

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**ALL SUBJECTS OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST: JOHN OWEN'S  
CONCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY AND SCHISM**

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BY  
SUNGHO LEE

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**To Sunghyun, My Beloved Dove**

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the seventeenth century the Church of England experienced disintegration and schism. Each Protestant party charged the other with breaking the unity of the church. For this reason, schism and unity were one of the most controversial issues that leading theologians wrestled with. However, scholars have not paid due attention to this issue.

The object of this dissertation is to explore how John Owen, a great leader of the second-generation Congregationalists, defended Congregationalism, Protestantism, and Nonconformity from the charge of schism. Aware that the ecclesiological terms, such as “schism,” “unity,” and “separation,” were seriously abused by his opponents, Owen carefully redefined those terms based upon his own biblical interpretation.

Accordingly, the dissertation surveys Owen’s ecclesiastical life and works against the historical background of ecclesiology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, recognizing that ecclesiology was one of Owen’s main theological concerns throughout his life, and that ecclesiology in general and schism and unity in particular were significantly developed by him in debate. The general tenets of Owen’s ecclesiology are examined in his two definitive ecclesiological works: *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches* and *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*. Examination of Owen’s *Of Schism* and his controversy with Daniel Cawdrey, a prominent English Presbyterian, shows more precisely what the real issues were between

Congregationalists and Presbyterians with regard to the unity of the church. Owen's criticism of *Fiat Lux*, a Roman Catholic work written by John Vincent Canes, reveals that the problem of authority is fundamental to the understanding of unity and schism: for Owen, Scripture is the final judge in all religious matters not only in itself but also in relation to us. In Owen's apologies against two eminent Conformists, Samuel Park and Edward Stillingfleet, the question of "unity how?" is as important as that of "unity in what?" Owen argues that Nonconformity is not schism but the true way to Christian unity whereas imposition of conformity is a false way.

## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OWEN'S ECCLESIOLOGICAL WORKS

#### **1. Introduction**

##### 1.1 Brief Statement of Thesis

This essay will explore the controversies surrounding schism during the latter half of the seventeenth century in England with special reference to John Owen, who devoted a great amount of his energy to defending Congregationalism from the charge of schism. The changes of the religious situation in England pressed Owen throughout his life to write on the Christian unity and schism. His opponents and partners in debate included not only Presbyterians and Conformists but also Roman Catholics. It is little surprise to find that ecclesiology in general and unity and schism in particular were one of Owen's major theological concerns.

Owen believed not only that the church fell into schism but that the concepts of unity and schism themselves were seriously corrupted. He noticed that each religious party of his time used the terms "unity" and "schism" ambiguously and incorrectly. Typically, unity was defined as a complete communion with the catholic church, and schism as a causeless separation from her. According to the traditional concepts of unity and schism, Congregationalism can hardly escape from the charge of schism. In order to overcome this predicament, Owen felt the need for a biblically grounded criterion determining the meaning of unity and schism. By careful expositions of the Scriptures, Owen set up 'new' notions of unity and schism and then used them in defense of Congregationalism. Accordingly, the importance of exegesis and, in particular, pre-

critical models of interpretation were significant to Owen's resolution of ecclesiological issues.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Twenty years after Owen's death, Cotton Mather, one of the most eminent Puritans in New England, lamented, "The church of God was wronged, in that the life of the great John Owen was not written."<sup>1</sup> I would argue, further, that given the importance of issues concerning the church, its nature, its unity and schism to Owen, the study of Owen's thought would be incomplete until a satisfactory study on Owen's ecclesiology is written. Almost all of the last four volumes of *The Works of John Owen* deal with the ecclesiological issues. In fact, Owen wrote on ecclesiology more extensively than any other Congregationalist. His books on ecclesiology were used as the text books for theological students in the late seventeenth century because they were considered to be the best books for Congregational ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup>

Owen's ecclesiological writings enable us to understand contextually the meanings of unity and schism in the latter part of the seventeenth century. From the Reformation to the Civil War, a separated party in general justified separation from its mother church by condemning her as a false, corrupted, or anti-Christian church. For a separated party, the essence of schism is separation not from an institutional church, but from Christ himself or the true doctrines. In this respect, the eventual split between

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Andrew Thompson, *Life of Dr. Owen in The Works of John Owen* (London: The Banner of Truth, 1965; reprint), xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Godfrey Noel Vose, "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen (1616-1683)" (Ph.D. diss., The State University of Iowa, 1963), 64. Edward Stillingfleet's and Samuel Rutherford's ecclesiological works were respectively considered the best for the Episcopalian and Presbyterian doctrine of the church. Thomas Goodwin's major work on the church, *Of the Constitution, Right, Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ*, was not yet published until 1696.

Presbyterians and Congregationalists is particularly interesting given that the two parties had reached a complete doctrinal consensus. With only a few exceptions, they did not spend much time and energy arguing over the basic doctrines of the Westminster Standards. The parties differed from each other primarily with respect to the church polity, and they failed largely for ecclesiological reasons to construct a unified church. For this reason, the earlier Protestant distinction of the true and false church was not sufficient to determine the meanings of unity and schism in Owen's time. It was inescapable that the traditional concepts of unity and schism should be reexamined because Congregationalists wanted to separate from the Church of England without condemning her as false. How can such a separation be justified? This question challenged Owen to write extensively on ecclesiological issues. In this regard, this dissertation will shed light on the area which has long been neglected. In so doing, it will contribute to the study on Owen's theology in general.

### 1.3 Present Status of the Problem: A Historiographical Survey

Since the solid establishment of the Protestant church in England by the reign of Queen Elizabeth, major theological debates had been by and large limited to liturgical and disciplinary issues. In the late sixteenth century, Anglicans, Puritans, and Separatists produced a great amount of controversial works on ecclesiology. Each party devoted a great deal of energy to developing its own ecclesiology, and its fervor did not die throughout the seventeenth century. Although the general studies on the historical

developments in ecclesiology have failed to pay attention to the importance of this period,<sup>3</sup> contemporary scholars did not keep silent on it.

On the side of Anglicans, the first major work on the early Anglican ecclesiology was published in 1954 by H. F. Woodhouse.<sup>4</sup> In the following year, Donald O. Platt wrote a massive dissertation covering the Anglican ecclesiology in the reigns of Elizabeth, James I and Charles I.<sup>5</sup> While Woodhouse's approach was thematic, Platt explored the ecclesiology of each major Anglican in a chronological order from the enthronement of Queen Elizabeth to the break of the Civil War. Both explorations are helpful to our study in that they give us a good understanding of the earlier development of the Anglican ecclesiology. Unfortunately, however, they are limited to the time period before 1650s. Hence, the later development of the Anglican ecclesiology should be complimented by other studies such as Paul Avis' *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective* (1989), and John Spurr's *The Restoration Church* (1990). The former covers the whole Anglican ecclesiology from the Reformation to the present and the latter focuses on the period of the Restoration. Both Avis' and Spurr's works help us to understand the historical context of the Anglican ecclesiology in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Neither Avis nor Spurr, however, pays significant attention to the ecclesiastical debates between John Owen and the apologists for the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 1977); Paul M. Bassett, "A Survey of Western Ecclesiology to about 1700" in *The Church: An Inquiry into Ecclesiology from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. Melvin E. Dieter et al. (Anderson: Warner Press, 1984), 125-261; Ed. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery, *The People of God: Essays on the Believers' Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), pt. 3; Edward J. Gratsch, *Where Peter Is: A Survey of Ecclesiology* (New York: Alba House, 1974); Most recently, Roger Haight, S. J., *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Continuum, 2004 and 2005).

<sup>4</sup> *The Doctrine of the Church in Anglican Theology 1547-1603* (London: S.P.C.K, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> Donald O. Platt, "The Doctrine of the Church in the Church of England from the Accession of Elizabeth I to the Outbreak of the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1955).

Church of England. This negligence can be corrected by comparative studies on Anglicans, Catholics, and Nonconformists. Finally, it is sad to see that no significant work was written on the individual Anglican's view of ecclesiology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries except a recent dissertation on Herbert Thorndike.<sup>6</sup>

With respect to the ecclesiology of the early Separatists, two books are worth noting. Brachlow Stephen wrote a definite study on the Separatist ecclesiology in which he persuasively argued that the ecclesiology of the early Separatists is not much different from that of the radical Puritans.<sup>7</sup> Timothy George wrote an extensive essay on the ecclesiology of John Robinson, an influential Separatist who held a strong Calvinist view of the doctrine of predestination.<sup>8</sup> Robinson was a good example as he shows us that the Separatist ecclesiology was not necessarily contradictory to the Calvinist understanding of predestination.

The Presbyterian ecclesiology of the later seventeenth century was relatively ignored.<sup>9</sup> Of course, many have paid attention to the ecclesiological debates between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists that occurred in the Westminster Assembly.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ernest Charles Miller, Jr. "The Doctrine of the Church in the Thought of Herbert Thorndike (1598-1672)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> *The Communion Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, *John Robinson and the English Separatist Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> John MacPherson's *The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology* published in 1903 is still the only major study on the Scottish ecclesiology of the seventeenth century. Only recently was a book on George Gillespie's ecclesiology published: W.D.J. McKay, *An Ecclesiastical Republic: Church Government in the Writings of George Gillespie* (Caslie: Paternoster Press, 1997). The comprehensive study on the English presbyterian ecclesiology is still being waited for.

<sup>10</sup> Many scholarly works were written on "the grand debate" in the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Cf. John Richard de Witt, *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine of Church of Government* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1969); Paul Joseph Smith, "The Debates on Church Government at the Westminster Assembly or Divines, 1643-1646" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975); Philip L. Anderson, "Presbyterianism and the Gathered Churches in Old and New England 1640-1662: The Struggle for Church

However, most of the analyses stressed formal views of church polity, rather than the heated debates subsequent to the Assembly. This deficiency was recently alleviated by the publication of Martin Sutherland's study on John Howe's ecclesiology.<sup>11</sup> Sutherland's monograph provides significant information of the ecclesiological debates between Conformists and Nonconformists. His work is of particular importance in that it helps us to better understand Owen's ecclesiology in historical context. Although not a strict Presbyterian, Richard Baxter also drew attention from scholars due to his numerous books and treatises on the issue of unity and schism. E. Gordon Wood's *Church Unity without Uniformity* appeared in print in 1963 and Paul Chang-Ha Lim's *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty* in 2004.<sup>12</sup> Both Wood and Lim correctly viewed Baxter's ecclesiology in historical context, but they failed to notice the importance of Baxter's debate with Edward Stillingfleet on unity and schism.

In contrast to Presbyterianism, Congregationalism continued attracting the attention of significant scholars. By way of example, Geoffrey F. Nuttall's *Visible Saints* was still a classic for Congregational ecclesiology.<sup>13</sup> Nuttall's work needs to be complimented by Alan P. F. Sell's *Saints: Visible, Orderly & Catholic: the Congregational Idea of the Church* (1986) given that the latter covers the greater period than the former which focused only on the years between 1640 and 1660. David Russell

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Government in Theory and Practice" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1979); Most recently, Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> *Peace, Toleration and Decay: The Ecclesiology of Later Stuart Dissent* (Carlisle, Pa.: Paternoster Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Wood's study is historical while Lim's theological. Cf. Wood, *Church Unity without Uniformity: A Study of Seventeenth-Century English Movements and of Richard Baxter's Proposals for a Comprehensive Church* (London: The Epworth Press, 1963); Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter's Ecclesiology in Its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640-1660* (Weston Ryhn: Quinta Press, 2004; second edition). The original edition appeared in print in 1957.



Ehalt's dissertation<sup>14</sup> is the major work that exclusively deals with the ecclesiology of the Five Dissenting Brethren, who were leading Congregationalists in the Westminster Assembly. The ecclesiology of the individual Congregationalist has not been fully researched except Rembert Byrd Carter's full research on the ecclesiology of Thomas Goodwin.<sup>15</sup> One major merit of Carter's monograph is that it paid attention to the importance of the hermeneutical difference that had influence on the ecclesiological debates. Carter's dissertation still remains the only extensive work on an individual Congregational ecclesiology. By contrast, the ecclesiology of the New Englanders such as John Cotton and Thomas Hooker, who had a great influence on the British Congregationalism, has not yet been published.

There are few studies of Owen's view of the church, even though ecclesiological issues were Owen's long-lasting concern throughout his literary career. Several significant works were written on Owen in the twentieth century, but his ecclesiology has not drawn any great attention. D. M. Lloyd-Jones delivered a lecture on Owen's ecclesiology at the Puritan and Westminster Conference in 1963. The lecture was published in the essay entitled "John Owen on Schism."<sup>16</sup> In fact, Lloyd-Jones' essay remains the only article that exclusively deals with Owen's view of schism. That article presents us with some important points of Owen's ecclesiology, but is very brief and offers no documentation. In the same year, Godfrey Noel Vose wrote a dissertation that

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<sup>14</sup> "The Development of Early Congregational Theory of the Church, with Special Reference to the Five 'Dissenting Brethren' at the Westminster Assembly" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1965).

<sup>15</sup> "The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy with Special Reference to Dr. Thomas Goodwin and the Years 1640-1660" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> D. M. Lloyd-Jones, "John Owen on Schism" in *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors: Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences, 1959-1978*, ed. D. M. Lloyd-Jones (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 73-100.

deals with Owen's major theological concerns such as Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the church.<sup>17</sup> Vose took notice of the importance of Owen in the development of Congregational ecclesiology. In the conclusion of the dissertation, he asserted that "no English theologian was more interested in the doctrine of the church, nor more aware of its problems than Owen."<sup>18</sup> Vose's discussion of Owen's ecclesiology, however, examines only Owen's writings. No attention is paid to the opponents against whom Owen spoke so that we can hardly find the contextual meaning of Owen's ecclesiology.

Two years later, in 1965, Dewey D. Wallace completed the dissertation on Owen.<sup>19</sup> The merit of the dissertation is that it provides us with the detailed historical background for Owen's earlier life and theology before the Restoration. For that reason, however, the dissertation gives us only a partial picture of Owen. Wallace's major concern is about Owen's soteriological debates with the Arminians during the Interregnum. Consequently, Wallace touches Owen's ecclesiology so briefly that he does not give us a full picture of Owen's earlier controversy with Daniel Cawdrey on schism. Don M. Everson's dissertation, "The Puritan Theology of John Owen,"<sup>20</sup> attempts to cover Owen's entire theology, beginning with the doctrine of God and ending with eschatology. However, neither did Everson's work overcome the drawback that Vose produced. Although Owen's ecclesiology constitutes one of the chapters of Everson's work, the dissertation is primarily dogmatic rather than historical and contextual. Unity

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<sup>17</sup> Godfrey Noel Vose, "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen (1616-1683)" (Ph.D. diss., The State University of Iowa, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> Vose, "Profile of a Puritan," 309.

<sup>19</sup> "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1965).

<sup>20</sup> Don M Everson, "The Puritan Theology of John Owen" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1970).

and schism, our main concerns, are only briefly dealt with in Everson's discussion of Owen's ecclesiology.

A more thorough and convincing work on Owen's theology was written by Sinclair B. Ferguson in 1987.<sup>21</sup> Ferguson's work is the best introduction to Owen's theology and this might be true of his ecclesiology. Ferguson allotted one whole chapter for discussing Owen's ecclesiology. But Ferguson's discussion is confined exclusively to Owen's works and thus we cannot fully grasp the historical relevance of Owen's ecclesiology. Therefore, his discussion on unity and schism does not give us a better benefit than Lloyd-Jones' work does. Graham Harrison's more recent essay on Owen's ecclesiology,<sup>22</sup> however, does deal with Owen's view of unity and schism. Moreover, unlike the preceding works on Owen, Harrison is more interested in the dialogues between Owen and his opponents. Still, Harrison's article only references Owen's opponents from Owen's works, and fails to fully contextualize Owen's thought. None of these works, however, analyzes Owen's exegetical argumentation in the context of seventeenth-century biblical interpretation.

Most recently, Steve Griffiths, an Anglican minister, published a work on Owen entitled *Redeem the Time: Sin in the Writings of John Owen*.<sup>23</sup> As the title reveals, Griffiths' main concern is not Owen's ecclesiology but his soteriology. In Chapter IV, however, Griffiths deals with the relationship between sin and the church. Griffiths convincingly argues that one of Owen's main grounds for schism is to protect the

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<sup>21</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh and Carisle: The Banner of Trust and Trust, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> "John Owen's Doctrine of the Church," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 159-190.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: Sin in the Writing of John Owen* (Fearn: Mentor, 2001).

members of a congregation from God's punishment by preventing them from sinning. Neither does he fail to recognize that Owen's writings on schism were the most controversial and influential. Griffiths' research, however, is confined to Owen and an earlier Congregationalist, William Bartlet.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, Owen's opponents are referred to only by names and, moreover, the name of Edward Stillingfleet, one of the most able controversialists to whom Owen vigorously responded, is never mentioned.

#### 1.4 The Scope of the Study

As we have seen above, contemporary research on ecclesiology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has largely ignored debates and interactions between different polities and ecclesiologies. In this respect, the study of Owen's ecclesiological works can be an effective way to contextually understand not only Congregationalism but also other ecclesiologies given that he was involved in ecclesiological controversies with Presbyterians, Catholics, and Conformists. This dissertation will explore Owen's ecclesiology with close attention to its relationship with other parties' ecclesiological points of view.

Given that the main subject of the dissertation is Owen's notions of unity and schism, this dissertation will not exhaust Owen's entire ecclesiology in all its detail. For instance, the issues of church government such as church officers, though not insignificant in Owen's ecclesiology, will be excluded from the discussion. By contrast, careful attention will be paid to examining Owen's interpretation of biblical texts in issue

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<sup>24</sup> Bartlet was the author of a famous book entitled *ΓΧΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ. Or A Model of the Primitive Congregational Way* (London, 1647).

and its application to the doctrine of unity and schism and to comparing them with his opponents' alternatives.

In its description of Owen's doctrine of the church, the method of this dissertation will be chronological as well as analytical. The rest of the first chapter will survey the historical background for Owen's ecclesiological writings. We will see that Owen's ecclesiology is located within the wider Reformation tradition. Chapter Two will discuss the general features of Owen's ecclesiology primarily on the basis of his two definitive works on ecclesiology published in his last years.<sup>25</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that Owen's ecclesiology contains a sophisticated analysis of unity and schism as well as the essential elements of Congregationalism.

The following three chapters will divide Owen's ecclesiastical works into three parts in a chronological order. Chapter Three turns to Owen's views of unity and schism in his controversy with Daniel Cawdrey, one of the most eminent English Presbyterians in the 1650s. We will see how Owen redefines the notions of unity and schism in his own biblical interpretation and applies them to refuting his adversaries. Chapter Four will deal with the controversy between Owen and John Vincent Canes, a Franciscan friar, which occurred right after the Restoration. It will be shown how Owen defends the protestant cause from Catholicism on the basis of the principle of *sola Scriptura*, and that the real issue of church unity between Protestants and Catholics is related to the doctrine of Scripture. Chapter Five looks at Owen's responses against two eminent Conformists: Samuel Parker and Edward Stillingfleet. Owen vindicates Nonconformity from the charge of schism by demonstrating that the unity of the church is none other than unity in

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<sup>25</sup> *Inquiry concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity* (1681) and *The Nature of a Gospel Church* (1689).

the truth from which Nonconformists are never separated and that unbiblical impositions are the real cause of schism.

## 2. Owen's Ecclesiastical Life and Works<sup>26</sup>

### 2.1 From a Moderate Presbyterian to a Leading Congregationalist

On July 16, 1643, fifteen days after the first meeting of the Westminster Assembly was held, Owen began his first ministry at a very small congregation in Fordham—a rural village which preserved a long tradition of Puritanism. By this time, a bill for the abolition of episcopacy had already been passed by both Houses of Parliament. Hence, Owen could minister to the congregation without episcopal jurisdiction and oversight. In the following year, Owen's pastoral experience led him to publish a booklet entitled *Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished: or A Brief Discourse Touching the Administration of Things Commanded in Religion*. In this work, we take notice of Owen's preference for Presbyterianism. Owen sets forth:

Only that the principles and rules of that church government from which I desire not to wander are of that kind (to which I do, and always, in my poor judgment, have adhered, since, by God's assistance, I had engaged myself to the study of his word) which commonly called Presbyterian or Synodical, in opposition to prelatical or diocesan on the one side, and that which is commonly called independents or congregational on the other.<sup>27</sup>

In his earliest career, Owen confessed himself as a Presbyterian and he believed that presbyterian government is the *via media* between Congregationalism and Episcopatism.

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<sup>26</sup> For the biography of John Owen, see Andrew Thompson, *Life of Dr Owen in Works of John Owen*, vol. I; Dewey D. Wallace, "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1965); Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1971).

<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, XIII: 39. The title-page of *Duty of Pastors* indicates that the work was published in 1643, but this mistake was corrected by Owen himself in his *True Nature of Schism*.

The colleagues with whom Owen kept a close fellowship were mostly Presbyterians. Indeed, the last paragraph of *Duty of Pastors* reveals that Owen was familiar with Samuel Rutherford, one of the influential Scottish Presbyterians. However, Owen's conviction concerning the value of Presbyterianism should not be exaggerated. *Duty of Pastors* does not give us a clear view of Owen's opinion on church government since it was not written as church polity but as a pastoral manual for guiding a congregation. Its primary concern was rather to address lingering concerns over episcopacy and ceremonies.<sup>28</sup> In the beginning of his pastoral ministry, Owen took notice that the Arminian, Papist and Prelate doctrines had been preached from pulpits. To protect the true Christians from such fallacies, Owen supported private meetings if they were held peacefully and quietly. It is to be noted, however, that Owen was strongly opposed to complete separation from the Church of England. Private assemblies were permissible only when they kept communion with her. Owen says:

They [the faithful Christians] do not, under a pretence of Christian liberty and freedom of conscience, cast away all brotherly amity, and cut themselves off from the communion of the church. Christ hath not purchased a liberty for any to rend his body. They will prove at length to be not duties of piety which break the sacred bonds of charity. Men ought not, under a pretence of congregating themselves to serve their God, separate from their brethren, neglecting the public assemblies; as was the manner of some rebuked by the Apostle, Heb. 10:25.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after the publication of *Duty of Pastors*, however, Owen changed his view of church government and finally became the most prominent apologist for Congregationalism in the latter half of the seventeenth century. In *A Review of the True*

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<sup>28</sup> Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 223.

<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*, XIII: 45.

*Nature of Schism*, we can see Owen's autobiographical comment that describes how he changed his mind. The comment, though long, deserves full quotation.

I professed myself of the presbyterian judgment, in opposition to democratical confusion; and, indeed, so I do still, and so do all the congregational men in England that I am acquainted withal. So that when I compare what then I wrote with my present judgment, I am scarce able to find the least difference between the one and the other.

Of the congregational way I was not acquainted with anyone person, minister or other; nor had I, to my knowledge, seen any more than one in my life. My acquaintance lay wholly with ministers and people of the presbyterian way. But sundry books being published on either side, I perused and compared them with the Scripture and one another, according as I received ability from God. After a general view of them, as was my manner in other controversies, I fixed on one to take under peculiar consideration and examination, which seemed most methodically and strongly to maintain that which was contrary, as I thought, to my present persuasion. This was Mr Cotton's book of the Keys . . . . In the pursuit and management of this work, quite beside and contrary to my expectation, at a time and season wherein I could expect nothing on that account but ruin in this world, without the knowledge or advice of; or conference with, anyone person of that judgment, I was prevailed on to receive that and those principles which I had thought to have set myself in an opposition unto. And, indeed, this way of impartial examining all things by the word, comparing causes with causes and things with things, laying aside all prejudicate respects unto persons or present traditions, is a course that I would admonish all to beware of who would avoid the danger of being made Independents.<sup>30</sup>

John Cotton's *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*,<sup>31</sup> as Owen points out, was so influential that it changed Owen's view on church government. Owen did not state exactly which part of *The Keys* made him change his mind. Certainly, he was not such a person who would simply accept any doctrine because others taught it. He carefully

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<sup>30</sup> Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 223.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Larzer Ziff, ed. *John Cotton on the Churches of New England* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1968), 69-164. *The Keys* is mainly Cotton's description of the New England way of the church government. Cotton's own ecclesiastical view was expressed in his later work, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*. Both of them had an enormous influence on Congregationalists in the Britain and brought about severe controversies between the two parties. Of course, many other leading Presbyterians such as Samuel Rutherford, Robert Baillie, and Daniel Cawdrey vigorously attacked the New England Way.



examined *The Keys*, compared it with other works, and finally found that Cotton's argument was more convincing than that of Presbyterians. According to Owen's comment, his final judgment on church government was the result of his own "impartial" examination of *The Keys*.

In Owen's comment above, we can also see the reason Owen remained a presbyterian when he published *Duty of Pastors*. The main reason is that Owen considered Congregationalism to be a democratic church government which he believed tended to set the church in confusion.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as Owen indicates, he had no chance to have personal fellowship with other Congregationalists. This implies that Congregationalism was not yet influential or popular at that time. Owen's knowledge of Congregationalism must have been indirect rather than direct. As a matter of fact, it was not until the Westminster Assembly was held that Congregationalism was seriously discussed in a public square.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is no wonder that the young Owen was not able to discern the exact differences between Presbyterianism and Congregationalism in his earlier career. Neither of them was yet clearly stated or firmly established. Each was in process to form its own church polity in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Owen's ministry at Fordham was short due to the death of the sequestered incumbent. The patron of the parish of Fordham appointed a minister for Owen and thus he had to leave his first ministry.<sup>34</sup> However, Owen soon became a pastor of a big parish church of Coggeshall, the membership of which reached 2000. By this time, Owen was

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<sup>32</sup> For Owen as a Congregationalist, Congregationalism is not a democratic government. The rule or government of a congregation is in the hand of the elders. Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 106.

<sup>33</sup> George Yule, *The Independents in the English Civil War* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 34.

<sup>34</sup> Dewey D. Wallace, "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1965), 127.

no longer an unknown pastor. Thereafter, Owen was invited to preach before the House of Commons on April 29, 1646. His sermon was published the following month.<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that Owen attached to the sermon a small treatise on church government, *Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government There*.<sup>36</sup> While staying in the parliament, Owen could easily know that church government was a hot issue. Although “The Form of the Presbyterial Church-Government” had been approved by the Westminster Assembly, it had yet to be passed by the parliament. *A Country Essay*, in which Owen presented his proposals for church government, was written in order to satisfy both Presbyterians and Congregational members of the parliament. To his disappointment, Owen’s essay did not draw any significant attention and The Form was endorsed in the long run by the Parliament about a month and a half later.

Even though Owen was no doubt a Congregationalist by this time, *A Country Essay* can hardly be categorized either as Presbyterian or as Congregational. As a matter of fact, Owen rather described himself as “Christian,” “Protestant,” “Calvinist,” “Puritan,” and even “Presbyterian.” In that essay, Owen did not make a clear distinction between Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. In general, his proposals for church government could be accepted by Presbyterians as well as by Congregationalists. Owen intentionally excluded burning issues such as the relationship between local parish and presbytery. Nevertheless, we can see here some important tenets that allude to Congregationalism. Owen claimed that a parish should be organized by professors who

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<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Vision of Unchangeable Free in Sending the Means of Grace to Undeserving Sinners*, VIII: 5-41. As the title implies, Owen’s preaching was fundamentally Calvinistic.

<sup>36</sup> Owen, VIII: 49-69. After the last page of his sermon was finished, Owen spent a few hours preparing the essay.

gathered by their own desire and voluntary consent.<sup>37</sup> What is more, the latter half of *A Country Essay* was allotted for supporting toleration, a feature the English Congregationalism deemed important.

Owen's second opportunity to preach before the parliament occurred a year and a half later. The day was very significant in British history because King Charles I had been beheaded only one day before. The fact that he was asked to preach indicates that by this time Owen was nationally recognized. His sermon was so moderate that he did not get in trouble at the time of the Restoration. As in the case of the previous preaching, Owen's sermon was published with a short treatise: *Of Toleration: and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion*.<sup>38</sup> At this time, the Presbyterian church government had already been approved by the parliament and, though not thoroughly, had been more and more established in England. Since Presbyterianism was officially established, toleration was the only option which Congregationalists could hope for. By writing the treatise, Owen wished to assure the parliament of the need for toleration.

Owen's preaching was so influential that he was once again requested to preach to the Commons on April 19, 1649.<sup>39</sup> On that day, Owen met Oliver Cromwell, a man who had been the leader of the army and whose power had continued to increase. Cromwell was so attracted by Owen's sermon that he invited Owen to accompany him as a chaplain to Ireland. This led him to be Cromwell's chief advisor in ecclesiastical matters. Owen was also appointed to the position of the Dean of Christ Church and to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. During the Commonwealth and Protectorate,

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<sup>37</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government There*, VIII: 51.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Of Toleration; and The Duty of the Magistrate about Religion*, VIII: 163-206.

<sup>39</sup> The sermon's title is *OYPANQN OYPANIA: The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth*. Cf. Owen, VIII: 247-279.

Owen played a critical part in the religious affairs as a prominent Congregational leader. Even after the Restoration, Owen's leadership over Congregationalists remained steady until his death.

## 2.2 The Interregnum and Schism Controversies

The execution of King Charles I widened the gap between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians and the relationship between the two parties then became worse during the Commonwealth. In particular, the Scottish Presbyterians resisted the Cromwellian military reign. However, their opposition was severely repressed by Cromwell at the battle of Dunbar in 1650 and the battle of Worcester in the following year. The wound that the Presbyterians received was never healed.<sup>40</sup> To make matters worse, the hatred between the two parties increased from the execution of a pious and noble Presbyterian named Christopher Love on August 22, 1651. The example of the courage that Love showed at the execution impressed the followers of Presbyterianism. While Love was in prison, Owen visited him to persuade him to speak in a conciliatory tone in his appeal for pardon. Owen's attempt, however, could not save Love's life.<sup>41</sup>

During the Interregnum, Owen's main concern was to keep reconciliation and unity among the orthodox Protestants. When Owen preached again before the parliament about a month after he became the Vice-Chancellor, the main topic was the relationship between church and state.<sup>42</sup> Unlike with his two previous sermons, he no longer had to

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<sup>40</sup> J. B. Marsden, *The History of Later Puritans* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2002; reprint), 339.

<sup>41</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Saints and Rebels: Seven Nonconformists in Stuart England* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 33.

<sup>42</sup> The sermon's title is "Concerning the Kingdom of Christ, and the Power of the Civil Magistrate about the Things of the Worship of God." Cf. *Works of John Owen*, VIII: 367-395.

preach to the Parliament about church government or toleration. In his sermon, Owen argued not only against complete separation between state and church but also against the state's excessive interference in the church. The magistrate should act for the well-being of the church but the power of the magistrate should be restricted. Owen sets forth as follows:

Not that I would you [the magistrate] should go and set up forms of government to compel men to come under the line of them, or to thrust in your sword to cut the lesser differences of brethren . . . Nor do I speak a word what it is, may, or may not be incumbent on you in respect of the most profligate opposers of the truth of the gospel, but only this, that . . . certainly it is incumbent on you to take care that the faith which you have received, which was once delivered to the saints, in all the necessary concernments of it, may be protected, preserved, propagated to and among the people which God hath set you over.<sup>43</sup>

For Owen, the power of the magistrate was necessary for keeping the unity and prosperity of the true church. It is equally to be noted, however, that the gospel truth should first be promulgated in order for the magistrate to use his power.

In the year 1652, Owen and other leading Congregationalists submitted to the Parliament fundamental articles entitled *Principles of Christian Religion*.<sup>44</sup> Nobody was allowed to preach or print anything contrary to the articles as set forth in the *Principles*. The doctrines of the Trinity and the full divinity of Jesus Christ were clearly stated so that

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<sup>43</sup> Owen, *Christ's Kingdom and the Magistrate's Power*, VIII: 386. After about one and half months later, in order to realize his scheme into practice, Owen submitted to the Parliament the concrete proposals for the propagation of the gospel together with other prominent Congregationalists. Cf. *The Humble Proposals of Mr. Owen, Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Nye, Mr. Sympson and other ministers . . . for the furtherance and propagation of the Gospel in this Nation* (London, 1652).

<sup>44</sup> *Principles of Christian Religion* was attached to the *Proposals for the Furtherance and Propagation of the Gospel in the Nation* (London, 1652). The year on the title page, 1653, was mistaken for 1652. Richard Baxter suggested the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer for fundamental doctrines. His suggestion was declined by Owen because it could tolerate Papists and Socinians. According to Baxter, the sixteen articles were mainly composed by Owen, and other Congregationalists such as Goodwin and Nye were his assistants or scribes. Cf. Geoffrey, Nuttall, "Presbyterian and Independents: Some Movements for Unity 300 Years Ago," *The Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England* 10 (1652): 14.

atheism and Socinianism could be silenced in the pulpit. Roman Catholicism was also condemned by the thirteenth article that denies justification by works. By contrast, the *Principle* does not precisely state the other controversial issues. With respect to church discipline, the fourteenth article of the *Principles* simply states, “That to continue any known sinne, upon what pretence or principle forever, is damnable.”<sup>45</sup> Neither does the *Principles* mention the liturgical form. The fifteenth article reads, “That God is to be worshipped according to his own will, and whosoever shall forsake and despise all the duties of his worship, cannot be saved.”<sup>46</sup> For these reasons, Presbyterianism and Anglicanism were not expressly condemned. The articles of the *Principles* reveal that Owen strived for a loose unity on the basis of the fundamental doctrines. Owen was ready to cooperate with any denominational leaders if they agreed on the fundamental doctrines as was stated in the *Principles*. In order to put the *Principles* into practice, a committee called “Committee of Triers” was formed by the Parliament to examine the candidates for preaching in March of 1654. The members of the committee consisted of the leading Presbyterians and even the Baptists, as well as Congregationalists.<sup>47</sup>

The rising ecumenical concerns in Britain were extended to the entire continent. On April 5, 1654, Cromwell sent John Dury, remembered for his widespread ecumenical work, to the continent. Dury brought Cromwell’s letter with him that desperately called for the formation of the Protestant league over against Roman Catholicism. Along with

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<sup>45</sup> Owen et al., *Principles of Christian Religion*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Owen et al., *Principles of Christian Religion*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 152. The membership of the Triers was thirty eight. To be sure, the Congregationalists constituted the main body of the committee. The membership of the Presbyterians was eleven but that of the Baptists was as little as four.

other British Protestant leaders Owen's signature can be found in the letter.<sup>48</sup> During the Interregnum Owen was deeply involved in the ecumenical movement and his hope for the reunion of Protestants was not dead until later in his life.<sup>49</sup>

In spite of Owen's ecumenical efforts, in the end, the unity of Protestants was still not accomplished. Congregationalism was repeatedly criticized by its opponents for aggravating the rising of sectarian and heretical movements. *Of Schism*, Owen's first major apology for Congregationalism, was prompted by a little-known Congregational pastor, John Beverley, who earnestly called on him to defend Congregationalism from the charge of schism.<sup>50</sup> Owen's *Of Schism* was so challenging that it provoked quick responses from his opponents. Among the responses, only Daniel Cawdrey's *Independencie a Great Schism: Proved against Dr. Owen his Apology in his Tract of Schism* deserved Owen's attention.<sup>51</sup> As a staunch English Presbyterian, Cawdrey had already written many works against the New England Congregationalism. Cotton's *The Keys*, which changed Owen's view of church government, only provoked Cawdrey's

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<sup>48</sup> Greaves, *Saints and Rebels*, 36. The text of the letter can be found in Peter Toon, *Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683): with an Account of his Life and Work*, (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1970), 68-70. Owen also helped to raise funds to relieve Protestants in Poland. Cf. Greaves, *Saints and Rebels*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, Owen published *Some Considerations of Union among Protestants* in 1680. Cf. *Works of John Owen*, XIV: 518-555.

<sup>50</sup>The full title is *Of Schism: the True Nature of It Discovered and Considered with Reference to the Present Differences in Religion*. Toon, *Correspondence of John Owen*, 96-97. Beverley's letter was written on February 24, 1657.

<sup>51</sup> The other minor responses to *Of Schism* are Giles Firmin's *Of Schism: Parochial Congregations in England and Ordination by Imposition of Hands: Wherein Dr. Owen's Discovery of the True Nature of Schism Is Briefly and Friendly Examined, Together with Mr. Noyes of New England His Arguments against Imposition of Hands in Ordination* (London, 1658) and Henry Hammond's *A Continuation of the Defence of Hvygo Grotivs, in an Answer to the Review of His Annotations. Whereto Is Subjoined a Reply to Some Passages of the Reviewer in His Late Book of Schisme, concerning His Charge of Corruptions in the Primitive Church, and Some Other Particulars* (London, 1657). The doctrine of schism was not fully discussed in Firmin's *Of Schism* or in Hammond's *Continuation*. Not schism but ordination is the main topic of Firmin's *Of Schism*. Only the first 38 pages of the work were given to evaluate Owen's view of schism. Hammond's discussion is confined only to the issue of episcopacy in the early church.

severe criticism: *Vindiciae Clavium* (1645). In 1648, Cotton inserted a response to *Vindiciae* in the second part of *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*. Three years later, in 1651, Cawdrey wrote *The Inconsistencie of the Independent Way*, which criticized Cotton and Thomas Hooker. The exchange of criticism, which had to stop due to the death of Cotton, was resumed by the publication of Owen's *Of Schism*. Cawdrey's *Independencie a Great Schism* was followed by Owen's *Independency No Schism* to which Cawdrey responded by writing *Independency Further Proved to be a Schism* (1658). Owen continued defending Congregationalism by publishing Cotton's posthumous work written against Cawdrey's *Inconsistencie*.<sup>52</sup>

### 2.3 The Relationship between Presbyterians and Congregationalists after the Restoration

When Charles II came back home from the exile in 1660, his primary concern was to restore the unity of the Church of England. The king ordered a conference in order to reconcile Presbyterians and Conformists.<sup>53</sup> The former were ready to make a great concession to the latter on a few conditions. Moderate Presbyterians, however, were not opposed to the kind of episcopacy advocated by Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656). However, the returned bishops did not yield a single point to the Presbyterian divines. No compromise was achieved and the Presbyterians' hope for remaining within the established church was scattered. The failure of the negotiation was soon followed by a harsh uniformity which was imposed on all dissenters.

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<sup>52</sup> John Cotton, *A Defence of Mr. John Cotton from the Imputation of Selfe Contradiction, Charged on Him by Mr. Dan: Cawdrey Written by Himself Not Long before His Death* (Oxford, 1658). In Cotton's work, Owen inserted a brief response to Cawdrey: *An Answer to a Late Treatise of Mr. Cawdrey about the Nature of Schism*.

<sup>53</sup> Leading twelve bishops and twelve Presbyterian divines met at Savoy. Among dissenters only Presbyterians were allowed to participate in that negotiation. Not only Catholics but also Congregationalists were excluded from the conference at the outset.



After the Great Ejection of 1662, Presbyterians shared the same fate with Congregationalists. Once expelled from the established church, Presbyterians had no means to put their theory in practice. Under persecution, it was impossible for Presbyterians to set up presbyteries or a national synod, which is essential to Presbyterianism. As a result, there was little difference in appearance between Presbyterian and Congregational congregations except atmosphere.<sup>54</sup> It was no wonder that both parties stopped criticizing each other harshly on church government as they did about a decade prior.<sup>55</sup> In order to survive, they had to cooperate in raising the same voice against the imposition of Conformity. Owen also joined that voice by publishing *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and Their Imposition* (1662). One of the easiest cooperative activities was to share a theological lecture which was not prohibited by the state. Owen could be found as a lecturer on the same platform where a prominent Presbyterian divine such as Thomas Watson had spoken previously.<sup>56</sup> Nor was it unusual that a Presbyterian was found in a Congregational worship service. Sometimes, both parties shared the same minister when a qualified preacher was difficult to find. After the Indulgency was announced, it even happened that a Congregational minister joined with the Presbyterian ministers to ordain a candidate for ministry.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> R. Tudor Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1962), 111.

<sup>55</sup> There was an exception for this peaceful relationship. A posthumous work of John Davenport, an influential New England Congregationalist, was published in 1672. The title was *The Power of Congregational Churches Asserted and Vindicated in Answer to a Treatise of Mr. John Paget, Intituled The Defence of Church-Government Exercised in Classes and Synods*.

<sup>56</sup> Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism 1660-1688* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1968; reprint of 1931), 75.

<sup>57</sup> Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism*, 63.

In spite of all those cooperative activities, the complete union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists was never fully accomplished.<sup>58</sup> The crucial difference between the two parties was related to building a united church. There were two possible ways: toleration or comprehension. In general, Presbyterians did not entirely give up the hope that the Church of England would again be reformed. Their goal was not toleration but comprehension in the established church.<sup>59</sup> Reformation, for Presbyterians, did not mean separation from a true church at all.<sup>60</sup> For the Presbyterians toleration meant none other than a way to schism. In particular, toleration could be abused to foster the revival of Catholicism, which was horrifying to Presbyterians.

By contrast, from the very outset, Congregationalists would not consider comprehension. Realizing that comprehension had no future, Congregationalists were consistent with their principles by organizing gathered congregations out of the Church of England. All they wanted was toleration: a mere freedom of worship outside the established church. In order to defend toleration Owen published two short works in 1667: *Indulgence and Toleration Considered in a Letter unto a Person of Honour* and *A Peace Offering in an Apology and Humble Plea for Indulgence and Liberty of Conscience*. One of Owen's main aims was to defend the liberty of conscience in the

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<sup>58</sup> For the negotiations between Owen and Baxter, see Roger Thomas, "Parties in Nonconformity," in *The English Presbyterians*, ed. C. Gordon Bolam et al. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968), 95-98.

<sup>59</sup> In fact, there was no complete consensus on comprehension among Presbyterians. In contrast to the old generation called "the Dons," the younger generation Presbyterians called "the Ducklings" thought that they had better make the best of toleration. It is no wonder that Owen cooperated with the Ducklings to achieve toleration. For the study of comprehension and toleration during the Restoration, see Roger Thomas, "Comprehension and Indulgence" in *From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962*, ed. Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick (London: S. P. C. K, 1962), 191-287.

<sup>60</sup> Zachariah Crofton, *Reformation not Separation: or Mr. Crofton's Plea for Communion with the Church, Under Those Corruptions, and by That Disorderly Ministration to Which He cannot Conform nor by it Administer* (London, 1672).

matters of religion. Irritated by Owen, Presbyterians criticized him, stating that his intolerant position on toleration ruined their plan for comprehension.<sup>61</sup>

The failure of the union of the two parties did not mean the end of their cooperation. Whenever the hope for comprehension was thwarted and toleration was granted to Dissenters, Presbyterians could not help but accept toleration. The active movement for the union of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians resumed and resulted in the Common Fund, which was established to support poor ministers regardless of denomination. The Fund was governed by managers drawn from both denominations. The cooperative activity culminated in the so-called “Happy Union of London” in 1691.<sup>62</sup> The union was possible because the terms of union intentionally evaded unsolvable issues. For the same reason, however, it was not strong enough to last long. The union dissolved within months because of internal discord. In spite of this failure, the proposals laid out in the Happy Union continued to have an important influence on later cooperative activities between the two parties.<sup>63</sup>

#### 2.4 Owen against Catholicism and Conformism

In 1661 when the Uniformity was not yet firmly established, a Franciscan friar, Vincent John Canes, published a controversial work entitled *Fiat Lux, Or, A General Conduct to a Right Understanding in the Great Combustions and Broils about Religion*

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas, “Comprehension and Indulgence,” 204.

<sup>62</sup> The Happy Union was achieved on the basis of the principles laid out in the Heads of Agreement. The text can be found in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960; reprint), 455-462. The Union was not a union of two denominations as a whole, but an agreement among Congregational/Presbyterian ministers who lived in the London area.

<sup>63</sup> David L. Wykes, “After the Happy Union: Presbyterian and Independents in the Provinces,” in *Unity and Diversity in the Church: Papers read at the 1994 Summer Meeting, and the 1995 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 283.

*Here in England.* In this work, Canes argued that the history of the English Reformation proved that the Church of England failed in keeping her unity and that this failure could be fixed only by the pope who can resolve all doctrinal differences and controversies. Canes' argument endangered the *raison d'être* of Protestantism. *Fiat Lux* prompted Owen to write two definite refutations against Roman Catholicism: *Animadversions on a Treatise Entitled "Fiat Lux," A Guide in Differences of Religion between Papists and Protestant, Presbyterian and Independent* (1662) and *A Vindication of the Animadversions on "Fiat Lux": Wherein the Principles of the Roman Church as to Moderation, Unity and Truth, are Examined; and Sundry Important Controversies, concerning the Rule of Faith, Papal Supremacy, the Mass, Images, Etc., Discussed* (1664).<sup>64</sup>

The real issue between Canes and Owen was: Who is the final judge for all religious differences? Over and against the papal infallibility, Owen defended the final authority of Scripture over all other authorities. He argued that although different interpretations of Scripture are inescapable, this does not prove that Scripture needs a higher authority in order to be properly interpreted. For Owen, the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* is the true way to the unity of the church.

In his later years, Owen devoted himself to defending Nonconformity. The apologists of the Church of England supported the practice of intolerance by providing their opponents with various justifiable grounds. One of the notable defenses of Conformity came from Samuel Parker's *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1669).

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<sup>64</sup> Besides Owen, many Protestants penned against *Fiat Lux*. Two more anti-Catholic works were published by Owen in his later years: *The Church of Rome no Safe Guide* (1679) and *A Brief and Impartial Account of the Nature of the Protestant Religion* (1682). More details on Owen's refutation of Roman Catholicism will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Parker claimed that the authority of the magistrate ought to be over the conscience of his subjects even in the religious matters for the sake of peace and unity of civil society.

Owen responded to Parker by writing *Truth and Innocence*, to which Parker returned a huge rejoinder: *A Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Politie* (1671). One of Owen's important aims was to defend the liberty of conscience in the matters of religion. Given that the church is clearly distinct from the state, Owen argues, the liberty of conscience does not necessarily impair the magistrate's authority.

Just a few years before his death, Owen also exchanged criticisms with another prominent Conformist, Edward Stillingfleet. The controversy began with Stillingfleet's provocative sermon, *On the Mischief of Separation* (1680), which came out largely from fear of the papacy. The threat of Roman Catholicism to the Church of England did not die down. Rather, the power of the papacy continued to rise in the late 1670s with the help of the Court. Spain was still a powerful Catholic adversary to Protestant England. Most of all, James II, who would succeed the throne, openly confessed his faith in Catholicism. In the face of this danger, however, the English Protestants were still divided.

For Conformists, the unification of Protestants was the most effective way to defend the Church of England from the attacks of Roman Catholics. In *Mischief of Separation*, Stillingfleet criticized Nonconformists for endangering the nation by tearing down the unity of the church. He claimed that Nonconformists would eventually promote the interest of the papacy. When his sermon was published, it triggered a great deal of responses from Nonconformists. Owen joined these responses by writing *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformist* (1680). Stillingfleet chose Owen's work and replied to it with a much greater response: *The Unreasonableness of Separation* (1681).

Stillingfleet's *The Unreasonableness of Separation* provoked Nonconformists to publish numerous responses to it. In return, Owen attached a brief reply to the first part of his definite study on ecclesiology: *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches* (1681). The second part, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, was completed before Owen's death, but it was posthumously published in 1689. Ecclesiology remained Owen's most important concern until his death.

### 3. Survey of Unity and Schism in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century

#### 3.1 The Reformers<sup>65</sup>

The Reformation resulted in the breakdown in the unity of the Western Church. In the earlier stage of the Reformation, the doctrines of the unity of the church and the nature of schism, unlike the doctrines of justification and sacrament, were not fully addressed in a formal manner. Once the Reformers rejected the papacy and broke confessionally with the Roman church, however, these larger issues of ecclesiology came to the forefront of debate.

As far as schism is concerned, it must always be remembered that the Reformers of the sixteenth century never dreamed of separating themselves from the Catholic Church or of making a new church.<sup>66</sup> Even when Luther burned the papal bull that threatened his excommunication, he did not intend to separate from the Catholic Church but rather to deny the authority of the pope and the Roman hierarchy. The Reformers

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<sup>65</sup> The best introduction to the ecclesiology of the Reformers is Paul D. L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

<sup>66</sup> For the strong apology for the Protestant ecumenism, see John T. McNeil, *Unitive Protestantism: The Ecumenical Spirit and Its Persistent Expression* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964).

were even ready to acknowledge that the Roman church still retained many good things such as creeds, hymnals, and the Scriptures. Their intention was to reform serious doctrinal errors and moral abuses in order to restore the true catholicity of the church.<sup>67</sup> For the Reformers, the Reformation was no separatist movement, but rather a war against the Roman sectarianism for the sake of true catholicity. The Reformers were determined to leave the Roman church in order to be true catholics. Embedded in this intention of catholicity, moreover, was one of the seeds of Owen's sense of church unity—a unity determined by acceptance of biblical truth, not by the imposition of a hierarchy or of liturgical forms.

After the separation from the Roman church, the Reformers were constantly criticized for dividing the one church. Simple believers of the Protestant persuasion were vexed by the question, “Where was your church before Luther?” Because both the Reformers and Roman Catholics fully agreed that the church is one, the main issue was, “Which is the true church?” For the Catholics, the answer was quite simple: it is obviously the Roman church, which had already visibly existed throughout centuries from the beginning of Christianity. Roman Catholics assumed that their church had been always true because the true church cannot err in the fundamentals due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. By contrast, the Reformers believed that all the visible churches did and could err even in fundamental doctrines and thus should be put to the test. It is no wonder that the Reformers developed the concept of the marks of the true church. In general, the word and the sacraments were proposed as the two major marks of the true

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<sup>67</sup> This is one of the greatest differences between the Reformers and the Anabaptists whose aim was not the reformation but the restitution of the Church. Cf. Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: An Introduction to Sectarian Protestantism* (American Society of Church History, 1952), ch. 3. Littell's work is still the best introduction to the Anabaptist ecclesiology.

church, but the importance of church discipline was never ignored, especially, in Calvinist churches.

### ***3.1.1 Martin Luther***

For Luther, the church is most of all the congregation of the saints. In this respect, a significant shift occurred during the Reformation in understanding the creedal phrase *communio sanctorum*. The word *sanctorum* can be interpreted in various ways in accordance with different grammatical standpoints. It could be translated as either “the saints” or “the sacred,” that is, the sacraments.<sup>68</sup> The former was not ignored, but the latter was the predominant view during the Middle Ages. For this reason, medieval ecclesiology was largely the doctrine of the sacraments. Neither is the meaning of *communio* clear. It can mean either communion or congregation. The former gives emphasis on the sacraments whereas the latter on the believers. In his *Larger Catechism*, Luther clearly explained the meaning of *communio*. The word *communio* ought not to be translated into communion [*Gemeinschaft*], but congregation [*Gemeinde*].<sup>69</sup> The shift of the emphasis from the sacraments to the saints had a great impact on the later development of the protestant ecclesiology.

The church as a congregation for Luther is not a visible and external institution but a spiritual reality because she is in the Holy Spirit. Hence the reality of the church is invisible so that it can be the object of faith.

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<sup>68</sup> For the historical research on the meaning of *communio sanctorum*, see Stephen Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio* (Naperville: Allenson, 1969), especially chap. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans., Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 417.



The church or congregation exists in the Spirit and is at all times a spiritual thing; as we also say: I believe in the Christian church or congregation. What one believes, however, can be neither seen nor touched, for faith belongs to those things which are not apparent, Hebrews 11. How then can Peter or the popes rule or maintain this congregation, since they cannot know who is holy and also they never see the congregation; they, too, can only believe in it as we all do. For Christ alone sees this congregation, he only brings and keeps it together and maintains it.<sup>70</sup>

It is to be noticed that the catholic church is invisible to man but visible to Christ. Hence, the distinction between the visible and invisible church ought to be used carefully. The invisibility of the church is only partially true because it can apply only to human beings. The invisibility of the church for Luther is the major ground for rejecting the governance of the pope who cannot see the real members of the church.

However, the invisibility of the church does not mean that we cannot recognize it at all. The true church becomes visible to us by its marks. Even though the Lutheran Church finally approved the two marks, the Word and sacraments, as the only marks of the true church in the Augsburg Confession (1530),<sup>71</sup> Luther himself does not seem to be clear on the issue of the marks of the true church. He sometimes mentions seven marks and at other times even ten.<sup>72</sup> Luther and his followers did not completely ignore church

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Luther, *Ob Christus seyne Gemayn oder Kirch: The Church of Christ (1524)*, translated by Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (Dublin: The Friends of the Library Trinity College, 1983), 14. Luther prefers the phrase of "Christian church" in the German edition of the Apostles' Creed to that of "Catholic Church" in Latin.

<sup>71</sup> *The Augsburg Confession*, art. 7. The Confession describes the "One holy Christian Church" as the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. It is also worth noting that the creedal word "Catholic" was replaced with "Christian."

<sup>72</sup> For the full list of Luther's marks of the true church see Bernhard Lohse's *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 181. It is interesting to see that the office of the key, church discipline, was included in the list. As James C. Spalding convincingly argued, discipline as the third mark is neither incompatible with Lutheranism nor can it be a criterion for distinguishing Lutheranism and Calvinism. Cf. James C. Spalding, "Discipline as a Mark of the True Church in its Sixteenth Century Lutheran Church," in ed. Carter Lindberg *Piety, Politics, and Ethics* (Kirksville: The Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1984), 119-138.

discipline as a mark of the true church. It is nevertheless no doubt that from the outset the Word was the decisive mark in the Lutheran Church. By the Word of God, claims Luther, even a seven-year-old child can recognize the true church just as a little lamb follows the voice of its shepherd.<sup>73</sup> Even the sacraments as such cannot be an independent mark because the true church is a church where the sacraments are administered “according to the Word of God.”

The superiority of the Word to the sacraments is one of the most significant differences between Luther and his preceding reformers. For example, John Huss, the Bohemian reformer, did not leave the Church of Rome despite his severe criticism of it. He believed that the sacraments are more essential than the Word in determining the true church. Huss’ ecclesiology did not break down the tie with the sacramental system of the Roman church.<sup>74</sup> On the contrary, Luther wanted to lay the church on the only ultimate foundation, that is, the Word. Separation from the Roman church that was not founded on the Word was a logical consequence of Luther’s ecclesiology.

The real issue between Luther and his opponents was how to find the Word of God. For Luther, the Word of God did not simply mean a written form of Scripture which the Church of Rome also claimed to have. Therefore, Scripture, as a written form, cannot be the mark of the true church. While Roman Catholics asserted that the Word can be found both in Scripture and Tradition, Luther claimed Scripture alone was the true Word of God. On the Roman Catholics’ side, the Word of Luther was a partial and incomplete Word. On Luther’s side, however, the Word of Roman Catholics was augmented and

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. William Russell, *Luther’s Theological Testament: Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 12.

<sup>74</sup> Scott Hendrix, “‘We are all Hussites’: Huss and Luther Revisited,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 65 (1974): 153.

corrupted. In this respect, we should pay attention to the fact that the adjective “pure” was added to the Word in the Lutheran confession. When Luther mentioned the Word as the mark, it primarily meant the spoken Gospel, even though the Law was not entirely excluded.<sup>75</sup> The central message of the Gospel was the justification of the sinner through faith and by God’s grace alone; however, this gospel, Luther believed, was completely corrupted by the Roman doctrines of merit, indulgence, and others.

### **3.1.2 John Calvin**

Like Luther, Calvin also approves only the Word and sacraments as the two marks of the true church. Calvin writes:

Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, then, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists. For his promise cannot fail: “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”<sup>76</sup>

Calvin’s argument for the two marks seems to be strange because the quoted biblical passage, Matthew 18:20, does not refer to anything concerning the Word or sacraments. In this respect, Calvin’s commentary helps us to better understand his argument. The key phrase in Christ’s promise is “in my name.” Calvin rejects the papists who argued for the infallibility of the general council on the basis of the same text. The council for Calvin is useless unless it is assembled in the name of Christ. Calvin interprets “in my name” as

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<sup>75</sup> Edmund Schlink, *The Coming of Christ and the Coming Church* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 119. Also cf. Herman Amberg Preus, *The Communion of Saints: A Study of the Origin and Development of Luther’s Doctrine of the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1948), 97-101.

<sup>76</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. i. 9.

obedience to the Word and the Holy Spirit.<sup>77</sup> Calvin's logic flows as follows: The true church is where Christ is; Christ is present where the Word of God is purely preached and the sacraments are administered according to it; therefore, the true church is where the Word of God is purely preached and the sacraments are administered according to the Word.<sup>78</sup>

It is well known that Calvin did not include church discipline as one of the marks. Yet he did not consider it a secondary element for the church. For example, the primary reason that Calvin rejected the call to ministry at Geneva is the refusal of the Genevan church to accept his proposals for church discipline. Calvin believed that the reformation of the church was impossible without the right administration of discipline according to the Word. Discipline or ban is "not only useful but also necessary in the church" and thus the church cannot be preserved without it.<sup>79</sup>

Up to this point, Calvin and the Anabaptists were in complete accord. There was, however, a fundamental difference between them regarding whether we should view discipline as a mark of the true church. The crucial issue between the two parties was whether one can be justified for leaving the church where the pure word is preached and the sacraments are properly administered on the grounds that the church does not fully exercise discipline. Calvin denied the Anabaptist view that the corruption of Christians

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<sup>77</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke*, tr. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979; reprint), vol. 2, 362.

<sup>78</sup> It is worth noting here that there is a slight but significant difference between Cyprian and Calvin in their interpretation of the text. For Cyprian, the gathering of two or three should presuppose their unity with catholic church. Therefore, the Word and sacrament are not effective unless the participants were already united with the catholic church. On the other hand, for Calvin, unity in the Word or gospel is prerequisite. Thus, for Calvin, the Word precedes the church, and the church is dependent upon the Word. Cf. Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, para. 12.

<sup>79</sup> Calvin, "On the Ban," in *Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 56. Calvin even acknowledges that church discipline belongs to "the substance of the church." Calvin, "On the Ban," 60.

within the church can destroy the Word and sacraments. Of course, a Christian should try his best to protect the sacraments from being corrupted by evildoers. Even if such a bad thing happens, however, he is not allowed to leave the church. Rather, Calvin says, “he ought to always continue to worship God with the others, listen to the Word, and receive the Lord’s Supper as long as he lives in that place.”<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, for Calvin, separation from a church can never be justified as far as the two marks are founded in that church. However, is it possible that the church keeps all the articles of faith and sacraments perfectly? Or can an ecclesiastical separation be justified on the grounds that the church corrupted only one or some of the important articles of faith? Calvin’s answer to the two questions is negative. Making a distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles, Calvin claims that only the corruption of the essential articles can justify separation, but a difference of opinion over the non-essential matters can never be a basis for schism. Therefore, the crucial question for the justifiable ecclesiastical separation is “Which differences or errors are secondary and which are fundamental?” Unfortunately, Calvin does not provide a suitable list of fundamentals and non-fundamentals except for a few examples. He merely mentions the issue about the status of the soul after death as an example of a non-fundamental article. Likewise, he also refers to only a few examples for the fundamentals such as the oneness of God and the deity of Christ.<sup>81</sup> Calvin’s list of fundamentals, however, seems to be too brief to explain the exact reason for his separation from the Church of Rome because the fundamentals on the list were not denied by the Catholics. Calvin certainly assumed that

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<sup>80</sup> Calvin, “On the Ban,” 61.

<sup>81</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* IV. i. 12.

the Roman Catholics did err in some fundamentals, but he did not tell us exactly what they are.

### ***3.1.3 Peter Martyr Vermigli***

Calvin's limitation of the marks of the true church to the Word and sacraments did not satisfy all the Reformed churches. Not only his contemporaries but also his successors added the third mark, discipline, to the previous two marks. More importantly, the two major Reformed confessions, the Belgic and Scottish Confessions, officially approved discipline as the third mark. Therefore, there was no complete consensus on the number of the marks of the church and their precise nature among the Reformed churches.

Peter Martyr Vermigli, a great influence on the English Reformation, also claimed that church discipline is one of the marks of the true church. The primary reason for including discipline as the third mark is that discipline is the means to achieve morality, which belongs to the essence of the church.<sup>82</sup> According to Vermigli, the Roman church lost a mark of the true church because she turned upside down moral instructions. "What is good they consider evil," Vermigli criticized, "and what is evil they present as good."<sup>83</sup> The Roman church was full of all kinds of non-biblical regulations on food, festivals,

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Martyr Vermigli, "Schism and the True Church," in *Early Writings*, translated by Mariano Di Gangi and Joseph C. McLelland, The Peter Martyr Library, vol I (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 1994), 175. The original title of "Schism and the True Church" is "Whether Evangelicals are Schismatics for Having Separated from the Papists." Vermigli defines ecclesiastical discipline as follows: "Ecclesiastical discipline is nothing else but a power granted to the church by God, by which the willes and actions of the faithful, are made conformable to the lawes of God: which is done by doctrine, admonitions, correction, and finallie by punishments, and also by excommunication if neede require." Cf. Vermigli, *Common Places of the Most Diuine Doctor Peter Martyr* (London, 1583), translated by Anthonie Marten, pt. IV, ch. 5, para. 56, col A.

<sup>83</sup> Vermigli, "Schism and the True Church," 175.

celibacy, etc. and she had no intention of getting rid of them. Therefore, the separation of the Reformed church from the Roman church became not only good but necessary.

Here we need to note the slightly different way in which Calvin and Vermigli viewed discipline. In controversy with Anabaptists, Calvin viewed discipline from its exercise and believed that whether or not discipline is exercised in the church could not be a criterion for determining the true church. By contrast, Vermigli viewed discipline from its content and believed that a church could not be true if its discipline is exercised on the basis of perverted moral teaching.

Vermigli's insistence on church discipline as the third mark contributed greatly to the development of ecclesiology in England.<sup>84</sup> Unlike in the Lutheran Church that did not adopt the church discipline as the third mark, church polity became the hot issue in the Church of England during the later sixteenth century and the whole of the seventeenth century. The divisions of the Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and Separatism were primarily the result of the differences on church discipline, not on fundamental doctrines.

With respect to discipline, the earlier Reformed writers did not have a unified view. It is not to be ignored, however, that they shared with each other a greater part of the doctrine of the true church and they never argued over the differences concerning the third mark.<sup>85</sup> Those differences were not considered to be an essential matter and they were tolerated and preserved within the greater boundary of the Reformed tradition. This

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<sup>84</sup> Robert M. Kingdon, "Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Marks of the True Church," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 214.

<sup>85</sup> Glenn S. Sunshine, "Discipline as the Third Mark of the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 479.

broad consensus on discipline, however, could not hold unity among the English Protestants. Although they implicitly or explicitly agreed on discipline as the third mark, there was no consensus on how to exercise it. Sooner or later, it became obvious that Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism were not compatible with each other. The disagreement over the means to discipline finally resulted in divisions of the Church of England.

## 3.2 Great Britain

### ***3.2.1 The Elizabethan Puritan Movement***

After Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, she strengthened the unity of the church by firmly establishing a national church based on the following four pillars: royal supremacy, the Thirty Nine Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, and prelacy. Royal supremacy was designed for political unity, the Thirty Nine Articles for doctrinal unity, the Book of Common Prayer for liturgical unity, and episcopacy for ecclesiastical unity. During more than 40 years of the Elizabethan reign, those four foundations were firmly established in England by the theological supports from eminent scholars such as John Jewell (1521-1571), John Whitgift (1530/1-1604), and Richard Hooker (1554-1600). However, the Elizabethan settlement also suffered from internal tensions which were occasioned by Puritans who wished to more thoroughly further the Church of England according to the Word of God. Some Puritans were satisfied with a moral or spiritual reformation of the English people mainly through the ministry of preaching. On the other hand, some radicals severely attacked the liturgy and episcopacy of the Church of



England. In this case, open conflicts between Conformists and Puritans<sup>86</sup> were inescapable. In the beginning, the Puritan movement was no separatist movement but some more radical Puritans chose separation when they felt forced to do so.

The major controversies between the Elizabethan Puritans and Conformists were largely limited to liturgy and church government.<sup>87</sup> The former was hotly debated in the vestments controversy and the latter in the admonition controversy. The authors of *Admonition to the Parliament* emphasized the further reformation of the Church of England on the basis of the three marks of the true church. Their criticism of the Church of England, however, was not directed at the substance of the Word, sacraments, and church discipline, but at the way in which all three marks were carried out. For instance,

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<sup>86</sup> It is worth here noting some problematic terms. The term ‘Anglican’ is confusing in that in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, ‘Anglican’ was a geographical term simply referring to the church in England without any theological connotations. All mainline Protestants were Anglicans in the sense that they were the members of *ecclesia Anglicana*. The term “Anglicanism” had not been used until the nineteenth century. Cf. J. Robert Wright, “Anglicanism, *Ecclesia Anglicana*, and Anglican: An Essay on Terminology,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes and others (SPCK and Fortress Press: London and Minneapolis, 1988; revised edition), 477-483. For this reason, I prefer not to use the term Anglican except when it occurs in relation to Roman Catholicism. Instead, the term “Conformist” will be found throughout in this dissertation. Following Peter Lake’s suggestion, I will apply the term “Conformist” not to all those who hesitatively conformed to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, but to those who actively and strenuously enforced conformity and harshly criticized their opponents as Puritans. Cf. Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 7. The term “Puritan” or “Puritans” has been hotly debated, and scholars have been more and more dissatisfied with the dichotomic understanding of Anglicans and Puritans. The term “Puritans” can hardly refer to a homogeneous group in terms of principle or idea. For instance, some Puritans were Calvinists and others were Arminians. Neither was a consensus on church government found among Puritans. Some Puritans supported Presbyterianism and others Congregationalism. All Puritans wanted to reform the Church of England and strongly resisted impositions of conformity. However, they were also significantly different from each other with respect to the method and range of reformation. Puritanism was not an ideology but a cultural movement in the sense that Puritans had in common a distinct way of life by sharing similar religious experiences. For recent studies on the definition of Puritanism, see Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, “Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700,” in *The Culture of Puritanism, 1560-1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1996), 1-31; Peter Lake, “Defining Puritanism—again?,” in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 3-29; John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1998), 1-14.

<sup>87</sup> The Thirty-Nine Articles as such was not a serious problem to Puritans until the Westminster Assembly convened. Neither was royal supremacy a serious problem. All Puritans were ready to obey the Queen as the “governor” of the church although they worried about her excessive involvement in the church. Most of the Puritans took national church for granted.

the writers complained that the Word was not frequently preached in the parish churches, that the sacraments were promiscuously administered to the wicked, and that discipline was not exercised properly according to Scripture.<sup>88</sup> The Elizabethan Puritans believed that the reformation of the Church of England could be completed not only by doctrinal but also by disciplinary reform. Most of all, they claimed that episcopacy was illegitimate because it was contrary to Scripture.

In his vast criticism of *Admonition*, John Whitgift, one of the major opponents of Puritans in the Elizabethan era, made a careful distinction between the matter and form of church government. The former clearly prescribed in Scripture was as follows: “The word truly taught, the sacraments rightly administered, virtue furthered, vice repressed, and the church kept in quietness and order.”<sup>89</sup> On the contrary, the form of church government, Whitgift believed, is not clearly set forth in Scripture and thus should be determined according to its circumstances. For Whitgift, the whole matter of the controversy was not what kind of a church government to set up but whether or not the established church order and the king should be obeyed in the perilous time when the foreign Catholics were ready to destroy the kingdom of God.<sup>90</sup> In short, the peace or unity of the church is much more important than the external reformation of the church and thus it should not be disturbed by the non-essentials. Whitgift wrote:

Our peace is in truth and due obedience: we have the true doctrine of the word of God, and the right administration of the sacraments; and therefore to make

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas Wilcox, “The Necessity of Reformation: An Admonition to the Reformation 1572.” Cited from Iain Murray’s *The Reformation of the Church: A Collection of Reformation Puritan Documents on Church Issues* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 85-94.

<sup>89</sup> John Whitgift, *Works of John Whitgift*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1851-3), I, 6.

<sup>90</sup> *Works of John Whitgift*, I, 5.

contention in this church, and to disturb the quietness and peace, cannot be but mere schismatical, I will say no worse.<sup>91</sup>

The Elizabethan Puritans were considered to be schismatics by their opponents because the issues they raised were external, and therefore not substantial, to the Church of England. They failed to receive full support from the Conformists as well as from other moderate Puritans.<sup>92</sup> Their hope for the further reformation was crushed in the name of unity by Conformists. At last, the Elizabethan Puritan movement lost its cause and vitality until the beginning of the next century.

### ***3.2.2 Separatists***

Separatists, greatly influenced by the Elizabethan Puritans,<sup>93</sup> took the Puritan movement to the extreme. By judging that true reformation of the Church of England was no longer possible, Separatists were determined to separate from her in order to achieve what the Puritans failed to accomplish. Unlike the Elizabethan Puritans, Separatists did not wait for a pious magistrate who would reform the church.<sup>94</sup> They strongly advocated immediate withdrawal from the Church of England, denouncing her as no true church. One of the Separatist catechisms answers the question “What is a true Visible or Ministeriall Church of Christ?” as follows: “A true Visible or Ministeriall Church of Christ is a particular Congregation being a spirituall perfect Corporation of Believers, &

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<sup>91</sup> *Works of John Whitgift*, II, 243.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Lake, *The Moderate Presbyterians and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 60-1.

<sup>93</sup> For instance, Robert Harrison and Robert Brown had been taught by Thomas Cartwright before they converted to Separatism.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Browne, *A Treatise for Reformation without Tarrying for Anie*, in ed. Elbert Peel and Leland H. Carlson, *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne* (London: Sir Halley Stewart Trust, 1953), 150-170.

having power in it selfe immediately from Christ to administer all Religious meanes of faith to the members thereof.”<sup>95</sup> This catechism makes it known that Separatists elevated church polity to the essential mark of the true church. For Separatists, only a gathered congregation is a true church and thus the Church of England cannot be a true church even if she upholds the true doctrines and proper sacraments.

For Separatists, Christ is not only the prophet and the priest but also the king of the church.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, the church is not merely where Christ’s word is preached and the sacraments are properly administered, but also where His word is obeyed by his people. Separatists viewed the church primarily as a kingdom with Christ as its king. As the king of the church, Christ rules not only in a spiritual way but also in an external way. This was the fundamental difference between Separatists and their opponents. Robert Harrison says:

Christ dwelleth not, where he rules not. He may not be an idle Idoll. His Church and Kingdome in this worlde is outwarde and visible, and except he gouernue visible, euen by his outwarde ordinances; It is vayne for vs to say, He ruleth in our hartes.<sup>97</sup>

For Separatists, church discipline means primarily the external reign of Christ. They rejected the idea that discipline belongs to the church as an accident or incidental property, not to her essence, because the church cannot be separated from Christ’s dominion. The church that does not faithfully exercise discipline, Separatists argued,

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<sup>95</sup> Henry Jacob, “Principles & Foundations of Christian Religion.” Cited from Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), vol. II, 157.

<sup>96</sup> Robert Browne, *An Answer to Master Cartwright*, in *Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, 462. It is worth noting that the ecclesiology of Separatists is closely related to Christology.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Harrison, *A Little Treatise uppon the First Verse of the 122 Psalm*, in *Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, ed. Albert Peel (London: Ruskin House, 1953), 110.

makes Christ a dead Christ or an idol Christ.<sup>98</sup> For Separatists, obeying the Word is more important than hearing it. Consequently, preaching is subordinate to church discipline.

Robert Browne says:

And therefore when Christ appointeth the Apostles to plant churches throughout the world, he appointeth them not, to talke of and professe the word in their mouthes onley, but he giueth in charge these three things, as being the chiefe marks of a planted Church: namely *preaching the word*, *ministration* of the sacraments, & *reformation of life*, which is the chiefest thing of all to set forth in his Church & kingdom: for he commmandeth to preach and baptize, & because preaching & baptizing is nothing without amendment of life, he addeth these words, teaching them obserue & do all things, whatsoever I haue commanded you.<sup>99</sup>

According to Browne, preaching is a means to church discipline. Although the two marks of the church are important, they are not sufficient enough to verify the true church.

Rather, they would be useless if not sincerely received by the members of the church.

Separatists were severely criticized by the non-separatist Puritans who believed that separation from a church can be justified only when that church first separated from Christ by corrupting the substance of doctrine and worship. William Perkins answered the question, “At what time may a man with good conscience make separation from a Church?” as follows:

So long as a Church makes no separation from Christ, we must make no separation from it: and when it separates from Christ, we may also separate from it: and therefore in two cases there is warrant of separation. The one is, when the worship of God is corrupt in substance. . . The second is, when the doctrine of religion is corrupt in substance.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Browne, *An Answer in Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, 460.

<sup>99</sup> Browne, *An Answer in Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, 441. Italics original.

<sup>100</sup> William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creede of the Apostles*, (London, 1611), 442.

Perkins made a distinction between the corruption in substance and that in manner. The former makes a church no church but the latter makes it only a bad church. With that distinction, Perkins justified the separation of the Church of England from the Roman church. The Roman church corrupted in the substance of doctrine because she believed in the justification by works, which is obviously incompatible with the justification by grace. The Church of Rome also corrupted in the substance of worship because the doctrine of transubstantiation makes the perfect satisfaction of Christ imperfect. Furthermore, the Roman Catholics worshipped the images of the Trinity and of the Saints.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the Church of Rome for Perkins was no church and the separation from it was not only justifiable but necessary.

On the contrary, corruptions in the manners of worship and doctrine cannot justify separation from the church. Perkins argued that since the Church of England did not fail in the substance of doctrine and worship, separating from her is “bad and schismaticall.”<sup>102</sup> By the same measure, Perkins also recognized the Lutheran Church as a true church. Although there is a great difference between the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in regard to the Lord’s Supper, that difference pertains only to the manner of receiving the body and blood of Christ. Perkins points out the difference between the transubstantiation and consubstantiation as follows: “While the former is utterly against an article of faith, the latter is only contrary to a main point of philosophy, which is, that *a body doth occupie only one place at once.*”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Perkins, *Exposition*, 437-8.

<sup>102</sup> Perkins, *Exposition*, 443. We can see that Perkins’ view of schism was in accord with Calvin’s.

<sup>103</sup> Perkins, *Exposition*, 440.

Perkins's view of church unity had a great influence on the later Puritans in the seventeenth century. William Ames (1576-1633), an earliest Congregationalist who was one of the most eminent pupils of Perkins and left England for Holland in order to escape religious persecutions, was strongly opposed to separation from the Church of England. In arguing against John Robinson who claimed for the separation due to lack of Congregational principles, Ames pointed out that there were still not a few churches in the Church of England that were retaining Congregational tenets in some way.<sup>104</sup> Ames did not give up the hope that the Church of England would be reformed in a Congregational way. For Ames, separation was neither necessary nor desirable.

### ***3.2.3 Congregationalists***

Congregationalists shared many essential elements of ecclesiology with Separatists.<sup>105</sup> Like Separatists, Congregationalists believed that supremacy rests with each particular congregation, that church covenant is the essential form of the church and that the church should be a gathered church that consists of the visible saints alone. However, Congregationalists were different from Separatists in that they did not condemn the Church of England as a false church. When Congregationalists set up congregations according to Congregational principles, they did not think that their newly founded congregations were completely separated from the Church of England. It seemed

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<sup>104</sup> William Ames, *Second Manuduction for Mr. Robinson or a Confirmation of the Former, in an Answer to his Manumission* (London, 1615).

<sup>105</sup> It is not clear whether or not the earlier Separatists had a direct influence on Congregationalists. In general, the English Congregationalist historians tend to view the early Separatists as the forerunners of the later Congregationalists while the American scholars stress the discontinuity between the two. Cf. Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985; reprint), 95. The Congregationalists severely rebuked the Separatists, but they did not entirely reject their doctrines. The Separatists were tolerated during the Interregnum and were largely absorbed into Congregationalism.

to their opponents, however, that both Separatist and Congregationalists were virtually the same given that both showed no difference in practice. For this reason, Congregationalists found it more difficult to defend themselves from the charge of schism than did Separatists.

First of all, Congregationalists deny their connection with Separatists. Rather, they consider the non-separatist Puritans such as William Ames, Matthew Parker, and Robert Baynes to be their fathers.<sup>106</sup> In general, Ames' view is similar to the traditional view of schism at some important points: schism is defined as the separation from the catholic unity that ought to be kept; it is a most grievous sin; the difference between heresy and schism is that the former is opposed to faith while the latter to love. However, Ames has a significantly different view of schism than the traditional perspective in that he supports a separation not only from a false church but also from a true one. According to Ames, there are three justifiable cases for separation from a true church: "As first, if a man cannot continue his communion, without a communication of their sinnes. Secondly, if there be any eminent danger of being seduced. Thirdly, if by oppression or perfection, a man be compelled to withdraw himselfe."<sup>107</sup>

What is more, Ames makes a careful distinction between separation from a church and that from some actions or persons in it.<sup>108</sup> To leave a church in order to

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<sup>106</sup> John Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared (1648)*, in ed. Larzer Ziff, *John Cotton on the Churches of New England* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 189.

<sup>107</sup> William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (Amsterdam, 1639) V, chap. 12, 4.2. The *Conscience* was the English translation of the original Latin work published in 1630. Ames' view of schism had an influence not only on Congregationalists but on Presbyterians. In their discussing of schism, the ministers and elders who convened in the London provincial assembly regarded Ames view of schism as authoritative. Cf. *Vindication of the Presbyteriall-Government and Ministry* (London, 1649), 131-132.

<sup>108</sup> Ames, *Conscience*, bk. V, ch.12, 6.



prevent from the communion with evil persons should not be considered to be a schism.

Ames also makes a distinction between total and partial separation. A congregation should not withdraw itself from the communion with all the true churches. If so, that congregation would be no longer a church. In contrast, it is possible for a congregation to separate from a true particular church, remaining a member of some other church.<sup>109</sup>

Neither is this partial separation to be considered a schism. Ames' careful distinctions of schism are well reflected in the writing of later Congregationalists. John Cotton points out the reason why Congregationalists are different from Separatists. Cotton says:

No marvel, if Independents take ill to be called Brownists, in whole or in part. For neither in whole, nor in part do we partake in his schism. He separated from the churches and from saints; we only from the world, and that which is of the world.<sup>110</sup>

And he explains what the "world" means:

We do not separate from such Protestant churches . . . but only we separate from the World, that is, from the worldly sort of them, who either live in open scandal, or at least do not openly hold forth any spiritual discerning of the Lord's body, and are therefore unmeet to communicate at the Lord's Table.<sup>111</sup>

For Cotton, the church is sometimes mixed with the world from which we should separate. This separation is neither schism nor separation from that church. What is more, Cotton insists that non-communion should be distinguished from separation or schism. It is one thing to recognize a church as true, and another to keep communion with it. Cotton acknowledges that the Church of England, though corrupted, is a true church, but he

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<sup>109</sup> Ames, *Conscience*, bk. V, ch.12, 7.2.

<sup>110</sup> Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, 185.

<sup>111</sup> Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, 186.

rejects the idea that all other churches should necessarily keep communion with or subjection to her for that reason.<sup>112</sup>

Thomas Goodwin, one of the leading Congregationalists at the Westminster Assembly, also makes a distinction between a defective and a more complete church. A defective church, for Goodwin, is a true church, and yet we should, if possible, choose a more complete church. He also argues that the move from the former to the latter is not separation at all.<sup>113</sup> This does not mean, however, that it can be justified for a Christian to leave his church in order to choose the best one among all the particular churches. Every church is a defective church in some sense. The defective church, for Congregationalists, is a church in which one cannot escape from committing a sin insofar as he keeps communion with it.

The Congregational understanding of schism was severely criticized by Presbyterians. In *Antapologia*, Thomas Edwards (1599-1648) likened Congregationalists to a wife who leaves her husband and joins another man saying that the former is a true husband.<sup>114</sup> Robert Baillie (1602-1662), one of the strong Scottish presbyterians, also claimed that Congregationalists' separation is worse than that of Separatists because "it is greater sinne to depart from a Church which I professe to bee true, and whose ministry I acknowledge to be saving, then from a Church which I conceive to be false."<sup>115</sup> For Baillie, professing the church as a true church is incompatible with leaving it. In this

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<sup>112</sup> Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared*, 186.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Constitution, Right, Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ*, XI: 307.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia: Or, A Full Answer to the Apologetical Narration* (London, 1644), 199. As the title indicates, *Antapologia* was written to refute *An Apologetical Narration*, the famous Congregationalist manifesto presented to the parliament by the five dissenting brethren during the session of the Westminster Assembly.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (London, 1645), 104.

regard, Separatists, who condemned the Church of England as false and then left her, are more logically consistent than Congregationalists. Furthermore, Baillie pointed out that the reasons Separatists left the Church could not be applicable to Congregationalists given that “stumbling blocks” to Congregationalists, prelacy and liturgical ceremony, were cleared.<sup>116</sup>

Presbyterians denied Cotton’s distinction between separation from the church and separation from the world. Neither did they think that some corruptions in the church can be justification for leaving the true but corrupted church. If that is allowed, any separation could be justified. Moreover, such view of schism cannot prevent further schism because there is no perfect church in this world. How can Congregationalists forbid their members to leave for a purer church? For Edwards, this is the “dilemma” from which Congregationalists cannot escape.<sup>117</sup>

### ***3.2.4 Roman Catholics and Anglicans***

Rejecting the Roman Catholics’ institutional concept of unity, the Church of England firmly grounded the unity of the church in true doctrine. King Henry VIII declares:

The unity therefore of the Church is not conserved by the bishop of Rome’s authority or doctrine; but, the unity of the catholic church, which all Christian men in this article do profess, is conserved and kept by the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, *in retaining and maintaining of such doctrine and the profession of Christian faith, and true observance of the same.*<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Baillie, *A Dissuasive*, 103.

<sup>117</sup> Edwards, *Antapologia*, 200.

<sup>118</sup> Henry VIII, *A Necessity Doctrine and Erudition for Any Christian Man* (London, 1543), the ninth article on the Creed (no pagination in the original work). Italics added.

The criterion of church unity is not the church itself but the truth that it professes. Given that unity could be found in heretics and even pagans, unity that is not grounded on the doctrinal truth cannot be a unity in a true sense. The superiority of truth to unity is well described in Hugh Latimer's sermons:

St. Paul to the Corinthians saith, *Sitis unaniues*, 'Be of one mind'; but he addeth, *secundum Jesum Christum*, 'according to Jesus Christ': that is, according to God's holy Word for her sake . . . Therefore let us set by unity; let us be given to love and charity; but so that it may stand with godliness. For peace ought not to be redeemed *jactura veritatis*, with the loss of the truth of God's word.<sup>119</sup>

Unity in truth was a useful weapon for the Elizabethan Anglicans to fight against Romanists.

As a matter of fact, Romanists preferred to charge the Church of England as heretics rather than as schismatics. For instance, John Jewel, the first major Anglican apologist, wrote his *Apologia pro Ecclesia Anglicana* in order to defend the Church of England from the charge of heresy.<sup>120</sup> Hence, Jewel's main aim in *Apologia* was to prove that the Church of England preserved the true doctrines.

Thanks to a series of eminent Anglican theologians, the Church of England effectively defended herself against Catholicism until the middle of the seventeenth century. However, things changed dramatically during the Interregnum, which was a critical time to the Church of England. Her important pillars were radically shaken: the king, the supreme governor of the church, was beheaded, episcopacy was abolished and

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<sup>119</sup> Cited from Philip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980; new edition), 253.

<sup>120</sup> *Apologia* was published in Latin in 1562 and was translated into English as *The Apology of the Church of England with a Briefe and Plaine Declaration of the True Religion Professed and Vsed in the Same* (London, 1635).

the Prayer Book was removed from worship service. The Church of England completely lost her status as an established church and leading Anglican divines had to hide or flee to the continent. Catholics used this opportunity to convert Anglicans to Rome. For instance, Théophile Brachet de La Miletière, a counselor to the king of France, wrote a letter to Charles II in order to persuade him to embrace Roman Catholicism<sup>121</sup> Some of the Anglican exiles indeed converted to Catholicism, although most of them kept their loyalty to the Church of England.<sup>122</sup> Catholics claimed that the main reason for the breakdown of the Anglican Church is her separation from the true church: the Church of Rome.

Over against Catholics' accusation of the Church of England, Anglican scholars produced many important treatises on schism during this period.<sup>123</sup> John Bramhall, the Bishop of Derry, wrote *A Just Vindication of the Church of England from the Unjust Aspersion of the Criminal Schism*. A Roman Catholic reply entitled *A Brief Survey of the Lord of Derry his Treatise of schism : Wherein He Intends to Cleare the Protestant Church from Schism, and to Lay the Fault upon the Roman Church* (1655) came from the pen of Richard Smith, the bishop of Chalcedon. In the following year, Bramhall responded to it by publishing *A Replication to the Bishop of Chalcedon his Survey of the Vindication of the Church of England from Criminous Schism Clearing the English Laws from the Aspersion of Cruelty* (1656).

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<sup>121</sup> *The Victory of Truth for the Peace of the Church to the King of Great Britain* (Hague, 1653).

<sup>122</sup> For the important converts in this period, see George H. Tavard, *The Seventeenth Century Tradition: A Study in Recusant Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 107-132. John Vincent Canes also converted to Catholicism.

<sup>123</sup> For the discussion of the Anglican controversies on schism, see John Spurr, "Schism and the Restoration Church" in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 41 (1990): 408-424.

It is also worth noting that a very interesting conference on schism was held in May of 1657 between Anglicans and Catholics. The conference was carried out only by the exchange of written papers. Two of the most prominent Anglican scholars, Peter Gunning and John Pearson, and two unknown but undoubtedly most gifted Catholics participated in the debate.<sup>124</sup> The main issue of the conference was ‘Whether those of the Roman church, or those of the English Protestant Church be Schismaticus.’ The debate between the two parties continued for about a year and ended in June of 1658. The papers presented to the conference were collected and were finally published in a book of over 600 pages.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, we need to pay attention to Henry Hammond (1605-1660), one of the most important apologists for the Church of England during the Interregnum. In 1653, Hammond wrote *Of Schisme: A Defence of the Church England, against the Exceptions of the Romanists*, which was followed by severe criticisms on the Romanist side to which in turn Hammond replied. The first response to *Of Schisme* was written in a form of letter by “a Catholic Gentleman.”<sup>126</sup> Hammond responded to the letter point by point in *A Reply to the Catholick Gentlemans Answer to the Most Material Parts of the Book of Schism* (1654). The second and more important response came from John Sergeant, who was educated as an Anglican but converted to Catholicism. Sergeant responded to

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<sup>124</sup> According to Charles Dodd, the two unknown Roman Catholic scholars were John Spencer and John Lenthall. Cf. Thomas M. McCoog, “Spencer, John (1600-1671),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>125</sup> Peter Gunning et al., *Schism Unmask’t: Or, A Later Conference betwixt Mr. Peter Gunning and Mr. John Pierson Ministers on the One part, and Two Disputants of the Roman Profession on the Other: Wherein Is Defined, Both What Schism Is, and to Whom It Belongs* (Paris, 1658).

<sup>126</sup> B. P., *An Answer to the Most Materiall Parts of Dr. Hammond’s Booke of Schisme* (London, 1654). We can also see a brief response from Henry Holden, one of most influential Catholic priests during the Commonwealth. Holden added *Appendix of Schism to The Analysis of Divine Faith: or Two Treatise of the Resolution of CHRISTIAN BELIEF* (Paris, 1658).

Hammond's *Of Schisme* and Bramhall's *Just Vindication* by writing the *Schism Disarm'd of the Defensive Weapons, Lent it by Doctor Hammond, and the Bishop of Derry of Schism* (1655). Hammond immediately replied to Sergeant with *The Disarmers Dexterities Examined: In a Second Defence of the Treatise of Schisme* (1656), which was followed by Sergeant's second response, *Schism Dispatch't or A Rejoynder to the Replies of Dr. Hammond and the Ld of Derry* (1657). Hammond again answered the rejoinder by writing *The Dispatcher dispatched* (1659). Only his death in 1660 could stop him from vindicating the Church of England.

## CHAPTER 2

### OWEN'S CONGREGATIONAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores some of the general tenets of Owen's ecclesiology. Most of the analysis in this chapter focuses on Owen's two definitive ecclesiological works: *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches* and *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*.<sup>1</sup> More specific points and comparative analyses of unity and schism are discussed in the following three chapters. The order of the discussions is important for understanding Owen's notions of unity and schism as matters in the church; consequently, the church must first be clearly defined in order to properly understand what unity and schism are. Owen's primary concern was that the doctrines of the church and the church itself had been seriously corrupted. Although the former were significantly corrected by the Reformation, the latter remained the same. As a result, distorted images of the church were rooted in the minds of all Christians. The best way to correct those images, for Owen, was to rediscover the original state of the church and its exact nature. Owen's two works were written to meet such needs: *Inquiry* was written for the former; *True Nature* for the latter. In Owen's doctrine of the church, therefore, the most important questions were "What is the nature of the church?" or "What constitutes the church?" These

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the two works were intended to be written in one volume. Both *Inquiry* and *True Nature* were the fruit of Owen's mature ecclesiological reflections. It is worth noting that part of *Inquiry* and *True Nature* were jointly published in a book entitled *A Guide to Church-Fellowship and Order according to the Gospel-Institution* (London, 1692).



questions ought to be distinguished from the question, “How can a true church be recognized?” which had dominated the thoughts of the Reformers. In this regard, it is no wonder that neither *An Inquiry* nor *The True Nature* allotted a chapter for a discussion of the marks of the true church.

## 1. Significant Shifts of Emphasis in Ecclesiology

### 1.1 From the True Church to the Nature of the Church

Ecclesiology was not fully developed or extensively discussed until the Reformation. The scholastic teachers of the high Middle Ages produced significant analyses of most topics in theology, but they contributed little to the advancement of ecclesiology. In general, ecclesiology was not an independent topic in their theological discussions.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, which enjoyed a place as a theological textbook for hundreds of years, contains no special section on the doctrine of the church. Consequently, it is no surprise to see that the hundreds of commentaries on *Sentences* did not deal with ecclesiology at any length.<sup>3</sup> All ecclesiastical topics such as the nature of the church and attributes of the church were simply ignored, and thus no systematic work on ecclesiology appeared. Neither were Thomas Aquinas’s writings an exception. His magnum opus *Summa Theologica*, one of the greatest works produced in the Middle Ages, lacks any set of *quaestiones* concerning the church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Various medieval theologians wrote treatises of *De Ecclesia* especially during the Avignon Captivity and its following period. However, their primary concern was institutional questions related to the extent of papal jurisdiction. It is against this background that both John Wycliffe and John Huss wrote *De Ecclesia*. However, neither of them can be considered to be a systematic study on ecclesiology.

<sup>3</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 71.

<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that ecclesiology was not important to Aquinas. His teachings on the church can be found scattered throughout the *Summa*. Cf. Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church: Studies by Yves Congar*, 2d ed. (Baltimore and Dublin: Helicon Press, 1965), 54.

The Reformation began with some soteriological controversies concerning free will, justification, and indulgences. Ecclesiology became the Reformers' main concern only when they were determined to separate themselves from the Church of Rome. For the Reformers, ecclesiology was not completely separate from soteriology. Cyprian's maxim, "There is no salvation outside of the church," was universally accepted by Protestants as well as Roman Catholics.<sup>5</sup> In the Reformers' theology, the question of "How can I obtain a gracious God?" was closely connected to "How can I find the true church?"<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the marks of the true church, as we have seen in the previous chapter, became the most significant ecclesiological issue in the thought of the Reformers.

Although the later orthodox Protestants still struggled with the issue of the true church, we can see a significant shift of emphasis in Congregational ecclesiology. Formerly, the primary difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants lay in each denomination's definition of the "true" church. According to the Reformers, the Roman church was a false church because she erred in the fundamentals; however, she could be easily restored to her former orthodoxy by reclaiming the true doctrines. In contrast, the real question for Congregationalists was "What is the true 'church?'"<sup>7</sup> Given that the true doctrines may be taught by a human society other than the church, doctrinal orthodoxy should be distinguished from the identity of the church itself, although they could not be actually separated from each other. For Congregationalists, the fact that a religious body called "the church" proclaims the truth does not prove that it is truly a church. The church

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<sup>5</sup> Even Owen was ready to accept the maxim, which he did not consider to be a Romish statement. Cf. Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 323.

<sup>6</sup> Paul S. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>7</sup> The best example for this is Thomas Hooker's *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline wherein the Way of Churches of New England is Warranted out of the Word* (London, 1648).

can be recognized by its marks: the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. However, those marks simply make the church known without actually *making* the church. The foundation of the church—the true faith—should be distinguished from the church building. In the preface to Owen’s *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, Isaac Chauncy states:

The foundation part of a visible church is the credible profession of faith and holiness, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is the corner-stone . . . This profession is the foundation, but not the church itself. It is not articles of faith, or profession of them in particular individual persons, that make an organized visible church. We are the “household of faith, built upon the foundation” etc.<sup>8</sup>

Congregationalists found that the Church of England was enormously different from the church described in Scripture. They were convinced that their task was to build a church on the basis of the true foundation which had been already laid down by the earlier Reformers. For Congregationalists, the church was not something given, but something to be constructed. This was especially true of the New England Congregationalists who had to start a “new” church. Owen was well aware of this most fundamental problem in ecclesiology. He lamented:

For the most part, the churches that are in the world at present know now *how they came so to be*, continuing only in that state which they have received by tradition from their fathers. . . . And it is acknowledged that there is a difference between the continuation of a church and its first erection; yet that that continuation may be regular, it is required that its first congregating (for the church is a congregation) was so, as also that the force and efficacy of it be still continued. Wherefore the causes of that first gathering must be inquired into.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 6. The author’s initial “J. C” in the preface was identified as Isaac Chauncy by the editor of *The Works of John Owen*. In 1687 Isaac Chauncy became the pastor of the congregation to which Owen had ministered. He was one of the leading Congregational figures in establishing the ‘Happy Union.’ Chauncy also wrote many books on Congregational church polity.

<sup>9</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 25. Italics original.

Owen's primary ecclesiastical concern was to build the church as it had been established by its first founders. This work of building, however, could not be completed while remaining in the Church of England. Owen's separation from the Church of England was inescapable because some essential Congregational principles, as we shall see later, were incompatible with the Church of England. This was one of the significant differences between Presbyterians and Congregationalists: While Presbyterians wanted to reform outward religious manners within the Church of England, Congregationalists made efforts to establish a gathered church altogether outside the Church of England. The more important issue between the two parties was not its external government, but the nature of the church.

## 1.2 From Visible/Invisible Catholic to Visible Catholic/Particular

Different religious parties viewed the church in different ways. The Roman Catholics retained the medieval triple distinction between the church triumphant, the church militant, and the church dormient.<sup>10</sup> Protestants accepted the former two while denying the last given their denial of limbo and purgatory; Owen also followed the same path.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, like other Protestants, Owen's major concern was not with the church

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<sup>10</sup> Even the pre-Reformation reformers such as John Hus approved the threefold distinction of the church. Cf. *Ecclesia: The Church by John Hus*, trans. David S. Schaff (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1974; reprint), 12. The church triumphant is the church in heaven; the church dormient, the church in limbo; the church militant, the church on earth. The threefold understanding of the catholic church was virtually universally accepted by Roman Catholics. However, it is interesting to note that the catechism of Trent mentions only the triumphant and militant churches without denying the dormant church.

<sup>11</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, VII: 329.

triumphant but with the church militant. Owen dealt only with the church militant in his discussion of the nature of the church.<sup>12</sup>

The distinction of the visible and invisible church was universally accepted by Protestant parties except Anabaptists. This distinction was a decisive factor that distanced Protestants from Roman Catholics who utterly denied it. The distinction of invisible and visible, to Roman Catholics, seemed to endanger the unity of the church because it could imply two incompatible churches. They argued that if the church is truly one, the same church cannot be both visible and invisible at the same time. Robert Bellarmine, the most influential Roman Catholic theologian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, strongly denied the Protestant distinction of visible and invisible. Bellarmine said:

According to our doctrine, there is only one Church, not two. And this one and true Church is the assembly of men, bound together by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by the communion of the same sacraments, under the rule of legitimate pastors, and in particular of the one Vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff.<sup>13</sup>

For Bellarmine, the catholic church is visible only. In this regard, there is no difference between the church and the worldly kingdom. The church is a “congregation of persons which is just as visible and tangible as a group of the Roman people or the kingdom of France or the republic of Venice.”<sup>14</sup>

The Reformers attacked the Church of Rome in the name of the invisible church. They defined the invisible church as God’s elect. In a sense, the doctrine of the invisible

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<sup>12</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 78.

<sup>13</sup> Cited from John Hardon, “Robert Bellarmine’s Concept of the Church” in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, ed. J. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, Western Michigan Press, 1966), 120.

<sup>14</sup> Cited from Edward J. Gratsch, *Where Peter Is: A Survey of Ecclesiology* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 131

church was the application of the doctrine of predestination. According to that definition, the visible church alone cannot be identified with the true church because the visible church is obviously a mixed church containing tares as well as chaffs. Therefore, the doctrine of the invisible church was of great use for Protestants to defend their separation from the Roman church. Furthermore, that doctrine was a great comfort to the true Christians in tribulation given that God's election and his inner call were sure and immutable.<sup>15</sup> The Protestant distinction of visible and invisible was not a fruit of pure speculation at all.

Although the Reformers did "relativize" the importance of the visible church,<sup>16</sup> their intention was not to disregard the visible church. It is not difficult to see that the Reformers devoted more energy to discussing the visible church rather than the invisible church. They did not give up the hope to build the truly reformed visible church, although they firmly held on to the doctrine of the invisible church. Their intention for the distinction of visible and invisible was to correctly define the church, not to repudiate the importance of the visibility of the church. Rather, as John T. McNeill points out, the distinction was used to effectively reform the visible church according to the pattern of the invisible church.<sup>17</sup>

The distinction of visible and invisible was almost universally adopted by the mainline English Protestants. No serious questions were raised about the distinction itself

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. i. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Conwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 61.

<sup>17</sup> McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: Ecumenical Spirit and Its Persistent Expression* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 39.

or about the nature of the invisible church.<sup>18</sup> However, great difficulties arose when a definition of the visible church was attempted. Each Protestant party has its own idea of the visible church. Both Presbyterians and Congregationalists shared the same mind in rejecting the Episcopalian view of the church; yet, there was also a significant difference between the two parties with respect to the visible catholic church. Some Congregationalists even utterly denied the concept of the visible catholic church itself. For instance, Isaac Chauncey says, “The Scripture speaks of no church as catholic visible. The thing itself is but a chimera of some men’s brains, it is not *in rerum natura*.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, he approved only the twofold distinction between the invisible catholic church and the particular visible church. John Cotton also maintained that there is no reference to the visible catholic church in Scripture. He argued that “though the whole church may be visible in her singular members; yet so they are not a church. Or though it may be visible in the several particular congregations, yet none of them is catholic.”<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, the majority of Congregationalists accepted the phrase “the visible catholic church,” but redefined it in a very different way. We notice this when we compare the Westminster Confession with the Savoy Declaration. The Confession states:

Unto this catholic visible Church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the

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<sup>18</sup> The Thirty-Nine Articles does not mention the invisible church. The Savoy Declaration did not change the article on the invisible catholic church of the Westminster Confession. Both describe it as follows: “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (The Westminster Confession, ch. 25, a. 1 and The Savoy Declaration, ch. 26, a. 1).

<sup>19</sup> Chauncey, “Preface,” in Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 4.

<sup>20</sup> Cotton, *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (1648), 313.

end of the world: and does, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.<sup>21</sup>

And the Declaration states:

The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel and obedience unto God by Christ according to it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are, and *may be called* the visible catholic church of Christ; although as such it is not entrusted with the administration of any ordinances, or have any officers to rule or govern in, or over the whole body.<sup>22</sup>

For Congregationalists, the visible catholic church is merely an assembly in which each particular church functions independently; on the contrary, for Presbyterians, it is a society or body upon which all of the particular churches are dependent. As a result, the particular church became the Congregationalists' primary concern.

### 1.3 Owen's Threefold Distinction of the Church

The threefold distinction of the church—the invisible catholic church, the visible catholic church and the visible particular church—is clearly and repeatedly expressed in Owen's ecclesiological works. Owen defines the invisible catholic church as God's "elect, redeemed, justified, and sanctified ones, who are savingly united unto their head by the same quickening and sanctifying Spirit, dwelling in him in all fullness, and communicated unto them by him according to his promise."<sup>23</sup> Owen's definition is clearly stated in the sense that not only election but also justification and sanctification

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<sup>21</sup> The Westminster Confession, ch. 25, a. 3. For the Westminster Standards, I used *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large: Together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, ed. (John G. Eccles Printers Ltd.: Inverness, 1981; reprint).

<sup>22</sup> The Savoy Declaration, ch. 26, a. 2. Italics mine.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 78.



were considered to be an important element for the invisible catholic church. As a result, the Holy Spirit plays a dominant role in the unity of the invisible church.

Owen describes the visible catholic church as follows:

In this *catholic visible church*, as comprehensive of all who throughout the world outwardly own the gospel, there is an acknowledgement of ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’; which are a sufficient foundation of that love, union, and communion among them, which they are capable of, or are required of them, for in the joint profession of the same Lord, faith, and baptism, consists the union of the church under this consideration,—that is, as catholic and visibly professing,—and *in nothing else*.<sup>24</sup>

In his explaining the unity of the visible catholic church, Owen uses a simple and familiar phrase: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5). Even the Roman Catholics might have gladly accepted it. What makes Owen different is that he believed that these three unities are the “sufficient” ground for the unity of the visible catholic church and that it does not exist as institutional body. In other words, sacramental unity, in Owen’s view, is an indicator of the visible unity of the church in a congregation—and not a broadly ecumenical act implying intercommunion in the modern ecumenical sense. For Owen, the visible catholic church is simply the aggregate of the believers who confess the same faith.

The visible particular church, Owen continues to say, is “the conjunction of professors for the celebration of the ordinances of sacred worship appointed by Christ by way of their voluntary obedience unto the commands of Christ.”<sup>25</sup> This church, for Owen, is the only one that was instituted by Christ. It is no wonder that the particular church as

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<sup>24</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 81-2. The last italics mine.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 87.

Congregational is Owen's primary concern in his discussion of the doctrine of the church. This is highly contrasted with Presbyterians who claimed the priority of the catholic church over the particular church.<sup>26</sup>

The threefold distinction of the church is very important to Owen's view of church unity in that it leads us to a threefold distinction of church unity. Just as the church itself is understood in three ways, so should the unity of the church be understood. Owen summarizes the church unity in three ways:

A man may be a member of the Church of Christ in every sense insisted on;—of the Catholic Church, by a *union with Christ, the head*; of the visible general church, by his *profession of the faith*; and of a particular congregation, by his *voluntarily associating* himself therewith, according to the will and appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

The essence of the unity of the invisible catholic church is the Holy Spirit who alone unites the church with Christ. This unity cannot be broken by human beings. Therefore, we cannot speak of schism with respect to the invisible catholic church. On the contrary, the profession of faith is the essence of the unity for the visible catholic church. As we have seen above, Owen emphasized that the profession of gospel truth is sufficient for the unity of the church. As a result, unity can be broken only by the denial of that profession.

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<sup>26</sup> For the debate on the priority of the visible catholic/particular church, see Congregationalist John Ellis's *Vindiciae Catholicae, or The Rights of Particular Churches Rescued and Asserted against Meer Notion of One Catholic, Visible, Governing Church* (London, 1647) and Presbyterian Samuel Hudson's *A Vindication of the Essence and Unity of the Church Catholike Visible, and the Priority Thereof in Regard of Particular Churches; in Answer to the Objections Made against It, both by Mr. John Ellis, Jurnior, and by That Reverend and Worthy Divine, Mr. Hooker, in his Survey of Church Discipline* (London, 1650).

<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Of Schisme*, XIII: 206. Italics original. This is the last paragraph in Owen's *Of Schism*.

Finally, the unity of the particular church can be broken by the church members' disagreement.<sup>28</sup>

Owen's negative attitude toward nation-wide ecclesiastical uniformity sometimes leads the scholars to overlook Owen's emphasis on the visibility of the church. While referring to Anglicanism as a "visiblist" ecclesiology, Martin P. Sutherland categorizes Owen's ecclesiology as an "invisiblist" ecclesiology because, for Owen, "true communion was not a matter of uniformity but of 'faith and love, and all the fruits of them, unto the glory of God.'"<sup>29</sup> The simple dichotomy of "visiblist and invisiblist" cannot be easily demonstrated. It is true that the Thirty-Nine Articles mentions only the visible catholic church without any reference to the invisible church and that the apologists for the Church of England gave more emphasis on visible rather than on invisible. Nevertheless, it is equally to be noticed that they never gave up the distinction of visible and invisible, which is the very heritage of the Reformation. Even the superiority of the invisible church was at times approved. The visible catholic church is obviously a true church but not "principally, fully, and absolutely."<sup>30</sup> In substance, the distinction of visible and invisible remained intact in the seventeenth century England.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, neither can Sutherland's simple dichotomy be applied to Owen. First of all, there was no substantial difference among all the Protestant parties as far as the unity of the invisible

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<sup>28</sup> Owen's view of the threefold unity of the church will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> Martin P. Sutherland, *Peace, Toleration and Decay: The Ecclesiology of Later Stuart Dissent* (Carlisle: Pater Noster, 2003), 83.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Field, *Of the Church*, bk. I, ch. 7 and 8. Paul Avis is incorrect in stating that the starting point of Field's ecclesiology is the visible church. It is clear that Field's discussion of the church begins with the invisible church. Cf. Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 68.

<sup>31</sup> William Allen, *Catholicism: or Several Enquiries Touching Visible Church-membership, Church-Communion, The Nature of Schism* (London, 1683), vii and 5. Allen was a Congregationalist, but he converted to a jealous Conformist after the Restoration.

church is concerned. They all highly respected the visibility of the church, whether catholic or particular. The difference was merely the way in which each party viewed the visibility of the church. As we shall see later, Owen's great emphasis on the visible unity of both the catholic and the particular church and on the visibility of the sainthood makes groundless the claim that Owen was an "invisiblist."

## 2. The Role of Scripture in Ecclesiology

Scripture increasingly played an important role in debates on ecclesiology within the boundary of Protestantism. In particular, the doctrine of Scripture was at times dealt with as a prolegomena to the doctrine of the church. For instance, the first two books of Richard Hooker's magnum opus<sup>32</sup> deal with the issue of the functions of Scripture and natural law before discussing what the church is. Hooker's format is also found in Presbyterian and Congregational works. The first part of the *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici or the Divine Right of Church-Government*, one of the finest clarifications of the original intent of the Westminster Assembly on church government,<sup>33</sup> deals at length with the concept of divine right. On the Congregational side, Thomas Goodwin's masterpiece on ecclesiology followed a pattern similar to Hooker's. We can easily notice that the issue of divine right was the subject matter of the first book of Goodwin's *Of*

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 8 vols. in *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker: With an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*, 2 vols., ed. Izaak Walton (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1865). The first four books were published in 1593; Book V, the biggest one, in 1597; Books VI and VIII in 1648 and 1651. Book VII appeared for the first time in 1662 edited by Bishop Gauden.

<sup>33</sup> The *Jus Divinum* was first published by the cooperated London ministers in 1646; the second edition in the following year; the third edition in 1654. I used David W. Hall's edition published by Naphtali Press in 1995.

*Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ.*<sup>34</sup> Both Presbyterians and Congregationalists agreed that there is a church government by divine right, yet they disagreed on the question of what it is. The disparity between the two parties was due primarily to their different interpretations of Scripture, on the basis of which each party constructed its own ecclesiology. Just as the principle of *sola scriptura* did not bring about the unity of all Protestants, so the principle of *jus divinum* did not bring about a unity between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

## 2.1 The Authority of Scripture

Article 6 of the Thirty-Nine Articles explicitly affirms the superiority of Scripture: “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an Article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”<sup>35</sup> The article needs to be carefully understood, as Scripture does not exhaust all Christian doctrines and is sufficient only for the saving doctrines, which are not specified by the Articles. Hence, the crucial question is whether or not ecclesiological issues belong to the saving doctrines. For Conformists, the answer to that question was negative. They believed that Scripture alone was not enough for determining matters of worship or church discipline. In order to support this view, John Whitgift, a Calvinist Archbishop of Canterbury in the Elizabethan era, applied the distinction between the visible and invisible church to church government. According to Whitgift, the spiritual government

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<sup>34</sup> In *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Eureka, Ca.: Tanski Publication, 1996; reprint), vol. XI. Goodwin’s *Churches of Christ* was first published in 1696.

<sup>35</sup> Bicknell, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, 125.

of the invisible church, which is necessary to salvation, is clearly stated in Scripture; on the other hand, the external government of the visible church, which is helpful but not necessary to salvation, is not so clearly stated.<sup>36</sup> Due to that silence of Scripture, such outward matters of religion should be determined by human discretion. The former should be ordained by a particular or national church and the latter should be exercised by the magistrate.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, both the bishops and the king, although inferior to the authority of Scripture, played an important part in keeping the unity of the Church of England. Her defenders did not seek merely a doctrinal unity. Both ceremonial and political uniformity were equally important to keeping the unity of the church.

It should be noted that neither Presbyterians nor Congregationalists believed that Scripture states every detail on church discipline. The Westminster Confession clearly points this out:

There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.<sup>38</sup>

This article was not changed in the Savoy Declaration at all. Nevertheless, neither Presbyterians nor Congregationalists believed that all the circumstances on church government are subject to human directions. Both parties believed that not only the being

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<sup>36</sup> John F. H. New, "Whitgift-Cartwright Controversy," in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 59 (1968): 208.

<sup>37</sup> Article 20: "The church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and Authority in controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another." Article 34: "Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies, or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying."

<sup>38</sup> Ch. I, a. 6.

but the well-being of church government was plainly prescribed by Scripture. The five Dissenting Brethren pointed this out as follows:

And although we cannot professe that sufficiency of knowledge as to be able to lay forth all those rules therein which may meet with all cases and emergencies that may or sometimes did fal out amongst us, or that may give satisfaction unto all Queres possibles to be put unto us; yet we found principles enough, not onely *fundamental* and essential to the being of a Church, but *superstructory* also for the wel-being of it, and those to us cleare and certain, and such as might well serve to preserve our Churches in peace and from offence, and would comfortably guide us to heaven.<sup>39</sup>

Presbyterians had no different point of view in this regard:

*All the Substantials of Church government under the New Testament are laid down in the Word in particular Rules, whether they are touching Officers, Ordinances, Censures, Assemblies, and the compass of their power as will appear after. And all the Circumstantials are laid down in the Word, under general Rules of Order, Decency, and Edification.* Consequently, there is a perfect and sufficient Rule for Church government laid down in the Scriptures, which is obligatory unto all.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, both Presbyterians and Congregationalists rejected the idea that fundamentals of church government are stated in Scripture, and that non-fundamentals are not. As expected, Owen, a strong defender of the principle of *jus divinum*, repeatedly emphasized that the church is a divine institution which ought to be grounded in Scripture alone. This idea is, as we shall see later, fundamental to Owen's ecclesiology.

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Goodwin et al., *An Apologeticall Narration Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament* (London, 1643), 9-10. Italics original.

<sup>40</sup> *Jus Divinum*, 53. Italics original.

## 2.2 The Divine Origin of the Church

Owen deeply deplored divisions, schisms, and contentions in the Church of England with regard to the doctrine of the church. The ultimate reason for conflicts among Protestants, Owen believed, was that each party had different ideas concerning the church. Consequently, confusion was inescapable and effective discussions on the church were impossible. The unity of the church could not be accomplished until the common notion of the church was firmly established. In order to do this, a criterion should be set up first that evaluates each concept of the church. The criterion for Owen is the church as it was instituted by God, not by human beings. Thus, Owen's first question is not "What is the true church?" but "What is the origin of the church?" In the first chapter of *Inquiry in the Original*, Owen clearly states the first and most fundamental question of the church: "Whether they are from heaven or of men, —that is, whether they are of a divine original, having a divine institution, or whether they are an ordinance or creation of men."<sup>41</sup> The answer is quite obvious: the church came from heaven. Based on this simple answer, Owen further states that the church that originated from human beings is not a church at all. In this regard, Owen holds a strong dualistic view of the church. There is no middle zone between the heavenly and worldly churches. Therefore, if one proves that a church is not divine, he would automatically prove that it is merely a human institution.

Owen's question about the origin of the church leads to the disparity between the contemporary and original churches. Owen believes that this question had never seriously been asked; Christians simply assumed that the Roman church had always been

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<sup>41</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 223. The second part of the treatise is *The True Nature of Gospel Church and its Government*, which was posthumously published in 1689.



the same as the original church. In order to refute this assumption, Owen enumerates the numerous evidences that the Roman church cannot be anything but a human institution.

- 1) The Church of Rome claimed that she is the only church. This [claim] was nothing but a human invention.
- 2) The presumed power of the Roman church had been used for satisfying human greed.
- 3) The church brutally persecuted numerous holy people only because they would not obey her commands.
- 4) The church was so arrogant that she exalted its authority over anything else, even Scripture.
- 5) The *pretense of the church* is one of the greatest causes of atheism because she produced many professed atheists. Many Christians simply believed that religion was nothing but to accept what the church suggested unto them.
- 6) There are woeful divisions and hostile controversies among Christians that result in the disgraceful scandals in Christianity.<sup>42</sup>

These evidences, for Owen, clearly prove that the Roman church was a mere human invention. The state of a church reveals what it really is.<sup>43</sup> All the evils and corruptions in the Church of Rome show that her being itself was seriously destroyed. In particular, the members of the Roman church did not know how to belong to the church and, as a result, it was filled with “professed atheists.”<sup>44</sup>

What, then, does it mean that the church is of divine origin? First, the foundation of the church was laid in the creation by God. By the light of nature we know that human beings were created for worshipping God communally and that all things ought to be done decently in this community.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted here that the light of nature was highly respected in Owen’s ecclesiology. For Owen, since the most general principles for

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<sup>42</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 224-6. Italics original.

<sup>43</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 227.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 225.

<sup>45</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 229.

the church were inherent in human nature, we need no extra revelation even in the New Testament era. The concept of *jus divinum* does not exclude the light of nature insofar as the church is also a society in general. Owen says, “Whatever is required by the *light of nature* in such societies as churches, as useful unto their order, and concluding unto their end, is *a divine institution*.”<sup>46</sup> We can freely decide many things for the church only by using the light of nature: time for worship, size of congregation, methods in preaching, etc. If a church determines precise regulations on those things, then it begins to be a human invention because those regulations are contrary to the light of nature.<sup>47</sup>

However, the light of nature alone is not enough to set up the church because it gives us no specific rules for ordinances of worship. In these matters, the church has been completely dependent upon God’s revelation throughout history. Even when God set up the church for Adam in his innocence, He “completed its order by the *sacramental* addition of the two trees,—the one of life, the other of the knowledge of good and evils.”<sup>48</sup> For Adam, the prohibition of eating of the forbidden fruits, although only one regulation, was a sufficient ecclesiastical ordinance. God also gave the Jewish church numerous directions for church ordinances. Nobody was supposed to change, remove or replace them. With the coming of Christ, many things were changed greatly. “It is God *alone*,” says Owen, “who made all these alterations and changes.”<sup>49</sup> In particular, God made Christ the only author of the church. Owen explains its meaning as follows:

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<sup>46</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 243.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 232.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 229; Also *A Brief Instruction*, XV: 472.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 230.

Our principal assertion is,—*That Christ alone is the author, institutor, and appointer, in a way of authority and legislation, of the gospel church-state, its order, rule and worship, with all things constantly and perpetually belonging thereunto, or necessary to be observed therein.*<sup>50</sup>

Since the time of the New Testament, nothing can be considered as church ordinances which were not instituted by Christ. All church ordinances, which are not expressly in Scripture, are merely a human invention.

In short, for Owen, the divine church is a church both where freedom is fully exercised according to the light of nature in regard to circumstantials in general, and where the practice of church ordinances is completely dependent upon Scripture alone. Owen's distinction between divine and human is crucial to his understanding of the unity of the church given that if a church proves to be a human invention, separation from it would be no schism.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.3 The Relationship between the Old and New Testament

One of the most difficult problems in ecclesiology is related to the fact that two very different forms of church government were respectively described in the Old and New Testaments. Is the church of the Old Testament merely a transitory type for the church of the New Testament? Does the Old still have permanent binding forces for the New? If so, what are they? Each Protestant party answered these questions in different ways. The difference came from a different understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testament churches. However, we should first notice that there was a substantial agreement within all of the English Protestants on the issue of the relationship

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<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 244. All italics original.

<sup>51</sup> This will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

of the two Testaments in general. The seventh article of the Thirty-Nine Articles states the relationship of the Old and New Testament as follows:

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ . . . Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil Precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.<sup>52</sup>

The distinction between ceremonial and civil laws that were abrogated in the new era, on the one hand, and moral law that has perennial validity for all Christians, on the other, was not at all new in the seventeenth century. This threefold and dichotomic distinction had already been developed by the medieval scholastics and was also already fully accepted by the Reformers. No mainline Protestant party would disagree on the above article. However, it was difficult to apply that general principle to ecclesiological issues which could pertain to ceremonial and civil laws as well as moral law.

For Conformists, the model for the Church of England was not the primitive church but the Jewish church of the Old Testament. When we look at the Old Testament carefully, however, we see that it does not provide a single permanent model of the church. The form of the Old Testament church continued to change according to its circumstances. When the Israelites were in Egypt and Babylon, the form of the church was drastically different from that during the reign of King David. Which one can be a model for the Church of England? The answer for Conformists was the latter because England was not a heathen but a Christian kingdom that was ruled by the Christian king

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<sup>52</sup> Bicknell, *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, 127. The Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration substantially agree on this point. The difference is only that the Confession and Declaration more clearly and fully described what the Thirty-Nine Articles only briefly stated. See the chapter on the law of God.

and his magistrates.<sup>53</sup> The same is true of the New Testament church, which cannot be considered a full-grown church in the sense that it does not have the supreme magistrate as its protector. As far as church government is concerned in the thought of Conformists, the Old Testament is superior to the New.

Conformists also supported royal supremacy and hierarchical episcopacy on the basis of the church of the Old Testament as it is prescribed by the Mosaic law. The relationship between Moses and Aaron was one of many favorite analogies used to describe the relationship between the king and bishops.<sup>54</sup> For Conformists, significant Old Testament figures such as Moses and David are the types not only for Christ, but also for all Christian kings. Likewise, episcopal hierarchy was grounded not only in the New Testament church, where the superiority of the apostles was exercised over other ecclesiastical offices, but also in the Old Testament church where priests maintained superiority over the Levites.<sup>55</sup>

Presbyterians were not much different from Conformists in that they viewed the church of the Old Testament in a very positive way. Like Conformists, most Presbyterians were strong supporters of the idea of a national church. Still, for Presbyterians, the Old Testament church was more than a shadow of the New Testament church. Hence, Presbyterians criticized Congregationalists who placed much emphasis on discontinuity between the two Testaments, claimed for the superiority of the New over the Old Testament in ecclesiology, and thus downplayed the relevance of the Old Testament to the New. Presbyterians insisted that rules and directions of the New

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of Lawes*, VIII, i, 3.

<sup>54</sup> John Copleston, *Moses next to God and Aaron next to Moses subordinated and subservient* (London, 1661).

<sup>55</sup> Copleston, *Moses Next to God and Aaron*, 21.

Testament for church government should be supplemented by the Old Testament. The imperfection of the New Testament can be proved even by Congregationalists themselves. Thomas Edwards points out that just as the orthodox doctrine of infant baptism cannot be proved by the New Testament alone, neither can Congregational doctrines such as ordination by the people without officers and church covenant be proved from the New Testament alone.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Presbyterians also made a careful distinction between the two Testaments. For instance, George Gillespie, the eminent Scottish presbyterian, viewed the church and the state of Israel as clearly distinct on the basis of his interpretation of the Old Testament.<sup>57</sup> The church of the Old Testament was a good example for the New Testament church to follow. This does not mean that every element of the Old Testament church has permanent value that binds the New Testament church. Gillespie argues that the church of the Old Testament can be viewed from two distinctive perspectives: it was a ‘church,’ but at the same time it was ‘Jewish.’<sup>58</sup> The Old Testament church as ‘Jewish’ was abrogated in the New Testament era and was no longer available, but as ‘church’ it still contains force to bind the New Testament church. The Jewish church had the high priest and the four other offices: Priests, Levites, Doctors, and Elders. The high priest is a Christ—type, and thus this office was abrogated. However, the four remaining offices

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Antapologia*, 56.

<sup>57</sup> George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming; or, The Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated*, ed. David C. Lachman (Harrisonburg,: Sprinkle Publications, 1985), especially, bk. 1, ch. 2.

<sup>58</sup> George Gillespie, *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland in the Points of Ruling Elders, and of the Authority of Presbyterian and Synods* (Edinburgh, 1641), 17ff.

were not Jewish, but belonged to the church as such, and are a perpetual ecclesiastical institution.<sup>59</sup>

Like other Congregationalists, Owen's ecclesiology is based upon his view of the fundamental difference between the two Testaments. That difference for Owen is primarily grounded in the difference of two covenants: the covenant established through Moses at Mount Sinai and the covenant established by Christ. In his exposition of Hebrews 8:9, Owen numerates as many as sixteen significant differences between the two covenants.<sup>60</sup> Owen likens the relationship between the Old and New to that between the sun and the moon. Owen sets forth:

The lights which God maketh are sufficient to rule the seasons for which they are ordained. As, in creating of the world, God 'made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night'; so, in the erection of the new world of his church, he set up two great lights, the lesser light of the Old Testament to guide the night, the dark space of time under the *law*, and the greater light of the New Testament to rule the glorious day of the *gospel*.<sup>61</sup>

According to Owen, the Old and New Testament belong to different dispensations. The former is governed by the moon (law) and the latter by the sun (grace). It follows that the church under law is inferior to the church under grace. In this regard, it is interesting to again compare the Westminster Confession with the Savoy Declaration. The reference of the "people of Israel" as a "church under age" in the Confession, as Carter points out, was

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<sup>59</sup> Gillespie, *Assertion of the Government*, 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, VI: 87-96.

<sup>61</sup> Owen, *Duty of Pastors*, XIII: 12. Italics mine. *Duty of Pastor* was written when Owen was still a Presbyterian. Therefore, Owen seemed to have a strong view of the dissimilarity of the Old and New Testaments before he was a Congregationalist.

omitted in the Declaration.<sup>62</sup> For Presbyterians, the difference between Old and the New is simply like that between a young man and an adult. For Owen, however, the difference is more than that. The difference is that of the sun and the moon. The Old Testament as the moon is no longer needed in the New—the daytime. Owen asserted the temporality of the Old Testament and the excellence of the New as follows:

The whole church-state of the Jews, with all the ordinances and worship of it, and the priviledges annexed unto it, depended wholly on the covenant that God made with them at Sinai. But introduction of this new priesthood whereof the apostle is discoursing, did necessarily abolish that covenant, and put an end unto all sacred ministrations that belonged unto it. And this could not well be offered unto them without the supply of another covenant, which should excel the former in privileges and advantages.<sup>63</sup>

For Owen, Christ came as a new priest, who is not compatible with the old system of priesthood that was grounded in the old covenant. With the coming of Christ, a new epoch began and the old Jewish system ceased to exist. This can be supported by the fact that Jesus came “in the fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4) and He came “in these last days” (Heb. 1:2). Most commentators interpreted the phrases “the fullness of the time” and “the last days” as the times of the gospel. However, Owen convincingly argues that the phases should be understood to refer to the last days with respect to the church of the Old Testament.<sup>64</sup> The coming of Christ heralds both the end of the Jewish church and the beginning of the new church, which became “transformed into her eternal state, perfect in

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<sup>62</sup> Rembert Byrd Carter, “The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy with Special Reference to Dr. Thomas Goodwin and the Years 1640-1660” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1961), 98.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, VI: 49.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *THEΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΑ*, 594. *THEΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ* has been Owen’s “forgotten book.” It was published in Latin in 1661 has not recently been translated. I cited from Stephen P. Westcott’s translation, *Biblical Theology* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994). See also *Exposition of Hebrews*, III: 11-13.



its nature and thenceforward immutable.”<sup>65</sup> Consequently, only the church of the New Testament is the permanent type that all of the later generations should follow.

### 3. The Nature of the Church

#### 3.1 Christ’s Presence in the Church by the Holy Spirit

For Owen, pneumatology takes a significant place in ecclesiology. According to Owen, it is the Holy Spirit that prepares the two bodies of Christ. Just as the natural body of Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, so his mystical body—the church—was formed by him too.<sup>66</sup> The former is the beginning of the new creation and the latter is the perfection of it.<sup>67</sup> For this reason, Owen calls the Holy Spirit the principal builder or architect of the church.<sup>68</sup> Owen even emphasizes that the presence of Christ by the Holy Spirit belongs to an article of faith and thus its denial leads to overthrow the whole gospel.<sup>69</sup>

Owen maintains that the Holy Spirit is the decisive factor that distinguishes the Old Testament church from the New. Although new ordinances were established by Christ in the new dispensation, there would be no real difference between the Old and New Testament without the work of the Holy Spirit. Owen points out the importance of the Holy Spirit in this matter as follows:

There is, indeed, a great difference between their [the Jews’] *ordinances* and ours. . . . But *our* ordinances with *their* spirit would be *carnal* also. The principal

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<sup>65</sup> Owen, *THEOLOGIA*, 593.

<sup>66</sup> Owen, *IINEYMATOLOGIA* or *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, III: 159-206.

<sup>67</sup> Owen, *IINEYMATOLOGIA*, III: 207.

<sup>68</sup> Owen, *Branch of the Lord the Beauty of Zion*, VIII: 287. The apostles and prophets are the secondary and instrumental builders.

<sup>69</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 500-1.

difference lies in the *administration of the Spirit* for the due performance of gospel worship by virtue of these gifts, bestowed on men for that very end.<sup>70</sup>

In the new dispensation, the church is primarily a spiritual community. The outward ordinances of the New Testament church are essentially dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, the being of the church would be in danger, given that the Holy Spirit is the means by which all Christ's promises are fulfilled. Owen summarizes the relationship of the Holy Spirit and the church as follows:

In brief, then, where there is no participation of the promise of Christ to send the Spirit to abide with us always, no interest in that covenant wherein God engageth that his Spirit shall not depart from us for ever, and so no presence of Christ to make the word and ordinances of worship living, useful, effectual in their administration, unto their proper ends, there is no church-state, whatever outward order they may be.<sup>71</sup>

For Owen, as far as ecclesiology is concerned, the Holy Spirit is important because Christ is present in the church through the Spirit's works. Before Christ ascended into heaven, he promised the disciples that he would be with them always until the end of the world. The presence of Christ is essential to the existence of the church. The church is nothing other than where Christ is. Owen says that the presence of Christ is "that which makes the church to be what it is, —a Congregation essentially distinct from all other societies and assemblies of men."<sup>72</sup> Consequently, "if Christ be not present with them," says Owen, "they are no church, nor can all the powers under heaven make them so to be.

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<sup>70</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 421. Italics original.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 501.

<sup>72</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 499.

And when any church loseth the especial presence of Christ, it ceaseth so to be.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit is paramount to the existence of the church.

Owen is aware that many churches failed to sincerely inquire into whether Christ is really present with them; they just assumed that He was with them. The outward seals of the presence of Christ should be distinguished from Christ’s presence as such. In this respect, Owen relativizes the importance of the marks of the true church. It is true that the pure preaching and the right administration of the sacraments are the external means by which Christ is present with the church. Yet, those means alone cannot automatically guarantee Christ’s presence. For instance, the Jewish church, in which the two marks were not found, was a true church. Only when that church rejected Christ and the catholic faith, did it become no church.<sup>74</sup>

According to Owen, the Word and sacraments need to be enlivened by the Holy Spirit’s works such as covenant, gospel ministry and the spiritual gifts. All these are equally necessary to the preservation and continuation of the church. Once more, Owen uses the distinction between the visible and invisible church in order to defend the importance of the Holy Spirit’s works to the church. While the invisible church is formed by the saving grace of the Holy Spirit, the external form of the visible church is structured by the spiritual gifts.<sup>75</sup> Without the former, a church becomes no church; without the latter, it becomes a church without order. In sum, ecclesiology for Owen is inseparable from pneumatology.

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<sup>73</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 499

<sup>74</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 500.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Two Discourses Concerning the Holy Spirit and His Work*, IV: 503.

### 3.2 Christ as the Immediate Head of the Church

Richard Daniels is correct when he describes Owen's ecclesiology as "Christ-centered."<sup>76</sup> The centrality of Christology in ecclesiology is no wonder, given that the body of Christ is a favorite biblical reference to the church (Cf. Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18). For this reason, head and body had long been considered one of the most important biblical metaphors to describe the relationship between Christ and the church. No Christian could expressly deny the headship of Christ over the church, since a denial of that headship makes one a heretic. The headship of Christ, however, was not always understood in the same way. Therefore, the real question is "In what way is Christ the head of the church?" The answer to this varies according to different religious parties.

The difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics on the headship of the church was chiefly related to the issue of the papacy. Romanists claimed the pope to be the visible head of the church while not denying Christ as the invisible head of the church.<sup>77</sup> It seemed to Protestants, however, that the church of the papists was a monster with one body and two heads.<sup>78</sup> For this reason, Protestants entirely rejected the distinction between the invisible and visible head because that distinction, they believed, would do great harm to the honor of Christ's headship. Thus, Protestants proclaimed Christ *alone* was the head of the church. The pope as the universal governor of the church

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Daniels, *The Christology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2004), 450-480.

<sup>77</sup> The ecclesiastical distinction between internal and external headship was already made during the High Middle Ages. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Daniel Cawdrey, *The Inconsistency of the Independent Way, With Scripture and It Self* (London, 1651), 51. We can also see Owen criticize the Romanist idea of the double head in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government*, XVI: 187. The Romanist reference to the pope as a visible head is the main reason that he was labeled "Anti-Christ" by Protestants.

was considered to be a usurper because only Christ deserved the title. Protestants fought for the true church government in order to protect Christ as the true king of the church.

The concept of *solus Christus* was taken over by all Protestants, but they did not all understand this concept in the same way. For instance, Conformists called the Christian king the head of the church and sometimes called bishops the heads of the church while retaining the Protestant principle of *solus Christus*. They denied the headship of the pope for the universal church, but did not reject the idea of the headship of a king or bishops over a particular church.

On the contrary, Presbyterians and Congregationalists did not approve any kind of headship of the church except for Christ's. Both the Presbyterian *The Form of Church-Government* and the Congregational *Of the Institution of Churches and the Order Appointed in Them by Jesus Christ*<sup>79</sup> solemnly declared the sole headship of Christ from the very beginning. For Congregationalists as for Presbyterians, church government or institution is a matter of how to apply the headship of Christ to the church. In this application, however, we can see a slight but important difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. In contrast to Presbyterians, Congregationalists emphasized that the headship of Christ should be "directly" exercised to particular churches, without any mediation such as classis, synod, or episcopacy. To Congregationalists, the Presbyterian hierarchy seemed to infringe upon the headship of Christ. For this reason,

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<sup>79</sup> *The Form* was the product of the Westminster Assembly and *Of the Institution* was written at the Savoy Conference in which Owen played a leading part.

Congregationalists tended to more clearly define the meaning of *solus Christus* by adding the idea of “immediacy.”<sup>80</sup>

For Congregationalists, Christ is the immediate head of the church, not only in terms of internal or spiritual influence, but also in terms of external governance. They believed that the external ordinances of the church must be established and ruled immediately by Christ in order for Christ to be the head of the church in the true sense. Owen also emphasized this point when he stated that “the original of church-state is directly, immediately, and solely from *Jesus Christ*; he alone is the author, contriver, and institutor of it.”<sup>81</sup>

The meaning of the immediate headship needs to be carefully determined, given that Christ is no longer on earth. Owen also recognized this problem by saying that “When I say it [the church] is immediately and solely from him, I do not intend that in and by his own person, or in his personal ministry here in the earth.”<sup>82</sup> In fact, the apostles played a key role in establishing the original church. However, the apostles’ works for the church should be considered to be contributed to Christ Himself in two senses:

First, it was immediately from him that they received *revelations* of what did belong unto this church-state, and what was to be prescribed therein. They never did, neither jointly nor severally, once endeavor, in their own wisdom, or from their own invention, or by their own authority, to add or put into the church-state, as of perpetual use, and belonging unto it as such, either less or more, any one thing greater or less whatever.

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Constitution, Right, Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ*, XI: 302-308.

<sup>81</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 234. Italics original.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 234.

Second, the *authority* whereby they acted in the institution of the church in its order, whereon the consciences of all believers were obliged to submit thereunto, and to comply with it in a way of obedience, was the authority of Christ himself, acted in them and by them, 2 Cor. 1: 24, 4:5.<sup>83</sup>

In no sense can the apostles deserve the title “the head of the church” since their leadership depends entirely on the full revelation and authority for the church that they received immediately from Christ. The immediate headship of the church does not exclude the leadership of the apostles and other officers.

The concept of the immediate headship of Christ has a great effect on the understanding of church government. First of all, it excludes the magistrate from church discipline because magistracy was not instituted as a church ordinance by Christ. In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between the Old Testament and the New. In the Old Testament, a magistrate could exercise his power to protect the Jewish church from her enemies, to appoint some church leaders, and to make some additions to outward worship only because, as in the case of the apostles, he received immediate revelation from God.<sup>84</sup> In the New Testament era, however, the magistrate no longer had a place in the church because immediate divine revelation was finished perfectly and completed by the coming of Christ.

Christ’s immediate headship also denies all kinds of hierarchical church governments such as authoritarian synods or bishops. The authority of the church, Owen says, “is not only ascribed to Jesus Christ in Scripture but it is *enclosed* unto him, so as

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<sup>83</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 234. Italics original.

<sup>84</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 239.

that no other can have any interest in it.”<sup>85</sup> As a result, the members of the church as Christ’s body immediately receive the power and authority from its head—Christ.

Christ’s immediate headship also has an influence on the relationship between the church officers and her members. According to Congregationalists, the authority to which the church officers hold is mediated by the church members who received it directly from Christ. In his explaining the meaning of this immediacy, Thomas Goodwin says about the relationship between the ministers and the church members that “Ministers make not a church, nor are they or their power requisite to the first gathering of it.” Furthermore, “Two or three saints have an immediate power from Christ to begin this fellowship.”<sup>86</sup>

Finally, Christ’s immediate headship provided the Congregationalists with the theoretical foundation that encourages them to establish their own church without external supervision or guidance. Congregationalists did not have to get some official permission from a higher authority in order to establish a church. This practice of Congregationalists caused a schism in the middle of the seventeenth century, and thus was severely criticized by all their opponents

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<sup>85</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 237. Italics Original.

<sup>86</sup> Goodwin, *Of the Constitution, Right, Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ*, XI: 303.



### 3.3 Matter and Form of the Church<sup>87</sup>

In early 1650, amidst the decisive the war between Cromwell’s army and Scotland, Owen twice preached the same sermon based on Isaiah 56:7 (“For mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people”).<sup>88</sup> He effectively used the metaphor of a house to explain the nature of the church. Like a house, the church consists of three important elements: the foundation, the stone (matter), and adhesive relation (form). The foundation of the church is Christ, yet this foundation alone cannot be called a church; a building should be set upon the foundation. The building of the church is made of the living stones—the visible saints. As with a house, the stones by themselves are merely a heap, which cannot make a building. In order to be a building, the stones must be fit together.<sup>89</sup> In the same way, the visible saints—the matter of the church—should be firmly united in covenant in order to be a building of the church. This covenant is the form of the church while the visible saints are its matter.

In Owen’s later works, we can clearly see that the distinction of matter and form is critical to understanding the nature of the church. Owen states:

The church may be considered either as unto its *essence*, constitution, and being, or as unto its *power* and *order*, when it is organized. And unto its essence and being, its constituent parts are its *matter* and *form*. . . By the matter of the church, we understand the persons whereof the church doth consist, with their qualifications; and by its form, the reason, cause, and way of that kind of relation

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<sup>87</sup> Owen’s use of the terms “matter” and “form” or “manner” indicates that he is not hesitate to use philosophical concepts to more clearly explain the meaning of biblical terms. He does not entirely reject use of reason in theology. For Owen, philosophy is a useful means by which we refine our understanding of divine revelation.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *The Branch of the Lord the Beauty of Zion*, VIII: 280-309. One was preached at Berwick, the other at Edinburgh. Both cities are located in Scotland. The basic theme of the sermon was about what the church is and how to build it.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *The Branch of the Lord the Beauty of Zion*, VIII: 287. In this sermon, Owen does not explain explicitly what the manner is. Owen does not seem to accept the concept of church covenant wholeheartedly at this time.

among them which gives them the being of a church, and therewithal an interest in all that belongs unto a church, either privilege or power, as such.<sup>90</sup>

Owen's use of the terms matter and form in the doctrine of the church was not totally new. The basic concepts of the terms were already adopted by Separatists<sup>91</sup> and were highly developed and widely used by Congregationalists. For instance, Thomas Hooker, in his defense of Congregationalism, made a distinction between "the efficient cause of the church" on the one hand, and "the formal and material causes of the church" on the other.<sup>92</sup> The efficient cause is no doubt the holy Trinity; the material cause is visible saints; and the formal cause is the mutual consent of church members. Although the distinction of matter and form concerning the church was not favored by the opponents of Congregationalism, it was not entirely rejected as such; in fact, some Anglican divines used that distinction in order to defend the Church of England against Roman Catholics. George Jenney explained about the matter and form of the church:

The matter of the Church is the soules and bodies of men, which are reasonable and voluntary agents; for no creatures can be of this body and societie, but such as have reason and will: and the forme of it is the lawes and doctrine of salvation reveiled in the Word of God.<sup>93</sup>

According to this explanation, the concepts of the matter and form of the church might seem to be too broad. The matter of the church is defined as human beings; not as believers; and the form of the church is defined as the content of the church; not as the act

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<sup>90</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 11. Italics original.

<sup>91</sup> George Selement, "The Covenant Theology of English Separatism and the Separation of the Church and State," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 67.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (London, 1648), ch. 2.

<sup>93</sup> George Jenney, *A Catholike Conference, betweene A Protestant and a Papist, about the Church visible and invisible* (London, 1626), 59.

of faith. By contrast, Separatists developed stricter and narrower concepts of matter and form of the church. In fact, Separatists condemned the Church of England as false because of her failure to recognize the visible saints and covenantal unity. Over and against this criticism, the defenders of the Church of England claimed that both matter and form were well-preserved in their church. In his criticism of Separatism, Richard Bernard maintained that the matter of the church should be distinguished into two kinds: good and bad true matters.<sup>94</sup> Some members of the Church of England may be “bad,” but they are still the true matter of the church. Bernard also argued that the Church of England was covenanted by the Word of God, the ordained ministers, and the sacraments, which are the form of the church.<sup>95</sup> It follows that the Church of England is a true church with respect to form as well as matter.

### ***3.3.1 Matter of the Church: Visible Saints***<sup>96</sup>

In reciting the Apostles Creed, the Western Church had long professed that she believed in *communio sanctorum*. However, the phrase had at times been interpreted in different ways due to its ambiguity. *Communio sanctorum* could be interpreted as “fellowship of earthly believers with one another”; “fellowship of earthly believers with the saints in heaven”; “fellowship of the saints in heaven with each other”; or

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<sup>94</sup> Richard Bernard, *Plaine Evidences: Church of England Apostolicall, the Separation Schismaticall* (London, 1610), 276.

<sup>95</sup> Bernard, *Plaine Evidence*, 277.

<sup>96</sup> As a matter of fact, it is a little surprising to see that Owen does not use the phrase “visible saints” except once in his *Country Essay* on church government. Since its concept is clearly apparent in Owen’s ecclesiastical works, however, I will use the phrase for convenience.

“participation in the sacraments.”<sup>97</sup> In the time of the Reformation, the concept of the saints became a crucial issue between Protestants and Roman Catholics as the latter advocated the invocation and worship of saints. Roman Catholics tended to reserve the title of saints to particular individuals whose eminent holiness was certified by church authority; other church members were considered simply believers. For instance, Aquinas supports the view of “saints” as a nobler group than “believers” on the basis of his own exposition on Ephesians 1:1, “To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.”

Aquinas comments on this verse:

Either [this could mean], I, Paul, write about morals to those who are holy through the exercise of virtue; and about faith to those who believe with true knowledge. Or, [it may mean], to the saints who are the elders are perfect [members], and to the faithful who are less experienced and imperfect. They are said to believe in Christ Jesus and not in their own deeds.<sup>98</sup>

By contrast, Calvin identified ‘saints’ with ‘the faithful’ in his commentary on the same text that Aquinas used above. “No man,” says Calvin, “is a believer who is not also a saint; and on the other hand, no man is a saint who is not a believer.”<sup>99</sup> There is no significant difference, for Calvin, between saints and believers. As a result, the members of the church were identified as saints as well as believers. In Calvin’s exposition of First Corinthians 1:2, we can see the same idea. Calvin interprets the phrase “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” as follows:

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<sup>97</sup> Stephen Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964), 69. The *communio* could also be interpreted as “participation in something,” “The *communio* that consists of the *sancti*,” or “the participation which the saints have.”

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb, O.C.S.O (Albany: Magi Books, 1966), 43.

<sup>99</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians*, vol. 21, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993; reprint), 196.

He [Paul] points out what sort of persons ought to be reckoned among the true members of the Church, and who they are that belong of right to her communion. For if you do not by holiness of life show yourself to be a Christian, you may indeed be *in* the Church, and pass undetected, but *of* it you cannot be. Hence all must be *sanctified in Christ*, who would be reckoned among the people of God. Now the term *sanctification* denotes *separation*. This takes place in us when we are regenerated by the Spirit to newness of life, that we may serve God and not the world.<sup>100</sup>

Calvin makes a distinction between those who are *in* the church and those who are *of* the church. Not all who are in the church belong to the church, yet those who are of the church are considered saints. It is to be noted that the saints are visible since they are reckoned to be people of God by their holy lives. Calvin's understanding of church membership is essentially in accord with Owen's in two fundamental points: sanctification is crucial for a person's entrance into the church; and regeneration, which is distinct from sanctification, is necessary for the true members of the church.

Owen follows Calvin in that he rejected the Romanists' distinction between saints and believers. In *The Greater Catechism*, Owen defines the communion of saints as "an holy conjunction between all God's people, wrought by their participation of the same Spirit, whereby we are all made members of that one body whereof Christ is the head."<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the word "saints" does not refer only to a special group of the church but rather to all its members. In his exposition of the phrase "holy brethren" in Hebrews 3:1-2, Owen writes:

Believers are all related one unto another in the nearest and strictest bond of an equal relation. They are all brethren, "holy brethren."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians*, 52. Italics original.

<sup>101</sup> Owen, *The Greater Catechism*, I: 492.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, III: 496.

Again,

All true and real professors of the gospel are sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and made truly and really holy.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, for Owen, there is no substantial difference between saints and believers. They are only different names that refer to the same thing. In this respect, Owen inherits the Reformers' identification of saints and believers.

In what sense, then, are all the members of the church holy? Owen does not believe that the mere external separation from the world makes them holy. The holiness of believers is "internal, real sanctification and purity."<sup>104</sup> For Owen, a mere profession of true faith is not enough for the membership of the church. That profession must be sufficiently sincere and only the real holiness qualifies a person to be a member of the church. Owen says:

First, If they [professors of gospels] do not so profess it as not to be convinced by any gospel means of the contrary, they are not to be esteemed professors at all. . . . Secondly, If that holiness which men profess in their lives be not real in their hearts, they have no right to the privileges that attend profession, John iii. 5.<sup>105</sup>

In sum, for Owen, the church is the society that consists of the holy ones in a true and real sense. Nobody can be a member of the church without holiness. It follows that holiness is highly regarded with respect to church membership.

Church membership was not a serious issue at all in the Church of England where nearly all the citizens were identified as her members. It was generally assumed that one

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<sup>103</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, III: 497.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, III: 493.

<sup>105</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, III: 497.

becomes a member of the church upon receiving the sacrament of baptism and that profession of faith alone is sufficient for granting him that sacrament. Sincerity of that confession, although highly valued, was not considered to be necessary for granting the membership of the church. In Christian states, moreover, most people received the membership of the church through infant baptism. As far as the membership of the church is concerned, there was no significant difference between Roman Catholics and magisterial Protestants. However, Congregationalists wanted to overcome this formalism by strictly confining church membership to the visible saints.

Robert Bellarmine is strongly opposed to the idea that proof of a spiritual virtue is required for admission to the church. Bellarmine states:

We also believe that in the Church are found all the virtues; faith, hope, and charity, and all the rest. However, for anyone to be called in some sense a part of the true Church of which the Scriptures speak, we do not think that any internal virtue is required, but only an external profession of faith and communication of the sacraments, which can be perceived by the sense themselves. For the Church is an assembly of men, as visible and palpable as the assembly of the Roman people, or the Venetians.<sup>106</sup>

According to Bellarmine, all the members of the church who profess the same catholic faith are “visible believers.” It is to be noted, however, that for Catholicism, a profession of faith alone is not sufficient for preserving church membership. Obedience to lawful ministers, especially, to the Roman pontiff as the vicar of Christ on earth, is also considered to be necessary for a member to keep his membership. Although one enters

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<sup>106</sup> Cited from John Hardon, “Robert Bellarmine’s Concept of the Church,” 121. See also Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 14. In general, Protestants did not require some proof for the internal virtue for the church membership. They may have been stricter in exercising excommunication than Roman Catholics. In admission of a member into the church, there was no significant difference between them.

the church through the gate of baptism, he must keep his membership by obedience to lawful ecclesiastical authorities. Bellarmine says:

Wee enter into this congregation by baptisme, which is as the doore of the church. And to be in the Church, it doeth not suffice to bee baptized, but it is needefull to beleue and confesse the holie faith and law of Christ, as the Pastors and Preachers of the same Church do teach vs. Neither doth this suffice, but it is necessarie to obey the chiefe Bishop of Rome, as Vicar of Christ, to wit, to acknowledge and hold him for Chiefe Superiour and Vicar of Christ.<sup>107</sup>

When Protestants separated from the Church of Rome, they still kept the significance of faith and obedience to church membership. Of course, obedience to the pope was replaced with obedience to Christ. This meant that not only external confession but also moral life was considered to be important to church membership. Protestants called the members of the church “saints” as well as “believers”; the question, however, was how to define the term saints. For Conformists, members of the church should be holy, but that holiness was a “relative” holiness<sup>108</sup> because it is determined by relationship with God. The saints were holy not because they had something holy in themselves but because they had a holy relationship with God. Given that the members of the church are united to God by covenant, it is covenant that makes one holy.

The Westminster Divines describes the membership of a particular church as follows:

Particular churches in the primitive times were made up of visible saints, viz. of such as, being of age, professed faith in Christ, and obedience unto Christ,

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<sup>107</sup> Bellarmine, *Ample Declaration of the Christian Doctrine*, 59.

<sup>108</sup> William Allen, *Catholicism, or, Several Enquiries Touching Visible Church-membership, Church-communion, the Nature of Schism, and the Usefulness of Natural Constitutions for the Furtherance of Religion* (London, 1683), 64.



according to the rules of faith and life taught by Christ and his Apostles; and of their children.<sup>109</sup>

It is worth noting that the phrase “visible saints” has remained in the Westminster Standards’ “Form of Church Government.” Presbyterians do not oppose the term “visible saints” as such and thus it was not a Congregational term alone. The real difference between the two parties lies in their approach to defining that term. Satisfied with the qualifications for visible saints as described above—faith in Christ and obedience to Him, an anonymous Presbyterian rhetorically asked, “Doth the Scripture require more then this?”<sup>110</sup> Like Congregationalists, Presbyterians believed that their concept of visible saints is more faithful to Scripture than Congregationalists.

In contrast, Congregationalists claimed that the Presbyterian concept of visible saints resulted in promiscuous admissions to the church, by which church discipline was significantly corrupted. Thus, Congregationalists tried to gather a church by admitting sincere believers alone. The issue between Congregationalists and their opponents was whether or not the Congregational approach to church membership is a Christian duty or a necessary condition without which nobody becomes a member of the church.<sup>111</sup>

Owen believes that one of the key messages of Scripture is that the church should consist of the members who possess personal righteousness. Owen says:

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<sup>109</sup> Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, ed., *The Confession of Faith; The Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, 398.

<sup>110</sup> *A Vindication of the Presbyteriall-Government and Ministry* (London, 1649), 134. *A Vindication* was largely written by Edmund Calamy, one of the most prominent English Presbyterians. The work was published by the London Provincial Assembly. Cf. Roger Thomas, “Rise of the Reconcilers” in C. Gordon Bolam ed., *The English Presbyterians* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1968), 59.

<sup>111</sup> William Allen, *Catholicism*, 71.

But of all the prophecies concerning the Church, nothing occurs more frequently, nor is insisted on more emphatically, than the absolute necessity for personal righteousness on the part of its members.<sup>112</sup>

Owen strongly defends the Congregational way of church membership. For Owen, personal righteousness is not an option, but an absolute necessity for all the members of the church.

### ***3.3.2 Visible Saints as the Regenerate***

Regeneration is central to Owen's ecclesiology in that it is essentially connected with the issue of church membership. For Owen, visible saints, the matter of the church, are those who are born again. In order to support his view, Owen reiterates John 3:5, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Regeneration is necessarily required for the entrance to the kingdom of God. "Evangelical theology," says Owen, "requires that the true church consists of none but the regenerate."<sup>113</sup> Owen says that regeneration is "the basis of evangelical theology."<sup>114</sup>

Owen defines regeneration as:

the infusion of a *new, real, spiritual* principle into the soul and its faculties, of spiritual life, light, holiness, and righteousness, disposed unto and suited for the destruction or expulsion of a contrary, inbred, habitual principle of sin and enmity against God, enabling unto all acts of holy obedience, and so in order of nature antecedent unto them.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Owen, *THEOLOGIA*, 652.

<sup>113</sup> Owen, *THEOLOGIA*, 651

<sup>114</sup> Owen, *THEOLOGIA*, 636.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *IINEYMATOLOGIA or A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, III: 219.

Owen's definition stands opposed to the Catholic and Socinian views of regeneration. The former identified regeneration with baptism and the latter with a moral change. In his discussion of regeneration, Owen places a strong emphasis on the distinction between regeneration and baptism. Baptism is a sign whereas regeneration is the substance to which it refers. The identification of baptism with regeneration, for Owen, could bring a serious problem into the church because it is inescapable to admitting a great number of hypocrites into the church. However, Owen does not imagine an ideal church which consists of the perfect alone. The regenerate are clearly distinct from the innocent.

Owen's identification of the visible saints with the regenerate causes a serious problem given that regeneration, as Owen's definition of regeneration itself affirms it, is purely a divine action which works in the human soul. Therefore, regeneration is purely a spiritual reality. From this arises a most difficult question: "Who can tell the regenerate from the non-regenerate?"

First, Owen rejects the idea that baptism is sufficient for proving whether or not one is regenerated. If that idea is true, then baptism can be administered to anyone such as drunkards and prostitutes; baptism has no effect if the baptized person does not fully obey the law of Christ. In that case, that baptism is no baptism in the sight of God in regard to "the real communication of grace and acceptance with him"; nor is it baptism in the sight of the church in regard to "a participation of the external rights and privileges of a regenerate state."<sup>116</sup>

Second, Owen makes a distinction between regeneration in itself and its fruit. The former is completely hidden from man but the latter is discernable. Owen sets forth:

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<sup>116</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 13.

God alone is judge concerning this regeneration, as unto its *internal, real principle and state* in the souls of men . . . whereupon the participation of all the spiritual advantages of the covenant grace doth depend. The church is judge of its evidences and fruits in their external demonstration, as unto a participation of *the outward privileges of a regenerate state*, and no farther, Acts 8:13.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the fact that God alone is the searcher of men's hearts, Owen does not degrade the importance of the judgment of charity<sup>118</sup> by which the visible saints could be recognized by human beings. Each congregation should try their best to identify the regenerate using the judgment of charity.

### ***3.3.3 The Formal Cause of the Church: Church Covenant***

The word "covenant" is a biblical term that is frequently found throughout Scripture. It is no wonder, therefore, that the word was widely used by theologians. The concept of covenant, however, had not fully been developed and systematized until the Reformation. With the help of the extensive study of the numerous covenant-related passages in Scripture, Calvinists made covenant one of the important centers for the whole theology.<sup>119</sup> Presbyterians and Congregationalists, both as the heirs of the Reformed theology, have no significantly differing view on covenant theology. The

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 13. Italics original.

<sup>118</sup> Owen uses a concept of "the judgment of charity" without defining it. Cf. Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 21. The basic concept of the judgment of charity had already been well developed by medieval scholastics (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa*, II-II, q. 60, a. 4). We can also see the same idea in William Ames' *Conscience*. The judgment of charity, which is distinct from the judgment of prudence, pertains to judging a person. According to this judgment, we could consider a person with favour unless there are clear evidences to the contrary. Congregationalists adopted the judgment of charity and applied it to identifying the regenerate. The judgment of charity was Congregationalists' best answer to the tricky question of how to identify the regenerate. Cf. John Norton, *The Answer to the Whole Set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollonius*, trans. Douglas Horton, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard, 1958), 39. For the judgment of charity in the seventeenth century New England, see also Baird Tipson's "The Invisible Saints: the 'Judgment of Charity' in the early New England Churches" in *Church History* 44 (1975): 460-471.

<sup>119</sup> Richard Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 175-188.

Savoy Declaration changes no phrase in its dealing with the section on covenant in the Westminster Confession.<sup>120</sup> The distinction between the covenant of grace and the covenant of works was accepted with no reservation by Congregationalists. The main difference between the two parties is that Congregationalists apply the basic idea of covenant to a particular congregation.<sup>121</sup> This is called church covenant, in which the members of a congregation should be united not only with God but also among themselves by a solemn commitment. Therefore, Congregationalists claim that not only a mere profession of faith but also the mutual commitment of church members was necessary to the being of the church. In doing so, Congregationalists make church covenant one of the central concepts in ecclesiology.

The basic idea of church covenant was for the first time fully expressed by Robert Browne.<sup>122</sup> Church covenant was so important to Separatists that the lack of that covenant was used as one of the major grounds for justifying their separation from the Church of England. For this reason, Congregationalists were criticized as Brownists by their opponents. In refutation of this criticism, Congregationalists were not reluctant to admit that their doctrine of church covenant is essentially similar to that of Brownists. The similarity, however, did not matter to Congregationalists. Although Congregationalists severely repudiated Brownists, they did not assert that all doctrines Brownists held were

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. The Westminster Confession, ch. 7; The Savoy Declaration, ch. 7.

<sup>121</sup> In fact, Presbyterians also applied the concept of covenant to a specific situation. The Scottish Presbyterians united themselves under the name of the National Covenant (1638), which later incorporated to the Solemn League and Covenant (1643). The Jewish covenant which was established on the Mount Sinai is a good model for supporting the idea of national covenant. However, the national covenant was merely a product of a historical situation in Britain and thus it cannot be a perennial element in Presbyterian ecclesiology unlike Congregationalism in which church covenant enjoyed the permanent importance.

<sup>122</sup> Champlin Burrage, *The Church Covenant Idea: Its Origin and Its Development* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society), 34.

wrong. Furthermore, they could find the same idea in the early non-separatist Congregationalists such as William Ames.<sup>123</sup> All of the later Congregationalists adopted the idea of church covenant and fully developed it for defending Congregational ecclesiology.<sup>124</sup>

The concept of church covenant is central to Owen's ecclesiology. In covenant, God gives the church His promise and commandments, to which the members of the church should respond with sincere trust and complete obedience. Just as regeneration is an invisible divine act, so trust and obedience are invisible human acts. Nevertheless, both regeneration and trust become visible in two symbols, for Owen: baptism and covenant. Baptism and covenant cannot be separated from each other. Baptism has no effect until its recipient is engaged in covenant.

It is no surprise to see that the idea of church covenant plays a key part in Owen's ecclesiology. In this respect, it is intriguing to note the difference between Owen as a Presbyterian and Owen as a Congregationalist in his definition of the church. In his *Greater Catechism* (1645), which was written when Owen was yet a Presbyterian, he defined the particular churches as:

Peculiar assemblies of professors in one place, under officers of Christ's institution, enjoying the ordinances of God, and leading lives beseeming their holy calling.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> William Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, ch. 32, para. 14.

<sup>124</sup> Congregationalists did not produce an independent treatise on the doctrine of church covenant except Richard Mather, who wrote *Apologie of the Churches in the New England for Church-Covenant* (London, 1643). The *Apologie* was severely criticized by the Scottish presbyterian, Samuel Rutherford. Cf. *The Due Right of Presbyteries or A Peaceable Plea for the Government of the Church of Scotland* (London, 1644), 78-139.

<sup>125</sup> Owen, *Greater Catechism*, I: 493.

About twenty years later in the so-called Independent Catechism, *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God* (1667), Owen defined the particular church as:

A society of persons called out of the world, or their natural worldly state, by the administration of the word and Spirit, unto the obedience of the faith, or the knowledge and worship of God in Christ, joined together in *a holy band, or by special agreement*, for the exercise of the communion of saints, in the due observation of all the ordinances of the gospel.<sup>126</sup>

In *Greater Catechism*, not the particular church but the catholic church takes an important place. A particular church is merely an assembly in one place, a part of the catholic church. In *A Brief Instruction*, however, a particular church is more fully defined and the idea of mutual bond of church members is described as an essential element that constitutes the church.

In general, Owen seldom mentions the phrase “church covenant.” It might be true, as Ferguson points out, that Owen did not overemphasize the necessity of church covenant.<sup>127</sup> It should be noted, however, that even though he does not use the term very often, its idea is not trivial in his ecclesiological works. Owen shares all the important congregational ideas with other Congregationalists. Church covenant is no exception and thus it is an important doctrine in Owen’s ecclesiology. Owen argues that just as the general church is founded on general covenant (the covenant of grace), so a particular church should be established on a particular covenant (church covenant).

In *A Brief Instruction*, Owen gives us the answer to the question “By what means do persons so called become a church of Christ?” as follows:

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<sup>126</sup> Owen, *A Brief Instruction*, XV: 479. Italics mine.

<sup>127</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen*, 155.

They are constituted a church, and interested in the rights, power, and privileges of a gospel church, by the will, promise, authority, and law of Jesus Christ, upon their own voluntary consent and engagement to walk together in the due subjection of their souls and consciences unto his authority, as their king, priest, and prophet, and in a holy observation of all his commands, ordinances, and appointments.<sup>128</sup>

It is clear that church covenant is the means by which one becomes a member of the church. In the later more systematic work, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, Owen defines the church-covenant as the “*mutual confederation or solemn agreement* for the performance of the all the duties which the Lord Christ hath prescribed unto his disciples in such churches.”<sup>129</sup> Church covenant consists of two essential parts: the complete obedience to Christ and the mutual commitment of church members. This covenant is the formal cause of the church, by which the scattered subject matter of the churches, visible saints, is formed.

The weakest point of the doctrine of church covenant is that it cannot easily be proved by Scripture, as the term itself is not found in Scripture. Hence, the opponents of church covenant repeatedly pointed out the lack of Scriptural proofs for the doctrine of church covenant. In particular, the New Testament was not clear on this issue. In his letter to Thomas Goodwin, John Goodwin points out that the New Testament shows a lot of instances where a person becomes a member of the church only upon his profession of faith, with no mention of church covenant.<sup>130</sup>

Even though there is no explicit reference to church covenant in Scripture, Owen does not doubt that church covenant is a biblically grounded doctrine. Given that Owen

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<sup>128</sup> Owen, *A Brief Instruction*, XV: 486.

<sup>129</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 25. Italics Original.

<sup>130</sup> Goodwin, *Of the Constitution, Right, Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ*, XI: 531-2.



tries to establish his ecclesiology on the New Testament as much as he possibly can, it is very interesting to note that in defending the doctrine of church covenant, Owen is more dependent upon the Old Testament than upon the New. The only New Testament textual proof for church covenant is 2 Cor. 8:5, “They gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” Owen does not fully explain how to connect the verse to church covenant. He interprets “to give ourselves to the Lord” simply as “*to engage to do and observe all that he hath appointed and commanded in the church, as that phrase everywhere signifieth in the Scripture; as also ‘joining ourselves unto God,’ which is the same.*”<sup>131</sup> Owen thinks that “to give ourselves to the Lord” is another expression of “joining ourselves unto God,” which has a covenantal connotation in the Old Testament.

Owen’s interpretation on 2 Cor. 8:5 is criticized by William Allen, who argued that in the given text, “us” does not refer to the Macedonians, but to Paul and Timothy.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the context of the whole chapter is not related to church covenant; instead, the Apostle Paul is speaking about the almsgivings of the Macedonians to the Church of Jerusalem. The expression of “giving themselves” emphasizes how earnestly the Macedonians were dedicated to the charitable work. They were ready even to dedicate themselves to help the brethren in Jerusalem. Therefore it is very difficult to justify church covenant on the basis of that text.

In contrast to brief statements on church covenant in the New Testament, Owen explains the concept in detail when it comes to the Old Testament. According to Owen, Israel became a national church by covenant. This is neither the covenant of grace nor the covenant of works; it is “a peculiar covenant” which God established with the people of

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<sup>131</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 27.

<sup>132</sup> William Allen, *Catholicism*, 211.

Israel.<sup>133</sup> This peculiar covenant was God's way not only to erect a church but also to "eminently reform" the Old Testament church.<sup>134</sup> The crucial question is whether or not that peculiar covenant can be applied to the New Testament church. In order to answer that question, Owen makes a distinction between substance and external ceremonies of the peculiar covenant. The church of the Old Testament as a national church ceased to exist, and thus the covenant as the formal cause of that church was utterly abolished. In the New Testament era, the external form of the national church was replaced with congregational church. However, the substance of national covenant—a complete obedience to God and mutual commitment—"belongs to every church as such, even under the gospel."<sup>135</sup> In short, the form of the national covenant was abolished, but its substance still remained.

For Owen, church covenant does not belong to the *bene esse* of the church; as a formal cause of the church, it belongs to the *esse* of the church. Hence, he says that the church cannot exist without church covenant.<sup>136</sup> This view was severely attacked by his opponents. Thomas Lamb argues against Owen that church covenant divests all other churches of the character of the church except the churches established by it.<sup>137</sup> Owen does not maintain that all non-Congregational churches are not churches. How then can he justify his argument for church covenant as the essential formal cause? Owen solves

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<sup>133</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 29. The type of church covenant is not the covenant of grace but the Sinaiic covenant and the later covenants. Church covenant, says Owen, is "a gospel duty in the covenant of grace." See also *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 27.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *A Brief Instruction*, XV: 488.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, *A Brief Instruction*, XV: 488.

<sup>136</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 28.

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Lamb, *A Fresh Suit against Independency, or, The National Church-way Vindicated, the Independent Church-way Condemned* (London, 1677).

this dilemma by using the distinction between implicit and explicit covenant, which was widely used by Congregationalists. Owen says:

I do not deny the being of the churches unto those societies wherein these things are virtually only observed, especially in churches of some continuance, wherein there is at least an implicit consent unto the first covenant constitution.<sup>138</sup>

Owen believed that many churches still retain a kind of church covenant in the sense that all their original churches had been established on church covenant.

The distinction between “implicit” and “explicit” can be found in Ames’ *Marrow*.<sup>139</sup> Though he does not carefully define the terms, Ames asserts that implicit covenant alone can be the formal cause of the particular church. His view of ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ had a great influence on later Congregationalists as well as Presbyterians. Following Ames, Presbyterians emphasized that implicit covenant is sufficient for the constitution of the church,<sup>140</sup> as Congregationalists. No Congregationalist dared to consider explicit covenant to be necessary for the being of the church. As a result, there was no substantial difference between the two parties on this matter. It is not to be neglected, however, that Congregationalists emphasized that explicit covenant is a better ordinance than an implicit one.<sup>141</sup> It is no wonder that church covenant took the central place in Congregationalism.

Church covenant entails the issue of church unity and schism given that it diminishes non-Congregational churches and, at the same time, justifies the gathered

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<sup>138</sup> Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 28.

<sup>139</sup> Ames, *Marrow*, ch. 32, para. 15.

<sup>140</sup> John Brinsely, *The Arraignment of the Present Schism of New Separation* (London, 1646), 33.

<sup>141</sup> Norton, *The Answer to the Whole Set of Questions*, 59.

church that is formed outside of the Church of England. Therefore, church covenant was criticized for instigating separatist movements. In fact, if church covenant is the formal cause, then it would be inescapable to set up a new or renewed church outside of the Church of England in which voluntary covenant was, at least, not allowed. Jeremiah Burroughs, a moderate early Congregationalist, was keenly aware of this problem. Schism presupposes the unity of the church, and this unity can be understood in two ways: the unity of the catholic church and the unity of the particular church. The unity of the particular church was formed by the agreement of its members: church covenant. “Where there never was such an agreement,” Burroughs says, “there cannot be the guilt of this schism.”<sup>142</sup> If one did not join the church by way of covenant, leaving that church is no schism because he has never been united to that church. According to Burroughs, Congregationalists cannot be schismatics because they were never united with the Church of England by their voluntary commitment.

### 3.4 Summary

Owen challenges some important tenets of traditional understanding of the church. He redefined ecclesiological concepts on the basis of his own biblical interpretation. Owen’s congregational view of the church is not compatible with other kinds of ecclesiology due to his own concepts of the nature of the church. Given Owen’s redefinition of the nature of the church, some mere reformation of external ecclesiastical ordinances alone did not satisfy him. Convinced that his view of the church alone is biblical, Owen set up a church outside of the Church of England. Owen’s notion of the nature of the church also caused a change in the definition of schism, which in turn

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<sup>142</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Irenicum: Healing the Divisions among God’s People*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 250.

allowed Owen to separate from the Church of England without considering that separation schismatic. This seemed to be self-contradictory to his opponents. Owen responded to their criticism by writing *Of Schism*, which we will discuss in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### OWEN'S QUEST FOR THE TRUE AND BIBLICAL CONCEPTIONS OF SCHISM AND UNITY

#### **1. *Of Schism in Context***

*Of Schism*, Owen's first major apologetical work for Congregationalism, was published in 1657. Since his conversion to Congregationalism in 1647, Owen had not written any ecclesiological work except a booklet called *Eschol: a Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan* (1648). By this time the burning debates between Presbyterians and Congregationalists, which had been caused by the opening of the Westminster Assembly, did not die down, but neither could they keep their earlier vitality. Most of all, many of the major controversialists on both sides were dead. Of the Scottish Presbyterians, Alexander Henderson died in 1646 and George Gillespie in 1648.<sup>1</sup> Of the English Presbyterians, Thomas Edwards, Stephen Marshall, Richard Vines, and Thomas Gataker were dead by 1655, and some prominent officers of the Westminster Assembly were dead before 1660.<sup>2</sup> On the side of the Congregationalists, John Cotton and Thomas Hooker, the two pillars of the New England Congregationalism, died in 1652 and 1647, respectively. Out of the five Apologists who published *An Apologetical Narration*, Jeremiah Burroughs and Sidrach Simpson were dead before 1657. During the latter half of the 1650s, the leadership of Congregationalism began to transfer from the first to the second generation, to which Owen belonged.

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<sup>1</sup> Other eminent Scottish Presbyterians, Robert Baillie and Samuel Rutherford, died respectively in 1662 and in 1661.

<sup>2</sup> William Twisse (died in 1646); John White (1648); Charles Herle (1659); Herbert Palmer (1647); William Gouge (1653).

When *Of Schism* was published, Owen was still the Dean of Christ Church and the vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford.<sup>3</sup> Owen was busy reforming the university. He was involved not only in academic affairs but also in ecclesiastical business at the national level. In spite of such great ecclesiastical burdens, Owen did not stop writing massive theological works. In particular, great anti-Socinian and anti-Arminian works were published during his tenure of office. *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, one of the greatest anti-Arminian works in the seventeenth century, was published in 1654.<sup>4</sup> Owen's preoccupation with anti-Socinianism is understandable, given that Socinianism became a significant threat to Protestantism in the early 1650s. In January 1652, the Latin edition of the Racovian Catechism was published and the Council of State commanded Owen to write against it.<sup>5</sup> The result was *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655), a book of 700 pages. The following year saw the publication of Owen's other anti-Socinian work, *A Review of the Annotations of Grotius* (1656).

Given that Owen was devoted to writing against Socinianism and Arminianism but did not write any significant work on ecclesiology, *Of Schism* was something unexpected. In fact, it is not easy to figure out exactly what motivated Owen to write *Of Schism*. At first, Owen himself does not offer any clue as to why he wrote the book. The editor of *The Works of John Owen* also indicates that "there is no reference to any authors

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<sup>3</sup> Owen stepped down from the Vice-Chancellor's position on October 9, 1657. Owen wrote his first answer to Cawdrey's criticism, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, in July of that year. Therefore, Owen's two works on schism were published while he was still in office. However, Owen's brief second reply to Cawdrey, *An Answer to a Later Treatise about the Nature of Schism*, was published after his resignation.

<sup>4</sup> *Perseverance* was written against John Goodwin's most controversial work, *Ἀπολύτρωσις Ἀπολυτρώσεως* or *Redemption Redeemed* (1651). Owen already had published two major anti-Arminian works: *A Display of Arminianism* (1643) and *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu; or, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647).

of the day by whose writings he might have stimulated to defend his position as an Independent.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, *Of Schism* does not have any preface or an epistle to Christian readers which may help them to better understand its background.

According to Peter Toon, *Of Schism* primarily aimed at Presbyterianism, partly in response to John Beverley’s request for a defense of Congregationalism.<sup>7</sup> In response, *Of Schism* provoked Daniel Cawdrey, an unyielding presbyterian, to publish a work with a sensational title, *Independencie a Great Schism*. It is equally true that Owen’s subsequent two works, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism* and *An Answer to a Later Treatise of Mr Cawdrey about the Nature of Schism*, were directly written against Daniel Cawdrey. However, Toon’s description of *Of Schism* does not seem to be entirely correct. In *Of Schism* Owen did not severely attack Presbyterianism or even Episcopalianism explicitly, but his hostility to Catholicism was clearly expressed. Most of all, Cawdrey was utterly unknown to Owen.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it may be difficult to say that Owen’s main purpose of writing *Of Schism* was an apology against Presbyterianism.

The editor’s account of Owen’s silence on the contemporary works also needs to be corrected. In the end of the first chapter, Owen quoted some passages from a pamphlet without mentioning its author’s name.<sup>9</sup> The editor does not identify him. Nor has any scholarship on Owen paid attention to the pamphlet, which might have helped us to better understand the background of *Of Schism*. The title of the pamphlet was *A Treatise of the*

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<sup>5</sup> Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688* (New York and Toronto: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), 261.

<sup>6</sup> William Goold, “Prefatory Note,” XIII: 90.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Toon, *God’s Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1971), 94.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 214 and 217.

<sup>9</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 97.



*Schism of England* written by a Romanist named Philip Scot.<sup>10</sup> The pamphlet was published in 1650 and was sent to the two universities—Oxford and Cambridge—to be discussed. The targets of the pamphlet were John Hales and Thomas Hobbes, the latter being undoubtedly the greatest political philosopher during the middle of the seventeenth century in England.<sup>11</sup> The main purpose of the pamphlet was to prove the schism of the Church of England, regardless of any grounds for her separation from the Church or Rome.

Although *Of Schism* contains only one quotation from Scot's *Treatise*, Owen's reference to its exact pagination implies that Owen had it in hand when he wrote *Of Schism*. According to Scot, separation from the catholic church is allowed for no reason. He even says, "Suppose the church should in necessary points teach error, yet even in that case every child the church must exteriorly carry himself quiet, and not make commotions; for that were to seek a cure worse than the disease."<sup>12</sup> Scot's argument makes secondary all the other doctrinal issues except the doctrine of schism. The unity of the church in itself is considered to be more important than the truth. As far as a church is considered to be in schism, all doctrinal truths that it proclaims cannot have any value because they only serve to deteriorate the church. Owen's notice of this danger which lay in Scot's argument motivated him to write a full version of a treatise on schism.

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<sup>10</sup> I failed to find a biographical reference to Philip Scot. *A Treatise of the Schism* was the only book that he wrote. Its cover page indicates that the pamphlet was published in Amsterdam but it was printed in London. Cf. Thomas H. Clancy, S. J. *English Catholic Books 1641-1700* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1974), 84.

<sup>11</sup> Hobbes' work was *De Cive* and Hales' was *A Tract Concerning Schisme and Schismaticks*. Both were published in the same year, 1642. *De Cive* was originally written in Latin in 1642 and its English translation appeared in 1653 under the title *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*. Therefore, Scot could not see the English edition when he wrote the treatise.

<sup>12</sup> Scot, *A Treatise of the Schism of England*, 237-8.

*Of Schism*'s main goal was to defend Congregationalism from the charge of schism. Owen tried to achieve this in two ways. One was to demonstrate that the conventional notion of schism as a causeless separation is unwarranted, and thus the charge of Congregationalism as schism is groundless. The other was to demonstrate that Congregationalism does not break any unity of the church. In order to do so effectively, Owen attempted to define the notion of schism and unity as concisely as possible. This chapter will deal with Owen's notion of schism and then the unity of the church.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Quest for the True Conception of Schism

### 2.1 The Biblical Definition of Schism

Owen does not write *Of Schism* in order to justify schism or separation. Rather, Owen's primary intention is to promote Christian unity as strongly as possible. Owen confesses, "I would spend all my time and days in making up and healing the breaches and schisms that are amongst Christians than one hour in justifying our divisions."<sup>14</sup> For Owen, Congregationalism is not a separatist or schismatic movement but a way to the unity of the church in a true sense.

First of all, Owen tries to demonstrate that he is not schismatic by condemning schism. For Owen, schism as such is a grave sin and that there is no way to justify it. He describes schism as "evidently a *despising of the authority of Jesus Christ*, the great

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<sup>13</sup> For Owen, schism is not an antonym of unity. In a proper sense, schism has nothing to do with separation because schism and separation are essentially different from each other. For this reason, Owen deals with both topics separately. Owen demonstrates that Congregationalism is neither schism nor separatism.

<sup>14</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 95.

sovereign Lord and Head of the church.”<sup>15</sup> There is no room for the so-called good or justifiable schism. Consequently, Owen does not defend Congregationalism by verifying just grounds for schism. Instead, the only way left to defend Congregationalism is to prove that it is not schism in any sense.

For Owen, the crucial issue on schism is how to find a general rule for determining the meaning of schism. Schism had been conventionally defined as “causeless separation from the communion and worship of any true church of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> The basic idea of this definition was widely accepted by English Protestants. For instance, John Hales defines schism as “nothing else but an unnecessary Separation of Christians from that part of the visible Church, of which there were once Members.”<sup>17</sup> According to this concept, a ‘separated’ church can escape the charge of schism only by presenting just or necessary grounds for separation. Owen is not satisfied with such a definition because it does not work at all when each religious party claimed itself as the true church. Moreover, Owen asserts that the notion of schism, like some other doctrinal concepts, has been corrupted and abused particularly by the Roman church. Hence, the proper meaning of schism should be recovered by a thorough re-examination of Scripture.<sup>18</sup>

In order to find the biblical concept of schism, Owen investigates how the word “schism” is used in Scripture. According to Owen, the term *σχίσμα* is used in three different ways: natural, political, and ecclesiastical.

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<sup>15</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 112. Owen also says that schism is especially the sin against Christ’s wisdom. Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 113.

<sup>16</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 110.

<sup>17</sup> Hales, *Tract concerning Schisme*, 2. Hales’ *Tract* was widely circulated even before its publication. In fact, *Tract* was published without the author’s notice.

<sup>18</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 92.

First, the term is used to refer to natural things. For instance, the rent (σχίσμα) in the cloth of Jesus is made worse (Mt. 9:16); the veil of the temple was rent (ἐσχίσθησαν, Mt. 27:57). In these cases, the basic meaning of schism is “a scissure or division of parts before continued by force or violent dissolution.”<sup>19</sup> As a matter of fact, the cloth of Jesus was frequently used to refer to the church and the rent of the cloth was likened to the rent of the church in schism controversies. Schism was considered to be a grave sin because it is as good as tearing up the seamless cloth of Jesus. Owen is opposed to this interpretation. Pointing out that the church was clothed with Jesus and not vice versa, Owen calls the traditional description of the cloth of Jesus as the church “an illusion.”<sup>20</sup> For this reason, it is not easy to apply the natural meaning of schism to the church. By contrast, Cawdrey believes that the natural meaning of schism is not essentially different from its ecclesiastical meaning. He argues that if dividing Jesus’ cloth is a sin and dividing his natural body by nailing him is a greater sin, then dividing his mystical body—the church—is a much greater sin.<sup>21</sup> According to Cawdrey, division or separation is the core concept of σχίσμα, which should be kept in other contexts.

Second, the word schism is often used in a political sense too. Some examples are as follows: there was a division (σχίσμα) among the people, some being of one mind, some of another (Jn. 7: 43); there was a division among them (Jn. 9:16), etc. In these cases, the term schism is constantly used to describe “*differences of mind and judgment,*

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<sup>19</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 100.

<sup>20</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 111. Although Owen does not offer the biblical texts for his argument, he must have had two bible verses in his mind: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27) and “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

<sup>21</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism Proved against Dr. OWEN his Apology in his Tract of Schism* (London, 1657), 51-2.

*with troubles ensuing thereon, amongst men met in some one assembly, about the compassing of a common end and design.*”<sup>22</sup> Owen’s point is this: even in the political uses, schism means no separation. In those examples above, there was indeed a division, but a separated political party did not come into being for that division. In sum, schism in a political sense has to do only with differences of mind and judgment in an assembly.

Third, the word schism is used only a few times in Scripture in an ecclesiastical sense: “I exhort you that there be no schisms (σχίσμα) among you” (1 Cor. 1:10); “I hear that there be schisms (σχίσμα) among you” (1 Cor. 11:18). Owen believes that the true meaning of schism should be found in the texts in which Scripture expressly uses it in an ecclesiastical sense. First of all, Owen pays attention to the fact that σχίσμα in an ecclesiastical sense is found only in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. For this reason, Owen argues that the meaning of schism cannot be determined without fully considering the context of the Church of Corinth. In order to understand that context, we first need to know exactly what the Church of Corinth was like. For Owen, the Church of Corinth was not an assembly of churches but a congregation which was planted by Paul and then watered by Apollos (1 Cor. 3:6). It is clear that a schism occurred when the members of the church, who had gathered together for the worship of God and the administration of discipline into one place (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό), experienced divisions among themselves.<sup>23</sup> Owen’s point is that σχίσμα is purely a congregational event. No mention is made of the catholic church in Paul’s dealing with schism. Consequently, schism in an ecclesiastical sense has nothing to do with the catholic church.

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<sup>22</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 101. Italics original.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 101. “Ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό” is one of the key biblical phrases for supporting the Congregational understanding of the church.

Furthermore, Owen argues that schism does not mean any separation from a church. Neither did such a thing happen in the Church of Corinth nor was it mentioned in the epistle.<sup>24</sup> It is certain that there were severe controversies or divisions in the Church of Corinth. The Corinthians, however, did not for that reason set up a separate congregation. The Corinthian schism was a division or separation not *from* but *within* the church.

Next, Owen deals with the reason for the schism within the Church of Corinth. Owen also makes a note that the Corinthians did not dispute the worship or discipline. The schism occurred while the Corinthians were still keeping with the same worship and discipline.<sup>25</sup> The cause of the discord was related only to some unnecessary things. This is an important point for discussing schism in seventeenth-century England given that the schisms of the Church of England were caused chiefly by the different views of worship and discipline. Owen's intention was to indicate that the Corinthian schism is significantly different from the schism in the Church of England.

Finally, Owen points out that the schism of the Church of Corinth has nothing to do with ecclesiastical authority. It was conventionally believed that an ecclesiastical schism is completed in setting up a different or opposing church. A simple secession from communion of a church was considered a negative schism whereas setting up a church *against* a church was considered a positive schism.<sup>26</sup> The essential concept of schism is disobedience to a legitimate ecclesiastical authority. This idea should be

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<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 103. Cf. *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, 234.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 102.

<sup>26</sup> John Brinsley, *The Arraignment of the Present Schism of New Separation in Old England* (1646), 16. The distinction between negative and positive schism, which was invented by John Cameron, was widely adopted by Protestant divines.

rejected by Owen because Paul's epistle to the Corinthians makes no mention about it.

Owen sets forth as follows:

Here is no mention of any *particular man's* or any *number* of men's, separation from the holy assemblies of the whole church, or of subduction of themselves from its power. . . Here is no mention of any *subtraction of obedience* from bishops or rulers, in what degree soever, no exhortation to regular submission unto them—much less from the pope or church of Rome.<sup>27</sup>

In sum, schism has nothing to do with the catholic church, with separation, or with ecclesiastical authority such as bishops or councils. It is an internal congregational conflict caused by some causeless differences that are not related to worship or discipline. Thoroughly investigating the meaning of schism in the biblical uses, Owen came up with “the chief and only seat of the doctrine of schism”; *causeless differences and contentions amongst the members of a particular church, contrary to that [exercise] of love, prudence, and forbearance, which are required of them to be exercised amongst themselves, and towards one another.*<sup>28</sup> If we follow this definition strictly, we cannot call Congregationalism schism even if it implies separation from a church. Owen believes that no religious party is as free from schism as Congregationalism since all of the Congregationalists were bearing with each other and worshipping God without disputes and divisions among them.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, the Roman church is the most schismatic church because she persecutes and even kills her own members for their doctrinal differences. The unity enforced by sword is no unity. No enemy is more harmful to true

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<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 103.

<sup>28</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 108. Italics original. See also, XIII: 112.

<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 117. Cawdrey was skeptical of Owen's optimistic view of unity among Congregationalists. Cawdrey believed that Congregationalists suffered more from internal dissensions than from the other parties due to private preaching. Cf. Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 27.

unity than enforcement. Thus, Owen even says, “For my part, I would greatly prefer a Church externally divided into a thousand groups than one united in the papal fashion.”<sup>30</sup>

In defending his own definition of schism, Owen does not entirely depend upon Scripture. Owen emphasizes that the biblical notion of schism is also found in the post-apostolic era. Using an example of the primitive church, Owen reinforces his notion of schism. It is well known that in an epistle to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome (d. 101 A.D.) rebuked them for deposing the legitimate elders. This deposal had usually been considered a stereotype of schism. Owen however, tries to carefully decipher exactly what the Corinthian schism was as it is described in Clement’s letter. Owen says:

Only the difference in the church is the schism whereof they are accused. Nor are they accused of schism for the deposition of the elders, but for their differences amongst themselves, which was the ground of their so doing.<sup>31</sup>

First, Owen points out that the letter does not mention any separation in the Church of Corinth. Therefore, the Corinthian conflict in the time of Clement has nothing to do with separation. As far as schism is concerned, there is no essential difference between the Church of Corinth of the apostle Paul and that of the bishop Clement.

For Owen, Clement’s letter helps us to understand schism by clarifying Paul’s letter. The title of Paul’s letter is simply Τη ἐκκλησία τῆ οὔση ἐν Κορίνθω (To the church in Corinth) and the title of Clement’s is “Ἡ ἐκκλησία Θεοῦ ἡ παροικοῦσα Ῥώμην τῆ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ παροικοῦση Κόρινθον ([From] the Church of God that dwells

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<sup>30</sup> Owen, *THEΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΑ*, 157.

<sup>31</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 104.



in Rome to the Church of God that dwells in Corinth).”<sup>32</sup> The participle of παροικουσα is crucial for determining the nature of the Church of Corinth. Owen believes that it simply means “dwelling” and has nothing to do with parochia which denoted the adjacent region to a metropolis. As a result, there is little difference between Paul’s and Clement’s letters with respect to the recipients.<sup>33</sup> The Church of Corinth in the later first century A.D. was not a metropolitan Church but a single congregation as it had been in the time of the apostle Paul. Clement’s letter fortifies Owen’s thesis that schism was primarily a matter of a congregation.

## 2.2 Schism and Separation in Distinction

As we have seen above, Owen’s definition of schism is primarily a result of his own biblical interpretation. Owen’s way of biblical interpretation is significant different from that of his opponents. He clearly states how he came to the definition of schism as follows:

If in all and every place of the New Testament where there is mention made of schism, name or thing, in an ecclesiastical sense, there is nothing intended by it but a *division* in a particular church, then that is the proper Scripture notion of schism in the ecclesiastical sense; but in all and every place: *ergo*.<sup>34</sup>

According to the statement above, only what is explicitly stated in Scripture should be used to determine the meaning of schism. Consequently, separation *from* a church cannot be called schism since no evidence for it is found in Scripture.

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<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 105.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 105.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *An Answer to a Late Treatise on Mr. Cawdrey about the Nature of Schism*, XIII: 282.

Cawdrey strongly rejects Owen's limitation of the meaning of schism to separation *in* a congregation. Cawdrey argues that Owen's way of interpretation, which is grounded on *via negativa*, is invalid.<sup>35</sup> In Cawdrey's view, Scripture provides us only with some examples for schism, which cannot cover the full meaning of it. Thus, Owen's definition of schism could be merely a part of the whole. By making a substantial distinction between separation *in* a church and that *from* it, Owen excludes the latter from the true notion of schism. On the contrary, for Cawdrey, the difference between *in* and *from* is not a matter of substance but rather of degree. Schism is a broader concept which comprises both separation and rent. Separation *in* a church is an embryo which quickly grows into separation *from* a church.<sup>36</sup>

It is to be noted that Owen's definition of schism does not mean that separation is not a sin in any sense. Although not all separations are a sin,<sup>37</sup> there are some separations that are undoubtedly sinful. Therefore, Owen's notion of schism does not allow all kinds of separation into the church. The point is that a sinful separation from a church is named a term other than schism. According to Owen, a believer separates himself from the church in three different sinful ways: apostasy, irregularity of walking, and professed sensuality.<sup>38</sup> All these are significantly different from schism and thus should not be confused with it.

Apostasy is defined as "falling away from the faith of the gospel, and thereupon forsaking the congregations or assemblies for the worship of God in Jesus

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<sup>35</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> For Owen, it is impossible to justify schism, but possible to justify some separations. Justifiable separations will be discussed later when we deal with the unity of the particular church.

Christ.”<sup>39</sup> In its nature, apostasy is different from schism. When a believer turns away from Christianity to other religions such as Islam, we do not call him schismatic. Owen’s proof text for apostasy as forsaking a congregation is Hebrew 10:25, in which the author warns his recipients not to forsake their assembly. The verse had been often used to refer to schism, but Owen did not agree. What kind of separation is identified here? Owen interprets it not as schism but as apostasy on the basis of the following verses. The people who forsook the assembly sinned willfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth and fell into perdition.<sup>40</sup>

The second kind of a sinful separation identifies those who had retained some Christian faith but walked outside the church. They are called ἄτακτοι in Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:14). They are clearly distinguished from schismatics. “In our days,” says Owen, “we charge them vanity, folly, disobedience to the precept of Christ in general.”<sup>41</sup> The third group is those who live according to their own sinful sensuality. Denying “only Lord God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ and turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 1:19),<sup>42</sup> they separated from the church. Nevertheless, they cannot be charged with schism because their wickedness belongs to another category of sin.

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<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 120. The more delicate distinction of apostasy, heresy, and schism will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>39</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 121.

<sup>40</sup> Owen’s interpretation of the text remained the same in his last response to Cawdrey. Cf. Owen, *An Answer to a Late Treatise of Mr. Cawdrey about the Nature of Schism*, XIII: 296-297. It is interesting however to see an inconsistency in Owen’s interpretation of the given text. In *The Duty of Pastors*, Owen, who was yet a Presbyterian, does not mention apostasy. The text was interpreted to forbid a private meeting outside public worship. Cf. Owen, *The Duty of Pastors*, XIII: 45. In his exposition on Hebrews, Owen says that it is not apostasy but a partial withdrawing from the assembly that the author intended. Cf. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, VI: 522.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, 121.

<sup>42</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, 121.

### 3. The Quest for the True Conception of Unity

After Owen carefully redefines the notion of schism, he deals with the question of whether Congregationalists broke the unity of the church. First, he discusses the nature of the church from three perspectives: the invisible catholic church, the visible catholic church, and the particular church. Then, Owen deciphers exactly what constitutes the unity of each church and what sinful actions break that unity. Finally, on the basis of his own notion of the unity of the church, Owen argues that Congregationalism is no schism because it does not breach any unity of the church.<sup>43</sup>

#### 3.1 The Invisible Catholic Church and Unity

Owen defines the invisible catholic church as “the mystical body of Christ” which consists of “the elect, redeemed, justified and sanctified ones throughout the world.”<sup>44</sup> Owen’s definition is typically a Protestant one. Owen applies this definition to the unity of the church in a strict way. His emphasis is that the invisible church is absolutely one and all the members are perfectly united with Christ. That church is, as a rule, called one sheepfold, one spouse, and one body. The last metaphor is important for explaining the unity of the invisible church. In the case of the natural body, the members are united only by one common head. In the same way, Christ, the head of the elect, is the only way that all the members of the mystical body can be united with one another. Owen says, “That which is the formal reason and cause of the union of the members with the head is the

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<sup>43</sup> In Chapter 2, I already dealt briefly with how Owen’s triple understanding of the church is related to his notion of unity and schism. This chapter will discuss the theme more at length.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 124. Owen says that the invisible catholic church is commonly called “the catholic church militant.” In general, however, the church as the elect was considered to comprise both the militant and triumphant church.

formal reason and cause of the union of the members with themselves.”<sup>45</sup> For this reason, union with Christ alone is the source of the unity of all the elect. Owen calls this union “the *fountain-radical* union of the church catholic in itself.”<sup>46</sup>

If we understand the unity of the invisible church according to Owen’s way, the following question must be asked: how can this union be breached? Owen’s answer is this: given that the elect are united with Christ by the Holy Spirit, the only possible way to break the union is either “*The casting out, expelling, and losing that Spirit which, abiding in us, gives us this union*” or “*The loss of that love which thence flows into the body of Christ, and believers as parts and members thereof.*”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Owen holds that if any one wants to prove that Congregationalists are separated from the invisible church, he should first verify that they are free from the Holy Spirit. Owen says:

Unless man can prove that we have not the Spirit of God, that we do not savingly believe in Jesus Christ, that we do not sincerely love all the saints, his whole body, and every member of it, they cannot disprove our interest in the catholic church.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, Owen emphasizes that it is impossible to break the unity of the invisible church itself due to Christ’s promise made to the church. Owen’s proof text for the indissoluble bond of the unity of the invisible church is Matthew 16:18, “Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The so-called Petrine text had been one of the most controversial texts since the Reformation. Severe debates arose made not only between Protestants and Roman Catholics but also among

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<sup>45</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 129.

<sup>46</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 130.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 131.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 132.

Protestants themselves. There was no consensus even among Congregationalists. While some Congregationalists such as John Cotton apply the text to the Congregational church,<sup>49</sup> Owen applies it to the invisible church. According to Owen, the triumphal promise of the gospel of Matthew was not given to the individual church as such but “to everyone that is truly and properly a part and member of that church.”<sup>50</sup> In his response to Cawdrey, Owen more clearly explains the meaning of the text:

The church is built on this rock in its individuals, or I know not how it is so built. The building on Christ doth not denote a mere relation of a general body to his truth, that it shall always have an existence, but *the union of the individuals with him*, in their being built on him, to whom the promise is made.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the essence of the unity of the invisible church is primarily the unity between Christ and its individual member. This union “was never utterly broken by any man taken into it, nor ever shall be to the end of the world.”<sup>52</sup> It follows that Congregationalism cannot even breach the unity of the invisible church.

Owen applies his notion of unity particularly to Roman Catholics. As far as the invisible church is concerned, union is primarily the matter of membership. Do the members of the Roman church belong to the invisible church? Roman Catholics also claimed that they sincerely believe in Christ and love all the members of the church.

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<sup>49</sup> Larzer Ziff, *John Cotton on the Churches of New England*, 87-92. Cotton argues that a particular church can be destroyed but there was, is and will be a particular church in the world to the end of age. This view was criticized by Cawdrey’s *Vindiciae Vindiciarum, or A Further Manifestation of M. J. C. His Contradictions, Instanced in Vindicae Clavium* (1651). As we have seen in Chapter I, Cotton’s *Keys* converted Owen to Congregationalism. The difference between Owen and Cotton on the interpretation on the given text clearly shows that Owen did not blindly follow Cotton.

<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 126-7.

<sup>51</sup> Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 246. Italics added.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 132.

Owen believes however that most Romanists are excluded from the invisible church.

According to Owen, the following five groups are utterly outside the invisible church:

1. All *wicked and profaned persons*, of whom the Scripture speaks expressly that they shall not enter in the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:7-10).
2. All *ignorant persons*, into whose hearts God hath not shined, “to give them the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (Hos. 4:6).
3. All *hypocritical self-justiciaries*, who seek for a righteousness as it were by the works of the law, which they never attain to (Rom. 9:31-32).
4. Idolaters (1 Cor. 6:9).
5. *All that worship the beast set up by the dragon* (Rev. 13:8, 16).<sup>53</sup>

Owen thinks that those sins, which are found in the Roman church, are the evidence that the Roman church is not united with the invisible church. For Owen, not Protestants but Romanists are evidently separatists not because the latter broke the unity of the church (this is impossible), but because they have never been members of the invisible church; they have already been separated from it. To be sure, there are some among Romanists who are the members of the invisible church. However, their membership does not originate from the Roman church but from the direct union with Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Owen’s understanding of the invisible church was not something new to Protestants. However, no other Protestant theologian in the seventeenth century but Owen so carefully dealt with schism in connection with the invisible church. In general, discussions on schism centered on the visible catholic church or particular church. As far as the invisible church and its unity are concerned, Cawdrey is not opposed to Owen.

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<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 133-136. Owen identifies the beast with the Roman church.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 136.

Cawdrey simply raises a minor objection to Owen's interpretation of the Petrine text.<sup>55</sup>

Cawdrey asserts that the Petrine text should be applied to the visible catholic church.

For Cawdrey, the issue is whether there could be separation in the invisible church. While granting that there cannot be an utter separation in the invisible church, Cawdrey denies that there can be no schism in the invisible church. Due to the effect of sin, even the union of the elect with Christ may be loosened. Cawdrey states:

That *Faith* may be weakened, and *Love* remitted, there is no question; and that the *Spirit* may be *quenched*, and *grieved*, the Scriptures insinuates; upon which *offence*, there may be kind of *Schism*, even in the *Invisible Church*, if not to *separation* of the Spirit utterly, yet to a *suspension* of its influence, by hiding itself, and leaving the *Believer* to a sad *desertion*; as experience tells us.<sup>56</sup>

For Cawdrey, this loosened unity is no less than a schism. Owen is also ready to acknowledge that a believer may fail in grace. However, a true believer “needs not fear the loss of it”<sup>57</sup> because he cannot lose God's grace completely and thus be separated from Christ. Although Cawdrey is barely different from Owen, they give different answers to the question of what we should call the severely loosened union caused by sin. For Cawdrey, it is a kind of separation and thus it is schism. For Owen, however, it is no separation and thus is not schism at all, because the true believer is still united with Christ in spite of the damaged relationship. If that were called schism, says Owen, it would simply be false because it is utterly a “new notion.”<sup>58</sup> Owen is convinced that Cawdrey's

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<sup>55</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 82.

<sup>56</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 86. Italics original.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 246.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 246. For Protestants as for Roman Catholics, “new” was identical to “bad” or “false” in contrast to the contemporary common sense that new



confusion of schism with separation inevitably endangers the Reformed doctrine that the bond of Christ and the elect is indissoluble.

### 3.2 The Visible Catholic Church and Unity

#### 3.2.1 *Unity in the Truth Alone*

Owen defines the visible catholic church as “the *universality of men professing the doctrine of the gospel* and obedience to God in Christ, according to it, throughout the world.”<sup>59</sup> At first sight, Owen’s definition does not seem to conflict with that of Presbyterians. In fact, Cawdrey is not opposed to Owen’s definition itself. The debate between the two is caused by the fact that Owen was too strict in his own definition.

According to Owen’s definition, the catholic church is most of all the community of faith. The profession of the gospel is the formal reason for the catholic church. The gospel does not cover all Christian doctrines. Rather, it is frequently referred to as fundamentals. What then are the fundamentals? No Protestants had ever dared to make a complete list of the fundamentals. Nor was Owen an exception. He gives us only a few examples: Jesus as the eternal Son of God; the saving efficacy of his death; the deity of the Holy Spirit and his sanctifying works.<sup>60</sup> Such fundamental doctrines are fully sufficient to make one a member of the catholic church. There may be great differences among the members of the catholic church and as a result, they could even mutually condemn and persecute by calling others heretics and schismatics. No matter how they

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is better than old. In his second response to Owen, Cawdrey silenced about the issues on the invisible church.

<sup>59</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 136-7. Italics original.

<sup>60</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 83 and 84.

are different, however, “yet are they all subjects of the visible kingdom of Christ, and belong all of them to the catholic church.”<sup>61</sup>

It is worth noting that the distinction of fundamentals and non-fundamentals was hotly debated between Protestants and Roman Catholics during the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> In general, it is considered that fundamentals are the doctrines necessary to salvation while non-fundamentals are not. Based upon this premise, many Protestants argued that disagreement on non-fundamentals do not have any effect on salvation. Neither do they have effect on the membership of the catholic church and on its unity. Roman Catholics denied such Protestant notions of fundamentals. The real question between the two parties can be clearly stated as follows:

Whether there be anie such *fundamental points*, as the beleif of them, is sufficient sauing faith, Church, and saluation, euen when ignorance or error in other points, is vincible and sinful: . . . And whether, there be anie such *Non fundamental points* of faith, as the actual belief of them is not necessarie to sauing faith, Church, or saluation, when they are sufficiently proposed, and virtual or intentional belief of them be necessarie, whether they be proposed, or no.<sup>63</sup>

To the question above the Protestants were affirmative while Roman Catholics were negative. Protestants would fully agree on the Romanist claim that we should believe in

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<sup>61</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 84. Italics mine.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Knott, *Charity Mistaken with the Want Whereof, Catholickes Are Vniustly Charged* (n.p., 1630), especially chapter 7 through 9. Knott’s *Charity* was responded by Christopher Potter’s *Want of Charitie Justly Charged, on All Such Romanists, as Dare (without Truth or Modesty) Affirme, That Protestancie Destroyeth Salvation* (London, 1633); Knott responded by writing *Mercy and Truth or Charity Maintained* (London, 1634). Knott’s *Mercy and Truth* was answered by William Chillingworth’s most famous Protestant apology against the Catholicism entitled *The religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation, or, An Ansver to a Booke entitled Mercy and truth, or, Charity Maintain'd by Catholiques, which Pretends to Prove the Contrary* (Oxford, 1638). Chillingworth provoked two Catholic reactions: Richard Smith, *Of the Distinction of Fvndamental and not Fvndamental Points of Faith* (London, 1645) and Knott’s massive work *Infidelity Vnmasked* (Gant, 1652).

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *Of the Distinction of Fvndamental and not Fvndamental Points of Faith*, 42 and 43.

non-fundamental doctrines when they are sufficiently proposed. No one would deny that errors in non-fundamentals should not be allowed in the church. The real issue was whether those who deny non-fundamentals are outside of the church and doomed to be damned.

For Roman Catholics, the difference between fundamentals and non-fundamentals is not a concern with salvation itself. The essential difference is whether a doctrine is absolute or conditional in respect to salvation. In order to be saved we should absolutely believe every fundamental but we don't have to believe all non-fundamental doctrines, but only those that are "sufficiently proposed." If we reject one of the non-fundamentals, despite that it is sufficiently proposed, we are excluded from salvation. Thus, the difference between fundamentals and non-fundamentals virtually comes to nothing when the latter are sufficiently proposed. A sinful denial of any point of faith is a heresy and it destroys substance of the church, unity of the church, and salvation.<sup>64</sup>

For Protestants as for Roman Catholics, the unity of the catholic church is based upon true faith. Truth, however, does not mean the same for both parties. For the Protestants, it means the pure or fundamental truth. But, for Roman Catholics, it means the whole truth which consists of many doctrines.<sup>65</sup> Since the truth is one, the fallacy of any doctrine destroys its trueness. The truth cannot be called such if even a small doctrine proves to be false. If it is true that the church is based upon the truth, we cannot say that the church errs in minor doctrines. The Catholic position is clear on this point: the catholic church is infallible in any point of the Christian faith regardless of whether it is fundamental or non-fundamental.

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<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Of the Distinction of Fundamental and not Fundamental Points of Faith*, 163ff.

Owen adopts the Protestant distinction of fundamentals and non-fundamentals and applies it to the doctrine of the unity of the church. For Owen, the unity of the church does not mean an agreement in every doctrine including non-fundamentals. “Every agreement and consent amongst men professing the name of Christ,” says Owen, “is not the unity and peace recommended in the Scripture.”<sup>66</sup> Owen’s strong loyalty to unity only in fundamentals makes him to be generous toward critical doctrinal errors. The issue is concerned not with critical errors in general but with the errors that could completely exclude from the church those who profess the fundamentals. Owen is doubtful of the existence of such errors. Owen says:

How far the errors in judgment, or miscarriages in sacred worship, which any of them have superadded unto the foundations of truth which they do profess, may be of pernicious a nature as to hinder them from a interest in the covenant of God, and so prejudice their eternal salvation, *God only knows*. There are but few errors of the mind of so malignant a nature as absolutely to exclude such persons from an interest in eternal mercy.<sup>67</sup>

In so far as fundamentals are preserved, the unity of the catholic church is not shaken in spite of critical errors in non-fundamentals.

### ***3.2.2 The False Views of Unity***

After Owen presents his view of the unity of the visible catholic church, he discusses the false views of its unity. Because the unity of the church depends on the truth alone, Owen rejects any other formal cause as a unifying factor for the visible catholic church.

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Smith, *Of the Distinction of Fvndamental and not Fvndamental Points of Faith*, 218.

<sup>66</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government There*, VIII: 54.

<sup>67</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace, and Unity*, XV: 85.

First of all, that unifying factor is essentially different from that of the invisible catholic church or particular church, in which the inner life of the Holy Spirit and a joint assembly for the same worship are unifying factors, respectively.<sup>68</sup>

Second, the unity of the visible catholic church has nothing to do with any officer such as the pope. Like all other Protestants, Owen is vigorously opposed to the papist view of the pope as the head of the visible church. It is one thing for a single officer to be a governor of many churches as the apostle Paul was; it is another thing to claim that his governance makes them one. “Suppose him an officer to every particular church,” says Owen, “no union of the whole would thence ensue.”<sup>69</sup>

Third, the unity of the catholic church does not pertain to general councils, which were favored by Presbyterians as well as Conformists. The preeminent London Presbyterian divines state that “*The Unity or Oneness of the visible Church of Christ, now under the New Testament laid down in Scripture, gives us a notable foundation for Church government by Juridical Synods.*”<sup>70</sup> It is to be noted that Owen is not hostile to general councils as such. He believes that they had played a very important part in defending the truth from heretical errors throughout history. What he denies, however, is that general councils are a bond that unites all members of the church. One main reason for his denial is that general councils are purely “extraordinary and occasional” and thus they “cannot be *an ordinary standing bond of union* to the catholic church.”<sup>71</sup> Owen emphasizes that the church had existed for the first hundreds years without any general

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<sup>68</sup> The unifying factor for the particular church will be discussed later.

<sup>69</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 139.

<sup>70</sup> *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, 225. Italics original.

council. He also entirely rejects the popular idea that a general council represents the catholic church. There is simply no logical ground for a church-representative. It may be possible that all church power of any particular church was invested in a person or group. However, we cannot call the assembly of those persons a church-representative.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, the unity of the catholic church is not related to any kind of ecclesiastical form. This is indeed one of the most controversial issues between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. For Congregationalists, no such form exists for the unity of the church. In this regard, the catholic church is essentially different from the particular church. Owen sets forth:

The universal church we are speaking of is not a thing that hath, as such, a specificative form, from which it should be called a universal church, as a particular hath for its ground of being so called . . . Nor are the several particular churches of Christ in the world so parts and members of any catholic church as that it should be constituted or made up by them and of them for the order and purpose of an instituted church,-that is, the celebration of the worship of God and institutions of Jesus Christ according to the gospel.<sup>73</sup>

Owen denies the Presbyterian concept that the visible catholic church is made up of all particular churches. In other words, for Owen, the particular church is not merely a part of the catholic church.

Neither does Owen fully agree with those Congregationalists who viewed the relation of the catholic and particular church as that of genus and species.<sup>74</sup> By definition,

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<sup>71</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 143. Interestingly, on the same ground, papists argued for the pope as a constant and ordinary bond of church unity over against general council. See page 23 of chapter 4 in this dissertation

<sup>72</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 145.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 137.

<sup>74</sup> For the Presbyterian-Congregational controversy on the relationship between the catholic and particular church, see Samuel Hudson, *The Essence and Unitie of Church Catholic Visible* (London, 1644); Hudson was refuted by John Ellis' *Vindiciae Catholicae* (London, 1647), by Thomas Hooker's *A Survey*

the visible catholic church is not the assembly of churches, but the assembly of all the professing believers. Owen continues to explain why the relation between the catholic and particular church is not that of genus and species. If the catholic church is a genus, then the whole nature of it should be preserved in each congregation, which is species. Owen argues that this distinction is absurd because it would “deprive everyone of membership in the universal church which is not joined actually to some particular church or congregation.”<sup>75</sup>

Owen’s elaborate definition of the church leads to the denial of the visible catholic church as also a political body. One of the significant differences between Presbyterians and Congregationalists is whether or not the catholic church is one organic or political body. Both parties agreed that there is no political body that actually governs all the particular churches; no such political church is possible or is designed by Christ. For this reason, Congregationalists entirely rejected the notion of the catholic church as a political body. On the contrary, Presbyterians still defended that notion.

In order to understand the Presbyterians’ position, we have to notice their careful distinction between habitual and actual. When they say that there is one catholic church in a political sense, it does not mean that that church exists actually. Samuel Hudson says:

I do not mean that there is one universal, visible, *actual* society, consisting of all such as are accounted or to be esteemed Christians, subjected actually to one or many universal, general, actual Pastors or guides, from whom subordinates must

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*of the Summe of Church Discipline* (London, 1648) and by Samuel Stone’s *A Congregational Church is a Catholike Visible Church* (London, 1652). Hudson responded them with his full criticism of Congregationalism entitled *Vindication of the Essence and unity of the Church Catholike Visible and Priority thereof in regard of Particular Churches* (London, 1650). The second edition of *Vindication* was published in 1658. Owen must have been acquainted with Hudson’s work.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 137.

derive their office and power, and with whom they must communicate in some general sacred things, which may make them one Church as the Jews were.<sup>76</sup>

As a matter of fact, the lack of actuality is the very reason that Congregationalists denied the concept of the political catholic church.<sup>77</sup> For Presbyterians, however, there is another way to support their political view of the catholic church. Hudson continues to explain the exact meaning of one political church as:

an *habitual*, Politico-Ecclesiastical society, body, flock in one sheepfold of the militant Church, in uniform subjection to the same Lord, the same Laws, in the same faith, and under the same visible seal of Baptism, performing the same worship and service in kinde: and though the members be dispersed far and wide, yea, divided into several particular places, and secondary combinations of vicinities, for actual, constant enjoyment of Ordinances . . . yet still those Ordinances, admissions, ejections, have influence into the whole body, as it is a polity.<sup>78</sup>

According to this view, the external ordinances habitually belong to the catholic church. Only in that sense can the church be called political. In consequence, the crucial issue between Presbyterians and Congregationalists is to which church Jesus Christ gave permanent ordinances. The answer to that question depends on how to interpret Matthew 16:18. For Congregationalists, the keys were given to each particular congregation only; for Presbyterians, however, the whole power of the keys was primarily, although habitually, given to the catholic church and then was only secondarily given to particular

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<sup>76</sup> Hudson, *Vindication of the Essence and Unity of the Catholike Visible*, 129. Italics added.

<sup>77</sup> John Allin and Thomas Shepard, *A Defence of the Answer Made unto the Nine Questions or Positions Sent from New-England, Against the Reply Thereto by that Reverend servant of Christ Mr. John Ball* (London, 1648), 76.

<sup>78</sup> Hudson, *Vindication of the Essence and Unity of the Catholike Visible*, 130. Italics added. The distinction of actual and habitual was also used by Cawdrey to support the political catholic church. Cawdrey, *A Review of the Svrvey of Church Discipline* (London, 1651), 56.



churches.<sup>79</sup> By the distinction of habitual and actual, Presbyterians could defend the catholic church in a political sense.

Owen also makes an essential distinction of *organical* and *political*, both of which were almost interchangeably used by Presbyterians. For Presbyterians, if the church is organical, then it is political. However, for Owen, such identification cannot be supported by Scripture. Owen admits that the apostle Paul clearly teaches that the church is an organical body like a natural body that has many organs (1 Corinthians 12:12). However, Owen objects that an organical body is identical to a political body, because Paul does not describe the church as an organical body in a political sense. Although it is not evident whether Paul speaks of the catholic church or the particular church in that context, it is clear that “the difference he speaks of in the individual persons of the church is *not in respect of office, power, and authority, but gifts or graces, and usefulness on that account.*”<sup>80</sup> Because of the utter silence of Scripture concerning the catholic church as a political institution, Owen denies any kind of the catholic church as a political body. In consequence, he insists that there can be no unity of the visible catholic church in a political sense. Such unity is simply false and no separation from that unity can be called schism.

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<sup>79</sup> For the debate on Mt. 16:18, see Cotton’s *Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Cawdrey responded with *Vindiciae Clavium: or, A Vindication of the Keyes of the Kingdom of the Heaven, in to the hands of the right owners*, (London, 1645). Cotton’s response to Cawdrey can be found in the second part of *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (1648). Cawdrey responded with *The Inconsistencie of the Independent Way* (1651).

<sup>80</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 151. Italics added.

### 3.2.3 Summary: *Congregationalism Defended*

Owen summarizes his notion of the unity and separation of the visible church as follows:

The belief and profession of all the necessary saving truths of the gospel, without the manifestation of an internal principle of the mind inconsistent with the belief of them, or adding of other things in profession that are destructive to the truths professed, is the bond of the unity of the visible professing church of Christ. Where this is found in any man, or number of men, though otherwise accompanied with many failings, sins, and errors, the unity of the faith is by him or them so far preserved as that they are thereby rendered members of the visible church of Christ, and are by him so esteemed.<sup>81</sup>

On the basis of this definition of the unity of the visible catholic church, Owen defends Congregationalism from the charge of schism. The unity of the catholic church can be broken either by a complete denial of fundamental truths or by an addition of some destructive doctrines to it; but Congregationalism does not break any union of the visible catholic church; therefore, Congregationalism is no schism. If anyone wants to prove that Congregationalists are separated from the visible catholic church, he should first verify the following statements:

- (1) That we either do not believe and make profession of all the truths of the gospel indispensably necessary to be know, that a man may have a communion with God in Christ and be saved.
- (2) That doing so, in the course of our lives we manifest and declare a principle that is utterly inconsistent with the belief of those truths which outwardly profess;
- (3) that we add unto them, in opinion or worship, that or those things which are in very deed destructive of them, or do any way render them in sufficient to be saving unto us.

For Owen, Congregationalism does not fall in such sins but rather is firmly faithful to fundamental doctrines. Therefore, it is never separated from the catholic church.

Furthermore, the sins that separate one from the catholic church are not called schism, but heresy or apostasy.<sup>82</sup> Schism should not be confused with heresy or apostasy. If Congregationalists proved to be separated from the catholic church, they may be called heretics or apostates, not schismatics.

### 3.3 The Particular Church and Unity

#### 3.3.1 *The Particular Church as a Congregation*

Owen defines the particular church as follows:

*A society of men called by the word to the obedience of the faith in Christ, and joint performance of the worship of God in the same individual ordinances, according to the order by Christ prescribed.*<sup>83</sup>

Owen's definition of the particular church does not severely contradict that of other Protestant parties. In contrast to Roman Catholics, all Protestants believe that the particular church has the right to determine its own ecclesiastical ordinances according to the order by Christ. However, a difficult problem arises from the following question: how should a particular church be constituted? Each protestant party proposes its own view of the particular church. For Owen, the particular church means no other than a gathered parish church. For Conformists, on the other hand, it is not merely a parish church, but rather a national and episcopal church where the magistrate exercises the supremacy through bishops over all the churches in his dominion.<sup>84</sup> In this regard, the Presbyterian

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<sup>81</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 147.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 157 and 170. Cf. *A Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 247.

<sup>83</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 174. Italics original. Also see *Review of the True Nature of Schism*, XIII: 257

<sup>84</sup> The 34<sup>th</sup> article of the Thirty-Nine Articles uses terms "particular" and "national" interchangeably. It is interesting to see that the first article of the canon law of the Church of England solemnly approved the royal supremacy. Cf. The Church of England, *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical Treated vpon by the Bishop of London* (London, 1604).

view of the particular church is not much different from the Conformists' view. Although Presbyterians reject episcopal government, they do not wholly reject the idea of a national church. For Presbyterianism, episcopacy is replaced with presbyterian government and monarchy with parliament. Like the Conformists, Presbyterians deny that the particular church is merely a congregation. Thomas Edward clearly points this out in his notable response to the *Apologetical Narration*:

A Particular Church is any company of believers conjoined in the observation of holy ordinances and united to one Presbyterie, keeping their meetings in one or more places: For the number of Parishes in which they meet is a thing accidentall being nothing at all to the essence of a particular church.<sup>85</sup>

For Presbyterians, therefore, to be a member of a congregation alone is not sufficient for proving him a member of a particular church. The particular church is not an assembly of believers, but primarily an assembly of congregations.

The different view of the particular church leads to a different view of its unity and schism. For Cawdrey, there ought to be a unity in the same numerical worship among congregations.<sup>86</sup> For Owen, on the other hand, it is enough to keep unity in the same worship only in a congregational level. Cawdrey criticizes Owen's rejection of a collective concept of the particular church, because it unchurches all the other churches except Congregational churches. For Cawdrey, there should be a distinction between "no particular church" and "no church at all." He argues that even if the Church of Rome is

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<sup>85</sup> Edwards, *Antapologia: or, A full Answer to the Apologeticall Narration of Mr Goodwin, Mr Nye, Mr Sympson, Mr Burroughs, Mr Bridge, Members of the Assembly of Divines* (London, 1646), 90.

<sup>86</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie further Proved to be a Schism*, 156.

not a particular congregation as Owen intends, it may be a particular patriarchal church.<sup>87</sup> By contrast, for Owen, a parish church, subject to the Church of Rome, may be called a particular church, but the Roman church as such is by no means a particular church.

The unity of the particular church is broken by a withdrawal from the same worship and discipline. But, is this separation called schism? Cawdrey's answer is clear: "Is it not an appointment of Christ, that the members of a Church be united, as to the *performance* the same *numericall worship*? Then by *parity* of reason, it followes, that to *break* that union causelessly, is also a schism."<sup>88</sup> Owen would fully agree that it was demanded by Christ that the same worship should be administered in a particular church, but he did not believe that refusing the worship of that church is a schism. Owen reaffirms his thesis that leaving a particular church is not called schism in Scripture.

Owen contends:

That departing or *secession of any man or men* from any particular church, as to that communion . . . which he or they have had therewith, is nowhere called schism, nor is so in the nature of the thing itself, but is a thing to be judged and receive a title according to the causes and circumstances of it.<sup>89</sup>

There are many different cases in which a member departs his previous congregation without the charge of schism. One may leave a congregation for another by changing his residency. Nobody would call this separation a schism. For Cawdrey, however, the issue is not concern with separation itself but with the way separation occurs. Cawdrey says:

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<sup>87</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie further Proved to be a Schism*, 112. Cawdrey's intention here is not to support the patriarchal church. He believed that the patriarchal church is a particular church in a corrupted form.

<sup>88</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie further Proved to be a Schism*, 101.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 181. Italics original.

A simple secession of a man or men, upon some just occasion, is not called schism; but to make causeless differences in a church, and then separating from it as no church, denying communion with it, hath the nature and name of schism in all men's judgments but his [Owen's] own.<sup>90</sup>

It is evident that Cawdrey's reply takes into account Congregationalists. Owen holds that Cawdrey simply missed the point. Owen agrees that raising causeless differences in a church and then separating from it as no church is obviously schism. Where is the point of issue? For Owen, Congregationalists peacefully left some parish congregations in the Church of England. Congregationalists did not condemn the previous congregations when they left them. Departing a congregation "without strife, variance, judging and condemning of others" cannot be considered evil.<sup>91</sup> They merely transferred from one congregation to another for various reasons. For Cawdrey, however, Congregationalists did not merely peacefully leave but also separated from the Church of England because they set up a new church that was utterly different from her in worship and discipline. Setting up a different church cannot be done without condemning the former one as no church.<sup>92</sup>

### ***3.3.2 No True Unity without Voluntarism***

The parochial system had been firmly established in England during the Middle Ages. According to that system, anyone who was registered to a given parish was also the member of that parish church. No freedom to choose a church or reform its ordinances was allowed to private believers. Such a system had never been seriously challenged until Congregationalists raised their voices. They emphasized that there was evidently no such

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<sup>90</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 154.

<sup>91</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 181.

system in the New Testament, and thus it was a merely a human invention. By contrast, Presbyterians argued that although the system is not “*jure divino positivo*” (by divine right positively), it may be “*jure naturalis*, which is originally *moral*, and consequently divine.”<sup>93</sup> This idea is rejected by Owen, because he is convinced that a church should be instituted according to the express teaching of Scripture alone. Given that Scripture clearly tells that the particular church is a voluntary society, it should be set up voluntarily. One can join that church only by his own voluntary choice. Owen emphasizes this point with this proposition:

*It is the duty of every one who professeth faith in Christ Jesus, and takes due care of his own eternal salvation, voluntarily and by his own choice to join himself unto some particular congregation of Christ's institution, for his own spiritual edification, and the right discharge of this his commands.*<sup>94</sup>

For this reason, Owen is strongly opposed to a church's enforcement of membership on those who refuse to be a member of that church. This enforcement is evidently contrary to Scripture and should be rejected. Owen sets forth:

The admission of such persons, much more the compelling of them to be members of this or that church, almost whether they will or no, is contrary to the rule of the word, the example of the primitive churches, and a great expedient to harden men in their sin.<sup>95</sup>

Owen's view of voluntarism is significant when it comes to the unity of the church. Since voluntary choice is necessary for the membership of the church, no true unity is possible

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<sup>92</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 157.

<sup>93</sup> Cawdrey, *Church-Reformation Promoted: In a Sermon on Matth. 18. Vers. 15, 16, 17, Preached at Northampton on the Day of Humiliation, before the Association of Ministers* (London, 1657), 42.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution Power, Order and Communion of Evangelical Churches*, XV: 320. All italics original.

without voluntarism. Consequently, if a believer is merely registered to a particular church by a national law and does not join it by his own choice, he may leave it at any time without being involved in schism. Given that he is not united with that church in a true sense, it is even impossible for him to break any unity. Even if he leaves the church for his own negligence of the duty of love and forbearance, he is “not in the least liable to the charge of schism.”<sup>96</sup>

Voluntarism makes it possible for anyone to set up a particular church without recourse to an ecclesiastical authority. Owen’s argument for this way of church establishment is grounded in the power of Scripture. Because the Holy Scripture has “a sufficient efficacy and energy in itself,”<sup>97</sup> unbelieving souls can be converted to the gospel only through hearing or reading Scripture. If this is possible, Owen argues, there is no reason why those who are converted that way can come together and assemble themselves in the name of Christ.<sup>98</sup>

Another of Owen’s arguments for voluntarism is connected with his understanding of the relationship between salvation and the particular church. There is no salvation outside of the catholic church, visible or invisible, but “salvation depends absolutely on no particular church.”<sup>99</sup> No particular church can dare to claim that salvation is confined to itself alone. Therefore, one may choose and join any one from many particular true churches without endangering his salvation.

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<sup>95</sup> Owen, *An Inquiry*, XV: 321.

<sup>96</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 198-9.

<sup>97</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 178.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 179.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *An Inquiry*, XV: 324.



It is to be noted, however, that Owen's voluntarism does not grant a private believer unlimited religious choices. Voluntary choice should be exercised within a certain boundary. The church, which a believer wants to join, must be a church where any fundamental articles of faith are preached, the fundamentals of religious worship are administered, and the fundamentals of church discipline are carried out.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, true believers should not join the Roman church where those fundamentals are severely corrupted.

Even if such fundamentals are preserved, a believer is not at liberty to choose any particular church. There is another restriction to voluntarism. Although choosing a particular church is not the matter of salvation, it is a great matter of spiritual edification. Thus, one should seriously take into account edifying church ordinances when he chooses a particular church. Owen points this out:

The choice of what church we will join unto belongs unto the choice and of the means for our edification; and he that makes no conscience hereof, but merely with respect unto the event of being saved at last, will probably come short thereof.<sup>101</sup>

Not only salvation but also edification is also important to the Christian life. Owen's emphasis on edification is found throughout his works. Owen often describes edification as the principal end of a particular church. In consequence, a believer should not choose a church that does harm to his spiritual edification.

Even if it is acknowledged that spiritual edification is a criterion for choosing a particular church, who can judge that edification? Moreover, how can we know that that

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<sup>100</sup> Owen, *An Inquiry*, XV: 335-6.

<sup>101</sup> Owen, *An Inquiry*, XV: 324.

judgment is right? For instance, the Thirty-Nine Articles utterly deny that a private believer can judge in religious matters.<sup>102</sup> Those matters should be decided by the lawful authority such as the magistrate. By contrast, Owen highly regards the judgment of private believers. Each believer should decide the best church for himself, based upon his own judgment. Owen is aware that in general, Protestants acknowledged that private believers have “a judge of discretion” in things of religion.<sup>103</sup> The doctrine of a judgment of private discretion was widely used by Protestants to attack the Romanist concept of implicit faith. Private judgment, however, does not mean that a private believer can determine any religious matters. Its capacity is modified by superior judgments.<sup>104</sup> Owen, however, elevates the private judgment to the extent that it becomes an ultimate authority in determining religious matters that pertain to spiritual edification. As far as his judgment is not contrary to Scripture, a private believer is the final judge to himself when he judges the edification of a particular church.

Once a believer joins a particular church by voluntary choice, is it possible for him to leave it for another church for any reason? The answer to this question varies according to the situation. For Owen, if the believer’s leaving is a causeless departure, it is obviously a grave sin, but not a schism. If that leaving is a departure for a better edification, however, we can consider two possible cases: first, when the church grants him leave and, second, when the church refuses to do it. Since the church covenant is

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<sup>102</sup> Bicknell, *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 299.

<sup>103</sup> Owen, *An Inquiry*, XV: 342.

<sup>104</sup> There is a four-fold distinction in judgment on religious matters: 1. A judgment of supreme legislation and decision, which is peculiar unto God; 2. A judgment of civil inspection and moderation, which pertains to the magistrate; 3. A judgment of ministerial direction and instruction, which belongs to the pastors of the church; 4. A judgment of private examination and discretion that belongs to every individual Christians. Cf. Thomas Wilson, *Judicium Discretionis: Or a Just and Necessary Apology for, the Peoples Judgment of Private Discretion* (London, 1667), no pagination.

mutual, he cannot leave the church by his own decision alone; the leaving member needs permission of withdrawal. Owen believes that in that case the church has no reason to refuse to grant him the dismissal.<sup>105</sup> If the church agrees on his withdrawal, he can peacefully leave the congregation without giving any offense; this is no schism. When the church refuses to do so, however, the “greatest difficult” problem arises in regard to the discussion of schism. Owen describes the situation as follows:

Suppose a man to be a member of a particular church, and that church to be a true church of Christ, and granted so by this person, and yet upon the account of some defect which is in, or at least he is convinced and persuaded to be in, that church, whose reformation he cannot obtain, he cannot abide in that church, on the other side, cannot be induced to consent to his secession and relinquishment of its ordinary external communion, and that that person is hereby entangled;—what course is to be taken?<sup>106</sup>

If a member of the church leaves his congregation this way, can this not be called schism? If so, whose fault is it? First, it should be remembered that in that case the church is not objectively defective in any administrations. The church is defective only according to the judgment of the person who wants to leave. The question is whether a believer can leave a church based upon his own judgment alone in spite of the church’s refusal to grant him a dismissal. Owen is ready to call this schism.<sup>107</sup> In this case, however, both the leaving member and the church in question should take responsibility for schism. The fault of the church is that it is not granting him a dismissal; the fault of the leaving member is that he is not peacefully leaving it.

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<sup>105</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 197. Also, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 177.

<sup>106</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 197.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 198.

For Owen, there are other cases that a member can leave a particular church without its permission. Especially when church discipline is significantly neglected, separation is permissible. Owen thinks that a believer can leave a particular church without the guilt of schism when reformation is impossible due to a number of profane people. Owen is clear on this point:

Suppose this congregation, whereof a man is supposed to be a member, is not reformed, will not nor cannot reform itself . . .;—in this case, I ask whether it be schism or no for any number of men to reform themselves, by reducing the practice of worships to its original institution, though they be the minor part lying within the parochial precincts, or for any of them to join themselves with others for that end and purpose not living within those precincts? I shall boldly say this schism is commanded by the Holy Ghost.<sup>108</sup>

In order to justify such a separation, Owen refers to three biblical passages: 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:5; Hos. 4:15.<sup>109</sup> It is clear that these texts somehow justify separation. For this reason, separatists frequently cited these passages in defense of their position. Unfortunately, Owen simply mentions the texts and does not give us his own interpretations of them. Cawdrey insists that all of Owen's proof texts for separation are totally mistaken, because he does not consider their context. The crucial issue is precisely what kind of separation these texts describe. No text justifies private believers' separation from a church or separation because of the lack of church discipline. The former two texts, Cawdrey indicates, do not pertain to private believers. The command, "From such separate or turn away," was given by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, who was a pastor of

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<sup>108</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 199-200.

<sup>109</sup> 1 Tim. 6:5, "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself"; 2 Tim. 3:5, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away"; Hos. 4:15, "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Bethaven, nor swear, The LORD liveth."

the church at Ephesus. Furthermore, in the context of Paul's warnings, separation means separation not from a particular church, but from a certain group of teachers. Therefore, the two texts cannot be used to justify a separation from a church by private believers. Neither does the last text have anything to do with separation from a particular church, because it only prohibits the true Christians from joining with idolaters.<sup>110</sup> The reason for commanding the separation is not a defect in church discipline, but idolatry.

Finally, Owen deals with one of the most convincing arguments that was very popular among opponents to separatism. The argument is based upon the example of the Church of Corinth. To put it simply, the logic of the argument flows as follows: the Church of Corinth was filled with many divisions, abuses, disorders, and immorality, but the Apostle Paul advised nobody to separate from it; therefore we should not separate from the Church of England whose spiritual edification is much better than that of the Church of Corinth. In order to refute this argument, Owen points out that the Epistle to Corinthians was silent on what would really happen later to the Church of Corinth. The letter does not tell us whether or not the Corinthians reformed themselves according to Paul's admonition. If they did, no separation would have occurred. However, if they had continued to live in their notorious wickedness, says Owen, "it had been the duty of every saint of God in that church to have with drawn from it, to come out from among them, and not to have been partaker of their sins."<sup>111</sup> For Owen, although Paul's epistle to the Corinthians encourages Christians to keep unity even with wicked members of the church, it does not absolutely forbid any kind of separation.

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<sup>110</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 191.

<sup>111</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 201.

### 3.3.3 *Communion among Particular Congregations*

As we have seen above, the unity of the particular church, for Owen, primarily has to do with private believers, not with particular congregations. This does not mean, however, that no unity exists among particular congregations. It is unquestionable that particular congregations should be somehow united. Thus, the real question is how they are to be united?

Congregationalism was nicknamed “independency” in the middle of the seventeenth century. For the opponents of Congregationalism, independency threatened the unity of the church. If a congregation is independent in a full sense from the rest of other churches, they argue, how can they keep unity among them? Independency meant none other than rejection of communion and thus separation. It is first to be noted that the term “independency” is ambiguous. Congregationalists, like their opponents, emphasized that their church government was absolutely “dependent” upon Christ. Owen also rejects the idea of Independentism, given that “no church is so independent as that it can always and in all cases observe the duties it owes unto the Lord Christ.”<sup>112</sup> Moreover, as John Cotton points out, all religious parties are independent in the sense that each claims independency for its own party. For instance, the Romanists claim independency for the Roman church and the Quakers for their church. For this reason, Cotton prefers a term “Congregational” as opposed to “Presbyterian” or “Classical.”<sup>113</sup> In fact, Congregationalists fought for independence or autonomy of a local congregation, whereas their opponents for independence of the particular church in their view.

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<sup>112</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 196.

<sup>113</sup> Ziff, *John Cotton on the Churches of New England*, 186-7.

In respect to the union among particular churches, Owen considers it in two ways: union of the all particular churches in the catholic church, and a communion among some particular churches. Owen first points out that all particular churches are already united with Christ in the true faith. Owen sets forth:

The Lord Christ himself is the *original and spring* of this union, and every particular church is united unto him as its head. . . Unless this union be dissolved, unless a church be disunited from Christ, it cannot be so from the catholic church, nor any true church of Christ in particular, however it may be dealt withal by others in the world.<sup>114</sup>

Who would deny that Christ is the spring of union of all the particular churches? So the real question is, “Is this the only union of particular churches?” Owen’s answer to this question is affirmative. Just as all believers are united with Christ through the profession of true faith alone, so are all the particular churches. “The true and only union of all particular churches,” says Owen, “consists in that which gives form, life, and being unto the church catholic.”<sup>115</sup> If a congregation professes the true faith, its union with all the other particular churches should not be denied.

Although a particular church is already united with all other churches by no other means than the true faith, it should endeavor to keep external and actual communion with other churches. Congregationalism does not mean isolation. “If a church were interested in itself alone,” says Owen, “it would not only cut itself from the external communion of the catholic church but also spiritually endanger its own members.”<sup>116</sup> There are two

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<sup>114</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 189.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 189.

<sup>116</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 196.

possible ways that some particular churches are actually united: in a subordinate or mutual way. Owen sets forth his own view of communion among particular churches:

We do believe that *the mutual communion of particular churches* among themselves, in an equality of power and order, though not of gifts and usefulness, is the only way appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, after the death of the apostles, for the attaining the general end of all particular churches.<sup>117</sup>

Therefore, Owen utterly rejects any kind of subordination in regard to the communion of congregations. Scripture does not give any example for subordinationism. In addition, Owen argues that the history of the church shows that subordinationism weakened or destroyed communion of particular churches. The Roman church in particular usurped the primacy of honor and then the supremacy of jurisdiction, by which a true communion was overthrown.<sup>118</sup>

Therefore, the communion of some particular churches, a synod, should not be hierarchical, but conciliar or associational. Although a synod is not expressly commanded by Christ, says Owen, it is evidently his institution because of “the nature of the thing itself, which was also fortified with the apostolic example.”<sup>119</sup> It is self-evident that there are many ordinances for spiritual edification that a congregation alone cannot carry out. Moreover, if a congregation cannot solve its own internal problem, it cannot be fixed except by an assembly of congregations.

As is expected, however, the meaning of the term synod, for Owen, is significantly different from that of Presbyterians. First, it is not an assembly of delegates of presbyteries but of representatives of congregations. In this regard, a synod is closer to

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 185. Italics original.

<sup>118</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 184.



presbytery in Presbyterian polity. Second, a synod is the ultimate external means by which a problem of a congregation or congregations can be solved. There is no higher or next-step ecclesiastical organization above a synod. Finally, a synod has no authoritative power over its local congregations.

It is to be noted here that Presbyterians did not deny that a single congregation has equal power with other congregations, that it has a full power within itself regarding internal disputes, and that synodal authority cannot impose itself upon a particular church “in a *privative or destructive* way.”<sup>120</sup> Up to this point, there is no essential difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. When it comes to the relation of a single congregation to a synod, however, we can see a great difference. For Presbyterians, higher assemblies have “authoritative power and Ecclesiastical jurisdiction” over their lower assemblies “by way of sentencing in and deciding of Ecclesiastical causes.”<sup>121</sup>

Another important feature of a synod is that like a congregation it is a voluntary assembly. The so-called “calling of a synod” is nothing but “the voluntary consent of the churches to meet together.”<sup>122</sup> Since a synod is primarily a voluntary assembly, a congregation has the right to refuse it. A congregation has no obligation to join that synod, and its refusal cannot be called schism either. Owen says, “*One church refusing to hold that communion with another* which ought to be between them is not schism, properly so called.”<sup>123</sup> Just as a private believer joins a particular church voluntarily, so a particular

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<sup>119</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 196.

<sup>120</sup> *Jus Divinum*, 237-8.

<sup>121</sup> *Jus Divinum*, 238.

<sup>122</sup> Owen, *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, XVI: 205.

<sup>123</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 181.

church joins a synod voluntarily. Congregationalism seeks for a voluntary unity among particular congregations while rejecting any enforcement.

### ***3.3.4 Unity in Toleration***

Toleration was one of the main reasons Congregationalism was charged with schism. Toleration was considered to be a seedbed that nourished heresy, error, and separatism. For the opponents to toleration, therefore, it was incompatible with the unity of the church.<sup>124</sup> In contrast to the modern period in which toleration is viewed in a very positive way, the word toleration was commonly used in a pejorative way in the seventeenth century.

Unlike the New England Congregationalists who established Congregationalism as the state-supported religion, British Congregationalists, who failed to accomplish that, argued the case for toleration. The difference between the two Congregational groups, however, should not be exaggerated. If we carefully compare the two groups, we can see that the difference lies in degree, not in substance.<sup>125</sup> Both groups shared the same view of toleration in regard to substantial points. For instance, neither the British nor New England Congregationalists would tolerate heresies and errors such as Catholicism, Socinianism, Anabaptism, and Quakerism. Nor did they deny that the magistrate has power over men's conscience in certain religious matters; both parties were convinced that religion is not purely a private matter. For these reasons, the term toleration should be carefully understood. For Congregationalists as for the other religious parties,

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<sup>124</sup>Thomas Edwards, *The Casting Down of the Last and Strongest Hold of Satan. Or, A Treatise against Toleration and Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1647), 3.

<sup>125</sup>For the significant consensus on toleration among the Puritans, see Avihu Zakai, "Orthodoxy in England and New England: Puritans and the Issue of Religious Toleration, 1640-1650," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 135 (1991): 401-441.

toleration did not mean freedom of religion without discrimination; it merely meant allowing different worship or church government within protestant orthodoxy.

Marchamont Nedham, a physician and pamphleteer, made the point clear on the toleration issue. Nedham wrote:

We yield not to errors in Gospel-principles, only we can see no reason why mens consciences should be burdened with outward ordinances, or that they should be bound to this or that opinion in carnal formalities, which they cannot be perswaded of, and perhaps can alledge evidence from the Word for the contrary.<sup>126</sup>

By contrast, Presbyterians insisted that Congregationalists pleaded for virtually universal toleration. For Presbyterians, it did not matter whether toleration is universal or limited in scope. There was no essential difference between the two, insofar as both are contrary to Scripture. The difference lay merely in degree. “Whereas a partial Toleration offends against many particular places of Scripture,” said Thomas Edwards, “a Vniversall Toleration is against all Scripture, goes against the whole current scope and sense of Scripture both in the Old and the New Testament.”<sup>127</sup> Presbyterians suspected that limited toleration necessarily leads to universal toleration. If toleration was to be granted to Congregationalists, there would be no reason why it should not be allowed to other heretical religious groups as well.

Owen is keenly aware of the Presbyterians’ hostility to toleration. Like Presbyterians, Owen also believes that divisions and conflicts in England should be avoided and that all Protestants should be reconciled. The problem remained, however,

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<sup>126</sup>Marchamont Nedham, *Independencie no Schisme. Or, An Answer to a Scandalous Book, Entituled, The Schismatick Sifted: Written by Mr. John Vicars* (London, 1646), 3. Nedham was a physician who was staunchly hostile to Presbyterianism.

<sup>127</sup> Edwards, *The Casting Down of the Last and Strongest Hold of Satan*, 4.

how to achieve it. According to Owen, there are two possible ways: enforcing uniformity, and toleration.<sup>128</sup> The latter, for Owen, is the best way for unity of divided Protestant churches.

Toleration was one of Owen's great concerns throughout his career. He published a treatise and a sermon on this issue before 1660.<sup>129</sup> After the return of King Charles II, several treatises and small statements were published, including Owen's great refutation of Samuel Parker's *Discourse of Ecclesiastical Polity, and of the Power of the Magistrate in Matters of Religion*.<sup>130</sup> There is a slight difference between his thought before and after the Restoration. In the earlier period, Owen was in the position that he had to defend toleration as an established religious policy; in the later period, however, he defended Nonconformity from the persecution of the state church. Nevertheless, there is no significant difference between the two periods except that his view of toleration is more developed in the later time.<sup>131</sup>

In order to understand Owen's view of toleration correctly, we need to grasp what Owen does not mean by it. First of all, toleration does not mean that heresies and errors

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<sup>128</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 96.

<sup>129</sup> *Of Toleration and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion* (1648); *Christ's Kingdom and the Magistrate's Power* (1652); *Two Questions concerning the Power of the Supreme Magistrate about religion and the Worship of God, with One about Tithes, Proposed and Resolved* (1659).

<sup>130</sup> *Truth and Innocence Vindicated; In a Survey of a Discourse Concerning Ecclesiastical Polity, and the Authority of the Civil Magistrate over the Consciences of Subjects in Matter of Religion* (1669). Owen's other minor works on toleration are as follows: *Indulgence and Toleration Considered; in a Letter unto a Person of Honour* (1667); *A Peace-Offering in an Apology and Humble Plea for Indulgence and Liberty of Conscience* (1667); *An Account of the Grounds and Reasons on which Protestant Dissenters Desire Their Liberty* (publication date unknown); *The Case of Present Distresses on Nonconformists Examined* (publication date unknown); *The State of the Kingdom with Respect to the Present Bill against Conventicles* (1721; posthumous).

<sup>131</sup> More specific issues on toleration will be discussed in Chapter 5.

should be tolerated.<sup>132</sup> For this reason, the Socinians, who rejected the fundamental Christian doctrine of the trinity, should not be allowed to publish their teaching. Neither does it mean, however, that heretics should be severely persecuted. Owen is strongly opposed to the severe persecution of heretics unless they disturb public peace. Heresy as such should not be punished, but regulated.

Second, Owen's toleration does not allow any doctrine that, in its own nature, causes a disturbance of the state.<sup>133</sup> Consequently, the Jesuits and the radical Anabaptists, whose doctrines by themselves were a threat to the safety and peace of the state, should not be tolerated. In this case, the reason for punishment is not religious, but political. These groups also can be protected if they renounce their doctrines offensive to the civil authority.

Third, toleration does not mean that the "evil communication that corrupts good manners" should also be tolerated.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the doctrines that contain some evident immorality and idolatry should be suppressed by the magistrates. For instance, Roman Catholics should be punished for the papal mass, which is undoubtedly idolatry.

Finally, neither does toleration mean a freedom to resist the authorized religion which is sanctioned by the supreme magistrate.<sup>135</sup> Public worship and ministry should not only be protected but respected. In sum, toleration denies a complete separation between the church and state at all. For Owen, both ministers and magistrates were God's servants. The difference between the two is that ministers preach the gospel, while magistrates

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<sup>132</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 58.

<sup>133</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 59.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 59.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 59 -60.

protect it. Without this protection, the church falls into danger. In his *On Toleration*, Owen comes to his final thesis: “That magistrates have nothing to do in matters of religion, as some unadvisedly affirm, is exceedingly wide from the truth of the thing itself.”<sup>136</sup>

Up to this point, we see little difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Both believe that the protection of the magistrate is necessary for the well-being of the church. Therefore, the issue is not whether the church should be protected by the magistrate, but to what extent the church should be protected and supported by him. For Presbyterians, the magistrate has a right to determine the form of church government and enforce it upon his people. On the contrary, Congregationalists entirely deny this. If we compare the Westminster Confession with the Savoy Declaration, we cannot fail to notice that an important article on the magistrate in the Confession is replaced with a new one in the Declaration. The Confession states:

The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.<sup>137</sup>

By contrast, the Declaration declares:

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<sup>136</sup> Owen, *Of Toleration and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion*, 206. This short article was added to Owen’s sermon entitled *Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection*. Owen’s *On Toleration* was prompted by *A Solemn Testimony against Toleration and the Present Proceedings of the Sectaries and their Abettors in England* (Edinburgh, 1649).

<sup>137</sup> *The Westminster Confession*, xxiii, iii. Quoted from *The Confession of Faith; The Larger and Shorter Catechism, with the Scripture Proofs at Large* (Inverness: John G. Eccles Printers Ltd, 1983; reprint).

Although the Magistrate is bound to encourage, promote, and protect the professor and profession of the Gospel, and to manage and order administrations in a due subserviency to the interest to Christ in the world, and to that end to take care that men of corrupt minds and conversations do not licentiously publish and divulge Blasphemy and Errors in their own nature, subverting the faith, and inevitably destroying the souls of them that receive them: Yet in such difference about the Doctrines of the Gospel, or ways of worship of God, as may befall men exercising a good conscience, manifesting it in their conversation, and holding the foundation, not disturbing others in their ways or worship that differ from them; there is no warrant for the Magistrate under the Gospel to abridge them of their liberty.<sup>138</sup>

The comparison between the Confession and Declaration helps us to see that the real difference between the two parties is concerned with the degree and extent of the power of the magistrate. According to the Confession, keeping the unity and peace of the church is the magistrate's important task. In order to accomplish this task, the magistrate can suppress blasphemies and heretics. For the Declaration, however, the power of the magistrate is significantly restricted to the extent that he cannot infringe upon the liberty of conscience to worship God in a different way without offending others.

Owen also argues that intolerance cannot be a remedy for heresy and schism. The history of the church reveals that intolerance failed to remove heresy and errors from the church. The early church in particular shows us that persecution did not stop, but rather encouraged heretics to flourish throughout the world. While the church was not protected by the civil magistrates, heretics had little hold over the church in the first three centuries.

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<sup>138</sup> *The Savoy Declaration*, xxiv, iii. Quoted from *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, ed. Williston Walker (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1960; reprint). The quotation is also found in Owen, *Two Questions concerning the Power of the Supreme Magistrate about Religion and the Worship of God, with One about Tithes, Proposed and Resolved*, XIII: 513.

By contrast, Arianism, the most pernicious heresy, permeated almost the entire church despite severe persecution by the Christian magistrates.<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, the remedy for heresies and errors should be found in places other than persecution. Since heresies and errors are spiritual diseases, they can be treated by none other than spiritual weapons. Owen says, “As such heresy is a canker, but a spiritual one, let it be prevented by spiritual means. Cutting off men’s heads is no proper remedy for it.”<sup>140</sup> What then are the spiritual means? Owen enumerates “admonitions, reproofs, mighty Scripture convictions, evidencing of the truth.”<sup>141</sup> However, what should be done to heretics if all those remedies fail to persuade them? According to Owen, there can be no other way, because the spiritual remedies are the best way. All we have to do is to remind the heretics that they will be judged by God on the last day.<sup>142</sup>

On the contrary, Presbyterians do not make a strict distinction between spiritual and secular diseases. Presbyterians argue that if the magistrate has an authority to punish the violators who transgress the second table in the Ten Commandments, there is no reason why they should not punish those who transgress the first table.<sup>143</sup> Like thieves, blasphemers and heretics should also be severely punished. Owen, however, points out a significant difference between a thief and a heretic. While a thief is a thief to everybody,

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<sup>139</sup> Owen, *Of Toleration*, 184-5.

<sup>140</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government There*, VIII: 64. Cf. Owen’s emphasis on the spiritual cure is also found in *Of Toleration*: “The spiritual sword of discipline may be lawfully sheathed in the blood of heresies. No spiritual remedy can be too sharp for a spiritual disease,” VIII: 170.

<sup>141</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 58.

<sup>142</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 59.

<sup>143</sup> The Church of Scotland, *A Solemn Testimony against Toleration and the Present Proceedings of Sectaries and Their Abettors in England, in Reference to Religion and Government* (Edinburgh, 1649), 3.



a heretic is not so.<sup>144</sup> One who is judged as a heretic by a papist may not be so by a Protestant. For this reason, a criterion is required in order to determine heresy. Is there such a criterion? Owen's answer seems to be negative. "It is a most difficult undertaking," says Owen, "to judge of heresies and heretics,—no easy thing to show what heresy is in general;—whether this or that particular error be a heresy or no,—whether it be a heresy in this or that man."<sup>145</sup> This does not mean, however, that Scripture does not have any truth that is plain and clear to all believers. The point is that heresy is generally about doctrines difficult to understand and the best judge is subjected to error in judging heresy. Hence, heresy should not be persecuted even by the wisest Christian magistrates.

For Owen, intolerance entails persecution that cannot but produce hypocrites in the church, and thus it is not compatible with true religion. Owens says that intolerance "is the readiest means in the world, to root out all religion from the hearts of men."<sup>146</sup> For Cawdrey, however, enforced uniformity is necessary to protect the true religion. Persecution should not be confused with prosecution. Cawdrey says, "Surely to force *conformitie*, to the way of God, is no *Persecution*, much less *bloody*: but is only a *just prosecution* of evill and refractory *Rebells* to the Kingdome of Christ."<sup>147</sup>

In order to defend his position, Cawdrey uses the example of the kings of the Old Testament. The history of Israel shows that intolerance was the way of reformation and was also "the best way to *plant* and preserve *Religion*, in their heart of the Jews."<sup>148</sup> On

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<sup>144</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 62.

<sup>145</sup> Owen, *A Country Essay*, VIII: 60.

<sup>146</sup> Owen, *Of Schism*, XIII: 96.

<sup>147</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 17.

<sup>148</sup> Cawdrey, *Independencie a Great Schism*, 14.

the contrary, defenders for toleration insisted that the Old Testament theocracy came to an end in the New Testament era, and a clear distinction was made between spiritual and temporal authority.<sup>149</sup> Toleration was not only a political, but also a theological issue in seventeenth-century England. We can see here again that biblical interpretation played a key role in the debate on toleration. Owen carefully describes the relation between the Old and New Testament with respect to the secular power as follows:

*Although the institutions and examples of the Old Testament, of the duty of magistrates in the things and about the worship of God, are not, in their whole latitude and extent, to be drawn into rules that should be obligatory to all magistrates now, under the administration of the gospel . . . yet, doubtless, there is something moral in those institutions, which, being unclothed of their Judaical form, is still binding to all in the like kind, as to some analogy and proportion.*<sup>150</sup>

According to Owen, the monarchy as such is not abrogated in the New Testament because it still holds something moral; its outward institutions and actions, however, cannot always be applied to the New Testament magistrates. For this reason, persecutions, which were frequently used by the Old Testament kings, are incompatible with the gospel ordinances in the New Testament era, since those persecutions are merely outward actions, which cannot be a norm for all other kings.

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<sup>149</sup> James E. Bradley, "Toleration and Movements of Christian Reunion, 1660-1789," in Stewart J. Brown ed., *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815*, vol. 7, Cambridge History of Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 357.

<sup>150</sup> Owen, *Christ's Kingdom and the Magistrate's Power*, VIII: 394. Italics original.

## CHAPTER 4

### OWEN'S VINDICATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE FINAL JUDGE

#### 1. Historical Context for John Canes' *Fiat Lux*

The return of King Charles II to England in 1660 brought relief to English Catholics who had suffered under the Commonwealth.<sup>1</sup> During his exile, Charles had received great help from Roman Catholics and he showed them favor. In the Declaration of Breda, announced before the king landed in England, he guaranteed toleration not only to Protestant dissenters but also to Roman Catholics.<sup>2</sup> In the following year, Vincent John Canes' *Fiat Lux* appeared in print. Although Canes' tone was mild and sometimes obscure throughout the book, it is clear that his purpose was to restore the Church of England to Rome. At the time when Canes' book was published, no Roman Catholic work drew more Protestants' attention than *Fiat Lux*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the persecution of Roman Catholics was not so severe under the Commonwealth. Only two Roman Catholic priests were executed during the period. Cf. E. E. Reynolds, *The Roman Catholic Church in England & Wales* (Wheatthamstead: Anthony Clarke Books, 1973), 275.

<sup>2</sup> Despite that the king's promise was not fulfilled, he continued to advance a policy to promote Catholicism in England. Charles married a Portuguese Catholic princess, Catharine of Braganza in 1662. The Secrete of Dover signed by France and England in 1670 required England to rejoin the Church of Rome on the condition that England would receive military assistance from France. Finally, Charles died in the bosom of the Roman church in 1685. Cf. Edward Norman, *Roman Catholicism in England from the Elizabethan Settlement to the Second Vatican Council* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from Owen's two responses to *Fiat Lux*, there were some other Protestant criticisms of it: Peter Samways, *The Church of Rome not Sufficiently Defended from Her Apostacy, Heresie, and Schisme as Appears by an Answer to Certain Quæries, Printed in a Book Entituled Fiat Lux, and Sent Transcribed from thence by a Romanist to a Priest of the Church of England* (York, 1663); Jeremiah Ives, *Rome is no Rule, or, an Answer to an Epistle Published by a Roman Catholic who Stiles himself Cap. Robert Everard: and May Serve for an Answer to Two Popish Treatises, the One Entituled the Question of Questions, and the Other Fiat Lux* (London, 1664); Daniel Whitby, *Dos Pou Sto, or, An Answer to Sure Footing, So Far As Mr. Whitby Is Concerned In: Wherein the Rule and Guide of Faith, the Interest of Reason, and the Authority of the Church in Matters of Faith, Are Fully Handled and Vindicated, from the Exceptions of Mr. Serjeant, and Petty Flirts of Fiat Lux* (Oxford, 1666); George Fox, *Something in Answer to a Book Called Fiat Lux Being a Discourse between a Papist and a Protestant &c. who Writes at the Bottom of the Title*

Although Roman Catholics had shrunk into a minor group in England since the Elizabethan religious settlement,<sup>4</sup> they never gave up hope that the nation would be restored to Catholicism. Given that the Church of England is a national church whose head is the monarch, only a change of the monarch could change religion, as in the case of Queen Mary.<sup>5</sup> The publication of *Fiat Lux* was an expression of such expectation. That is the reason English Protestant divines always considered Catholicism to be a potentially great threat to the Church of England, and so did not stop engaging in the doctrinal debate with Roman Catholics.

The Elizabethan polemics between John Jewel (1521-1571) and Romanist opponents such as Thomas Harding (1516-1572) and William Allen (1532-1594) were taken up by later polemicists: John Percy (1569-1641) and Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645).<sup>6</sup> The Roman Catholic/Anglican debates, as we have seen in Chapter I, were continued by Henry Hammond (1605-1660) and John Sergeant (1623-1707) during the Commonwealth. Neither did the Restoration completely change the hostility between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. For instance, Stillingfleet's *A Discourse Concerning the Idolatry Practised in the Church of Rome and the Danger of Salvation in the Communion of It* (1672) provoked severe criticisms from Roman Catholic scholars.<sup>7</sup>

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Page, J.V.C. : *Also Something in Answer to the Papists Queries* (London, 1667); Samuel Mather, *A Defence of Christian Protestant Religion* (Dublin, 1672).

<sup>4</sup> For the number of English Catholics in the later seventeenth century see John Miller, *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 9-12.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Gunpowder Plot (1605), which had a long-lasting influence on Englishmen, was an attempt by a group of English Roman Catholic conspirators to kill King James I in order to put his daughter Elizabeth on the throne.

<sup>6</sup> For the best study on English Catholic polemicists in the seventeenth century see George H. Tavard, *The Seventeenth-Century Tradition: A Study in Recusant Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Thomas Godden, *Catholicks no Idolaters, or, A Full Refutation of Doctor Stillingfleet's Unjust Charge of Idolatry against the Church of Rome* (n.p., 1672); Serenus Cressy, *A Collection of Several Treatises in Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet* (n.p., 1672). Canes also wrote against

It is however notable that there appeared a significant change in theological debates by the middle of the seventeenth century. Some English Catholic theologians, contrary to the traditional position of their church, began to write in a peaceful tone by placing emphasis on similarities rather than on differences between Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, in the first half of the century, as John Spurr points out, “most Anglican apologists concentrated their fire upon the novelties of faith and practice introduced by Rome, but in the second half, they were questioning the authority by which these errors were imposed.”<sup>9</sup> Long-debated doctrinal issues such as sacraments, justification, and images were still disputed, but the more important issue was not whether a certain doctrine is right or wrong, but how its veracity could be proved. The question of questions was “Who ought to be our judge in all these our differences?”<sup>10</sup>

The question “Who is our judge?” was especially relevant to the Restoration in which one of the most urgent ecclesiastical tasks was to heal the divided churches. As a matter of fact, Canes’ full title of *Fiat Lux* shows us that he deals with the most hotly debated issue: *Fiat Lux or, a General Conduct to a Right Understanding in the Great Combustions and Broils about Religion Here in England. Betwixt Papist and Protestant, Presbyterian & Independent to the End that Moderation and Quietnes May at Length*

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Stillingfleet’s treatise: *ΤΟ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΩΝ STILLINGFLEETON, an Account Given to a Catholick Friend, of Dr. Stillingfleets Late Book against the Roman Church* (Bruges, 1672).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas H. Clancy, “Ecumenism and Irenics in 17th-Century English Catholic Apologetics,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 85-89. See also Kenneth L. Campbell, *The Intellectual Struggle of the English Papists in the Seventeenth Century: The Catholic Dilemma* (Lweiston and Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 179.

<sup>9</sup> John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 113-114.

<sup>10</sup> J. Mumford, *The Question of Questions which Rightly Resolveth All Our Questions in Religion: This Question Is: Who Ought to be Our Iudge In All These Our Differences?* (Gant, 1658). The second edition of *The Question of Questions* came out in 1686.

*Hapily Ensue After so Various Tumults in the Kingdom.*<sup>11</sup> The title *Fiat Lux* (“Let there be light!”) assumes that the previous period, the Interregnum, is a dark age filled with divisions, tumults, and wars. The main theme of *Fiat Lux* is simply this: given the failure of the Protestant way to bring unity to the church, the only way to resolve the doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences is to come back to the light, which is the Church of Rome.

Both in the preface and in the conclusion to *Fiat Lux*, Canes quotes largely from a speech delivered by Edward Hyde, the first Earl of Clarendon, who was a chief ecclesiastical adviser to the king until his resignation in 1667.<sup>12</sup> Hyde’s speech did not pertain to anything special. He simply described the miserable situations in England, and placed emphasis on charity as a means to remedy it. Canes praised Hyde’s speech as “golden words,” but his praise did not please the Earl of Clarendon who was perceptive enough to recognize the danger of Catholicism in *Fiat Lux*. The Earl looked for an able theologian who could effectively refute Canes’ work. When John Owen met him to ask him to lighten the burden of Nonconformists, the Earl did not lose the chance.<sup>13</sup> Hyde asked Owen to write against *Fiat Lux* and Owen gladly accepted it. The result was *Animadversions on a Treatise Entitled “Fiat Lux” or, “A Guide in Differences of Religion between Papist and Protestant, Presbyterian and Independent.”* Canes did not reply to other Protestant criticisms of *Fiat Lux*, but he wrote a brief response to Owen’s *Animadversions* in a letter form, which stimulated Owen’s more detailed criticism, *A*

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<sup>11</sup> *Fiat Lux* was published in 1661. Its slightly enlarged edition appeared in the following year. Some of the titles of the sections were changed, but their number remained the same. Owen knew both editions. I will refer to Canes’ second edition in the dissertation except when necessary.

<sup>12</sup> Hyde’s speech was delivered to the two houses of Parliament in September 1660. Cf. Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> A. Thomson, *Life of John Owen*, I: lxxi.

*Vindication of the Animadversions on "Fiat Lux."*<sup>14</sup> Both *Animadversions* and *Vindication* were Owen's major apology for Protestantism against Catholicism. The two works, as Owen indicates at the end of the preface in *Vindication*, did not merely aim at Canes alone but at the whole system of Roman Catholicism.<sup>15</sup> Owen's main purpose of the two responses was to demonstrate why the Roman church cannot be a safe guide and why Protestantism is the only true way to Christian unity.

## **2. Four Competing Supreme Judges: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Inner Light**

It is obvious that endless doctrinal debates between different denominations cannot be ended if the final judge is not first determined. The problem of authority was the fundamental issue of unity controversies in seventeenth-century England, given that the same judge is a necessary way to ecclesiastical unity as well as doctrinal unity. Because each party insisted on its own judge, the divisions of the church could not be healed at all.

The question of the final judge in religious matters was not a totally new one during the middle of the seventeenth century. The sixteenth-century Reformation itself was nothing but a war between two authorities: the church and Scripture. The problem of authority remained one of the urgent issues in the early seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> That

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<sup>14</sup> Canes, *An Epistle to the Authour of the Animadversions upon Fiat Lux: In Excuse and Justification of Fiat Lux against the Said Animadversions* (n.p., 1663). Canes' *Epistle* was republished in *Diaphanta, or, Three Attendants on Fiat Lux wherein Catholick Religion is Further Excused against the Opposition of Severall Adversaries* (1665) and *Three Letters Declaring the Strange Odd Preceedings of Protestant Divines when They Write against Catholicks* (1672). The full title of Owen's second response was *A Vindication of the Animadversions on "Fiat Lux" Wherein the Principles of the Roman Church as to Moderation, Unity, and Truth, are Examined: and Sundry Important Controversies concerning the Rule of Faith, Papal Supremacy, the Mass, Image, etc., Discussed* (London, 1664).

<sup>15</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 181.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967; reprint), 71.

debate became far sharper by the middle of the seventeenth century, because two new rivals, Socinians' reason and Quakers' inner light, joined the former competition.<sup>17</sup>

Both Roman Catholics and Protestants believed that Scripture is divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit. Roman Catholics also considered Scripture as a judge-type for matters of faith. It is no wonder we see Roman Catholic divines justifying their doctrine by frequently resorting to the authority of Scripture. However, they denied Scripture as the only sufficient judge, since it is a book which needs an interpreter. As the exiled English Roman Catholic theologian Richard Smith argued, Scripture is merely a *proposal* of points of faith which should be distinguished from its *proposer*.<sup>18</sup>

For their part, Protestants did not deny that Scripture needs to be interpreted. However, they emphasized that an interpreter's interpretation of Scripture is merely human, which cannot escape errors. Consequently, Scripture, which alone is divinely inspired and thus infallible, should be the supreme judge for fallible interpretations. The Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does not mean that tradition or other authorities should be rejected. Rather, the essential meaning of *sola Scriptura*, as Anthony N.S. Lane points out, is that Scripture is the final or supreme judge by which all the other opinions or interpretations concerning religious matters are to be determined.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Socinianism was no great threat to the Protestant orthodoxy until 1640s. In England, active Socinianism was initiated by John Bidle, who was called "Father of English Unitarianism." It was in 1641 that Bidle began to teach at the Crypt School in Gloucester. Cf. H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in the Seventeenth Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 163. Quakerism also spread rapidly after the 1650s. For the growth of Quakerism see Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society 1655-1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), chap. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Smith, *Of the Al-Sufficient External Proposer of Matters of Faith* (Paris, 1653), 71-74.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony N. S. Lane, "Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite and D. F. Wright (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1994), 323. For the definite study of the doctrine of Scripture in the Reformation and post-Reformation, see Muller *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of the Theology*, vol. 2, Post-Reformation Reformed



*Sola Scriptura* did not mean the same thing to all Protestant parties either. The famous aphorism of William Chillingworth, “The BIBLE, I say, the BIBLE alone is the Religion of Protestants” did not prevent him from approving the catholic or universal church as a judge as well.<sup>20</sup> He did not believe that Scripture is the only judge for all religious controversies. The Church of England clearly proclaimed that Scripture is sufficient as far as things necessary to salvation is concerned.<sup>21</sup> In other words, there are some other areas to which *sola Scriptura* could not apply. The conflict between the Conformists and Puritans was related not to the principle of *sola Scriptura*, but to the extent to which the principle covers. On the one hand, the apologists for the Church of England fought against the Roman church in the name of *sola Scriptura*; on the other hand, they criticized Puritans for misusing that principle.

It is to be equally noted that the authority of Scripture was not denied by Socinians either. John Bidle, one of the most eminent English Socinians, was a gifted biblical scholar who translated the Scriptures. For Socinians as for orthodox Protestants, Scripture is the divine revelation which is not corruptible. Therefore, all the doctrines contained in Scriptures are necessarily true, and anything that is contrary to it is false.<sup>22</sup>

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Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520-to ca. 1725 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> William Chillingworth, *Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (London, 1638), 357. In its context, Chillingworth’s comment does not expressly intend to proclaim the principle of *sola Scriptura*. He simply compares the Bible with the Council of Trent. Just as all opposing Romish parties agree on the council’s creed, so the Protestants, no matter how different they are, agree that the Bible alone is the safe way to salvation. Chillingworth’s “catholic church” does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church but to “the consent and testimony of the ancient and primitive Church.”

<sup>21</sup> Article 6 of the Thirty Nine Articles. Quoted from E. J. Bicknell, *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, 125.

<sup>22</sup> R. H., *The Protestant Plea for a Socinian: Justifying His Doctrine from Being Opposite to Scripture or Church-Authority; And Him from Being Guilty of Heresie, or Schism. In Five Conferences* (London, 1686), 1. *Protestant Pleas* was an excerpt from the fourth discourse of *A Rational Account of the Doctrine of Roman-Catholicks concerning the Ecclesiastical Guide in Controversies in Religion* (n.p., 1673).

For instance, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly true because Scripture clearly testifies to that. Unlike Roman Catholics, Socinians gladly acknowledged the sufficiency and even perspicuity of Scripture.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to orthodox Protestants, however, they denied that all necessary doctrines such as Trinity can be known to all sincere Christians. The real issue between the Protestant orthodox and the Socinians was whether those doctrines are clearly and plainly stated in Scripture. Socinians believed that those doctrines are ambiguously stated in Scripture, and thus they should be determined by human reason.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, reason became the final judge of religious controversies in the thought of Socinians. It was by their own interpretation on the basis of reason that Socinians rejected the fundamental Christian doctrines.<sup>25</sup>

Quakers' doctrine of the inner light was the outcome of the radical interpretation of the Puritans' view of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture.<sup>26</sup> Both Puritans and Quakers acknowledged that the Holy Spirit is the true interpreter of Scripture. William Penn, a leading Quaker in Pennsylvania, emphasized that Owen himself said, "The *Publick, Authentick and Infallible Interpreter* of the holy Scripture, is He who is the Author of them; from the Breathing of Whose Spirit it Deriveth all its

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<sup>23</sup> Rees Thomas, F.S.A., *The Racovian Catechism, with Notes and Illustrations, Translated from the Latin: to which is Prefixed A Sketch of the History of Unitarianism in Poland and the Adjacent Countries* (Lexington: The American Theological Library Association, 1962; reprint), sec. I, chaps. 3 and 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Racovian Catechism*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: In Transylvania, England and American* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 193-7; H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in the Seventeenth Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 175-183.

<sup>26</sup> For the study of the Puritan understanding of the relation between the Spirit and Scripture, see Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992; reprint), chaps. 1 and 2.

Unity, Perspicuity and Authority.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of this premise, however, Quakers argued that Scripture itself should be tested by the Spirit who dwells in human beings. Although Scripture is an authentic account of divine revelation, it is only a secondary rule in comparison to the Spirit of God. Robert Barclay, one of the most prominent Quakers, clearly states this point as follows:

Because they [the biblical accounts of divine revelation] are onely a declaration of the Fountain, and not the Fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all Truth and knowledge, nor yet the *adequate, primary Rule* of Faith and manners. Yet, because they give a true and faithfull testimony of the first Foundation, they are, and may be esteemed, a *secondary rule, subordinate* to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty . . . Therefore, according to the Scriptures, the *Spirit* is the *First* and Principal Leader.<sup>28</sup>

The tendency of Quakers to detach the Spirit from Scripture was criticized by Owen. Although the Spirit and Scripture are not identical, they cannot be separated from each other. The fact that we cannot properly understand Scripture without the help of the Spirit does not necessarily degrade the status of Scripture as the only rule. The Spirit is a *guide* who leads us to the *rule*: Scripture.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the Spirit is not a self-determining guide who is separated from Scripture. Furthermore, the inner light itself, which cannot be identified with the Holy Spirit, should be tested by none other than Scripture.

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<sup>27</sup> William Penn, *The Christian Quaker and His Divine Testimony Stated and Vindicated, from Scripture, Reason and Authority* (London, 1699), 230 and 237. Italics and upper cases original. Penn's citation of Owen is found in Owen's *A Defense of Sacred Scripture against Modern Fanaticism* in trans. Stephen P. Westcott, *Biblical Theology*, 797. The original title was *Pro Sacris Scripturis Exercitationes adversus Fanaticos*, published in 1659.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, as the Same is Held Forth, and Preached by the People, called in Scorn, Quakers* (n.p., 1678), 41. See also, William Penn, *The Christian Quaker*, 205-254. Italics original.

<sup>29</sup> Owen, *ΣΥΝΕΣΙΣ ΙΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ* or *the Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein; and A Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scripture, with the External Means of the Interpretation of Them*, IV: 158-159.

### 3. The Church of Rome Is Not the Final Judge

#### 3.1 Protestantism Is Not Responsible for Schism

Canes insists that Protestantism is solely responsible for divisions and schisms that the Church of England experienced since the Reformation. Canes' argument in *Fiat Lux* flows as follows: there had been no such division in the church before the Reformation; there is no unity even among Protestants; but the Church of Rome is still enjoying her unity; therefore, not Catholicism but Protestantism is the cause of all divisions in the Church of England. Whether true or not, Canes' argument was simple and seemed to be highly convincing at first sight. Owen's primary concern in the reply to *Fiat Lux* was to remove from Protestantism that false accusation. In order to refute Canes' logic more effectively, Owen compares Canes with Celsus, a pagan philosopher in the second century, who criticized Christians in a similar way. Owen sets forth his argument as follows:

Doth our author lay the cause of all the troubles, disorders, tumults, wars, wherewith the nations of Europe have been for some season, and are still, in some places, infested, on the Protestants?—so doth Celsus charge all the evils, commotions, plagues, and famines, wherewith mankind in those days, was much wasted, upon the Christians.<sup>30</sup>

The comparison between Celsus and Canes clearly demonstrates that a party is not necessarily responsible for disorders such as schism, simply because the disorders occurred after the party was formed. In a similar way, although Christians formed a new community out of the Roman society, and consequently conflicts were created, we cannot

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<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 15.

say that the Christian church was responsible for that miscarriage. This could be true of Protestantism.

Owen's comparison may excuse Protestantism from its separation from the Roman church. However, how can Protestantism be excused for divisions within itself? It seems to be apparent that the Roman church cannot be responsible for the intra-Protestant schism. In order to answer that question, Owen continues to compare Canes with Celsus.

Hath he [Canes] gathered a rhapsody of insignificant words, at least as by him put together, out of the books of the Quakers, to reproach Protestants with their divisions?—so did Celsus out of the books and writings of the Gnostics, Ebionites, and Valentinians.<sup>31</sup>

The earliest heresies crept into the church through their abuses of the doctrines of Christianity. However, we cannot say that Christianity is responsible for those heresies. By the same token, Protestant orthodoxy is not necessarily responsible for the intra-Protestant heretics and schismatics. Only those who misinterpreted and abused it should bear that responsibility.

Furthermore, Owen denies Canes' claim that the church continued enjoying peaceful unity before the Reformation. Even granted that there was such a unity in the pre-Reformation church, unity or peace in itself does not have an absolute value. Still, the comparison between the Roman empire and Christian church is relevant to the debate over the unity of the church. The ancient Roman world had enjoyed unity for a long time before the gospel powerfully spread, but that unity was merely "a conspiracy against God,

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<sup>31</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 15.

a consent in error and falsehood.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, the unity of the church should be most of all unity in the truth, without which any unity is false.

For Owen, the true unity of the church cannot be compatible with force. The question of “unity how?” is as important as that of “unity in what?” The Roman church may have preserved her unity before the Reformation. That unity, however, was nothing but unity by force as well as unity in falsehood. Therefore, we cannot say that there was any unity in a true sense under the reign of the Roman church. Unity by force is like a house built upon sand. “No sooner was a door of liberty and light opened unto them,” says Owen, “but whole nations were at strife who should first enter in at it.”<sup>33</sup> Although divisions and schisms came into the church after the truth was proclaimed and freely received, the real cause for those miscarriages is not the truth itself, but the force by which the Roman church had long suppressed it.

Owen even attributes intra-Protestant divisions to the Roman church. “Our divisions,” says Owen, “are not the effect of our *leaving* Rome, but of our *being* there.”<sup>34</sup> According to Owen, the Protestant church was not completely free from the falsehood of the Roman church. She had long suffered from corruptions and abuses under the Church of Rome, and just began to turn away from her. Although all Protestants headed for the same destination, they varied somewhat “in their choice of particular tracts.”<sup>35</sup> This variation, for Owen, is not the result of departing from Rome, but it is merely inescapable due to human imperfection. Owen says:

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<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 30.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 31.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 33. Italics original.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 33.

That all men are not made perfectly wise, nor do know all things perfectly, is partly a consequence of their condition in this world, partly a fruit of their own lusts and corruptions; neither to be imputed to the religion which they profess, nor to the rule they pretend to follow.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, the ultimate causes for the internal schisms of Protestants are not the true doctrines that they proclaimed, but their incomplete reformation and imperfection in knowledge and judgment.

Finally, Owen points out that the Roman church was not free from internal schisms and divisions either. Although all the members of the Roman church seemed to be united in their subjection to the pope, their internal feuds are much more severe than Protestants'. It is not difficult to see that princes and nations of the same Romanist faith wage war against each other, and "invectives, apologies, accusations, charges, underminings of one another" among Roman Catholic scholars "are part of the weekly news of these days."<sup>37</sup> In Owen's view, papists should first take care of their own misery before criticizing Protestants.

### 3.2 The Origin of the Gospel

Canes sets forth one important criterion to determine the final judge: "He *from* whom it came, must have the primary guidance over al; and he *unto* whom it first came, must carry a secondary presidentship over all such as be derived from him."<sup>38</sup> Canes repeatedly emphasizes this point throughout *Fiat Lux*. Canes says:

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<sup>36</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 34.

<sup>37</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 34.

<sup>38</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 44. Italics original.

Did the Gospel first com from you, or only to you [?]: If either, tell me which and on what side it is, and I shall be on that; if neither, I can be of no side to follow it as my guide. For though each party may haply have it some reliques of truth amongst other fals inventions . . . yet can no such party hold forth any doctrin I may safely build upon.<sup>39</sup>

Canes' rhetorical question has two purposes: one is to support toleration for Roman Catholics and the other is to demonstrate the superiority of Catholicism over Protestantism. It is obvious to Canes that the gospel was proclaimed to Roman Catholics as well as to Protestants. Hence, for Canes, Roman Catholics' doctrines should be respected, neither should Protestants impose their doctrines on Roman Catholics. Canes, nevertheless, does not develop his idea to the extent that it elevates Protestantism to the same level as Catholicism. For Canes, Catholicism is superior to Protestantism because the latter received the gospel through the former. Consequently, Protestants should be guided by the Church of Rome. Thus, Canes makes the origin of the gospel the most important criterion for determining the final judge.

Owen refutes Canes' criterion in three ways. First, Owen denies that the Church of England first received the gospel from the Church of Rome. It is true that some Roman missionaries brought the gospel to Britain and their missionary efforts should be highly respected. However, they are not the first who spread the gospel on the island. At this point Owen relies on the traditional legend that Joseph of Arimathea, who was considered the Virgin Mary's uncle, brought the Word of God into Britain for the first time. Owen's point, however, is not whether the legend is true or not; the point is that the legend is evidence that the gospel must have been preached, without the mediation of the Church

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<sup>39</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 46 (The original pagination is a misprint).



of Rome, in England even in the time of the apostles.<sup>40</sup> Just as the gospel was directly delivered to Rome from Palestine, so was it to England. There is no difference between Rome and England with respect to the origin of the gospel.

Second, Owen distances the present Roman church from the former. Owen does not entirely deny that two great conversion movements occurred in England by the efforts of the missionaries sent by the Roman church. In the second century, the English church could survive a pagan conquest due to the works of two Roman missionaries: Fugatius and Damianus. At the end of the sixth century, too, the almost deserted English church could revive by the eminent Roman monk: Augustine of Canterbury. For Canes, those Roman missionaries are the proof that the Church of England was indebted to the Church of Rome for the reception of the gospel. On the contrary, for Owen, their missionaries' works do not support Canes' cause. The gospel preached by Fugatius and Damianus was the same as "the old catholic faith," but it was quite different from that of the later Roman church.<sup>41</sup> After both died, not only the English church but the whole world suffered considerably under horrible pagan savages. During that period, the Church of Rome degenerated more and more from primitive purity. When Augustine landed on the island, what he brought with him was not the pure gospel, but "the mixtures of human traditions, worldly policies, observances trenching upon the superstitions of the Gentiles, in many things it had then revived."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Owen shows a positive attitude toward

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<sup>40</sup> The editor of the *Works of John Owen* gives us a detailed footnote on the origin of Christianity in England. Not all Protestants agreed on the veracity of the legend of Joseph Arimathea. But there are a few references in which some church fathers implied the existence of a church in England. Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 95-98.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 98.

<sup>42</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 102.

Augustine in that Augustine's gospel did not contain such pernicious doctrines as the present Roman church hold.

Third, Owen rejects Canes' criterion for the final judge as such, because the question of who first received and delivered the gospel does not matter at all in determining the final judge. Canes argues that nonbelievers cannot believe the Bible unless they first acknowledge the authority of those who delivered it to them. Canes sets forth:

Put case we were all at this instant in our antient state of paganism, and a Priest or two should com to us from Rom to convert us now as then they did to Christianity, with the gospel in their hands, which they should tell us to be pure truth and Gods word, which we never heard before: if we should reject and disesteem them as cheating seducers, could we rationally accept and beleev the book?<sup>43</sup>

For Canes, the authority of the deliverer precedes that of the receiver because what is delivered totally depends on the authority of the deliverer. Consequently, the Church of Rome, the deliverer, is superior to the Church of England, the receiver. Owen entirely rejects this idea. "If we should grant that the fist news of Christianity was brought into England by Papists," says Owen, "yet it doth not at all follow that if we reject Popery we must also reject the gospel, or esteem it a romance."<sup>44</sup> The deliverer is merely a means by which the gospel is transferred to the receiver. The receiver receives the gospel not on the ground of the authority of the deliverer, but on the ground of the authority of the delivered in itself. For Owen, the evangelization of the Samaritans (John 4) is a good

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<sup>43</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 215.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 330.

example for this: at first, they receive the gospel through the woman, but “when they come to experience themselves its power and efficacy, they believe it for its own sake.”<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Owen points out that Scripture itself does not support the idea that the deliverer is superior to the receiver. When even the apostle Paul admonishes his readers, he says “If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed.” Paul never says, “*We* preached first unto you, by *us* you were converted; and therefore with *us* you must abide, from whom the faith came forth unto you.”<sup>46</sup> Even if the Church of Rome is the deliverer of the gospel, the receiver, the Church of England, has no obligation to abide with her when she falls away from the original gospel. Owen succinctly summarizes the discussion on this matter as follows:

If those from whom we first received our Christianity, ministerially, abide in truth, we must abide with them; not because they, or their predecessors, were the instruments of our conversion, but because they abide in the truth. Setting aside this consideration of truth, which is the bond of all union, and that which fixeth the centre, and limits the bounds of it, one people’s or one church’s abiding with another in any profession of religion, is a thing merely indifferent. When we have received the truth from any, the formal reason of our continuance with them in that union which our reception of the truth from them gives unto us, is their abiding in the truth, and no other.<sup>47</sup>

Whether or not the Church of England should have communion with the Church of Rome depends on the latter’s continuance in the truth, which alone is the formal cause of the unity of the church. Hence, for Owen, it is no schism to leave a church that is already separated from the truth itself.

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<sup>45</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 330.

<sup>46</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 23. Cf. Galatians 1:8. Italics original.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 21-22.

### 3.3 The Church of Rome Is a Fallen Church

Near the end of *Fiat Lux*, we see a set of questions called *Queries*<sup>48</sup> which defends the Roman church from the charge of heresy, apostasy and schism. *Queries*, although only two pages, was widely circulated. Most of the responders to *Fiat Lux* devoted themselves to refuting the questions in *Queries*.

The arguments of *Queries* can be briefly stated as follows: not only the Bible but also all Protestants affirm that the Church of Rome was once a pure, true, and mother church; there are only three ways by which the Church of Rome can fall from that state: apostasy, heresy, and schism; apostasy is defined as “not onely a renouncing of the Faith of Christ, but the very name and title to Christianity”; heresy as “an adhesion to some private and singular opinion, or errour in Faith, contrary to the general approved Doctrine of the Church”; and schism as “a departure or division from the Unity of the Church, wherby the Band and communion held with som former Church, is broken and dissolved.” Given that the Church of Rome has never fallen into the category of apostasy, heresy, and schism described as above, no one can deny that she is still the true church, and a church separated from her is in schism.<sup>49</sup>

Owen first agrees that the Church of Rome was once a pure and true church. However, he does not think that the Church of Rome deserves the name “mother.” The concept of “mother church,” for Owen, had been widely misused, and thus should be corrected. Most of all, we cannot find this phrase in Scripture. Only in one place does

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<sup>48</sup> Canes did not write *Queries* by himself. It was borrowed from a friend of Canes' who he does not identify. *Queries* shows that the author is familiar with well-known Protestant theologians such as Whitaker, Sanders, White and Reinolds.

<sup>49</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 386.

Scripture give that title to “Jerusalem that was above,” which is said to be “mother of us all.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the idea of the mother church may apply to the church triumphant, but it is apparent that the idea cannot refer to the Church of Rome.

Moreover, Owen, like other Protestants, entirely denies that the earliest Church of Rome remained the same. He also denies that there are only three ways by which the church ceases to exist as the true church. In particular, all the definitions of heresy, apostasy, and schism described in *Queries* need to be corrected.<sup>51</sup>

First, there are many other ways by which a church falls from the first pure state besides the three ways mentioned in *Queries*. For instance, a church cannot only fall but can also stop existing. The Church of the Britons, which was as pure as the Church of Rome, was once destroyed by the sword of Saxons. Similarly, the old Church of Rome was entirely ruined by the Gothic king, Totilas.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the contemporary Church of Rome cannot be identical with the old church. The Church of Rome is no different from the Church of England in that both can cease to exist at any time.

Idolatry, which the *Queries* omits, is another way for a church to fall from the pure state of the primitive church. In fact, this is the worst way in which Owen believes the Church of Rome had fallen.<sup>53</sup> The history of the church shows that many churches had fallen by idolatry, which is clearly distinguished from apostasy, heresy or schism.

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<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 26. Cf. Galatians, 4:26.

<sup>51</sup> Although *Queries* was added to the end of *Fiat Lux*, Owen’s response was found in Chapter 2 of *Animadversions* and in Chapter 4 of *Vindication*.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 214. Canes also acknowledges a possibility of extinction of a church by a natural disaster such as earthquake or famine. The main point, Canes says, is concerned “with a moral and voluntary laps in faith.” Canes, *Epistles to the Author of the Animadversions*, 23. On the other hand, Owen’s main concern is to prove that there are many possibilities that do not guarantee the perpetuity of the church.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 30.

The doctrine of transubstantiation and the worship of images, saints, angels, and Mary are clear evidences that the Church of Rome fell by idolatry. Canes also admits that a church could fall by idolatry; however, not all idolatry involves the fall of the church. “Idolatry,” says Canes, “is a mixt misdemeanor both in faith and manners, I speak of the single one of faith.”<sup>54</sup> According to Canes, the papacy may be responsible for idolatry in manners, but not for idolatry in faith, into which the Church of Rome has never fallen. However, Owen doubts the validity of Canes’ distinction of idolatry as such. Owen believes that the Church of Rome fell not only by idolatry in manners, but also by idolatry in faith. Furthermore, Owen does not agree that a church can fall by idolatry in manners only. In order to refute Canes, Owen refers to the history of Israel. Owen asks the question, “The Church of Judah was once a pure church, in the days of David; how came she, then to fall?” and then answers his own question: that the Church of Judah fell not by idolatry, “but by corruption of life, unbelief, and rejecting the word of God for superstitious traditions, until it became ‘a den of thieves.’”<sup>55</sup> Not only doctrine but also moral life is essential to determining the fall of the church. The purity of the church does not merely mean purity in doctrine. According to Owen, the purity of the church is most of all the holiness of the members of the church, and both cannot be separated from each other. The Church of Rome fell from her purest state in the sense that her members are severely corrupted in morality. Owen writes:

And it is a fancy, to dream of the *purity* of a church in respect of its outward order, when the power and life of godliness is lost in its members; an a wicked device, to

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<sup>54</sup> Canes, *Epistles to the Author of the Animadversions*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 215. “Manners” is here referred to as morality.

suppose church, though it may have “a name to live,” yet indeed is “dead,” and dead things are unclean.<sup>56</sup>

Next, Owen deals with apostasy and heresy. In refuting Canes, Owen felt the need to clearly define the meaning of the two words, because Canes does not seem to properly use them. If there is no consensus on the definition, it would be hard to discuss the same issue. First, Owen denies that apostasy is a total denial of faith while heresy is a partial error. Contrary to Canes’ definition of apostasy, the Galatians were charged with apostasy by the apostle Paul, despite that they retained “the name and title of Christians.”<sup>57</sup> The basic meanings of apostasy and heresy used in Scripture are departure and choice, respectively. Therefore, apostasy denotes “the *relinquishment* of any important truth or way in religion;” and heresy “the *choice* or embracement of any new destructive opinion, or principle, or way in the profession thereof.”<sup>58</sup> According to these biblical definitions, it is apparent to Owen that the Church of Rome is apostate in the sense that she departed from some fundamental doctrines such as justification by faith, and she is also heretical in the sense that she added some new poisonous doctrines, such as purgatory and papal supremacy, to the fundamentals.

Finally, Owen deals with the issue of schism. Canes’ concept of schism is based upon the traditional definition: separation from the true church. Hence, *Queries* insists that the following three questions should be fully answered in order to charge the Church of Rome with schism:

#### 1. Whose company did She leave?

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<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 215. Italics original.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 28.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 221. Italics original.

2. From what body did She go forth?
3. Where was the true Church which she forsook?<sup>59</sup>

If one adopts the definition of schism described in the *Queries*, he must answer those questions. Peter Samways, a strong Conformist, indeed answered that question by arguing that the Church of Rome left “the company of the Orthodox” for false doctrines.<sup>60</sup> Samways’ answer did not satisfy the Romanists, because the “the company of the Orthodox” is merely the reiteration of the true church. The real question, “What orthodox company did the Church of Rome leave?” remains unanswered.<sup>61</sup>

Owen does not deal with schism as much as with apostasy and heresy. Owen used his own definition of schism, as we have seen in the previous chapter in his criticism of papacy. A church does not need to leave the true church in order to be a schismatic church. Consequently, Owen does not have to answer the three questions in order to prove the schism of the Roman church. The Church of Rome is schismatic because of her internal conflicts. “She had fallen,” says Owen, “by *schism* in herself,—as the Judaical church did when divided into Essenes, Sadducees, and Pharisees,—setting up pope against pope, and council against council, continuing in her intestine broils for some ages together.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 387.

<sup>60</sup> Samways, *The Church of Rome Not Sufficiently Defended from Her Apostasy, Heresy, and Schism*, 16

<sup>61</sup> Samways, *The Church of Rome Not Sufficiently Defended from Her Apostasy, Heresy, and Schism*, 32. *The Church of Rome* consists of dialogues between Catholics and Protestants.

<sup>62</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 224. Italics original. It is interesting to see that Samuel Mather, a New England Congregationalist who then lived in Ireland, also responds to *Queries* in a similar way. Mather makes a distinction between schism *within* a church and schism *out of* a church. According to the former, a church could be schismatic even if it did not separate from other churches.



Not satisfied with Owen's criticism, Canes raised an ultimate question related to authority. Even if the Church of Rome had fallen by apostasy, heresy, and schism, who would judge her fall? Canes argues as follows:

If any ther were, to judg her, som Oecumenical council to condemn her, som fathers either greek or latin, expressly to write against her, as Protestants now do, som or other grave solemn authority to censur her; or at least som company of beleevers out of whose body she went, and from whose faith she fell: not of which since you are not able to assign, my Query remains unanswered.<sup>63</sup>

In short, as far as a superior judge is not identified, the fall of the Church of Rome cannot be proved even if she actually falls.

Owen refutes Canes by contending that a superior judge is not necessary to prove the fall of the Roman church, given that her doctrines by themselves are enough evidence for her state of the fall. A harlot is a harlot even if she is not officially condemned by any judge.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, those doctrines that the Church of Rome was teaching had already been condemned by the previous ecumenical councils, the church fathers, and Scripture. The fact that a church is not currently condemned by a superior authority does not necessarily mean that her purity is intact.

### 3.4 The Pope Is Not the Head of the Church

It is worth noting that the Council of Trent did not elaborate the doctrine of the church. Although the papacy was severely challenged by the Reformers, the Trent divines did not reach a consensus on the doctrine of papacy. Strong supporters for Gallicanism and conciliarism still could be found in the council. No Roman Catholics argued for the

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<sup>63</sup> Canes, *An Epistle to the Authour of the Animadversions upon Fiat Lux*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 224.

unlimited power of the pope, and thus marginalized the authority of the general council. Moreover, the more important ecclesiological issue in the council was the bishops' obligation of residence.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the relationship between the pope and general council was not finalized in Trent. However, we should not hastily conclude that Roman Catholics did not have any agreement on the issue of papacy. There is no doubt that the papacy was the center of the Roman Catholic ecclesiology. All Roman Catholics called the pope the only visible head of the catholic church. They were different only in regard to how the supremacy of the pope should be exercised in relation to the general council and to the bishops.

For Roman Catholics, the headship of the pope was established by divine right because it was directly ordained by Christ Himself.<sup>66</sup> Overall, the doctrine of the papacy is based upon three major suppositions: Christ appointed Peter the chief of the Apostles (Mt. 16:17-19 and Jn. 21:15-17); he was the first bishop of Rome; his headship was handed over to his successors. These Roman Catholic suppositions were highly criticized by English Protestants.<sup>67</sup> Protestants entirely rejected the first supposition based upon their own interpretation of the so-called Petrine texts. The second supposition seemed to be highly doubtful to Protestants given that Peter was called the apostle not for the

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<sup>65</sup> For the definite study on the Council of Trent, see Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Dom Ernest Graf O.S.B, 2 vols. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1961).

<sup>66</sup> Henry Holden, *Analysis of Divine Faith, or, Two Treatises of the Resolution of Christian Belief with an Appendix of Schism* (Paris, 1658), 222. *Analysis* is a translation of *Divinae Fidei Analysis* (1652).

<sup>67</sup> The bulk of works against papal supremacy were written in the period between the Restoration and Revolution. In particular, Isaac Barrow's masterpiece, *A Treatise of the Pope's Supremacy* (1680), continued to be reprinted since its publication. It should be noted that Anglicans were not consistent on the issue of the papacy. Some Anglicans were not slow to call the pope 'anti-Christ,' whereas others gladly acknowledged the pope's primacy in order and honor. However, all of the English Protestants, with one voice, criticized abuses and corruptions in the papacy and denied the papal supremacy over the Church of England. Cf. J. Robert Wright, "Anglicans and the Papacy," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 13.3 (1976): 382-385.

Gentiles, but for the Jews. Even if the first two suppositions are granted, there is no guarantee for the third one.

While holding fast to the conventional and ‘biblical’ defenses for papal supremacy, English Catholics argued for the doctrine by placing emphasis on the necessity of a supreme ecclesiastical governor for the unity of the church. As far as unity is concerned, they argued, the general council alone is not sufficient since it is an occasional assembly. The church needs a permanent officer that can always preside over all particular churches. Moreover, the general council may not completely solve its internal controversies and conflicts. “It would be impossible,” says Serenus Cressy (1605-1674), “without an *Ordinary*, constant, standing *Supreme Authority* in the Church, to prevent *Schisms*, that is, it is impossible the Church should subsists.”<sup>68</sup>

In *Fiat Lux*, we can see that Canes’ seeming support for toleration does not prevent him from weakening his confidence in the papacy. He even boldly says, “No pope no bishop, no bishop no Church, no Church no salvation.”<sup>69</sup> If we follow Canes’ logic, the pope is not only useful but also necessary for our salvation. Canes’ defense for the papacy is closely related to the question of how to view the church. For Canes, the church, which is instituted by Christ, is not aristocracy or democracy, but a hierarchical monarchy.<sup>70</sup> If the church is essentially a monarchy, then she always needs a supreme head, and the full submission of all particular churches to the head is essential for the unity of the church. That is the reason why Roman Catholic theologians spoke about a

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<sup>68</sup> Cressy, *Roman-Catholick Doctrines No Novelities* (n.p., 1663), 45. Italics original.

<sup>69</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux* (first edition), 179. The quotation was omitted in the second edition.

<sup>70</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 192.

double unity of the church: unity in faith and unity in government.<sup>71</sup> The truth of the gospel cannot stand alone without the assistance of the ecclesiastical government. Unity in faith should be preserved, protected, and fortified by unity in government.

The Roman Catholic/Protestant controversy over the head of the church is also closely related to the issue of how to view the unity of the church. If the church is absolutely one, then the church in a later period should be essentially the same as the primitive church. Neither Roman Catholics nor Protestants objected this point. If the two churches are essentially different, then we would have two churches. What makes the two churches, past and present, the same? Roman Catholics and Protestants differed on the answer. Roman Catholics argued that while Jesus was on earth, He was the visible head of the church, so the later church should also have a visible head. Given the absence of Jesus on earth, the present church needs a substitute for Him, that is, the pope. Otherwise, we cannot help but suppose two opposing churches: a church that once had a visible head and a church that does not have one. Canes says:

Since Jesus Christ as man, the head immediate of other believing men, is departed hence to the glory of his Father, that the Church should still have a head of the same kind, as visibly now present, as she had in the beginning; or els say I, she cannot be completely the same body, or a body of the same kind, completely visible as she was. But this she hath not, this she is not, except she have a visible byshop, as she had in the beginning, present with her, guiding and ruling under God. Christ our Lord is indeed still man-God, but his man-hood is now separate; nor is he visibly now present as man, which immediately headed his beleevers under God, on whose influence that nature depended.<sup>72</sup>

Protestants admitted that the visible head is essential to the unity of the church, but denied that the head, Christ, was replaced with someone else. The pope may be a head of

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<sup>71</sup> Sergeant, *Schism Disarm'd*, 656-658; Holden, *Analysis of Divine Faith*, 108-9.

<sup>72</sup> Canes, *An Epistle to the Authour of the Animadversions upon Fiat Lux*, 52.

the church militant, but it is evident that he cannot be such for the church triumphant. At most, therefore, we could say that the pope is a head of only a part of the whole church.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, Protestants argued that it is inevitable that Roman Catholics destroy the unity of the church by bringing in two heads: Christ, the head of the church triumphant, and the pope, the head of the church militant.

In response to *Fiat Lux*, Owen also severely criticizes Canes' notion of the head of the church. First, Owen indicates that there is no difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants as to the monarchy of the church. However, the church is a monarchy only in the sense that Christ is the king of the church. Due to the headship of Christ, the essence of the church did not change throughout history. This sameness depends on the same head alone. Owen points out that Canes' view of the sameness of the church is based upon the wrong inference: "The *sameness* of the church depends upon the *visibility* of its head, and not on the sameness of the head itself."<sup>74</sup> For Owen, therefore, whether the head is visible or invisible does not matter. Christ is always the same head of the church, but only in a different manner.

Owen argues that Canes is wrong in his understanding of the visibility of the head. For Owen, that visibility does not pertain to natural eyes, but to the spiritual eye, that is, faith. Owen responds to Canes:

You mistake the whole nature of the visibility of the church, supposing it to consist in its being seen with the bodily eyes of men; whereas it is only an affection of its public profession of the church, whereunto its being seen in part or in whole by the eyes of any or all men doth no way belong. That the church, as I said before, was indeed never absolutely visible in its head and members, he who was the head of it being never in his whole person visible unto the eyes of men;

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<sup>73</sup> Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning Nature, Unity, and Communion of the Catholic Church*, 7-10.

<sup>74</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 367. Italics original.

and he is yet, as he was of old, visible to the eyes of faith, whereby we see him that is invisible.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, there is no fundamental difference between Jesus on earth and Jesus on heaven with respect to visibility. The difference pertains only to natural eyes. Christ was and is the visible head of the church to true believers. On the contrary, that visible headship was invisible to those who actually saw him but did not believe in Him while He was on earth. Given that we always have Christ as the visible head of church, therefore, we do not need any substitute for it.<sup>76</sup> The visibility of the head depends upon faith alone, and thus the presence or absence of Christ does not have any effect on His visibility.

The Roman Catholic theory of the substitution of Christ's headship, Owen argues, necessarily will destroy His headship because: "To have one *succeed* another in his care infers that that other *ceased* to take and exercise the care which formerly he had and exercised."<sup>77</sup> In order to escape such criticism, Roman Catholics tried to protect the headship of Christ by making a distinction between headship of spiritual influence and headship of external government. For Roman Catholics, the latter alone was succeeded by the pope. Christ still remains the head of the church in the sense that He influences the church through the Holy Spirit. Owen accepted the double distinction itself, but entirely denied that the external government of the church was succeeded by the pope. Owen says: "It is Christ himself: who as by his Spirit he exercises the office of a head by invisible influence, so by his word that of visible direction and rule: he is, I say, the only

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<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 367.

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 369.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 374. Italics original.

head of visible direction to his church, though he be not a visible head to that purpose.”<sup>78</sup>

In short, Christ is both the invisible and visible head of the church.

#### 4. Scripture as the Protestant Principle of Unity

After criticizing Roman Catholics’ false view of the unity of the church, Owen devotes himself to defending Protestants’ true principle of the unity of the church. As a Protestant orthodox, Owen firmly believes in the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. For Owen, the true unity is no other than unity in the truth revealed in Scripture alone. In contrast, Canes maintains that endless internal divisions within Protestant churches are undeniable evidence that disproves the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Canes sets forth:

God’s word is both the sufficient and only necessary means of both our conversion and settlement, as well in truth as virtue. But the thing you heed not, and unto which I only speak, is this, that the Scripture be in two hands; for example, of the Protestant church in England, and of the Puritan, who with the Scripture rose up and rebelled against her. Can the Scripture alone of itself decide the business? How shall it do it? Has it ever done it? Or can that written word, now solitary and in private hands, so settle any in a way that neither himself, nor present adherents, nor future generations, shall question it, or with as much probability dissent from it, either totally or in part, as himself first set it? This is the case unto which you do neither here nor in your whole book speak one word.<sup>79</sup>

Canes’ argument is clear. If *sola Scriptura* does not and cannot resolve schisms among Protestant churches, it would be impossible for the doctrine to heal the division between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Since Scripture cannot but be differently interpreted according to different points of view, another final authority is necessarily required to resolve those differences. One of the major tasks of Owen’s *Vindication* was to refute

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<sup>78</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 371.

<sup>79</sup> Canes, *An Epistle to the Authour of the Animadversions upon Fiat Lux*, 29.

Canes' criticism of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. In his refutation, Owen demonstrates that Scripture is not the source of difference or division, but the only true way to Christian unity.

#### 4.1 The Material Sufficiency of Scripture

The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* means, first of all, that Scripture alone is materially sufficient for the entirety of Christian doctrine, because God revealed all divine truths in Scripture. From the perspective of Scripture's sufficiency, *sola Scriptura* should be carefully understood, especially in relation to Tradition. First of all, Scripture itself is a written tradition, whereas Tradition, properly called, is an unwritten tradition. Thus, Scripture and Tradition are in no sense mutually exclusive. In particular, no Roman Catholics subordinated Scripture to Tradition. In this regard, we should remember that the issue of the Reformation, as Heiko A. Oberman succinctly demonstrates, was not Scripture or Tradition but rather the struggle between two differing concepts of Tradition: Tradition I or the single-source theory held the view that all saving doctrines are contained in Scripture and thus appeal to an extrascriptural tradition should be rejected; by contrast, Tradition II or the two-source theory allowed it.<sup>80</sup> According to the latter, Tradition is not only "the *instrumental vehicle of Scripture* through which the contents of Holy Scripture in a constant dialogue comes alive," but also "the *authorative vehicle of divine truth*, embedded in Scripture but overflowing in extrascriptural apostolic

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<sup>80</sup> For Tradition I and Tradition II, see Heiko A. Oberman, "Scripture and Tradition: Introduction," in *Forerunners of the Reformation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 53-66; idem, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1983), 365-412. According to Oberman, there were two groups among the supporters of Tradition II: Canonists explicitly denied the material sufficiency of Scripture, whereas theologians of that persuasion upheld the view in theory, but gave it up in practice. The latter group believed that all divine truths revealed in Scripture while admitting extrascriptural tradition.



Tradition.”<sup>81</sup> Tradition II was officially adopted by the Council of Trent. Although the original well-known expression of *partim . . . partim . . .*<sup>82</sup> was replaced with the simple conjunction “*et*,” and thus Tradition I was permitted, the Tridentine divines did not reject the substance expressed in *partim . . . partim . . .*<sup>83</sup> As a result, the majority of the post-Tridentine Catholic theologians interpreted “*et*” as “*partim . . . partim*,” and thus “two-source theory” became dominant in the post-Tridentine Roman Catholic position.<sup>84</sup>

In both *Animadversions* and *Vindication*, Owen’s main target is the two-source theorists such as Bellarmine, Hosius, Phighius, and Hermannus whom Owen believes to be the authentic Roman Catholic interpreters of the Council of Trent. For Owen, the two-source theory inevitably causes great damage to the authority of Scripture by making it an imperfect revelation. Owen says,

Your council of Trent hath decreed that your *unwritten traditions* are to be received with the same faith and veneration as the Scriptures, constituting them to be one part of the word of God, and the Scripture another: than which nothing could be spoken more in contempt of it or in reproach unto it.<sup>85</sup>

We should not forget that even the two-source theorists do not deny that Scripture is the Word of God. According to the theory, however, Scripture is merely a part of the divine

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<sup>81</sup> Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 406; idem, “Scripture and Tradition: Introduction,” 55.

<sup>82</sup> The full sentence is as follows: *Perspiscinesque hanc veritatem partim contineri in libris scriptis, partim sine scripto traditionibus*. For the study of Trent on Scripture and Tradition, see Congar’s masterpiece, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967), chap. 5. This is a combined translation of the two originals in French: *La Tradition et Les Traditions; Essai Historique* (1960) and the same title with *Essai Théologique* (1963).

<sup>83</sup> Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2, 75. For Doberman’s arguments for viewing the council as Tradition II, see Oberman, *The Harvest*, 407.

<sup>84</sup> George H. Tavard extensively wrote on this topic. Cf. *Holy Writ or Holy Church; the crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959); “Tradition in Early Post-Tridentine Theology,” *Theological Studies* 23 (1962): 377-405; “Scripture and Tradition: Sources or Source?,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (1964): 445-459.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 351, 354. Italics original.

revelation. Furthermore, some Roman Catholics maintained that Tradition contains a greater part of the divine revelation than Scripture does.<sup>86</sup> It follows that both Scripture and Tradition should be the guide of the church, and the principle of *sola Scriptura* should be rejected.

Hence, Owen strongly supports the material sufficiency of Scripture in stating that Scripture is the “*only external means of divine supernatural illumination*, because it is the only repository of all divine supernatural revelation.”<sup>87</sup> Given that the whole revelation of God’s will is preserved in Scripture, the Word of God and Scripture are the same materially although they are not identical. “The word of God,” says Owen, “doth not in itself imply its being written, nor exclude it, but may be considered indifferently as to either; whereas ‘the Scripture’ signifies the same word, only with the addition of its being committed to writing.”<sup>88</sup> This difference between Scripture and the Word is an important point when Owen refutes the Roman Catholic view that the church is superior to Scripture, because the church, which was instituted before Scripture, authorized it. It is true that the church was before the Word of God was written, but we cannot say that the church precedes Scripture given that all the content of the Word of God, which would be written later, was already there before the church.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 352.

<sup>87</sup> Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, IV: 12.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church is not the Only nor the Chief Reason of Our Believing the Scripture to be the Word of God*, VIII: 500.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 299.

In order to defend the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, Owen devotes his energy to refuting the Romanist concept of *Scriptura et Traditio*.<sup>90</sup> It is not difficult to see that Owen uses the term tradition almost in a negative sense throughout his works. In Owen's works, the term mostly accompanies negative adjectives such as "human," "corruption," or "imperfect." It is to be equally noted, however, that Owen's *sola Scriptura* does not mean *Scriptura sine traditione*. Owen highly regards the early church fathers and ancient creeds, the Nicene Creed in particular. Moreover, Owen gladly acknowledges some usefulness of ecclesiastical tradition for the interpretation of Scripture. What Owen wants is to properly orient the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Hence, Owen does not attack Tradition itself, but the Romanists' abuses of it.

The fundamental weakness of Tradition, for Owen, is that it is undoubtedly human, while Scripture is divinely inspired. The humanness of Tradition does not mean that it is entirely false; that humanness emphasizes that Tradition itself should be put to the test, because it is subject to human errors. If someone claims that he has the true Tradition, Owen asks, for what reason should we believe his claim?<sup>91</sup> For Owen, there is no other way to find the genuine Tradition except by Scripture.

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<sup>90</sup> Besides the *Animadversions* and *Vindication* we need to confer Owen's other important treatises and sermons in order to properly understand his view of scripture and Tradition: *Pro Sacris Scripturis Exercitationes Adversus Fanaticos* (1658); *The Testimony of the Church Is Not the Chief Reason for Our Believing the Scripture to be the Word of God* (1675); *ΣΥΝΕΣΙΣ ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ* or, *the Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein; and a Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scriptures, with the External Means of the Interpretation of Them* (1678); *The Reason of Faith; or, An Answer unto That Inquiry, "Wherefore We Believe the Scripture to be the Word of God"* (1677). *The Testimony* was originally printed in N. Vincent's *The Morning-Exercises against Popery*. Although *Pro Sacris* and *Reason of Faith* were written against *Quakers* and *ΣΥΝΕΣΙΣ ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗ* against rationalistic theologians, both contain significant anti-Roman polemics. Cf. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 83.

<sup>91</sup> Owen, *Of Divine Original*, XVI: 332

Owen further argues that in contrast to the Romanist view, Tradition does not lead us to unity, but to divisions. In this regard, the Jewish church is the best example for this. The Roman Catholic and Jewish churches shared the same error in the sense that both insisted on the uninterrupted tradition. Like the Roman church, the Jewish church retained the “twofold law:” one being the written law, and the other a tradition that has been handed over to later generations. However, the oral tradition did not bring unity to the Jewish church. Rather, it bred numerous different teachings and doctrines particularly in the time of the Maccabbees. “Then it was,” says Owen, “that, for the first time, Judaism broke into various sects, taking the names of their various great teachers.”<sup>92</sup> In the time of Jesus in particular, despite the fact that the Jewish church was the only true church, its leaders rejected his doctrines on the grounds that they are contrary to their tradition.<sup>93</sup> The example of the Jewish church shows us that human tradition causes schism in the church and makes believers hostile even to the gospel truth.

#### 4.2 *Autopistos* of Scripture: Problem of Authority

The second important meaning of *sola Scriptura* is that Scripture, in and of itself, claims to be the Word of God. Although the two-source theory was largely a dominant view in the mainline post-Tridentine Catholic theologians on the continent, there was a significant group in the English recusants who held the one-source theory.<sup>94</sup> This group

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<sup>92</sup> Owen, *Pro Sacris Scripturis*, 818-819.

<sup>93</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 79.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Tavad, “Scripture and Tradition among Seventeenth-Century Recusants,” *Theological Studies* 25 (September, 1964): 343-385; *The Seventeenth-Century Tradition: A Study in Recusant Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974). However, there was an exception for this. Thomas Bayly, a converted Roman Catholic controversialist, clearly states the two-source theory when he says: “Though all scripture be inspired of God: yet, all Scripture is not all the Word of God. For, the Word of God is partly written, and partly unwritten.” Bayly, *An End to Controversy between the Roman Catholique and the Protestant*

believed that like Protestants, Scripture contains all the necessary revelation.

Consequently, the real issue between Roman Catholics and Protestants was not the content of Scripture, but the means or authority by which Scripture is known as the divine revelation. For Protestants, Scripture alone was sufficient for this task; for Roman Catholics, however, it was not. Well aware of this issue, Owen sets forth as follows:

The question is not concerning the object of faith, the thing to be believed; for both acknowledge it, in this business, to be divineness of the Scripture: nor concerning the efficient cause of the faith; for both [Catholics and Protestants] will own it to be the Spirit which works this faith in the heart: but concerning the *medium or argument* whereby the Spirit works it, and so the ground and foundation of our faith, that which is the formal reason why we believe the Scripture to be the word of God.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, the problem of authority became the fundamental issue of unity controversies.

Canes also notices the problem of authority. For Canes, the issue of Scripture's authority was a great ecumenical problem, even in the time of Jesus. When the New Testament was not yet written, a Jew might have raised the question of who can prove that the Old Testament prophesizes Christ as the coming Messiah, given that the Old Testament does not specifically mention His name and the whole church never dreamt of it. "This is the great ecumenical difficulty."<sup>96</sup> According to Canes, this difficulty cannot be avoided but by recourse to the infallibility of the church that preserved the whole teaching of Jesus by way of the apostolic tradition.<sup>97</sup> Owen rejects Canes' argument by simply referring to Jesus Himself, who repeatedly defended His doctrines by His own

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*Religions Justified* (Douai, 1654), 83. It is worth noting that Owen seldom mentions the English recusants. All in all, Owen devoted himself to refuting the Roman Catholics on the continent.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 503. Italics mine

<sup>96</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 158-9.

<sup>97</sup> Canes, *Fiat Lux*, 162.

interpretation of the Old Testament.<sup>98</sup> What is more, as Owen indicates, some of the earliest church fathers such as Justin Martyr also followed Christ when they vindicated Christian doctrines by resorting to the Old Testament.

It is to be noted that Protestants did not disregard the authority of the church in order to protect the honor of Scripture nor did Roman Catholics attempt to impair the authority of Scripture in the name of the church. What both parties wanted to do was to properly determine the relationship between the church and Scripture. In the matter of formal cause of authority, Protestants subordinated the church to Scripture whereas Roman Catholics reversed the order. Owen also highly respects the use of teaching ministry. “The Scripture is the only [external] means of illumination,” says Owen, “but it becometh so principally by the application of it unto minds of men in the ministry of the word. . . . The church and the ministry of it are the ordinances of God unto this end, that his mind and will, as revealed in the word, may be made known to the children of men, whereby they are enlightened.”<sup>99</sup> Owen believes that Scripture is the Word of God by the help of the church, an ordinary institution ordained by God for that task. This does not mean, however, that we believe Scripture *because of* the church’s guidance. If this were so, our faith would be groundless, although the object of faith itself is right. For Owen, “why to believe” is as important as “what to believe.” Owen says:

The Scripture is the word of God is infallibly true, yet the faith whereby a man believes it so to be may be fallible; . . . He may believe it to be so on tradition, or the testimony of the church of Rome only, or on outward arguments; all which being fallible, his faith is so also, although the things he assents unto be infallibly true.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 79.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, IV: 13.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, IV: 17-8.

As long as our faith is grounded on the testimony of the church, not Scripture, our faith is in danger. Owen preaches as follows:

If the church holds forth to me any divine truth, and I yield my assent to it merely because the church declares to me, though what I believe be a divine truth, yet the faith with which I receive it will be but a human faith; the truth is of God, but my faith is in man.<sup>101</sup>

In order to refute the Protestant doctrine of *autopistos* of Scripture, Roman Catholics claimed that the testimony of the church is none other than the testimony of God. They often argued that the testimony of God is absolutely divine, and the testimony of the church is *modo quodam*, “after a sort,” divine. Owen is not satisfied with that distinction. “If the testimony of the church be but ‘in some sort’ a divine testimony,” says Owen, “the faith which is built upon it can be but ‘in some sort’ a divine faith.”<sup>102</sup> That faith is necessarily inferior to the faith that is grounded on Scripture, which is God’s testimony itself.

Therefore, our faith should be ultimately grounded on Scripture which proclaims itself to be the Word of God. For Owen, Scripture is both the material object of our faith and the formal cause of it. From this identification comes Scripture’s highest authority, which resides not outside but within Scripture itself. Owen defines authority as “a power of commanding or persuading, or, as some phrase it, ‘convincing,’ arising from some

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<sup>101</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 515.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 516.

excellency in the thing or person vested with such authority.”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, the problem of authority can be stated as follows:

Now, when we speak of the authority of the Scripture, and ask from whence it hath it, we do but inquire whence it is that the Scripture persuades, convinces, or binds us to believe it, or commands us to assent to it, as the word of God; or commands us to assent to it, as the word of God; or whereon its power of so doing is founded,—whether it be not some excellency inherent in itself, or whether it be only something foreign and extrinsical to it.<sup>104</sup>

The Protestants affirms the former; Roman Catholics the latter.

It is further to be noted that Roman Catholics also believed that Scripture in itself is the Word of God, but denied that its authority is self-evident in relation *to us*. Roman Catholics argued that although the church cannot make Scripture, she has the authority to declare it. Without this declaration, we cannot know whether or not Scripture is the Word of God. Thus, the crucial difference between Protestantism and Catholicism, as Owen points out, is whether or not in relation to us, Scripture “binds us to receive and believe it.”<sup>105</sup>

Owen doubts the validity of the distinction between authority of Scripture *in se* and *quoad nos*. He points out that relation is an essential concept of authority and thus no

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<sup>103</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 500-501. Owen’s sermon is based upon the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man in hell asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers on earth and warn them. But Abraham declined the request, saying “they have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” Owen argues that given that it is evident that Abraham refers to “Moses and the Prophets” as the Old Testaments, neither as ministers or the church, Scripture alone is sufficient for our faith.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 500.

<sup>105</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 502. For the Catholic view of the distinction between internal and external, see Richard Smith, *Of the Al-Sufficient External Proposer of Matters of Faith*, 70. For the distinction between *in se* and *quoad nos* see Richard A. Muller, *Holy Scripture: the Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 262, 365-6. The Protestant orthodoxy also used the distinction, but denied that authority *quoad nos* comes from the church. Authority both *in se* and *quoad nos* depends upon Scripture alone. This is the fundamental difference between Catholics and Protestants with respect to authority of Scripture.



authority stands alone. If someone has authority, he should have authority over something or someone else. Just as a king has authority over his kingdom, Scripture also has authority over its readers.<sup>106</sup> In short, authority *in se* cannot be separated from authority *quoad nos*. That distinction is merely a conceptual one. If a law does not have authority *for us*, we would not have any obligation to keep it. By the same token, if we deny the authority of God's law in relation to us, no one could condemn us when we violate it.

Owen says:

That is not a law properly at all, which is not a law to some. Besides, all the evil of disobedience relates to the authority of him that requires the obedience. (James 2:10, 11) No action is disobedience, but from the subjection of him who performs it unto him who requires obedience. And, therefore, if the Scripture hath not an authority in itself towards us, there is no evil in our disobedience unto its commands, or in our not doing what it commandeth; and our doing what it forbiddeth is not disobedience, because it hath not an authority over us.<sup>107</sup>

Owen is also aware of the distinction between authority *de jure* and authority *de facto*: that a man has authority *de jure* does not necessarily mean that he exercises the authority *de facto*. For instance, a king's law can be indeed violated by his subjects. For Owen, however, this distinction does not support the Roman Catholic cause either. The fact that some subjects disobey their king's law does not invalidate its authority over them.<sup>108</sup> The king's law has authority over his subjects regardless of their obedience. This is equally true of the law of God—Scripture.

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<sup>106</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scripture*, XVI: 308.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scripture*, XVI: 309.

<sup>108</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scripture*, XVI: 309.

Owen points out that the Romanist claim that Scripture should be testified by the church is not self-evident. In order for the Romanist claim to be true, it should be first proved whether there is a church; then, the definition and nature of the church is to be determined; and, when this is done, we should find that church.<sup>109</sup> However, all of the knowledge of the church can be obtained through nothing but Scripture. Therefore, the church cannot be but ultimately dependent upon Scripture.

Moreover, Owen emphasizes that the authority of Scripture had been acknowledged before any church was instituted, even the Church of Rome. The council at Jerusalem is the best evidence for this. The church leaders at the council did not declare the Old Testament as the Word of God, but rather they took it for granted.<sup>110</sup> In order to refute Owen, Roman Catholics would claim that the canon of Scripture was determined by the church. Owen thinks that although that may be true, it cannot support the authority of the church over Scripture. The real question is why the church declared a certain book to be a canon. The church must first see a certain divine stamp of God in that book in order to declare it to be a canon.<sup>111</sup> The canonization is merely the church's cognition of the divine nature of Scripture.

Finally, Owen advocates *autopistos* of Scripture by pointing out its similarity with other manners of divine revelation. For Owen, there are three ways in which the divine truth is revealed: his works, the innate light of nature, and the Word. Creation and providence are the undoubted expression of God's glory and power. By the light implanted in the human mind, God reveals His moral law and judgment to human beings.

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<sup>109</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 506.

<sup>110</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 513.

<sup>111</sup> Owen, *The Testimony of the Church*, VIII: 529.

Both are not only a divine revelation in themselves but also to all human beings. God does not need any external authority to convince us that those revelations are God's revelations.<sup>112</sup> If God's works and light of nature in themselves are a divine revelation, Owen argues, it does not make sense that Scripture, which is much clearer than the two, cannot be a revelation to us without any external authoritative witness.

#### 4.3 The Perspicuity of Scripture

Although both the material sufficiency and *autopistos* of Scripture are granted, Scripture alone could be insufficient if Scripture by itself does not give us clear meanings of its texts. This was exactly the Roman Catholics' view on the doctrine of Scripture's sufficiency. In theory, Roman Catholics also adopted the sufficiency of Scripture, but made it merely conditional by claiming that Scripture is a sufficient rule only "if wee take the Scripture rightly interpreted."<sup>113</sup> Hence, Scripture was insufficient without its infallible interpreter. For Protestants, on the other hand, such an interpreter was not required, because all of the necessary truths are expressly revealed in Scripture. Thus, Protestants fought against the Romanist doctrine of the insufficiency of Scripture in the name of perspicuity.

Some Roman Catholics often argued that God revealed all things in Scripture, but He entrusted its interpretation to the church. This idea, for Protestants, did great harm to the authority of Scripture. Roman Catholics tried to escape this criticism by carefully setting up the relationship of Scripture to the church. Thomas Bayly wrote:

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<sup>112</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scripture*, XVI: 310.

<sup>113</sup> J. Mumford, *Catholike Scriptvrist: The Plea of the Roman Catholikes Shewing the Scriptures to Hold Forth the Roman Faith in above Forty of the Cheife Controversies Now Under Debate* (Gant, 1662), 1.

For though the *Scripture* be the *Word* of God, yet the *Church* is the *Spouse* of Christ: though the *Scripture* is the Spouses deed of jointure, yet the *Church* is the Spouse her selfe: though the *Scripture* is the *truth* her selfe, yet the *Church* is the *ground* of truth. Though the *Scripture* be the *law*, yet the *Church* is the *Kingdom* of Christ: *this* Kingdome, must be governed by *that* Law, but that *Law* must be interpreted by the *representatives* of that kingdom.<sup>114</sup>

According to the Romanist, although the church is the interpreter, she is always inferior to Scripture; the church is merely the interpreter, not the author. Again, Bayly wrote:

We make not the authority of the wife, to be before the husband Christ, or the written Word of God, to be inferiour to the authority of the Church, and to have its canonical credit thence. Did the blessed Mother of God make him to be God, because she bare him in her wombe, brought him into the World, gave him suck, and brought him up?<sup>115</sup>

For Roman Catholics, Scripture's obscurity, which inevitably makes Scripture insufficient, does not degrade its authority in that the church is merely the means by which God's revealed truth is declared.

In order to defend the obscurity of Scripture, Canes devotes the whole second chapter of *Fiat Lux* to dealing with the incomprehensibility of divinity and the powerlessness of human faculty. Owen thinks that Canes overemphasizes God's incomprehensibility and thereby put contempt on Scripture. It is true that the divine essence itself is inaccessible to human beings, and thus not all the truths in Scripture can be clear. Nevertheless, Scripture is "not concerning the essence of God, but the

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas Bayly, *An End to Controversie between the Romane Catholique and the Protestant Religions Justified by All the Severall Manner of Wayes Whereby All Kind of Controversies, of What Nature So Ever, Are Usually, or Can Possibly be Determined* (Douai, 1654), 55.

<sup>115</sup> Bayly, *An End to Controversie*, 101

dispensation of his love and favour to his people,”<sup>116</sup> and the latter is expressly revealed in Scripture. Thus, the doctrine of perspicuity does not pertain to everything in Scripture, but to some necessary things for us to know. Owen explains the perspicuity of Scripture as follows:

This is that we mean by “plainly:”—The whole will and mind of God, with whatever is needful to be known of him, is revealed in the Scripture without such ambiguity or obscurity as should hinder the Scripture from being a revelation of him, his mind and will, to the end we may know him, and live unto him.<sup>117</sup>

For Owen, we need no authoritative ecclesiastical interpreter as far as the necessary truths are concerned. This does not mean that Protestants are free from infallible interpretation of Scripture. Owen says, “We have infallible exposition of the Scripture in all necessary truths, as we are assured from the Scripture itself; but an infallible expositor, into whose authority our faith should be resolved, besides the Scripture itself, we have none.”<sup>118</sup>

In spite of the lack of that infallible interpreter, Protestants can reach agreement among themselves since they have “the same rule, the same *objective revelation*, the use of the same means to grow spiritually wise in the knowledge of it.”<sup>119</sup>

Owen’s approval of the infallible interpretation and his rejection of the infallible interpreter are dependent upon the close connection between the letter and sense in Scripture. When Roman Catholics criticized *sola Scriptura*, they considered it merely as

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<sup>116</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 61.

<sup>117</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 39-40. Perspicuity does not mean that “every text and passage in Scripture is plain and easy to be understood.” Many of them may be beyond our understanding. However, “the propositions wherein the revelation of them is made are plain and intelligible.” Cf. *Vindication*, XIV: 276.

<sup>118</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 40. It should be noted that the doctrine of perspicuity does not despise the church’s ministry of the word, which is a useful means for interpreting Scripture. Owen’s point is that the church is merely one of the interpretive means and is no infallible interpreter.

<sup>119</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 314.

Scripture's letter.<sup>120</sup> The Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, however, rejected such an idea of the separation of the letter and sense. Due to this different understanding of Scripture, Roman Catholics tried to find the true meaning outside the letter, whereas Protestants believed that the sense was rooted in the letter. For Protestants, Scripture was both a book and interpretation. This was one of the greatest differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics on the issue of biblical interpretation.

For Owen, it does not make sense that God ambiguously revealed the necessary doctrines in Scripture. It is impossible to believe that Scripture is the revelation of God, and at the same time, that Scripture is obscure. If that were true, it would be a serious challenge to God's omnipotence, given that Scripture's obscurity would mean that God wanted to reveal his will in Scripture, but he could not.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, according to Owen, the Roman Catholics conceive a Christ who has entirely neglected the task of interpreting Scripture rightly, and gave up it to the church.<sup>122</sup> The Romanist doctrine of Scripture's obscurity, for Owen, cannot help but impair the authority of Christ.

Owen stresses that the Roman theory of the obscurity of Scripture is not compatible with Scripture's testimony to itself. In a number of passages, Scripture refers to the law of God as a light. Light manifests itself, and thus does not require "proof, testimony or its evidence."<sup>123</sup> Although the church is called a pillar and ground to carry

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<sup>120</sup> Roman Catholics would not deny the sufficiency of Scripture when the letter is properly interpreted. J. Mumford, *Catholike Scripturist: The Plea of the Roman Catholikes Shewing the Scriptures to Hold Forth the Roman Faith in above Forty of the Cheife Controversies Now Under Debate* (Gant, 1662), 1.

<sup>121</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 39.

<sup>122</sup> Owen, *Pro Sacris Scripturis*, 779.

<sup>123</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, XVI: 319.

the light, the church performs its duty “*ministerially, not authoritatively.*”<sup>124</sup> If Scripture is perspicuous like a light, however, why cannot Protestants agree among themselves? Owen’s answer is simple: light is not an eye. No matter how bright a light is, the blind cannot see it. In the same way, the clear meanings of biblical texts cannot be known to those who distort them with their own prejudices.<sup>125</sup> We cannot say that the fault lies with Scripture; the imperfect human beings are wholly responsible for it.

Owen painfully acknowledges that there are indeed some divisions within the Protestant churches due to different biblical interpretations. However, he insists that the Protestant divisions should not be exaggerated. The differences among Protestants are not greater than Canes thought. The Protestants do not say, like Canes’ derision, “Lo, here is Christ; there is Christ” (Mt. 24: 23). All of the Protestant parties agree as to who Christ is and where He can be found. Their difference lies not in the fundamental doctrines, but “some few things of less importance in the way and manner of the worship of Christ.”<sup>126</sup> It should be noted, however, that such differences had always been in the church, but did not make the unity of the church “various and uncertain.”<sup>127</sup> The differences on the less important things do not prevent Protestants from loving, praying for, and having communion with each other. Given that even the wisest men cannot agree on every particular point in truth, there is only one alternative to unite all Christians: “only such a

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<sup>124</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, XVI: 321. Italics original.

<sup>125</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, XVI: 322.

<sup>126</sup> Owen, *Animadversions*, XIV: 73.

<sup>127</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 261-262.

concurrence in an assent unto the necessary propositions of truth as may enable them to hold together that outward communion in the worship of God.”<sup>128</sup>

Roman Catholics also admitted that a complete consensus on all particular truths is impossible. However, they did not agree that some necessary doctrines alone are sufficient for the unity of the church. The nature of unity, for Roman Catholics, consisted in the “explicit or implicit belief of all things and doctrines determined on, taught, and proposed by” the Church of Rome.<sup>129</sup> Such a Roman Catholic view of unity was based upon the doctrine of the infallibility of the church. Owen does not entirely reject the idea of the infallibility of the church. But here, what is meant by “church”? If the church means the mystical church, she is surely infallible in the sense that the true members of that church shall never forsake their true faith. It is equally true that the visible catholic church is infallible in the sense that there is always a number of believers who profess the same truth. If the church means a particular church, however, there is no such church in the world.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, even if the Church of Rome is actually infallible, how can we know it? For Owen, there was no other way but by Scripture itself.<sup>131</sup>

Roman Catholics did not deny that a particular church is not free from fundamental errors. In order to vindicate the infallibility of the Church of Rome, therefore, Roman Catholics identified the Roman church with the visible catholic church. Given that the catholic church is only one, the Church of Rome claimed that she is the only true church. According to this view, all the churches that have no communion with

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<sup>128</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 263.

<sup>129</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 257.

<sup>130</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 301.

<sup>131</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 302.



the Church of Rome are excluded from the catholic church. This is, for Owen, “the most *schismatical principle* that ever was broached under the sun, since there was a church upon the earth” because it is not only “*groundless*” and “*uncharitable*,” but also brings about “the most *pernicious* consequence, as having a principal influence into the present irreconcilableness of difference among Christians in the world.”<sup>132</sup>

Even if a particular church is not infallible and thus different biblical interpretations are not avoidable, Owen argues, we do not have to adhere to any particular church as far as we hold fast to the saving doctrines revealed in Scripture. A man, who sincerely believes in and lives by all saving truth, is undoubtedly a member of the catholic church. No particular church can cut him off from the eternal blessing who professes the saving faith on the ground that he does not belong to it. Likewise, “every assembly of Christians that ordinarily meet to worship God in Christ according to his appointment is a church of Christ.”<sup>133</sup>

Although differences in the church are not avoidable, we should not take them for granted. Owen repeatedly says that those differences do not result from Scripture, but from human imperfection. Therefore, Christians should try to reduce those differences as much as they can. Owen does not allow unlimited differences in the church. It is also to be noted, however, that Owen objects to narrowing down the terms of communion to specific doctrines on things less important. In particular, he is opposed to the reduction of the terms of communion by force. Given that the differences on non-fundamentals come from human defection, they can be resolved only by the right understanding of the truth. Owen ends the chapter on moderation and unity of Protestant principles with the

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<sup>132</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 305. All italics original.

<sup>133</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 317.

following words: “In the mean time, I shall pray that we may, amidst all our *differences*, love another, pray for one another, wait patiently for the communication of farther light unto one another, leave evil surmises, and much more the condemning and seeking the ruin of those that dissent from us, which men usually do on various pretence, most of them false and coined for the present purpose.”<sup>134</sup> In sum, for Owen, the true way to Christian unity is to mutually forbear differences within the boundary of fundamental truths.

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<sup>134</sup> Owen, *Vindication*, XIV: 318. Italics original.

## CHAPTER 5

### OWEN'S DEFENSE OF NONCONFORMITY

#### 1. The Problem of Uniformity at the Restoration

The Restoration Church of England failed to restore her unity.<sup>1</sup> All attempts at reconciliation between Conformists and their opponents proved to be unsuccessful. Not forgetting the sufferings during the Interregnum, the returned bishops refused to recede an inch in the defense of their strict uniformity. Rather than modifying the terms of communion in order to embrace Nonconformists, the churchmen were determined to exclude them from the Church of England.

The uniformity of the Restoration church was significantly different from previous ones in that she imposed on her opponents complete, strict, and constant conformity. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 clearly states that all clergymen should give their "unfeigned consent and assent" to everything in the Book of Common Prayer. Although the two words were used interchangeably, Nonconformists took pains to distinguish between them. Nonconformists may have been satisfied with reading the Prayer Book "in the manner of they were obliged to do, which showed their *consent*; but declaring their unfeigned *assent* to everything contained and prescribed and prescribed

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<sup>1</sup> Among the more important studies on the Restoration church are John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven: Yale University, 1991); R. A. Beddard, "The Restoration Church," in *The Restoration Monarchy*, ed. James Rees Jones (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 155-175; Robert S. Bosher, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement: The Influence of the Laudians, 1649-1662* (London: Dacre Press, 1957; reprint); Norman Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker: Aspects of English Church History, 1660-1768* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; reprint); Anne Whiteman, "The Restoration of the Church of England" in *From Uniformity to Unity: 1662-1962*, ed. Geoffrey F. Nuttall (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 19-88.

therein would imply . . . it was so perfect that nothing therein could be amended.”<sup>2</sup>

Although some Nonconformists conformed to the Church of England against their will, those who wanted to keep the purity of conscience chose the way of Nonconformity. The result was the Great Ejection of 1662, which was followed by a series of persecuting Parliamentary acts such as the Conventicle Act (1664) and the Five-Mile Act (1665).<sup>3</sup>

The ejected nonconforming group was not at all homogeneous. As a matter of fact, the Act of Uniformity primarily had to do with clergymen. The ejection mainly prohibited Nonconformists from preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. After the ejection, therefore, not a few leading Nonconformists, such as Richard Baxter, could be found preaching the Word in conventicles as well as worshipping at their parish churches. The main reason for Baxter’s Nonconformity was that he would completely lose chances for reforming the Church of England by swearing that there is nothing defective in the Book of Prayer.<sup>4</sup> For Baxter, Nonconformity did not mean separation from the established church. He did not believe it unlawful to participate in the worship according to the Book of Prayer. The form of worship in itself was not a serious doctrinal problem.<sup>5</sup> Although the Church of England was seriously defective in many ways, her defects, Baxter believed, should not be a ground for separation.

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<sup>2</sup> Clarendon, *History of Rebellion*, 1078. Quoted from John T. Wilkinson, *1662 and After: Three Centuries of English Nonconformity* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 50. See also C. E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism 1660-1688* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1968; reprint), 16.

<sup>3</sup> The Conventicle Act forbade conventicles of more than 5 people who were not members of the same household. The Five-Mile Act was the final act of the so-called Clarendon Code which forbade Nonconformist ministers from living within five miles of a parish to which they had formerly ministered. Violators were severely fined or imprisoned.

<sup>4</sup> Irvonwy Morgan, *The Nonconformity of Richard Baxter* (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), 216-7.

<sup>5</sup> This is one of the essential differences between Baxter and Owen with respect to Nonconformity.

While Baxter opted for occasional conformity and comprehension, Owen consistently strived for toleration. This difference made it difficult for even Nonconformists to be united among themselves against their common adversary. Unlike Baxter, Owen exhorted his followers not to join in the worship at parish church. “It is not lawful,” says Owen, “for us to go to and join public worship by the Common-prayer, because that worship itself, according to the rule of the gospel, is not lawful.”<sup>6</sup> No wonder Owen tried to set up a gathered church in a Congregational way at his hometown, Stadham, when he stepped down from his office. Such practice was severely criticized as schism by Conformists as well as moderate Nonconformists. In his retirement, Owen continued to defend the cause of Nonconformity against the charge of schism. This last chapter of the dissertation will focus on Owen’s responses to two eminent Restoration Conformists, Samuel Parker and Edward Stillingfleet.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Unity without Civil Impositions

### 2.1 Samuel Parker (1640-1688)

Samuel Parker was educated under the influence of Puritanism in his early years. When he was a student at Oxford, he must have listened to some of Owen’s lectures. In spite of this academic background, Parker became an ardent supporter of Conformity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Owen, *An Answer unto Two Questions: With Twelve Arguments against Any Conformity to Worship Not of Divine Institution*, XVI: 248. The manuscript of this little treatise, which is posthumously published in 1720, was sent to Richard Baxter, who quickly wrote a criticism entitled *Catholick Communion Defended against Both Extremes: And Unnecessary Division Confute, by Reasons Against both the Active and Passive Ways of Separation* (London, 1684).

<sup>7</sup> Parker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity* and Stillingfleet’s *Unreasonableness of Separation* were considered to be the best-known Conformist apologies of the Church of England from the Restoration to the Revolution. Mark Goldie, “The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England” in Ole Grell et al., *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 333.

<sup>8</sup> Owen himself reveals that he did not know Parker at all. Cf. Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 346. For the life and works of Parker, see Sason Jewell, “Authority’s Advocate: Samuel Parker, Religion

His several academic studies on philosophy drew attention from the leaders of the Church of England. When he was only 27 years old (1667), Parker was appointed a domestic chaplain to the archbishop of Canterbury, Gilbert Sheldon, who was the greatest ecclesiastical leader of the Restoration church. About two years later, Parker's notorious work, *A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie*, was published under the influence of Sheldon.

The years between 1667, the impeachment of the Earl of Clarendon, and 1672, the royal proclamation of an indulgence, revived the debate about the liberty of conscience.<sup>9</sup> With the fall of the Earl, the force of the notorious Clarendon Code, which had been a great burden to Nonconformists, was greatly weakened. A bill for comprehension, although failed, was once again prepared by the cooperation of moderate Conformists and Nonconformists. The churchmen felt the need to strengthen the policy of uniformity and to enervate Nonconformity. The need was greatly met by *Friendly Debate between a Conformist and a Non-Conformist*, which was published in 1669 by Simon Patrick, afterward the bishop of Ely.<sup>10</sup> *Friendly Debate* was only the beginning of the greater hostile debates, because it encouraged Parker to publish a much more controversial work, *A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie*. Parker's main thesis was that outward religious matters necessary to peace and unity of the civil society should be determined by the

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and Politics in Restoration England" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2004). Jewell's dissertation is the most complete study on Samuel Parker that has ever been written.

<sup>9</sup> Gary De Krey, "Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667-1672," *Historical Journal* 38 (1995): 53-83.

<sup>10</sup> Contrary to its title, the tone of *Friendly Debate* was in no way amicable. Since Patrick himself was a moderate Conformist, the *Friendly Debate* shocked Nonconformists and moderate Conformists as well. When the *Friendly Debate* was published, it became an immediate best-seller. The most important response to the *Friendly Debate* was Samuel Rolle's *A Sober Answer to the Friendly Debate betwixt a Conformist and a Nonconformist Written by Way of Letter to the Author Thereof* (London, 1669). Patrick continued to defend his position on Conformity by writing *A Continuation of the Friendly Debate* (London, 1669) and *A Further Continuation and Defense* (London, 1670).

magistrate. Due to the publication of *A Discourse*, Parker was in the center of religious controversy during the 1670s.<sup>11</sup>

When Owen first read Parker's *Discourse*, he did not feel like writing a criticism of his former student. By this time Owen was in discussion with Richard Baxter, exchanging letters on unity among Nonconformists. During that discussion, Owen asked Baxter to write against Parker instead of him. Baxter's decline of Owen's request made him write a full response to Parker by himself.<sup>12</sup> The output was *Truth and Innocence*, which provoked Parker to vindicate his position in great detail by writing a work of over 700 pages. Parker's harsh criticism did not receive any echo from Owen.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 The Church and State

The Church of England carried out her reformation in the name of royal supremacy. Since the Reformation, royal supremacy was firmly established as an official doctrine of the Church of England. At first, the primary purpose of royal supremacy was to keep out any influence of the papacy on the Church of England. In the following periods, the doctrine was also used to protect the king's authority from the encroachment of Puritans. It is thus to be noted that royal supremacy was not designed to allow the king

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<sup>11</sup> Besides Owen's *Truth and Innocence*, other replies to Parker's *Discourse* are as follows: Anonymous, *Insolence and Impudence Triumphant* (London, 1670); John Humfrey, *Animadversions on a New Book Entitled Ecclesiastical Polity* (London, 1669), which contained *A Case of Conscience*, a refutation of Patrick's *Friendly Debate*. When Parker's response to Owen was published, it was criticized by Andrew Marvell, one of the most eminent poets of the seventeenth century. Marvell's famous *Rehearsal Transpros'd* (London, 1672) was assailed by numerous works including Parker's own response: *A Reproof to the Rehearsal Transposed* (London, 1673), which was followed by Marvell's second part of *Rehearsal Transposed* (London, 1673).

<sup>12</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, 132. Baxter, who had rejected Owen's request for writing against Parker, highly regarded the excellency of Owen's publication. Jewell, "Authority's Advocate," 43.

<sup>13</sup> In his criticism of Owen, Parker called Owen's *Truth and Innocence* "nothing but Cavil and Vulgar Talk." Parker, *A Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Politie by Way of Letter to a Friend in London: Together with a Letter from the Author of the Friendly Debate* (London, 1670), preface (no pagination) and 231.

to wield an unrestrained sword, but to protect the king's proper authority in religious matters. Parker stressed this point when Owen claimed that the *Discourse* was full of expressions that portray the king as a universal and unlimited supreme authority.<sup>14</sup> With respect to the doctrine of royal supremacy, Parker tried to keep the *via media* between two extremes: "The Spiritual Tyranny" of the Roman Church and "Spiritual Anarchy" of Nonconformists.<sup>15</sup>

The doctrine of royal supremacy required all members of the church to be united under the king. Thus, a kind of subordination of the church to the state was inevitable. Yet, the question of exactly how the two polities are related remained unanswered. Consequently, the relation between the church and state was hotly debated since the Reformation. Except for religious radicals such as Anabaptists and Quakers, no mainline Christian denomination supported the complete separation between the two polities. Neither did the strictest Erastians identify the church with the state. Nobody claimed that the supreme magistrate can preach the gospel on the pulpit or administer the sacraments at the table.

Richard Hooker, whose *Ecclesiastical Polity* had a great influence on the later Anglican divines on this subject, strongly contends for the unity of the state and church. Hooker repeatedly emphasizes that they are not two separated entities in England. Hooker's view of the church and state, however, is to be carefully understood. He likens the relationship between the church and state to a triangle, in which the same bottom can be a side according to its position. Hooker's point is that the church is not "materially" different from the state. "We hold," says Hooker, "that seeing there is not any man of the

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<sup>14</sup> Parker, *Defence and Continuation*, 223-4. Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 374-5.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 24.



Church of England but the same man is also a member of the commonwealth; nor any man a member of the commonwealth, which is not also of the Church of England.”<sup>16</sup> It

follows that the king is the supreme governor of the state as well as the church.

Disobedience to the king is not merely a political matter, but also a religious one, and thus is a serious threat to the unity of the church.

It would be a mistake, however, to regard the doctrine of royal supremacy as merely Erastianism,<sup>17</sup> which reduced the church to a part of the state. Given that the king is the head of both the church and state, royal supremacy could mean the church’s subordination to the king, but not her subordination to the state. The church should obey the king not as the head of the state, but as that of the church. Although Parker’s earlier works, *Discourse* and *Defense*, show some Erastian tendency and, for this reason, he was often considered an Erastian, his later works that defended the distinct authority of bishops from the king were clear on this point: Parker was not an Erastian.<sup>18</sup>

Although the doctrine of royal supremacy granted the king the title of the head or governor of the church, his authority was not unlimited. Just as even his civil power was constrained by the parliament, so was his spiritual power by the convocation of bishops. When Hooker called the king the head of the church, he at the same time qualified this statement by saying that “kings have dominion to exercise in ecclesiastical causes, but

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Hooker, *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine Richard Hooker*, ed. Izaak Walton, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1839), 485. It is to be noted that Hooker did not identify the church with the state.

<sup>17</sup> Erastus himself did not fully develop the doctrine on the state and church. His main concern was confined to the use of excommunication. *Explicatio*, Erastus’ major work, was published for the first time in London in 1589 after he died. A significant amount of Erastians could be found in the parliament. During the Interregnum they tried to control the church by the state as much as possible. Cf. William Lyons Fisk, “John Sheldon: Erastian Critic of the English Church,” *Journal of Church and State* (1967): 538.

<sup>18</sup> Jewell, “Authority’s Advocate,” 117.

according to the laws of the church.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, there was always a tension between the church and state in England. As a matter of fact, it was common that not theory but historical situation determined the relationship of the two polities.

The Restoration marks a watershed point in the understanding of royal supremacy. As Jeffrey R. Collins points out, two great features began to be dominant in the Church of England: “The anti-Erastianism of the Restoration episcopacy, and the revival of ecclesiological dualism.”<sup>20</sup> King Charles II’s religious policy, his favorable attitude toward Roman Catholicism in particular, made the bishops suspect his sincerity. Hence, the bishops strove for independence from the influence of the king. They tried to accomplish this by defining the bishops’ own independent authority with great care without completely rejecting the doctrine of royal supremacy.

The real issue was related to making ecclesiastical laws, which can bind the conscience of members of the church. There were three different responses to this issue. Erastians handed over the outward government of the church to the magistrate. Catholics and Puritans tried to secure the autonomy of the church from the bondage of the secular power. The defenders of the Church of England tried to keep the *via media* between the two extremes. Robert Sanderson, a great Conformist casuist, asserts as follows:

The right of making ecclesiastical laws is vested in the *bishops* and *presbyters*, and other persons duly elected by the whole body of the clergy of the whole realm, and assembled duly in a lawful synod; yet so, that the *exercise* of this right and power ought to depend, in every *Christian* state, upon the authority of the *supreme civil* magistrate, and this both “*a parte ante, et a parte post,*” i.e.

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<sup>19</sup> Hooker, *The Works of Richard Hooker*, II: 507. This is a quotation from Ambrose: “*Imperator bonus intra ecclesiam, non supra ecclesiam.*”

<sup>20</sup> Collins, “The Restoration Bishops and the Royal Supremacy,” *Church History* 68 (1999): 550. Also cf. Gareth Bennett, “The Church of England and the Royal Supremacy,” *One in Christ* 22 (1986): 309-310.

previously and subsequently to deliberation, so that they cannot, without his permission first obtained, and being summoned by his mandate, or at least by his authority, either meet in order to make *ecclesiastical canons*; nor after they are thus called and authorized, are the *canons*, which may be agreed in such a convention, of any force to oblige, till the *assent* of the *supreme* magistrate be obtained; by whose public authority and approbation so soon as they are confirmed, they immediately obtain the force of laws, and oblige the Conscience of the subject.<sup>21</sup>

Nonconformists did not respond to the doctrine of royal supremacy in the same way either. Although Elizabethan Puritans were strongly opposed to referring to the king as “the head of the church,” Baxter gladly adopted that expression. As far as royal supremacy is concerned, Baxter stands with the Hookerian tradition. For Baxter, the supreme magistrate is “the Essential National Church-Head.”<sup>22</sup> He even opposed some Conformists who supposed that bishops alone were such essential heads of the national church. “Bishops or pastors,” says Baxter, “may be the constitutive Heads of Particular Churches, and yet not of National, nor therefore cease as such to be under the Government of Christian Princes.”<sup>23</sup> The real threat to the unity of the national church for Baxter is the innovated concept of episcopacy.

Owen does not reject the doctrine of royal supremacy as a whole either. It is worth noting that Owen defends the Protestant doctrine of royal supremacy in his

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<sup>21</sup> Robert. Sanderson, *Bishop Sanderson's Lectures on Conscience and Human Law: Delivered in the Divinity School at Oxford* (London and others, 1877), 225-6. Translated by Chr. Wordsworth. The original title is *De Obligatione Conscientiae Praelectiones Decem Oxonii in Scholâ Theologicâ Habitae Anno Dom. MDCXLVII* (London, 1660). All italics original. For the study of Sanderson's casuistry, see Kevin. T. Kelly, *Conscience: Dictator or Guide?: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Moral Theology* (London and Others: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> Baxter, *Of National Churches: Their Description, Institution, Use, Preservation, Danger, Maladies and Cures: Partly Applied to England* (London, 1691), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Baxter, *Of National Churches*, 3. For Baxter, a bishop was primarily a pastor for a parish church. For this reason, his view was called “a parochial episcopacy.”

confutation of Canes.<sup>24</sup> In *Fiat Lux* and *An Epistle*, Canes criticizes the discrepancy of the Protestants who call the king the head of the church, but “do not supplicate unto him and acquiesce in his judgment in religious affairs.”<sup>25</sup> Owen points out great differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants with respect to understanding the headship of the church. For Owen, Canes’ great weakness is to apply the Roman Catholic view of the head to Protestantism. In contrast to the papal supremacy over the universal church, the king is the head only within his own realm and dominion. No Protestant dared to say that the king is the head of the universal church.

More importantly, Owen asserts that Protestants never understood the head the way in which the king, like the pope, could determine all the controversial religious matters. The head of the church means neither a chief umpire nor a “supreme, *infallible proposer* of all things to be believed and done in the worship of God.”<sup>26</sup> Protestants, says Owen, do not “use absolutely that expression of ‘Head of the Church;’ but that they ascribe unto him all authority that ought or can be exercised in his dominions over any of his subjects, whether in things civil or ecclesiastical, that are not merely spiritual, and to be ministerially ordered in obedience unto Christ Jesus.”<sup>27</sup> On the basis of two famous biblical passages, Romans 13:1 and I Peter 2:13, Owen insists that “all people” including Catholic priests and even the pope should obey their own king.<sup>28</sup> For Owen, kings are protectors of the church in the sense that they “find out, receive, embrace, and promote

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<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Animadversions*, XIV: 378-392.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Animadversions*, XIV: 381. Cf. Canes, *An Epistle*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Animadversions*, XIV: 386.

<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Animadversions*, XIV: 381.

<sup>28</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Animadversions*, XIV: 382.

the truth of the gospel, and the worship of God appointed therein, confirming, protecting, and defending of it by their regal power and authority.”<sup>29</sup>

Owen’s attitude toward the doctrine of royal supremacy changes when he criticizes Parker in *Truth and Innocence*. There is not only a common ground but also a great difference between Owen and his opponent. The different views of the king come from different biblical interpretations. For Parker, the Jewish church, in which the king played a predominant role, is the best model for the Church of England. In particular, the image of the king as “the nursing father to the church” (Isaiah 49: 23) was perhaps most frequently referenced by the supporters of the king’s authority in religious matters. Owen did not oppose the metaphor as such, but reinterpreted it in his own way. The king as a nursing father should take care of the church as well as the state. However, “nursing” should not be confused with “begetting.” “The proposing, prescribing, commanding, binding religion on the consciences of men,” says Owen, “is rather the *begetting* of it than its *nursing*.”<sup>30</sup> The metaphor in its context presupposes that the church, its worship and government were already constituted by God Himself. What the nursing father, the king, should do is to only take care of his child, the church, which was born by God. In order to do the task, the magistrate first should discern what the true church is as instituted by God.<sup>31</sup> Hence, the king’s protection of the Church of England can be justified only when she first proves to be the church according to the Word of God.

Owen believes that royal supremacy was misunderstood and abused by Conformists and its true meaning significantly changed from what was expounded by the

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<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Animadversions*, XIV: 384.

<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 402. Cf. Parker, *Discourse*, 35-6.

<sup>31</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 402.

Church of England and her divines in the time of Queen Elizabeth. Owen points out that Thomas Bilson (1546/7-1616) criticized Stephen Gardiner, the Roman Catholic bishop, who expounded supremacy as if the king might do what he wanted in matters of religion such as forbidding priests' marriage and barring the people from the Lord's Supper.<sup>32</sup> Royal supremacy in its original intention did not infringe the church's own realms. Although canons and oaths enacted by Queen Elizabeth declared the supremacy as authority to rule all matters, whether religious or temporal, "there is not one word in our laws" about the king's authority over the consciences of men in the matter of religion.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.3 The Magistrate and Conscience

Parker clearly states the reason why religion should be subject to the supreme magistrate in religious matters:

It is absolutely necessary to the Peace and Tranquility of the Commonwealth, which, though it be the prime and most important end of Government can never be sufficiently secured, unless Religion be subject to the Authority of the supreme power, in that it has the strongest influence upon human affairs.<sup>34</sup>

For Parker, liberty of conscience is a great obstacle to the authority of the magistrate.

In both *Discourse* and *Defense*, we see that Parker's attitude toward conscience is predominantly negative. He describes conscience as follows: "everything any man has a mind to, is his conscience;" "what is this but a state of perfect Anarchy, in which every

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<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 408. Thomas Bilson was a contemporary of Richard Hooker. Bilson wrote *The Perpetual Government of Christ's Church* (1593), which was regarded as one of the greatest defenses for the divine right of episcopacy, and *The True Difference between Christian Subjection and Unchristian Rebellion* (1583), which was also one of the best apologies for the doctrine of royal supremacy against the papacy.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 392.

<sup>34</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 11-12.

man does what is good in his own eyes?;" "conscience is nothing but the judgment and opinion of their own Actions."<sup>35</sup> Parker repeatedly stresses that all kinds of rebels fight against their king and even killed him in the name of conscience.

However, we should not hastily conclude that Parker denies any independence of conscience from the supreme magistrate. Parker makes a clear distinction between conscience in itself and its exercise. The former is free from the magisterial authority, but the latter is not so, because it has a great influence on peace of society which is the magistrate's great duty. "The whole Affair of Christian Liberty," says Parker, "relates only to our Inward Judgment of things."<sup>36</sup> Thus, the debate on the magistrate and conscience is limited to "matters of outward Worship, and that are not in themselves apparently or essentially evil."<sup>37</sup>

Protestants' remarkable interest in conscience began as a response to the question of "How do I know that I was elected by God?"<sup>38</sup> Since the publication of William Perkins's great works on conscience,<sup>39</sup> the English divines produced numerous treatises on conscience.<sup>40</sup> Most of those treatises were primarily concerned with religious self-

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<sup>35</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 6 and 7.

<sup>36</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 95.

<sup>37</sup> Parker, *Defense*, 219.

<sup>38</sup> William Perkins, *A Case of Conscience the Greatest that Euer Was; How a Man May Know Whether He be the Child of God or No* (London, 1592).

<sup>39</sup> *A Discourse of Conscience: Wherein Is Set Donwe the Nature, Properties and Differences Thereof: As Also the Way to Get and Keepe Good Conscience* (Cambridge, 1596); *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience, Distinguished into Three Books* (Cambridge, 1608); *A Reformed Catholike* (London, 1597).

<sup>40</sup> It is little use enumerating all the casuistic works which were published in the seventeenth century. I was greatly indebted to the following studies on conscience in historical context: Waldo Beach, "The Meaning and Authority of Conscience in Protestant Thought of Seventeenth Century England" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1944); Rose Elliot, *Cases of Conscience: Alternatives Open to Recusants and Puritans under Elizabeth I and James I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); L. John Van Til, *Liberty of Conscience: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992); Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century in England," in *Duty and Private Conscience*, ed. John

examination, yet the relation of the individual conscience to the ecclesiastical or secular authority was discussed as well. With respect to that relation, two distinct attitudes toward conscience began to emerge in the beginning of the seventeenth century: one viewed conscience “as a practice within the purview of governmental authority;” the other viewed it “as a faculty of man that transcended all other forms of authority.”<sup>41</sup> The former was adopted by most Conformists who developed it to justify their imposition on Dissenters; the latter was welcomed by the supporters of toleration among Nonconformists.

The difference between Conformists and Nonconforming tolerationists should not be exaggerated. It was remarkable that many significant concepts and tenets of conscience were shared by both parties despite their difference in emphasis.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it would be simply wrong to say that tolerationists praised the liberty of conscience whereas Conformists disregarded it. Conformists also believed in the highest power of conscience as firmly as their opponents did. They all agreed that the only lord of conscience is none other than God.<sup>43</sup> Overall, both parties inherited, via Perkins, the Thomistic understanding of conscience as intelligence rather than will.<sup>44</sup> Conscience did not mean ‘Do whatever you please,’ but rather it should be subject directly to the law of God and indirectly or conditionally to the human law as far as it corresponds to the will of God.

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Morrill et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 29-56; Justin A. I. Champion, “Willing to Suffer: Law and Religious Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Religious Conscience, the State, and the Law: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Significance*, ed. John McLaren and Harold Coward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 13-28.

<sup>41</sup> Van Til, *Liberty of Conscience*, 24- 25.

<sup>42</sup> Beach, “The Meaning and Authority of Conscience,” 85-6.

<sup>43</sup> We can also see exactly the same view in Parker’s *Discourse*: “Conscience is subject and accountable to God alone, that it owns no superior but the Lord of Consciences.” Parker, *Discourse*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Keith Thomas, “Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England,” 30-35 and Beach, “The Meaning and Authority of Conscience,” 7.



Neither does the supreme magistrate have an absolute authority that binds conscience in all religious matters. In particular, he cannot command his subjects to do what is contrary to Scripture. These are almost universally acknowledged by all Protestant parties. In sum, they did not much differ in their understanding of the definition, nature, and function of conscience. All except religious radicals opposed universal toleration and claimed for limited toleration. Thus, the real issue was how to properly limit the power of conscience.<sup>45</sup> Conformists allowed the liberty of conscience only within the limit of the civil authority, whereas Nonconforming tolerationists expanded it by making the fundamental doctrines the ultimate bound for the liberty of conscience.

Cases of conscience come from the dilemma of when two of God's commandments seem to contradict. Regarding the practice of Conformity, a believer may encounter two of God's commands: "We should obey God rather men" (Acts 5: 29) and "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13: 1). Perhaps, it may not be exaggerated to say that the dispute on conscience depends on how to interpret the two biblical passages. Nonconformists rejected the idea to conform in order to obey God. Conformists also imposed uniformity in the name of the authority given by God. On the side of Conformists, nonconformity is merely a disobedience to God. When the magistrate's will clashes with his subjects' conscience, however, how can such conflict be resolved? Conformists sacrificed conscience in order to keep unity and peace. On the contrary,

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<sup>45</sup> Roger L'Estrange, *Toleration Discuss'd; In Two Dialogues* (London, 1673), sec. I – IV. This is also true of the debate between Owen and Parker. Owen pointed out Parker's ambiguous and inconsistent definition of conscience, but this was not a real issue between the two. Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 370.

Nonconformists defended the liberty of conscience by arguing that it is compatible with the magistrate's authority and does not breach the unity and peace of the church.

Considering himself “a person of such a tame and softly humour,”<sup>46</sup> Parker tries to evade two extremes: Hobbism and Nonconformity. The former places the magistrate over the natural law and thus makes him a tyranny, whereas the latter elevated the private conscience to the highest authority. For Parker, both are detrimental to the Christian kingdom which should be governed by the natural law. The unity and security of the kingdom can be protected by the magistrate who exerts his power on his subject according to the law of God.

Parker criticizes Hobbes's main philosophical premises. In contrast to Hobbes, Parker does not agree that the original state of human beings is “a state of war of every man against every man.” Government is not a result of a social contract to prevent such chaos, but is engraved in the human nature by the first cause—God.<sup>47</sup> Nor does Parker agree that the magistrate can command his subjects to commit internally evil actions, because the law is determined by him. For instance, the magistrate has no authority to make a law not to believe in God or to command a man to murder his father.<sup>48</sup> For Parker, Hobbes' view of the magistrate seems to strengthen his power, but indeed enervates it because his subjects obey the magistrate's commands only for fear of punishment or for

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<sup>46</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, iii.

<sup>47</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 121-2.

<sup>48</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 113. Parker's contemporaries often regarded him as a disciple of Thomas Hobbes. This is a mistake. It seemed to be clear to Parker that Hobbes was a great enemy of the Church of England. In fact, it is hard to recognize the real difference between Hobbes and his critics regarding conscience. Hobbes also claimed that conscience in itself is absolutely free, but its profession should be regulated. One important difference between Hobbes and Parker was that kings have a power to prohibit any doctrine from being publicly taught, whether true or false. John Marshall. “The Ecclesiology of the Latitudinarians 1660-1689: Stillingfleet, Tillotson and ‘Hobbism,’” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 411, 413.

their own interest. If a society is founded only upon personal safety or private interest, its members could rebel against the supreme magistrate and justify the rebellion when he cannot satisfy their needs.<sup>49</sup>

Parker's next target was Nonconformists. Parker acknowledges a liberty of conscience in a very limited sense. "The precise Notion of Christian Liberty," says Parker, "consists in the rescue of the Conscience of men from the divine Imposition of the Yoke of *Moses*, and therefore 'tis not to be pretended against any Restraints whatsoever."<sup>50</sup> Most of all, the liberty of conscience was restricted in its exercise. Parker repeatedly asserts that the liberty of conscience should be distinguished from its exercise. The inward conscience, of which God alone is the lord, should be entirely protected and secured, but its exercise should be regulated by the magistrate for the peace of society. By ignoring that distinction, Parker asserts, Nonconformists subordinated the king to the power of conscience.<sup>51</sup>

For Owen, however, the distinction between freedom of conscience as such and its practice is meaningless, since the former is of no use without the latter. Thus, Owen strongly opposed the separation between conscience and its practice. If conscience had to do only with inward thoughts, then it would free men from all duty to God. It would be absurd to say that "a man may think, judge, conceive such or such a thing to be his duty, and yet have thereby no obligation put upon him to perform it."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 129.

<sup>50</sup> Parker, *Defense*, 393.

<sup>51</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 441.

Another of Owen's arguments against the distinction between conscience and its practice is that it would deprive Christians of the privilege that was granted to them alone. Parker may agree that conscience is a Christian privilege. However, the freedom of inward thought alone is universal to all human beings. Even pagans think and judge freely for themselves. Hence, such a limited freedom of conscience cannot be called a privilege at all. It does not have any value but "a mere aggravation of bondage."<sup>53</sup> Most of all, the distinction of conscience and its practice cannot be supported by Scripture. Owen mentions Matthew 22:21 which was most frequently used to explain the relation between the state and church: "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Owen uses this text in order to make the distinction useless. He expounds the verse as follows:

This he [Jesus] did when he gave his disciples command not only to think, judge, and believe according to what he should propose and reveal unto them, but also to observe and do in outward practices whatever he should command them.<sup>54</sup>

For Owen, conscience is not merely a freedom, but also a duty to do what is pleased to God in all religious matters. For this reason, conscience and its practice should not be separated from each other. This can be affirmed by Romans 10:10: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."<sup>55</sup> The separation of believing and professing would deprive men of any religious obligation to God and thus open a door wide that leads us to atheism.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 444.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 372.

<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 387.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 442.

Owen agrees with Parker's assertion that the peace and unity of society should be preserved by the magistrate. However, Owen objects to making the magistrate's authority over conscience a necessary means to peace and unity. Owen says, "A liberty may be exercised without just offence to any."<sup>57</sup> Liberty is not incompatible with peace and unity. This can be proved without difficulty by experience and the history of the church. For the first three hundred years, Christians exercised their liberty in all religious matters in spite of great persecutions, but they "did not once give the least disturbance unto the civil government of the world."<sup>58</sup> They peacefully and gladly obeyed all the civil laws for Christ's sake. In those days, peace and unity were preserved not by the magistrate's imposition on conscience but by the obedience of conscience to the law of Christ. Undoubtedly, the same can be true for all ages.

#### 2.4 The Use of Force

The use of force, or imposition, was one of the main reasons that even moderate Nonconformists did not join the Church of England. Parker, as a defender of the Church of England, strongly supported the use of force in church discipline. We cannot say that Parker less highly regarded church discipline than Owen did, even though Owen himself believed that his separation from the Church of England can be justified by the lack of its church discipline. It might not have been difficult for both to find the opponent's deficiencies in church discipline. There was no difference between the two, insofar as both strived for a well-disciplined church. The main difference was how to achieve it. For

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<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 346.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 399.

Parker, the use of force is essential to church discipline; on the contrary, Owen entirely denies its use in the church.

For Parker, it is almost impossible for spiritual power alone to carry out church discipline. Spiritual power without civil power is so weak and powerless that it can have little influence on offending persons and nobody will be warned by it.<sup>59</sup> “If they will turn Apostates,” asks Parker, “How can they be awed back into their Faith by being told they are so?”<sup>60</sup> Thus, the spiritual power should be fortified by the civil power in order to more effectively administer church discipline.

Parker’s defense could be easily refuted by Scripture. Did Jesus ever use force to discipline? Didn’t he correct his disciples only by teaching and rebuking? Moreover, isn’t it obvious that his apostles did not use force? Jesus’ and the apostles’ examples were frequently used by tolerationists as a strong argument against forced uniformity. Parker acknowledges that Jesus did not use a civil force in his life, but he denies that Christ’s refusal of force can be a ground against the use of it. Parker insists that Jesus did not use a civil power not because its use is wrong, but because he was not able to do it. Furthermore, Jesus had a more efficient power such as the threat of “eternal penalties” instead of a civil power to enforce the law on his followers. Parker asserts:

The only reason why he bound not the Precepts of the Gospel upon our Consciences by any secular Compulsories, was not because Compulsion was an improper way to put his Laws in execution, for then he had never establish’d them with more enforcing sanctions; but only because himself was not invested with any secular power and so could not use those methods of Government, that are proper to its jurisdiction.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 44.

<sup>61</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 42-3.

Parker's logic extends to the apostles. It is true that the apostles did not use a civil force just like their master. According to Parker, however, this does not mean that the apostles did not use any kind of force. Scripture, Parker argues, reveals that even the apostles used miraculous powers to discipline the members of their churches. The death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 is a good example of this.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the New Testament shows a number of cases that the apostles governed the church not only by love, but also by 'a rod.' There is both difference and sameness between the primitive church and the later Christian kingdom. The primitive church was disciplined by "Miracles of Severity, as long as it wanted the Sword of the Civil Power," but "when Christianity had once prevail'd and triumphed over all the oppositions of Pagan Superstition, then began its Government to re-settle where nature had placed it."<sup>63</sup>

Owen believes that Parker's argument is very weak because it lacks logical consistency. According to Owen, Parker confines any truth to the primitive church alone and denies its continuance in the later churches, but he does not provide us with any ground for it. How can the use of the apostolic government be replaced with the civil power? In the time of the apostles, God was pleased that the church was governed with "extraordinary spiritual punishments." From this it does not follow that "the civil magistrate hath power to appoint things to be observed in the worship of God, and forbid other things which the light and consciences of men."<sup>64</sup> There is a great gap between spiritual discipline in the primitive church and civil discipline in the Church of England, which cannot be bridged. For Owen, the primitive church, in which spiritual government

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<sup>62</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 45.

<sup>63</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 48.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, XIII: 407.

was sufficient for church discipline, should be a permanent model for all later churches. It follows that the use of force should not be allowed in the church.

## 2.5 Grace versus Virtue

It was generally considered that the first table of the Ten Commandments pertains to religion or piety, whereas the second pertains to morality. Therefore, all religious ordinances, the outward manner of the first table, were clearly distinguished from morality. In his defense of the magistrate's power over conscience, however, Parker erased the traditional distinction by identifying grace or religion with morality. According to Parker, all religion is "either Vertue itself, or some of its instruments; and the whole Duty of Man consists in being Vertuous; and all that is enjoyn'd him beside, is in order to it."<sup>65</sup>

On the premise that religion is a virtue, Parker further argues that "All manner of Religious Ordinances" such as prayer and hearing sermons "have directly no other place in Religion, than as they are instrumental to a vertuous life."<sup>66</sup> To deny the magistrate's power over conscience in manners of religion, for Parker, leads to negation of his power over morality as well. As a result, the ultimate issue between Parker and Owen is not whether the magistrate has power over religious matters, but whether the outward religious ordinances belong to morality. Given that there is no dispute about whether the magistrate has a power with respect to the second table, outward manners of religion would automatically be considered to be subject to the power of the magistrate only if it is proved that they belong to morality.

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<sup>65</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 71.

<sup>66</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 77.



Once Parker identifies religion with morality, he applies it to justify the magistrate's power over conscience in religious matters. Parker first admits that the magistrate cannot make a new law concerning its substance. For instance, murder must always be prohibited, and the magistrate cannot change that. However, there are various definitions of murder. A husband's killing his adulterous wife, which is murder in one country, may not be so in another. Therefore, murder itself should be determined by the magistrate. The same argument can be applied to worship. Although the magistrate cannot have authority over its substance and thus cannot command worship of a false god, he is charged with maintaining good order in the outward manners of worship such as rituals, ceremonies and postures.<sup>67</sup>

It is to be noted that Parker's identification of grace with virtue does not mean that he denies the gracious power of the Holy Spirit. Parker's discussion of grace has to do only with its practical or habitual part. For instance, devotion is a moral virtue in the sense that it is nothing more than gratitude. The same act of devotion can be considered religion insofar as its object is God. Therefore, "Gratitude and Devotion are not divers Things, but only different Names of the same Thing."<sup>68</sup> Grace helps us to improve our virtues but does not require any evangelical duty distinct from them. Parker sets forth:

'Tis not enough to be completely Vertuous, unless we have grace too: But when we have set aside all manner of Vertue, let them tell me what remains to be call'd Grace, and give me any notion of it distinct from all Morality, that consists in the right order and government of our Actions in all our Relations, and so comprehends all our Duty.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 85.

<sup>68</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 70.

<sup>69</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 71.

For Parker, there is no grace that is essentially distinct from moral virtue. Consequently, there is only distinction between imperfect and perfect virtue. The former is caused by grace, but the latter without it.

Parker defends his view of grace and morality by resorting to Scripture. He points out that all sermons of Christ, especially His sermon on the Mount, do not cross the boundary of morality. Moreover, all of the seven fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22 are moral virtues. In particular, Titus 2:11 plainly reveals to us what the grace of God is: “denying ungodliness and worldly lust.”<sup>70</sup> Parker’s interpretation of Scripture could receive the following question: “If those moral virtues are called grace in the Bible, why do we have to use the term ‘morality,’ excluding the biblical term ‘grace’?” In order to answer that question, Parker stresses the important difference between the time of the primitive church and that of the later churches. The seven fruits of the Spirit are called grace in the first age of Christianity “because they were derived purely from Gods free Grace and Goodness,” whereas now “they are joint issues of our own Industry, and the Spirit of God co-operating with our honest endeavours.”<sup>71</sup> Here we can see another significant discontinuity between the era of the primitive church and Parker’s era. Nobody denies that some special spiritual gifts such as the apostles’ miraculous power ceased. Parker’s serious mistake for Owen is that he applies that cessation to the manner in which the Spirit exerts influence on the virtue of believers. The cessation of those

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<sup>70</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 72-3. Parker’s interpretation was criticized by Owen. The verse, as Owen rightly points out, does not say that the grace of God “consists” in those things, but that it “teaches” them. Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, 427.

<sup>71</sup> Parker, *Discourse*, 72 and *Defense*, 330.

kinds of spiritual gifts as pure grace was severely criticized by Owen as worse than Pelagianism.<sup>72</sup>

For Owen, Parker's identification of virtue and grace seriously endangers the power of the gospel, because it makes grace secondary to law. Owen begins his refutation of Parker with the biblical uses of the words, "moral," "virtue," and "grace." Grace is undoubtedly a biblical term, while the other two terms are purely philosophical terms and thus utterly strange to Scripture.<sup>73</sup> Although Owen thinks that it would be better not to use such unbiblical terms, he accepts them in a general sense. As a duty to the second table, virtue can be viewed from two perspectives. Virtue can be obtained without the special assistance of the Holy Spirit. In this case, a virtue is clearly distinct from grace. However, the same virtue can be performed by the grace of God. Here is the main difference between Owen and Parker. For Parker, as we have seen, it is still a virtue whereas for Owen it is a grace. "For that which is wrought in us by grace," says Owen, "is grace, as that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>74</sup>

For Owen, one of Parker's weakest points is that he does not take seriously the fall and redemption at all. If religion is purely a moral virtue, there is no place for grace such as repentance and conversion, which are surely man's principal duty toward God. Parker, Owen argues, supposes a religion as if there had been no Fall of Adam. On the contrary, for Owen, religion is not a religion in a general sense; it is primarily a Christian religion. Likewise, obedience is not obedience in general, but obedience of faith in

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<sup>72</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, 425.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, 412-3.

<sup>74</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, 415. This thesis was entirely rejected by Parker. Parker replied to Owen by saying that "Grace is nothing but infused Vertue, and infused Vertue is Vertue still." Cf. Parker, *Defense*, 336.

Christ.<sup>75</sup> After the fall of man, religion became religion of sinners. “To talk now of a religion without respect unto sin,” says Owen, “is to build castles in the air.”<sup>76</sup> Parker acknowledges that repentance and conversion are man’s great duty to God, but he claims that those duties are not essentially different from moral virtue. For Parker, spiritual qualities such as repentance and conversion are different expressions of the same thing. Repentance is not “a new species of Duty in the Christian Religion,” but a beginning for a virtue which was nullified by its opposite vice.<sup>77</sup>

### 3. Nonconformity Is Not Schism

#### 3.1 Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699)

Although Edward Stillingfleet was not an original thinker, nobody would deny that he was one of the ablest Anglican polemicists in his day. As his epitaph reads, he deserves the title of “Defender of the Anglican Church, forever unconquered.”<sup>78</sup> In order to defend the Church of England, Stillingfleet produced voluminous works against Catholics, Nonconformists, and philosophers.

Unity of all Protestants was Stillingfleet’s most pressing concern throughout his career. When the reconciliation between Conformists and Nonconformists failed at the Restoration, Stillingfleet worked hard for comprehension in cooperation with other

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<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, 422.

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence*, 422.

<sup>77</sup> Parker, *Defense*, 320-1.

<sup>78</sup> Joel Harris Fishman, “Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester (1635-99): Anglican Bishop and Controversialist” (Ph. D. diss.: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977), 259.

moderate Conformists and Nonconformists.<sup>79</sup> In so doing, Stillingfleet kept maintaining good relationship with Nonconformists, Richard Baxter in particular.

When Stillingfleet published his first work *Irenicum* in 1659, which gave him great fame, he was only twenty-four years old.<sup>80</sup> The subject matter of *Irenicum* was the form of church government. Denying the doctrine of episcopacy by divine right, Stillingfleet asserted that moderation is the only way to solve the issue of the ecclesiastical government. He was opposed to a rigid uniformity not because it was not desirable, but because it was impossible due to different persuasions. However, moderation for Stillingfleet is no more than moderation within the limit of the authority of the magistrate. Stillingfleet's Erastian leaning was attacked by other more rigid Conformists such as Simon Lowth.<sup>81</sup>

Although Stillingfleet was known as a Latitudinarian for his relatively moderate tendency, it is to be noted that the Latitudinarians were not so much different from other Restoration clergymen.<sup>82</sup> They wholeheartedly embraced the doctrine of the Church of England, highly regarded all liturgies and ceremonies, and deeply respected the episcopal government. Therefore, Stillingfleet's moderation should not be exaggerated. It is one thing to keep good fellowship with individual Nonconformists; it is quite another to show

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<sup>79</sup> H. G. Horwitz, "Comprehension in the Later Seventeenth Century: A Postscript," *Church History* 34 (1965): 342.

<sup>80</sup> For the full analysis of *Irenicum*, see John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 411-463.

<sup>81</sup> Marshall, "The Ecclesiology of the Latitude-men 1660-1689," 414.

<sup>82</sup> Simpson Patrick, *A Brief Account of the New Sect of Latitudinarians: Together with some Reflections upon the New Philosophy* (London, 1669), 7. For the definition of Latitudinarians, see Martin I.J. Griffin, Jr. *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 3-48.

sympathy to Nonconformity as such.<sup>83</sup> Understandably, Nonconformists who were familiar with Stillingfleet were surprised at his hostile tone in *Mischief of Separation* and *Unreasonable Separation*. Stillingfleet's unexpected criticisms of Nonconformity revealed that he did not weaken his loyalty to the principle of uniformity in order to establish one unified church in England.

When *Mischief of Separation* was preached on 2 May of 1680, the Englishmen had long been scared of the rising power of Catholicism. The powerful Roman Catholic states on the continent were always a great potential threat to Protestant England. During the reign of Charles I, there was significant increase in the number of Roman Catholics who held high offices.<sup>84</sup> The invented rumor of the Popish Plot in 1678 terrorized all English Protestants. The plot was followed by the Exclusion Crisis, caused by a bill that sought to exclude the king's brother from the throne of England because he was known to be of Roman Catholic persuasion. Stillingfleet preached that the best way for Protestants to overcome such Roman Catholic threats is to unite themselves and that schism was the most dangerous enemy to the Church of England.

The main target of the sermon was Baxter's *Sacrilegious Desertion* (1672) and Owen's *Discourse Concerning Evangelical Love* (1672).<sup>85</sup> Stillingfleet argued that separation cannot be justified insomuch as Nonconformists admit that the Church of England is true in doctrine and sacraments. For Stillingfleet the Nonconformists

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<sup>83</sup> John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church," *The Historical Journal* 31 (1988): 74.

<sup>84</sup> For the state of Catholicism in this period, see Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II: Volume I, 1558-1688* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 245-253.

<sup>85</sup> The Toleration Act in 1672 gave a rise of great controversy on toleration. Baxter's *Sacrilegious Desertion* and Owen's *Evangelical Love* contributed to that controversy. By mentioning the two works, Stillingfleet renewed it in a little different context. At this time, the main topic was not toleration but schism.

condemned themselves “while they preach against *Separation* in a *Separation Congregation*.”<sup>86</sup> Stillingfleet’s sermon triggered a great controversy between Conformists and Nonconformists that had been somewhat died. Not only Owen and Baxter but also other Nonconformists wrote against *Mischief*.<sup>87</sup> Nonconformists’ responses were immediately followed by Stillingfleet’s full response, *Unreasonableness of Separation*, which only caused more severe controversy between Conformists and Nonconformists.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.2 “Walk by the Same Rule,” Philippians 3:16

Stillingfleet’s sermon, *Mischief of Separation*, was based upon Philippians 3:16, “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.” The Philippian verse was frequently quoted by Conformists to refute their adversaries by applying “the rule” to Conformity. *Mischief of Separation* shows us how such an application could be possible. Stillingfleet’s process from interpretation to application is well summarized by Owen:

1. That all churches and the members of them, by virtue of the apostolical precept contained in the text, ought to walk according unto rule.

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<sup>86</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief of Schism*, 38. Italics original.

<sup>87</sup> John Howe, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Mischief of Separation* (London, 1680); Stephen Lob, *Peaceable Design Renewed* (London, 1680); Vincent Alsop, *The Mischief of Impositions* (London, 1680); John Troughton, *An Apology for the Non-conformists* (London, 1681); William Claggett, *A Reply to a Pamphlet Called the Mischief of Impositions* (London, 1681).

<sup>88</sup> Giles Firmin, *The Questions between the Conformist and Nonconformist Truly Stated, and Briefly Discussed* (London, 1681); John Barret, *A Reply to the Reverend Dean of St. Paul's Reflections on the Rector of Sutton* (1681); John Humfrey, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book of the Unreasonableness of Separation* (London, 1682); Gilbert Rule, *A Rational Defence of Non-conformity Wherein the Practice of Nonconformists Is Vindicated from Promoting Popery, and Ruining the Church, Imputed to Them by Dr. Stillingfleet in His Unreasonableness of Separation* (London 1689); For Conformists’ vindication of Stillingfleet, Thomas Long, *A Continuation and Vindication and the Defence of Dr. Stillingfleet's Unreasonableness of separation* (London, 1682); William Sherlock, *A Discourse about Church-Unity Being a Defence of Dr. Stillingfleet's Unreasonableness of Separation, in Answer to Several Late Pamphlets, But Principally to Dr. Owen and Mr. Baxter* (London, 1681).

2. That the rule here intended is not the rule of charity and mutual forbearance in the things wherein they who agree in the foundation are differently minded or otherwise than one another. But,
3. This was a standing rule for agreement and uniformity in practice in church order and worship, which the apostles had given and delivered unto them.
4. That this rule they did not give only as *apostles*, but as governors of the church, as appears from Acts xv.
5. Wherefore, what the apostles so did, *that* any church hath power to do, and ought to do, namely, to establish a rule of all practice in their communion.
6. That not to comply with this rule in all things is schism, the schism whereof Nonconformists are guilty.<sup>89</sup>

Number 1 is not an issue: no one would quarrel with it. The most important question is related to the definition of “the rule” (Numbers 2 and 3). It could mean the rule of faith in general, the rule of charity, or a particular rule. Given that the whole of Philippians 2 does not provide any significant clue to the meaning of the term, it should be determined in its larger context. For Stillingfleet, the context is the Church of Philippi which was already established by the apostle Paul himself, and would be in danger of schism due to false Jewish teachers. Therefore, Paul’s main purpose for the exhortation to keep the same rule was to warn the Philippians of the coming danger. In order to achieve that purpose, Paul gave them two rules to overcome it. The first rule is uttered in the very previous verse, “And if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you,” and the second rule in Verse 16. Parker’s point is that there is a significant difference between the two rules, since each rule was respectively given to different groups. The first rule was given to those who happened to differ from “the body of Christians they lived with,” but the second, as the phrase “whereto we have already attained” implies, was given to “those who were come to a firmness and settlement of

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<sup>89</sup> Owen, *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists*, XIII: 320-1.



judgment upon the Christian principles.”<sup>90</sup> In the former case, the remedy for schism is modesty and humility, while in the latter the remedy is “walking the same rule.” That rule must have been “a fixed and certain rule” with respect to government and order which the Philippians had already received from the apostle when their church was founded.<sup>91</sup>

Owen completely denies Stillingfleet’s premise that there was a known rule in the early church which determined all religious differences in outward matters, because Scripture is completely silent on this point. If there had been any such rule, the apostles would have written it in Scripture. Neither does anyone in the early church mention it. Rather, the history of the early church reveals that early Christians kept unity in spite of their outward differences on such things as the observance of Easter.<sup>92</sup> Even if we acknowledge that there was such a rule, Owen argues, no one including Stillingfleet himself can know exactly what it was except by Scripture.

Owen proceeds to criticize Stillingfleet’s following points. Even granted that Paul set up such a rule for the church, this does not necessarily mean that the present church can do the same thing as the early church did. It is obvious that not all apostolic rules can apply to the universal church; the apostleship itself does not exist anymore. The crucial question is, therefore, “What is it that bridges the past with the present?” Stillingfleet’s key concept is that Paul set up such a rule not as an apostle, but as a governor (Number 4). The best example for this is the council of Jerusalem in which the apostles, as governors, solved the ecclesiastical strife by setting up a rule, which can apply not only to the primitive church alone, but also to all later churches.

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<sup>90</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief of Schism*, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Stillingfleet, *Mischief of Schism*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists*, XIII: 323-4.

Owen rejects Stillingfleet's view of the apostle as a church governor. Owen argues that Stillingfleet's thesis, even if proved to be true, cannot support Uniformity. It may be granted that like the apostles, ordinary governors of the church may make rules for the practice of the church. "Yet," says Owen, "it will by no means follow that because the apostles appointed a rule of one sort, present church governors may appoint those of another."<sup>93</sup> The rules set up by church governors can be justified only if they are compatible with the apostolic rules. Likewise, the example of the council of Jerusalem as such, contrary to Stillingfleet's assertion, does not support Conformity. True, the apostles solved the problem of ecclesiastical divisions by setting up a rule at the council, but its content and effect were entirely different from Conformity. Stillingfleet's weakest point, Owen believes, is to fail to recognize that difference. Owen mentions two significant peculiarities of the council's decision, "it was only a *doctrinal determination*, without imposition on the practice of any" and "It was a *determination against imposition* directly."<sup>94</sup> Thus, the resolution of the council has nothing to do with the power of church governors, but its main purpose was to grant Gentiles a great amount of freedom. "It is true," says Owen, "the apostles imposed on or charged the consciences of men with the observance of all the institutions and commands of Christ, but of other things none at all."<sup>95</sup>

In his first response to Stillingfleet, Owen does not offer his own definition of "the rule." Owen is merely satisfied with proving that the rule is not so fixed and certain as is described by Stillingfleet. Owen simply points out that Stillingfleet's separation of

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<sup>93</sup> Owen, *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists*, XIII: 323.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 392. Italics original.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 392-3.

verses 15 and 16 is not convincing. In contrast to Stillingfleet, Owen draws attention to the similarity between the two phrases: “be thus minded” in verse 15 and “let us mind the same thing” in verse 16, which Owen believes prove that Paul’s exhortation is not intended to be delivered to two different groups.<sup>96</sup> “Walk by the same rule” is not essentially different from “mind the same thing.”

Stillingfleet’s criticism of Owen not for defining the meaning of the rule forces him to present his own interpretation in the second reply. Owen follows the well-known Protestant principle of biblical interpretation that Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture itself. Owen found that the phrase, “Walk by the same rule (τῷ αὐτῷ στοιχεῖν κανόνι),” is once more used in a similar way by the same apostle in Galatians 6:16, “As many as walk according to this rule (ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν).”<sup>97</sup> In contrast to Philippians 3:16, the meaning of the Galatian phrase is obvious due to its context. The rule or canon, intended by the apostle, is “no Book of Canons, but the analogy of faith, or the rule of faith in Christ as declared in the gospel in opposition unto all other ways and means of justification and sanctification, and salvation; which we ought to walk in a compliance withal, and that with love and forbearance towards them that in things not corruptive or destructive of this rule do differ from us.”<sup>98</sup> Owen claims that this rule should be the only ground for uniformity for all the churches.

Nonconformity does not reject rule or uniformity as such, but rather strives for the true

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<sup>96</sup> Owen, *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists*, XIII: 322. It is worth noting that there are many textual variants on the verse. In a modern Greek edition, the last phrase of the verse, “mind the same thing (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν),” is omitted. Stillingfleet does not argue on the textual variation. This means that Stillingfleet and Owen used the same original text which was most likely the *Textus Receptus*.

<sup>97</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 385.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 385-6.

uniformity. In sum, for Owen, Nonconformity is uniformity in the rule of faith as is described in Scripture. Owen asserts:

For decency and uniformity in all his churches the Lord Jesus also hath provided. The administration of the same specifical ordinances in the assemblies of his disciples, convened according to his mind, according to the same rule of his word, by virtue of the same specifical gifts of the Spirit by him bestowed on the administrators of them, constitutes the uniformity that he requires, and is acceptable unto him. This was the uniformity of the apostolical churches, walking by the same rule of faith and obedience, and no other; and this is all the uniformity that is among the true churches of Christ that are this day in the world. To imagine that there should be a uniformity in words and phrases of speech, and the like, is an impracticable figment, which never was obtained, nor ever will be to the end of the world.<sup>99</sup>

Stillingfleet criticizes Owen because his view of the rule is not clearly expressed in the text, and his limitation of the rule to the rule of faith cannot resolve differences in lesser religious matters.<sup>100</sup> If the rule is only the rule of faith, it cannot resolve those differences. Owen replies that Nonconformity as true uniformity is not indifferent to lesser differences. His notion of the rule does not allow unlimited freedom in lesser religious matters. Like Stillingfleet, Owen believes that the Christian should seek for unity even in those matters as earnestly as he can. The difference between Owen and Stillingfleet is how to achieve that unity: the way for Owen is mutual forbearance only, whereas for Stillingfleet it is imposition. For Owen, insofar as Christians are united in the rule of faith and forbear each other in the things wherein they differ, the Christian unity cannot be breached. This is “the substance of what is pleaded for by the Nonconformists.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Owen, *A Discourse concerning Liturgies, and Their Imposition*, XV: 48.

<sup>100</sup> Stillingfleet, *The Unreasonableness of Separation*, 168.

<sup>101</sup> Owen, *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists*, XIII: 325.

Finally, Owen complains that Stillingfleet calls the practice of Nonconformity *schism* without fully defining or explaining its meaning. Schism is solemnly condemned as a grave sin in Scripture. Nonconformity is quite different from such a sinful separation as is described in Scripture. Owen rhetorically asks Stillingfleet the following questions “Is refraining communion in a church-state not of divine institution, and in things not prescribed by the Lord Christ in the worship of God, [yet] holding communion in faith and love with all the true churches of Christ in the world, *a damnable schism*, or any schism at all?”<sup>102</sup> Not merely following the rule of imposition may be considered an abuse or error, but it would be wrong to call it schism. In conclusion, Stillingfleet’s charge of Nonconformity with schism is biblically groundless.

### 3.3 Nonconformity Defended

The second section of Owen’s *An Answer* deals with Stillingfleet’s five attacks on Nonconformity. According to Stillingfleet, Nonconformity cannot be justified for the following reasons:

1. That it weakens the cause of Reformation;
2. That it hinders all union between the protestant churches;
3. That it justifies the ancient schisms, which have been always condemned by the Christian church;
4. That it makes separation endless;
5. That it is contrary to the obligation that lies on all Christians to preserve the peace and unity of the church.<sup>103</sup>

Stillingfleet indicates that the Reformers justified their separation from the Church of Rome for two reasons: the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the

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<sup>102</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 423. Italics original.

<sup>103</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 397. Cf. Stillingfleet, *The Unreasonableness of Separation*, 178-9.

sacraments, and that they—Calvin in particular—strongly opposed causeless separation of the true church where the two marks were found. However, the separation of Nonconformists from the Church of England was quite different from that of Protestants from the Church of Rome, because Nonconformists' separation had nothing to do with the two marks. In their separation, Stillingfleet maintains, Nonconformists significantly weakened the cause of the Reformation.

By showing that the doctrine of the two marks is not necessarily incompatible with the practice of Nonconformity, Owen demonstrates that there is no discontinuity between Reformers and Nonconformists. Contrary to Stillingfleet's expectation, Calvin was nearer to the principle of Nonconformity. When the Church of Geneva refused to adopt Calvin's proposals for ecclesiastical reformation in church discipline, Calvin himself peacefully left the Genevan church without condemning it. Owen sets forth:

It is certain, therefore, that, by the separation which he [Calvin] condemns, he doth not intend the peaceable relinquishment of the communion of any church, as unto a constant participation of all ordinances in it, for want of the due means of edification, much less that which hath so many other causes concurring therewith.<sup>104</sup>

The practice of Nonconformity does not weaken the efficacy of the two marks of the true church, but rather strengthens them by the means of church discipline that is administered according to Scripture. Furthermore, Nonconformists are more faithful and consistent to other more significant principles of the Reformation than their opponents are. Those principles are as follows:

1. The Scripture, the word of God, is a perfect rule of faith and religious worship;

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<sup>104</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 399.

2. Christian people were not tied up unto blind obedience unto church-guides, but were not only at liberty, but also obliged to judge for themselves as unto all things that they were to believe and practice in religion and worship of God.
3. There was not any catholic, visible, organical, governing church, traduced by succession into that of Rome, whence all church power and order was to be derived.<sup>105</sup>

Those Reformation principles, which are as important as the two marks, were seriously weakened by Conformists. For Owen, Nonconformists are the much more faithful descendents of the Reformation than Conformists. Stillingfleet's criticism of Nonconformity can be justified only after those serious errors are first removed from the Church of England.

Second, Owen deals with Stillingfleet's assertion that the Lutheran churches strengthen their unity despite suffering more unscriptural impositions than the Church of England does. In order to refute Stillingfleet's justification of imposition in religious matters, Owen points out that since the Reformation, doctrinal or institutional differences had always existed among the Protestant churches, and all efforts to remove the differences for about 150 years had proved to be in vain. The ultimate cause of that failure, however, does not proceed from "the things themselves wherein they differ, but from the corrupt lusts and interests of the persons that differ."<sup>106</sup> Therefore, the best way to solve the problem is not to set up a liturgical and disciplinary uniformity, but to reform the life and manners of members of the church. The communion of particular churches can be strengthened by only faith and love, and thus it has nothing to do with compulsory orders and decrees.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 400, 402, and 404.

<sup>106</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 407.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 408.

Third, Owen deals with Stillingfleet's identification of Nonconformity with Donatism. Stillingfleet argues that the practice of Nonconformity is essentially the same as that of Donatism, which was solemnly condemned by all of the ancient fathers. However, Owen criticizes Stillingfleet because he overemphasizes the apparent similarities between Donatism and Nonconformity while totally ignoring the great differences between them. According to Owen, there are at least three substantial differences that can free Nonconformity from the charge of Donatism. First, while the Donatists left the catholic church, Nonconformists only withdrew from their parochial churches. Unless the parochial churches are the only catholic church, Nonconformists cannot be called Donatists.<sup>108</sup> Second, the reason for Nonconformists' separation is significantly different from that of the Donatists. The principal reason for Nonconformity is "*the unwarrantable imposition of unscriptural terms and conditions of communion upon us.*"<sup>109</sup> This was never a ground for Donatism. By contrast, the main reason for Donatists' separation was their false doctrine that none who had once fallen by apostasy should be readmitted to the catholic church. That Donatist doctrine, however, was never a principle of Nonconformity. Finally, Nonconformists, unlike Donatists, neither condemned the Church of England nor claimed themselves to be the only true church. Nonconformists never denied the possibility of salvation in the Church of England. In particular, the notorious practice of rebaptism, which could annul all the values of sacraments performed outside the Donatist church, was utterly condemned by Nonconformists. Donatism also arose from other false doctrines and practices; it was occasioned by the ambitions of various bishops; it contained impositions not warranted

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<sup>108</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 411.

<sup>109</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 412.



by Scriptures.<sup>110</sup> These are exactly what the Church of England does toward its opponents. In short, for Owen, Donatism is much nearer to Conformity than to Nonconformity.

Stillingfleet's fourth argument against Nonconformity is that it makes separation endless by refusing to set up solid bounds which are necessary for the unity and peace of the church.<sup>111</sup> According the practice of Nonconformity, anyone may set up a new church whenever he sees fit. Owen replies that Nonconformity does not mean boundlessness. Rather, it has certain and sure bounds: the rule of Scripture. Therefore, the issue is not whether Nonconformity has a bound, but whether Scripture is sufficient "to prescribe bounds unto separation, efficacious affecting the conscience of believers."<sup>112</sup> Owen claims that in Scripture, Jesus sufficiently lays out the instruction for the unity of the church. If we think that we need more than that, the authority of Christ would be inevitably weakened. Owen says that Stillingfleet's main mistake is that he believes the liberty of conscience leads us to license without external bounds such as ecclesiastical canons, as if Nonconformists "had no concern in Christ or his authority in this matter."<sup>113</sup>

Stillingfleet's last criticism of Nonconformity is that it is not compatible with Christians' strictest obligation to preserve the peace and unity of the church. As always, Owen asserts that the nature of peace and unity should first be properly defined. Neither unity nor peace in itself has a value, given that even a false church may have stronger unity than true churches have. Thus, unity alone does not have the highest value in the church. In the context of the debate between Conformity and Nonconformity, the issue is

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<sup>110</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 418. Italics original.

<sup>111</sup> Stillingfleet, *The Unreasonableness of Separation*, 197

<sup>112</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 418-9.

<sup>113</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book*, XV: 419.

whether or not we should preserve unity and peace “by a *neglect* or omission of the observance of any of the commands of Christ; by *doing or practicing* anything in divine worship which he hath not appointed; by *partaking* in other men’s sins, through a neglect of our own duty; by *foregoing* the means of our own edification, which he commands us to make use of.”<sup>114</sup> According to Owen, a peaceful withdrawal of a particular church can be justified in those cases. Owen’s view of justifiable separation is opposed to Stillingfleet who allows only three cases for it: idolatrous worship, false doctrines, and imposition of things indifferent as necessary to salvation. Owen raises the more fundamental question to Stillingfleet, “who would determine such cases?” If the determination is subject to the power of the imposer, no justified separation would be possible.<sup>115</sup> To put it another way, justified separation would be merely a theoretical possibility, unless the liberty of conscience is granted to private believers in determining such cases.

### 3.4 Grounds for Nonconformity

Stillingfleet repeatedly mentions the inconsistency of Nonconformity in that it rejects communion with the Church of England while recognizing her as the true church. Such a separation is no other than the essence of schism. Some defects in outward religious ordinances cannot justify separation from the true church. If this is allowed, Stillingfleet argues, then any separation for only one defect could be justified as well.<sup>116</sup>

The crucial difference between Stillingfleet and Owen is that each has his own view of the Church of England. For Owen, “church” is synonymous with “congregation”

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<sup>114</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 421. Italics original.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 425-6.

<sup>116</sup> Stillingfleet, *The Unreasonableness of Separation*, XV: 222-3.

or “assembly,” and this congregation is not a congregation of churches, but a congregation of believers. Therefore, the Church of England is defined as a congregation of all believers in England, from which Nonconformists never separated.<sup>117</sup> In addition, Owen claims that only a particular church or congregation is a divinely instituted church, and thus the so-called Church of England, which was established by the human law, is not a church in the proper sense. Consequently, we cannot call it a schism to separate from the Church of England, because “ecclesiastical schism neither hath nor can have respect unto anything but divine institution.”<sup>118</sup> Likewise, the human conception of church unity should also be rejected. It is true that Christ commanded unity, but it should be equally emphasized that He also taught what unity is. Therefore, we should strive for nothing but the unity as it was commanded by Christ. No one can make a new kind of church unity. Thus, Conformity, which was established by human beings, cannot be a true means to Christian unity. “To desert from it,” says Owen, “whatever fault of another kind it may be, is no more schism than it is adultery.”<sup>119</sup>

However, did Owen not separate from the Church of England by leaving her parochial churches? Not only that, did he not set up a new congregation on the grounds that a Congregational church is the only institutional church? Does this unchurch all the parochial churches in England? Owen criticizes Stillingfleet for oversimplifying the grounds for Nonconformity. Owen admits that there are serious defects in the Church of England, but those defects are not the primary reason for separation. Owen maintains that “it is one thing to separate from a church because it is not of divine institution . . . and

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 427.

<sup>118</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 345.

<sup>119</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 346.

another to do so because of things practiced and imposed in it contrary to do divine institution.”<sup>120</sup> The point is this: the primary cause for Nonconformity is not a desire to establish a new biblical church because of some defects in the Church of England, but a desire to escape unlawful impositions. In Owen’s view, therefore, not those who are separated but those who imposed that separation should take responsibly for the Nonconformists’ separation. Owen sets forth:

- (1) If I were joined unto any such church as wherein there were a defect in any of the rules appointed by Christ for its order and government, I would endeavour peaceably . . . to introduce the practice and observance of them [i.e. as “free from such defects”].
- (2) In case I could not prevail therein, I would consider whether the want of the things supposed were such as to put me on the practice of any thing unlawful, or cut me short of the necessary means of edification; and if I found they do not so do, I would never for such defects separate or withdraw communion from such a church. But,
- (3) Suppose that from these defects should arise not only a real obstruction unto edification, but also a necessity of practising some things unlawful to be observed, wherein no forbearance could be allowed, I would not condemn such a church, I would not separate from it, would not withdraw from acts of communion with it which were lawful, but I would peaceably join in fixed personal communion with such a church as is free from such defects; and if this cannot be done without the gathering of a new church, I see neither schism nor separation in so doing.<sup>121</sup>

It is critically important to understand that the ultimate reason Owen withdrew communion from the Church of England is not that she had many serious defects, but that she imposed them on her opponents. In other words, had the Church of England continued to hold defective views on church governance and worship but refrained from imposing them, separation would not have been in order. Conformity however required that all her members submit complete and constant obedience to the Church of England

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<sup>120</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 430.

<sup>121</sup> Owen, *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet’s Book*, XV: 431-432, clarification added in brackets.

in all important religious matters. More importantly, Conformity does not allow her members to use “any other church means for their own edification.”<sup>122</sup> The issue, Owen points out, is not whether the practices of the Church of England are lawful, but whether they are “a necessary condition” of communion.<sup>123</sup>

The principle of Conformity, a complete and constant obedience to things indifferent as a necessary condition of communion, prevents any further reformation of the church. Scripture clearly teaches that reformation is a duty of all Christians. When a particular church, which is in need of reformation, will not or cannot reform herself, separation can be justified.<sup>124</sup> For Owen, it is obvious that no church is so complete and perfect that it is not in need of reformation. The history of the church reveals that many churches fell into a corrupt state and perished when defects were not reformed. Scripture warns its readers over and over about the future degeneration of the church. When a church actually failed to keep its integrity, reformation was solemnly commanded by Christ. Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 show that if a corrupt church rejects reformation and thus the Lord Christ withdraws his presence from that church, separation becomes a Christian duty because “it is safer leaving of any church whatever than of Jesus Christ.”<sup>125</sup> This is equally true of the Church of England. When the Church of England will not or cannot reform herself, her members should leave the church in order to escape God’s judgment.

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<sup>122</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 344.

<sup>123</sup> Owen, *Discourse on Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 161.

<sup>124</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 352.

<sup>125</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 350.

According to Owen, the Church of England badly needs reformation in three areas: doctrine, worship, and discipline.<sup>126</sup> Because all Romish doctrines were purified by the Reformation, the defenders of the Church of England often claimed that as far as doctrine is concerned, she is in no need of reformation.<sup>127</sup> Owen also admits that the doctrines held by the Church of England are indeed true, but he thinks that the Church of England still did not overcome two serious defects. First, some of the doctrines, which had been formulated by the Reformers, were significantly changed or were interpreted differently by later Conformists.<sup>128</sup> Second and more important, the Church of England made her doctrines defective by rendering them a fixed standard. As a result, the Thirty-Nine Articles were not sufficient for condemning new heresies such as Socinianism and Arminianism.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, the Church of England did not care about the rising of liberal Anglicans who openly wrote against the fundamental Christian doctrines such as original sin, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and even the doctrine of Trinity or the deity of Christ. On the other hand, the Church of England, Owen complains, severely persecuted Nonconformists with a great indignation for merely dissenting from some outward manners of worship.<sup>130</sup>

As we have seen in the beginning of the chapter, Owen condemned enforcement of worship according to the Book of Prayer. Owen wrote:

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<sup>126</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 350. In *Inquiry*, Owen deals with only discipline concerning reformation. As we shall see, however, Owen speaks of defects in doctrine and worship in the Church of England.

<sup>127</sup> John Pearson, *No Necessity of Reformation of the Publick Doctrine of the Church of England* (London, 1660).

<sup>128</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 345. Cf. Owen, *Discourse on Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 184. Owen does not state exactly which doctrines were changed or misinterpreted by the next generation.

<sup>129</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 356.

<sup>130</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, XIII: 354-5.

The worship of God is of that nature that whatsoever is performed in it is an act of religious obedience. That anything may be esteemed such, it is necessary that the conscience be in it subject to the immediate authority of God.<sup>131</sup>

For this reason, true worship is worship that is expressly demanded by Scripture alone.

Owen calls worship not contrary to Scripture false worship. This of course does not mean that the content of the Book of Prayer is entirely wrong and contradictory to Scripture. It is true that the Book of Prayer is different from the Romish missal in that the latter contains numerous examples of idolatry and superstition. Nevertheless, the difference between worship that is contrary to Scripture and worship that is not contrary to Scripture is not significant. There is no essential difference between them insofar as we should not join in either of them.<sup>132</sup>

In order to defend the Book of Prayer, Conformists used the distinction between substance and manner or circumstances of worship. In contrast to the former, the latter are not prescribed by Scripture and thus should be determined by the ecclesiastical authority. They argued that defects in the external manner of worship cannot be a just ground for separation. In order to refute that argument, Owen makes three distinctions of circumstance. Some outward circumstances, such as place and time of worship, without which worship itself cannot be performed, may be determined by the ecclesiastical law. However, there is another kind of circumstance instituted by God. For instance, prayer is a manner and thus circumstance of worship but it was ordained by God as a substantial

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<sup>131</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and their Impositions*, XV: 43.

<sup>132</sup> Owen, *Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches*, XV: 336.

part of worship.<sup>133</sup> The two circumstances should be distinguished from the last kind of circumstance. Praying before an image or toward the east, a manner of prayer, is not a circumstance “attending the nature of the thing itself but arbitrarily superadded to the things that they are appointed to accompany.”<sup>134</sup> The crucial question is whether such added human practices are allowable or lawful. Owen’s answer is negative, because it is incompatible with the Great Commission of Christ: “Teach men to observe whatever I commanded you” (Mt. 28:20). The command cannot be interpreted as “Teach men to observe whatever you think meet, so it be not contrary to my commands.”<sup>135</sup> In the phrase “Teach men to observe πάντα ὅσα,” Owen argues, Christ comprises the whole duty of Christians: “things to be done and observed in the worship of God.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, if anyone does beyond what Christ commands, he disobeys him. For Owen, Nonconformity means nonconformity to what is not commanded by Christ; it is the very way to a complete obedience to Christ.

There is no doubt in Owen’s judgment that the Church of England is in need of reformation with respect to discipline as well. The essence of discipline for Owen is obedience to the gospel. Owen mourns that in general, the Church of England is full of ignorant, infidel, or profane persons. The presence of such people is the clear evidence that the Church of England is in need of reformation. For Owen, holiness is the *raison d’être* of the church, since the church “is a society gathered and erected to express and

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<sup>133</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and their Impositions*, XV: 36. Cf. Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, XIII: 484.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and their Impositions*, XV: 36.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and their Impositions*, XV: 42.

<sup>136</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and their Impositions*, XV: 45.



declare the holiness of Christ, and the power of his church is of any advantage unto the interests of his glory in this world.”<sup>137</sup>

It is worth noting that for Owen holiness is closely connected with church unity. Given that schism is primarily the result of the sinful corruption in members of the church, holiness is the best remedy for healing schism. If holiness is neglected in the church, it would be “in vain for any church to expect peace and unity in their communion.”<sup>138</sup> It would be, however, wrong to think that Owen believes that a church should be a perfect community where no sinner is found. The existence of sinners alone is not sufficient for justifying separation. However, Owen says:

When a church shall tolerate in its communion not only evil men, but their evils, and absolutely refuse to use the discipline of Christ for the reformation of the one and the taking away of the other, there is great danger lest the ‘whole lump be leavened’ and the edification of particular persons be obstructed beyond what the Lord Christ requires of them to submit unto and to acquiesce in.<sup>139</sup>

While holiness is an internal means to church unity, church discipline is an external means to holiness. Owen thinks that the primary reason for the lack of holiness in the Church of England is that discipline is critically abused in many ways. Most of all, the power of the keys is handed over to the secular power so that discipline became a tyranny, oppression and persecution. The result of that imposition, however, is not unity but endless schisms and divisions in the Church of England. The situation is worsened by the neglect of the fundamental principle of the gospel discipline: “every minister of the gospel hath, by the appointment of Jesus Christ, *the whole immediate care of the flock*

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<sup>137</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 120.

<sup>138</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 120.

<sup>139</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 120 -1.

whereof he is overseer committed unto him.”<sup>140</sup> Ministers of the Church of England can administer only partially to her members. The ministers can preach the Word of God to their flock on the pulpit, but do not have the power to discipline, which belongs to the authority of the bishop alone. As a result, parochial ministers do not care about the reformation of the moral life of their flock. In particular, they cannot prevent scandalists from participating in the Lord’s Supper. For Owen, preaching (doctrine), sacraments (worship), and gospel obedience (discipline) should not be separated from each other. True conformity, says Owen, is “conformity which (worth that we contend about ten thousand times over) ought to be between the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and the lives of them who are partakers of them.”<sup>141</sup> On the contrary, the false conformity, “the rigid imposition of unscriptural conditions of communion,” says Owen, “is the principal cause of all the schisms and divisions that are among us.”<sup>142</sup> The Church of England cries out for conformity with her mouth, yet she denies it in practice. By contrast, Nonconformity, although charged with schism by its opponents, is the way to the true conformity.

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<sup>140</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 166. Italics original.

<sup>141</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 170.

<sup>142</sup> Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Christian Love and Peace*, XV: 180.

## CONCLUSION

In the *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Ekkehard Müllenberg simply closes his article on heresies and schisms with the following sentence without giving us any ground for his judgment: “given their understanding of the Church, the Protestant churches have found it hard to develop a doctrine of schism, either canonically or theologically.”<sup>1</sup> As we have seen above, however, Müllenberg’s claim cannot apply to the British Protestants in the seventeenth century, who vigorously debated over unity and schism in great detail. As a matter of fact, it is in the middle of the seventeenth century that individual systematic studies on schism were printed for the first time.<sup>2</sup> In former periods, schism had been dealt with merely as a secondary topic to church unity.

Owen’s *Of Schism* was the first work that was ever written as a full systematic and biblical study on schism from the perspective of Congregationalism. After the publication of *Of Schism*, Owen vigorously defended Congregationalism from the charge of schism and argued that it is the true way to Christian unity. Throughout his life, the topic of schism and unity was Owen’s perennial theological concern. In his vindications against Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and Conformists, Owen’s treatment of biblical texts on schism and unity and his use of scholastic distinctions, terminology, and definitions reveal his gift as an exegete and a theologian.

Owen’s vindication of Congregationalism shows great continuity with his predecessors. He inherits most of the essential ecclesiological principles that had been

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (2001), s. v. “Heresies and Schisms.” The *Encyclopedia* is translated from the third edition of the *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* (1986).

<sup>2</sup> John Hales’s *A Tract Concerning Schism and Schismaticques* (1642) may mark the beginning of the blossom of the publications of treatises of schism.

promulgated at the Reformation. The distinction between the invisible and visible church, the marks of the true church, and the distinction between the fundamentals and non-fundamentals are found in Owen's ecclesiology. He does not believe that his conception of unity and schism is incompatible with Reformation principles. In fact, Owen more consistently applies them to the conception of unity and schism than his opponents.

In particular, Owen's anti-Romanist controversy with Canes reveals that Owen is an heir of the Reformation, standing in continuity with the Reformers' understandings of the relative authority of Scripture and the church. His defence of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and interpretation of the history of the Church of England is nothing new. Owen's task is to prove that internal divisions among English Protestants are not evidence that Scripture alone is insufficient for keeping the unity of the church. Given that Scripture is the final judge for all religious matters, Owen argues, the true unity will be achieved only by means of resorting to Scripture. The cause of internal differences and divisions within Protestantism is not Scripture; rather, it is human imperfection.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Owen does not merely duplicate the position of the Reformers. For Owen, the Reformation is not an end but a beginning for a further reformation. He believes, as did many of his Puritan predecessors and the Dutch Reformed proponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* or "further Reformation,"<sup>3</sup> that the *ecclesia reformata* in a doctrinal dimension should be upgraded to the *semper reformanda* in a disciplinary dimension. This "further reformation" is one of Owen's most desired aims throughout his career. When the Church of England denied such reformation, he was ready to withdraw from that church without, at the same time,

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<sup>3</sup> For the key concept of *Nadere Reformatie*, see Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (Peter Lang: New York, 1991), 383-413.

claiming to be in schism. The need to justify such non-schismatic withdrawal required a 'new' ecclesiology.

Specifically, Owen's conversion to the Congregational view of the church requires new notion of schism and unity. We see that Owen's emphases in ecclesiological controversy are shifted from the true church to the nature of the church, and from the visible catholic church to visible particular church. If a congregation is not merely a part of the catholic church, but the church in the full sense and the only institutional church, the notions of unity and schism should be significantly redefined. On the basis of his own biblical interpretation, Owen entirely rejects the traditional notion of schism and unity that most Protestants take for granted. In a strictly biblical sense, separation as such has nothing to do with schism. Moreover, the unity of the church is primarily the unity of believers, not the unity of churches. For Owen, schism is the internal conflict and difference of opinion within a congregation, and unity is unity of faith (the catholic church) and unity of covenant (the particular church). Owen further argues that according to the biblical and true definition of schism, Roman Catholics (not Congregationalists) are the most schismatic, because the Church of Rome is full of internal wars as well as doctrinal controversies.

For Owen, the practice of Nonconformity, a peaceful withdrawal of a true particular church without condemning it, is no schism. When the church is seriously defective concerning spiritual edification, its members can or should separate from it for the sake of their souls' safety. The Church of England as a merely human institution is seriously defective in doctrine, worship, and gospel obedience. Owen approves only the ecclesiastical ordinances prescribed by Scripture. In contrast to Baxter, therefore, Owen

prevents the members of his congregation from participating in worship according to the Book of Prayer.

Does Owen's view of church unity promote unlimited divisions of the church?

Owen's answer to the question is negative. Owen believes that the example of the primitive church strongly supports his cause. Without civil force or ecclesiastical higher office such as the pope and bishop, the earliest Christians enjoyed perfect unity, which was not disturbed by lesser differences. It should also be noted that Owen does not justify all differences in non-essentials. Owen emphasizes, however, that the cause of those differences are spiritual, and thus should be remedied by none other than spiritual means; that is, the holiness of church members.

Owen's criticisms of Parker and Stillingfleet reveal that the question "unity how?" is as important as "unity in what?" Both Conformists and Nonconformists profess the same faith in the fundamental doctrines. For Owen, however, unity does not mean uniformity, but unity in freedom. Uniformity by imposition cannot be compatible with Christian freedom which was given by Christ to all believers. There is no true unity without freedom. Admitting the use of force by the supreme magistrate as the protector of true religion, Owen denies that he is the final authority for less important doctrines. For Owen, the church is clearly distinguished from the state even though both cannot be totally separated from each other. Due to human beings' limited understanding of Scripture, differences in non-essential doctrines are inescapable. Yet, in Owen's view, the way to unity in those matters should not be imposition but toleration in which all Christians forbear each others' differences within the boundary of the fundamentals.

Finally, it must be noted that Owen's ecclesiology and particularly his views on unity and schism in the church were highly contextualized in the eras of the Interregnum and Restoration. Owen appears to have recognized that Congregationalism would never become a universal model for the church and he adopted his model for a non-schismatic Congregationalism to a situation in which an established, non-Congregational national church (whether Presbyterian or Episcopalian in structure) might tolerate independent congregations in its midst, as in fundamental unity with them.

Owen's model for the unity of the church, however, failed to convince his contemporaries, whether Presbyterian or Episcopalian. Especially, his opponents utterly rejected Owen's view that the fundamental doctrines by themselves are sufficient for the unity of the church. They argued that "Faith is that Virtue which unites the Church; not that it always does so, but it cannot be done without it."<sup>4</sup> For all of Owen's adversaries, doctrinal unity should be combined with ecclesiastical or magisterial force. Neither was Owen's attempt to redefine unity and schism fully recognized and supported by Congregationalists. Most of the New England Congregationalists in particular kept the policy of state church even at the end of the revolutionary war (1783).<sup>5</sup> Approximately six years after he died, one of Owen's hopes was realized; the Act of Toleration was passed and, from that time on, toleration became a permanent religious policy in England. Contrary to Owen's expectation, however, toleration did not bring unity to the Church of England just as it had previously failed during the Interregnum. Although a temporary "Happy Union" between Presbyterians and Congregationalists was achieved, the

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<sup>4</sup> Sherlock, *A Discourse about Church Unity*, 183.

<sup>5</sup> J. William T. Youngs, *The Congregationalists* (Greenwood Press: New York, 1990), 121.

fragmentation of the Church of England was never completely healed since the passing of the act. Furthermore, while all Nonconformists enjoyed a limited freedom of worship, they lost political rights and access to university education. They also began to lose their spiritual vitality and were never able to recover it.



## THESES

### **Theses Related to Dissertation**

1. For Owen, the traditional notion of schism as “causeless separation from the true church” is biblically groundless. Thus, it should be redefined as is described in Scripture. According to Scripture, schism is causeless differences and contentions *within* a congregation. In a strictly ecclesiological sense, schism has nothing to do with separation.

2. Scripture tells us that there are various sinful ways to separate from a particular church, but it does not call those separations as such schism. Furthermore, Scripture never calls schism a peaceful withdrawal from a particular church for serious defects without condemning it. Therefore, Congregationalism is not schism.

3. The term “church” does not mean “congregation of churches,” but “congregation of believers.” Since Congregationalists are the true believers who live in England, they are not separated from the Church of England although they are separated from the Church of England as is established by human law.

4. Given that the church is viewed in three ways, the invisible catholic church, the visible catholic church, and the particular church, it is impossible to talk about the unity and separation of the church in general. The invisible catholic church is united by the internal grace of the Holy Spirit; there is no way that the true Christian can be separated from this church. The visible catholic church is united by the faith in the fundamentals; a believer can be separated from this church only by renouncing that faith. The particular church is united by church covenant; its members can leave this church by withdrawal from that covenant.

5. The problem of authority is the fundamental issue of unity and schism controversies. According to Owen, Scripture is the final judge in all religious controversies. Scripture is the Word of God not only in itself but also in relation to us.

6. As far as the way of unity is concerned, the question of “unity how?” is as important as that of “unity in what?” Not imposition but toleration is the true way to Christian unity.

7. When a particular church neither can nor will reform itself, separation is not only lawful but also necessary. The Church of England is so badly defective in doctrine, worship, and discipline that she neither can nor will reform her self. Therefore, Nonconformity is a Christian duty.

### **Theses Related to Course Work**

8. For Gregory of Nyssa, God is above every name, but he has many names not for Himself but for us. By this divine accommodation, the true, although not essential, fellowship between God and human beings is possible.

9. John McLeod Campbell's view of Christ's suffering not as punishment, but as repentance is grounded in his exclusive view of God as a father. But, a father is not necessarily incompatible with a judge. The Scriptures clearly teach that God is both a loving father and a righteous judge.

10. According to Peter Martyr Vermigli, the Lord's Supper is not only commemoration but also communion in the true and real sense. In the Eucharist the bread changes into a sacramental means by the mystical work of the Holy Spirit. By the sacrament, the true, not corporeal, body of Christ is spiritually eaten through faith by the spirit of the participant.

11. Calvin's concept of the third use of the law can hardly be called legalism.

12. If revelation were only a personalistic event, as Emil Brunner argues, it would be impossible to explain God's revelation before the creation of human beings. Divine revelation does not necessarily require human reception.

#### **Theses Related to Personal Interest**

13. Fast, which has been almost forgotten in the Reformed tradition, ought to be restored to its proper uses as were frequently practiced by the Reformers.

14. Owen's approach to schism may apply to heresy. No one should be condemned as a heretic without proper and precise definitions of heresy and orthodoxy.

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