

⁸³ If the dates appended to the sermons are original, it would provide evidence that the Lord's Supper was observed bi-weekly in Owen's London conventicler since Discourse II is dated November 26, 1669 and Discourse III is dated December 10, 1669.

on the remaining homilies are spread further apart, suggesting that Hartopp omitted hundreds of similar messages that he may have considered to be redundant or of inferior quality.

The fact that only a small sample of Owen's Eucharistic sermons was included in the final collection indicates that Hartopp functioned not merely as a stenographer, but as a redactor who gave the collection its final shape. When the *Discourses* are viewed as a collection which was transcribed, edited and methodically arranged by a well-educated redactor who had some basic training in theology, it is possible to discern a thematic progression within the collection from beginning to end. The earlier *Discourses* tend to focus on the nature and purpose of the Sacrament. The middle *Discourses* place the accent on the importance of personal preparation and self-examination. The later sermons encourage reflection on the love of God which is displayed in the sacramental meal. The final Discourse contains the most comprehensive summary of Owen's Eucharistic doctrine that can be found in any of his writings – a summary which underscores Owen's rich Christology by relating the Supper to the *munus triplex*:

There is a reception of Christ as tendered in the promise of the gospel; but here [in the Lord's Supper] is a peculiar way of his exhibition under outward signs, and a mysterious reception of him in them, really, so as to come to a real substantial incorporation in our souls. This is that which believers ought to labour after an experience of in themselves....– to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in a peculiar manner, giving him the glory of his *kingly office*; mixing faith with him as dying and making atonement by his blood, so giving him the glory and honour of his *priestly office*; much considering the sacramental union that is, by his institution, between the outward signs and the thing signified, thus glorifying him in his *prophetical office*; and raising up their souls to a mysterious reception and incorporation of him, receiving him to dwell in them, warming, cherishing, comforting, and strengthening their hearts.⁸⁴

Another interesting trend which can be observed across the collection is that the homilies gradually diminish in length. While Hartopp may well have abridged the later sermons to cut out redundant material, and arranged the collection in such a way that certain themes would be

⁸⁴ *Works of Owen*, IX.621-622

emphasized, it must be admitted that each sermon, considered individually, is fully consistent with the theology of the Supper that is found in treatises published during Owen's lifetime. Internal consistency between these *Discourses* and the remainder of Owen's written corpus is a compelling argument in favour of their authenticity and is a testimony to the accuracy of Hartopp's stenography.

A second level of editing comes into view with the publication of Owen's *Sacramental Discourses* when we consider that Hartopp's longhand manuscripts were prepared for printing by the Rev. Richard Winter in 1760, nearly 80 years after Owen's death. Why the Rev. Winter felt that it was important to publish a collection of Owen's sermons in the mid-eighteenth century is a question that is worthy of careful consideration. From 1759 to 1799, Richard Winter was the Pastor of the Independent Congregation which met on New Court, Carey Street which was founded in 1687 on the remains of Thomas Manton's Presbyterian congregation.⁸⁵ After going through a period of decline, the Carey Street Church shifted to a Congregationalist polity in 1727 under the leadership of Thomas Bradbury, an eminent Dissenting minister who championed Calvinist Orthodoxy at the infamous Salter's Hall Synod of 1719.⁸⁶ At this landmark Synod, Non-Conformists including Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists gathered together to discuss the threats of Arianism and Unitarianism which had begun to influence some ministers within their ranks.⁸⁷ Bradbury proposed that the assembled ministers adopt a confessional statement that insisted upon Trinitarian orthodoxy and went beyond the wording of Scripture. The motion was voted down by a slim margin, and English Dissent was thereafter split into two

⁸⁵ Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses in London, Westminster and Southwark; Including the Lives of their Ministers, from the Rise of Non-Conformity to the Present Time*, vol. 3 (London: W. Button and Son, 1810), 492.

⁸⁶ Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, 493; 517-518.

⁸⁷ Roger Hayden, *English Baptist history and Heritage* (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1990), 81-82.

groups called “subscribers” and “non-subscribers.”⁸⁸ By 1732, it had become evident that Arminianism, Arianism and Unitarianism had made significant inroads into the non-subscribing Churches (primarily Presbyterians and General Baptists), while Bradbury and the subscribers (primarily Independents and Particular Baptists) continued to hold steadfastly to the Reformed Orthodoxy of their Puritan forefathers.⁸⁹ By the time Richard Winter succeeded Thomas Bradbury as the Pastor of New Court, Carey Street in 1759, the grip of Calvinist orthodoxy on English Dissent had been significantly weakened. With the historical context in view, we can postulate that Winter was using Owen’s seventeenth century sermons as a form of deliberative rhetoric in order to persuade his fellow Congregationalists to hold fast to their Puritan roots in the face of widespread ‘apostasy’.⁹⁰ The publication of Owen’s *Sacramental Discourses* was an apologetic move in the face of Unitarian ministers who had begun to endorse a memorialist view of the Supper which better aligned with the philosophical shifts of the Enlightenment.⁹¹ The Rev. Winter saw himself as a champion of Reformed Orthodoxy during a period of theological downgrade, and found in Owen an eminent ally who had fought valiantly in a similar battle against the Socinians a century earlier. Through the publication of his *Sacramental Discourses*,

⁸⁸ Michael A.G. Haykin ed., *British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910*, vol. 1 (Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press, 2000), 149.

⁸⁹ Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, 492; Bryan Spinks comments on the result of the meeting at Salter’s Hall: “For a variety of reasons many Presbyterian Churches drifted into Unitarianism and Calvinist Orthodoxy was maintained by the independent or Congregationalist Churches.” Bryan D. Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason: Worship and Sacraments in England and Scotland 1662-1800* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2008), 237.

⁹⁰ Aristotle divided rhetoric (persuasive speech) into three principle genres, viz. deliberative (or ‘political’), forensic, and epideictic: “Political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something,” “forensic speaking either attacks or defends somebody,” and the epideictic “either praises or censures somebody.” Furthermore, each genre of rhetoric has a temporal component, deliberative being associated with future action, forensic being associated with past action, and epideictic being associated with present action. McKeon ed., *Works of Aristotle*, 1335.

⁹¹ “William Whiston, Samuel Clarke and Benjamin Hoadly regarded themselves – and were regarded by man – as at the cutting edge of Enlightenment theology and the liturgical and sacramental implications of the new sciences. The fact that this led to a sub-trinitarian doctrine and a near-memorialist understanding of the Eucharist was not lost on their critics.” Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason*, 251-252.

an old warrior was summoned from the grave to earnestly contend against a new wave of eighteenth century Socinians.

The smaller collection of *Three Discourses Suitable to the Lord's Supper* was published in 1750 with a preface written by J. Greene. The reliability of these three sermons is even more questionable as we do not have a clear account of their history aside from Greene's assurance that "the three following Discourses were given me by a worthy Gentleman who assured me that they were taken from Dr. Owen's mouth by one who was a member of the Church of which he was Pastor."⁹² From this description it would appear that the original source was John Hartopp, although we cannot be certain. Nor can we be completely certain of the identity of J. Greene himself, although he was most likely a Dissenting minister by the name of John Greene.⁹³ The rhetorical intent of J. Greene begins to come into greater focus when we consider that these three homilies of Owen were prefixed to an anonymously written, polemical treatise on the Lord's Supper which attacked the memorialist Eucharistic theology of Bishop Benjamin Hoadly. Bishop Hoadly was a influential Conforming clergyman who was suspected by some of harbouring Socinian tendencies.⁹⁴ The fact that Orthodox Dissenters in the eighteenth century selected Owen's sacramental homilies as a weapon with which to strike down Hoadly's view of the Supper is a testimony to the strong objective emphasis that was perceived in Owen's Eucharistic theology.

While we must acknowledge that these two collections *Sacramental Discourses* were shaped and influenced by John Hartopp and that they were published for rhetorical effect during

⁹² Greene, *The Lord's Supper fully considered*, ii.

⁹³ Rev. John Greene was ordained in 1708 by another stanch Calvinist named Theophilus Lobb. Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches*, 146.

⁹⁴ Stephen Taylor, 'Hoadly, Benjamin (1676–1761)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13375> (accessed March 13, 2013).

the Trinitarian controversies of the eighteenth century, the internal consistency they demonstrate with the rest of Owen's written corpus makes them worthy of our inclusion within our analysis. Within these *Discourses* we can discern the true voice of John Owen speaking, not so much in the role of a theologian, but as a faithful pastor preparing his congregation to partake of the Supper and to fully appropriate its benefits. As such, the posthumous sermons are useful in confirming and expanding upon several themes which we have already touched upon in the previous analysis.

First, these Discourses reinforce the strong Covenantal underpinnings of Owen's Eucharistic theology which was evident as early as 1645. In the second *Discourse* Owen states that the Supper is "a *federal* ordinance, wherein God confirms the covenant unto us, and wherein he calls us to make a recognition of the covenant unto God."⁹⁵ There is a mutual sealing in the Lord's Supper, in which God confirms the Covenant of Grace with his people and his people, in turn, renew their covenantal vows with God. Both the objective and subjective aspects of the Sacrament are emphasized together as Owen employs the covenantal motif. In an interesting passage located in this same homily, Owen further develops the theme of the Covenant by waxing eloquent on the separation of the body from the blood. Just as the Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed when God sacrificed an animal, divided the carcass and passed between the two halves, so Owen maintains that the separation of the body from the blood in Christ's institution of the Supper is a significant part of the ordinance which indicates God's sealing of the Covenant of Grace.⁹⁶ This covenantal imagery which highlights the concept of 'separation' has a polemical edge in countering the Roman Catholic doctrine of *concomitance*, which was used as a theological basis to withhold the cup from the laity. The physical separation of the animal

⁹⁵ *Works of Owen*, IX.528

⁹⁶ *Works of Owen*, IX.526-527

sacrifice, in Owen's view, typologically prefigured the separation of the bread from the wine in Jesus' words of institution.⁹⁷

A second theme which is reiterated throughout these *Sacramental Discourses* is the uniqueness of the Lord's Supper in 'exhibiting' Christ in a way that goes beyond the reading or preaching of inspired Scripture:

It is said of the preaching of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is therein 'evidently set forth crucified before our eyes,' Gal. iii.1. And if Christ be evidently crucified before our eyes in the preaching of the gospel, Christ is much more evidently crucified before our eyes in the administration of this ordinance, which is instituted for that very end.⁹⁸

By emphasizing the uniqueness of the presence of Christ in the sacramental meal, Owen avoids the memorialist tendencies which are found in Zwingli's early theology and were so prevalent within his own Puritan tradition. In one fascinating passage, Owen compares the presence of Christ in the Supper to extraordinary manifestations of God in the Old Testament, such as the theophany which Moses experienced at the burning bush. Owen's contention is that there is a "special presence of God in all his ordinances and institutions" which is qualitatively different from his permanent presence with every believer who has entered into the Covenant of Grace.⁹⁹ The language of "exhibition" is repeated over and over again in these sermons with the important caveat that it is Christ who exhibits himself through the sacramental elements without being corporally contained in them: "Christ is present with us by way of *exhibition*; that is, he doth really tender and exhibit himself unto the souls of believers in this ordinance... They [the symbols] exhibit that which they do not contain."¹⁰⁰ Any 'Zwinglian' notion that the

⁹⁷ *Works of Owen*, IX.524-525

⁹⁸ *Works of Owen*, IX.566

⁹⁹ *Works of Owen*, IX.549

¹⁰⁰ *Works of Owen*, IX.573

sacramental elements are “naked figures” is rejected by Owen, since there is a “sacramental relation” between the outward elements and the body and blood of Christ which is signified.¹⁰¹ Although Owen strongly emphasizes a commemorative aspect of the ordinance (i.e. *Discourse III*), and the absolute necessity of advance preparation and self-examination (*Discourses V-VI*), he does not allow the subjective pragmatism of Congregationalist polity to swallow up the objective efficacy of the Lord’s Supper. In this way, Owen successfully resisted the memorialist tendencies which he perceived within his own tradition.

Although Owen speaks in his *Works* about a unique ‘spiritual communion’ which believers enjoy with the exalted Christ at his Table, the Eucharistic sermons expand on this theme by speaking of the believer’s “union” with or “incorporation” into Christ as they participate in the sacramental meal with their faith firmly fixed on the proper object. Just as “we receive our food that it may incorporate and turn into blood and spirits, – that it may become one with us,” so in the Lord’s Supper believers receive “incorporation and nourishment” as they are “received into union” with Christ.¹⁰² To avoid any misunderstandings on this point, Owen affirms that there are two ways to *receive* Christ that must be distinguished. On the one hand, “we receive him by faith *spiritually* when we are received into the Covenant of Grace, but on the other hand, “we receive him sacramentally... in the due and orderly performance of what he has appointed in his word for this end and purpose, that therein he may exhibit himself to our souls.”¹⁰³ The result of this unique sacramental union with Christ in the life of the believer is joy¹⁰⁴ and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*),¹⁰⁵ as well as the strengthening and confirmation of faith.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ *Works of Owen*, IX.563, 617

¹⁰² *Works of Owen*, I.491 cf. IX.574

¹⁰³ *Works of Owen*, IX.591; In *Discourse XVI* Owen makes a similar point: “Now there are two ways of Christ’s drawing persons to himself; – 1. His way of drawing sinners to him by faith and repentance. 2. His way of drawing believers to him, as to actual communion with him. Christ draws sinners to him by faith and repentance, as he is

Finally, it should be pointed out that the *Sacramental Discourses* continue to reflect Owen's lifelong affinity for scholastic methodology – something that we might not expect to see in a homily intended for a pastoral setting! In Hartopp's second *Discourse*, Owen explains the representation of the body and blood in terms of the fourfold Aristotelian causality. The "moving cause" is the "eternal love of God in giving Christ in this manner." The "procuring cause" is "our own sin." The "efficient cause" is further subdivided by Owen into the "principle efficient cause" which is the "justice and righteousness of God, the "instrumental cause" which is the "law of God" and the "adjuvant cause" which is the "wrath and malice of men" in crucifying Christ. Lastly, the "final cause" is the "glory of God."¹⁰⁷ Owen's Aristotelian explanation of the Supper in terms of its four causes closely follows the scholastic methodology of Theodore Beza who used the same language to great effect a century earlier to explain, in greater detail than Calvin, the relationship between the sign and the thing signified.¹⁰⁸

The preceding analysis of Owen's Eucharistic theology is best appreciated in the light of the theological inadequacies that he perceived within his own tradition: "One reason why we so little value the ordinance, and profit so little by it, may be because we understand so little of the nature of that special communion with Christ which we have therein."¹⁰⁹ From his early *Catechisms*, to his numerous theological treatises, to the posthumously published *Sacramental Discourses*, John Owen attempted to remedy this deficiency by upholding the sacramental

lifted up in the preaching of the word; and he draws believers to him, as unto actual communion, as by the word, so in an especial manner by this ordinance." *Works of Owen*, IX.595

¹⁰⁴ *Works of Owen*, IX.544

¹⁰⁵ *Works of Owen*, IX.557,578

¹⁰⁶ *Works of Owen*, IX.527

¹⁰⁷ *Works of Owen*, 523-524

¹⁰⁸ Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza*, 45-46,71.

¹⁰⁹ *Works of Owen*, IX.523

symbols as external means of grace, through which God *seals* the Covenant of Grace, *exhibits* the body and blood of Christ, *incorporates* us with him in a unique way, and *strengthens* the faith of believers. Although Owen came to acknowledge a distinctly pragmatic function of the Lord's Supper within a Congregationalist polity, his commitment to the purity of the visible church never overshadowed his deeper concern for Christians to experience the grace of God in all of its fullness. Far from minimizing the meaning of the Eucharist in his theology, Owen's writings on the Eucharist testify to his desire to foster a renewal of sacramental piety among his Puritan brethren.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Holifield shares this view of Owen's contribution: "Owen's references to the sacrament were not numerous, but by celebrating the uniqueness of the Lord's Supper, and by giving attention as he did to the doctrine of the presence, he did manifest a genuine kinship with men like Vines who were seeking to reaffirm the essentials of a Reformed doctrine and piety." Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 131.

Conclusion

As one of the seventeenth century England's premier Reformed theologians, John Owen drew upon his rich sixteenth century inheritance to develop a theology of the Eucharist which was relevant to the unique challenges of his own generation. Instead of capitulating to a highly subjective and pragmatic theology of the Supper, Owen went beyond many of his Congregationalist contemporaries in reasserting its objective efficacy in uniting the believer with the ascended Christ and in strengthening faith. A careful analysis of Owen's Works shows that he consistently affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Supper and stressed the efficacy of the elements in sealing the Covenant of Grace and uniting believers to Christ in a unique way.

The contours of John Owen's mature sacramental theology cannot be isolated from the turbulent political and ecclesiastical era in which he lived, studied and developed as a Congregationalist theologian. As a student, and chaplain who had witnessed the Laudian revolution in worship in the 1630s, Owen's mature Eucharistic theology reveals a deep concern to guard against what he and his Puritan brethren perceived to be a grievous form of idolatry. But unlike many of his Puritan contemporaries from Cambridge who had been deeply influenced by Ramism, Owen's education at Oxford University under the tutelage of Thomas Barlow, granted him a rare affinity for Aristotelian methodology. In an age when theological pragmatism increasingly held sway within the Independent Puritan tradition, Owen possessed the intellectual tools which were needed to reassert the objective efficacy of the Supper without conceding the corporeal presence of Christ in the elements. Aside from his extensive writing as a theologian, Owen was also an active Congregationalist pastor who helped to encourage a "sacramental renaissance" by firmly resisting the temptation to turn the Lord's Supper into a

pragmatic tool with which to guard the purity of the visible church. While Owen was always careful to acknowledge the subjective use of the Supper in fostering remembrance, obedience, and unity within a covenanted church body, he did not allow these considerations to overshadow the objective efficacy of the Sacrament in strengthening and nourishing the believer's faith.

Our analysis of Owen's Eucharistic theology within the volatile political, philosophical and religious climate of seventeenth century England suggests that the binary categories of 'Zwinglianism' and 'Calvinism' are too simplistic in analyzing the highly nuanced sacramental theology of John Owen. While acknowledging significant areas of continuity between Owen and his Reformed forefathers, we must also allow for discontinuity as the Reformed tradition continued to develop in Puritan England and New England during the period of Reformed Orthodoxy. While Owen followed Calvin in affirming the real presence of Christ in the Supper and emphasizing the objective efficacy of the Sacrament in strengthening and nourishing faith, he did not go so far as to assert that the "substance" of body and blood of Christ was present in the Supper. In his explication of the Eucharist, Owen never used Calvin's language of 'instrumentality' (although the concept is implicit in much of what he writes), nor did he emphasize, to the same extent as Calvin, the role of the Holy Spirit in effecting communion between the believer on earth and the exalted Christ in heaven. Rather than emphasizing the *Spirit's* exhibition of Christ in the Supper as Calvin did in the 1559 *Institutes*, Owen prefers to make use of the so-called *extra-calvinisticum* to stress his conviction that Christ exhibits *himself* in the Supper. Owen's strong emphasis on the believer's "spiritual communion" with Christ through the Lord's Supper is reminiscent of Martin Bucer's use of the Pauline concept of *koinonia*. But Owen's theology can hardly be labeled as "Bucerian" as he adamantly denies the corporeal presence of Christ and repudiates the *manducatio indignorum*. Also diverging from

Bucer, is Owen's insistence (along with Zwingli, Calvin and Vermigli) on the localized presence of Christ's physical body in heaven. Finally, we have seen from our analysis that Owen's emphasis on our "union" and "incorporation" with Christ through the Supper closely reflects the eucharistic theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli.

Whereas previous treatments of Owen's Sacramental theology have tended to assume the authenticity and accuracy of posthumously edited and published eucharistic sermons, the present analysis evaluates these *Sacramental Discourses* secondarily in the light of theological writings that were published during Owen's lifetime under his own supervision. Although the main collection of eucharistic sermons was compiled, edited and redacted by Sir John Hartopp in such a way that certain themes were highlighted, these Sermons do not add significantly to Owen's theology of the Supper, but rather serve to confirm and expand upon themes that we find elsewhere in Owen's written corpus. Furthermore, the publication history of these documents during the eighteenth century suggest that Owen was perceived to be a Puritan theologian who championed an objective view of the Eucharist much like Calvin, Bucer and Vermigli. After the Salter's Hall Synod when English Non-Conformity began to drift into Arianism and Unitarianism, Owen's sermons on the eucharist were published and appended to polemical works aimed at Bishop Hoadly and his memorialist view of the Supper. In the hands of eighteenth century Orthodox Dissenters like the Rev. Richard Winter and J. Greene, Owen's posthumous sermons were transformed into a potent form of deliberative rhetoric to encourage the Reformed Orthodox to remain steadfast in the face of a growing 'apostasy'. During these theological controversies, the great seventeenth century opponent of Socinianism was summoned from the grave to wage war against a new generation of Socinians and their memorialist posture toward the Lord's Supper.

Far from developing a theology of the Supper which was “rather formal and perfunctory, the expression of what was not a mature tradition,” our analysis of John Owen’s theology has revealed the mind of a thoughtful Reformed theologian and pastor who made a unique contribution within the seventeenth century Reformed tradition. By developing a carefully nuanced theology of the Eucharist which applied sixteenth century theology to the ongoing development of seventeenth century Federal theology, John Owen helped to counterbalance some of the pragmatic and subjective extremes which existed among many of his Puritan contemporaries. Furthermore, through the posthumous publication of his Eucharistic sermons, Owen’s formidable influence as a theologian continued to ripple well into the eighteenth-century.

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